

A THRIFTY PEOPLE.

One Hundred Thousand Armenians
Live in This Country.

History of What Was Once an All-Powerful
Nation in Eastern Countries.

Legends of the Wise and Brave Queen of
the Land—Armenian Weddings.

Living amongst us and beginning to exercise some influence by their numbers, their intelligence and their unusual talent for business and for amassing wealth, are thousands of Armenians. In New York and Chicago alone, it is estimated, there are about 15,000, and in the whole of the United States their number will not fall short of 100,000. "Armenians? What are they? What country do they hail from?" These and similar questions, clearly proving the most complete absence of acquaintance with this interesting race, I have often heard. And it is no wonder, for up to recently Armenians were not in the habit of emigrating to this country, and the facts I am going to cite further on will explain how it comes that the world at large does not know much of this people.

For the Armenians somewhat resemble the Jews in this that they are a race, but not a nation, being also widely scattered and leading no independent political existence. Like Poland, the territory once occupied by the Armenians under rulers of their own has been parcelled out to three powers—the eastern districts belonging to Persia; the northern to Russia, and the largest portion, the western, forming part of Asiatic Turkey. Erivan is the capital city of Russian Armenia, while Erzerum is that of the Turkish part and Tabriz that of the Persian.

How large the number of Armenians to-day is not definitely known, but it is probably not less than 10,000,000, for besides the wholly Armenian population of those three districts—together the size of France—there are thousands and scores of thousands of them to be found in other parts of Turkey, Russia and Persia, and their influence is very strong in all those countries, by reason of their superior intellectual gifts. As financiers and administrators especially they are eminently successful. Of late years the Armenians, conscious of their ancient civilization, of their Christianity and of their superiority in both ethical and mental respects, have shown an increasing restlessness under the yoke of their Moslem conquerors, and are anxious to reestablish their national independence. The horrible persecutions and the despotic oppression they have to undergo at the hands of the Turks especially have made this resolution stronger and stronger, and the fearful conditions under which they have to live at home have also induced them to emigrate in large numbers to this country.

It would not be the proper caper to write here a history of Armenia, but I will briefly outline its past at least. Armenia was for many years a great and prosperous kingdom, extending from the Black to the Caspian sea and taking in some of the most fertile and renowned districts of antiquity, being watered by the Araxes, the Tigris and Euphrates of old and producing on its volcanic soil nearly everything that a benignant sun can ripen. Mount Ararat lies in the heart of the Armenian mountain ranges, and its highest peak, the Mussis, after lying dormant for centuries, resumed its volcanic activity in 1840, and during that eruption the village of Argoorz, where tradition has it Noah planted his first vine, was destroyed.

Armenian history goes far back—to 2,500 years B. C., and 428 of our era they preserved their national integrity against all conquerors. The two dynasties of the Haighians and of the Aracides were flourishing during this long period, and then came the Persians, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Turks, the Tartars, who ravaged the country by turns and made it a mere dependency. Armenia had another period of prosperity during the time of



QUEEN TAMAR.

the Crusaders, from 1089 until about 1200, the most brilliant epoch being that of David the Restorer, and of his beautiful daughter, Queen Tamar. The latter occupies in the legendary lore of the Armenians as prominent a place as King Solomon among the Jews, and some poems and hymns com-



A TYPICAL ARMENIAN.

posed by her still survive. She was not only a wise and just ruler but also a great warrior, defeating armies of Turks and of Russians in turn. That, however, was the last brilliant point in the history of Armenia. From that time on—some 600 years—the country languished and decayed, the prey of her Moslem neighbors, until the last remnant of Armenian independence was swept away in 1800 by the cession of her Caucasian territory to Russia. As I noted above, however, the Armenians of to-day dream once more of the restitution of their national independence, and it is quite likely that they will ultimately achieve it.

The Armenians of the present time are a people who are physically strong and enduring, generally of regular features, dark-eyed and dark-haired; during their youth the girls and women are apt to be beautiful, but they wither and age very quickly, so that at 25 they are like our women of 50. The men wear better. They are of Christian faith—a type of the Greek-Catholic—but missionaries have been converting quite a large fraction of them to purer and simpler forms of Christianity. They are progressive, enterprising, industrious, endowed with great mental gifts, so that in Russia and Turkey there is an exceptionally high percentage of Armenians among the highest officials. Their commercial instinct is very strong, and they make the most successful dealers and merchants everywhere, outstripping even the Jews wherever they come into competition with the latter. Their morals are good, and their family life is happy and peaceful. They are patient, having become so in the school of adversity, and know how to dissemble when necessary, and their apparent humility is, in fact, their chief strength.

Among their virtues is hospitality; and I remember with pleasure a wedding festivity in an Armenian household at which I was an invited guest. The bride, a young girl of 14, but perfectly developed, looked a charming picture. Rather small in size, but of a delicate complexion, magnificent teeth, and hair that was silky and profuse and of beautiful shade, she was attired in a *caba* (a long, flowing robe) of atlas, and a sort of vest, made of white silk and embroidered with gold, was visible at the neck. A long veil (*setchaki*) of tulle and embroidered with gold and silver was held around her head by that handsome diadem of the young Armenian ladies which they call *thavacracti*. Musicians played on queer instruments, the *daira* (a species of drum), and the *Fourn* (a kind of flute), and there was some dancing, but dancing of a style not seen elsewhere—like the *dartouri* and the *laginka*. The most extensive hospitality reigned—sweets of every kind, meats and other solid food, wine and sherbet were dished out to whomsoever wished any. There were singing and conversation, and outside the broad veranda and the garden paths were brightly il-



ARMENIAN MUSICIANS.

luminated, and then everybody went to church and witnessed the ceremony, a much more symbolical and impressive one than our wedding ceremonies. But then, there is no divorce in the Armenian church, and hence they deem no expense too large for the one great event of their lives.

WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND.