

Reprinted from the Times, August 13, 1919.

THE ARMENIAN QUESTION
153 REGENT STREET
LONDON, W.

The Times.

No. 42,177.

LONDON, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13, 1919.



ARMENIA'S PERIL.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13, 1919.

THE remnant of the Armenians in Armenia is in danger of extinction. Of all the people affected by the war, none—not even the Serbians—has suffered like the Armenians. Had they waited on the turns of fortune they might have done better for themselves, but their faith in us and their feud with the Turks were too deep to let them temporize. In the early campaigns in the Caucasus they boldly sided with the Russians, and provided them with their best auxiliary troops. When the Russians retired they paid the penalty by wholesale massacre and deportation, and it has been calculated that of the Armenians who lived on the high plateau between the Caucasus and the Taurus, from one-third to one-half has been killed by violence, died of disease, or been lost in compulsory exile. Of all the atrocities of the war, none has been on so wholesale a scale of wickedness as this. In the last year of the war we realized how much the East, and especially the bridge between the Black Sea and the Caspian, concerned our interests as an Asiatic Power; and with incredible difficulty we transported across Persia a force to help hold this bridge for the Entente. When the Armistice came, a small British army was keeping order in the Caucasus; and both the course of negotiations and the wording of the mandatory clause in the League of Nations Covenant foreshadowed the creation of an Armenian state which, under the protection of a mandatory Power, should hold this bridge between Europe and Asia, and raise the banner of civilization and economic progress in these regions. The mandatory Power has been chosen by common consent, but the United States Government has not yet accepted its nomination. In the meantime, owing to the delays and uncertainties of Allied policy, the enemies of Armenia are uniting for her destruction. Anti-British Arabs at Diarbekr are intriguing with the Tartar Government of Azerbaijan, the northernmost province of Persia; Azerbaijan is in alliance with Georgia against DENIKIN; and between the Young Turks and the

Bolshevists of Russia there is an understanding like that of which we have seen the first-fruits in Afghanistan. At this grave moment, and in these circumstances, the British have announced their intention of withdrawing from the Caucasus. As a consequence, the Armenians in Armenia are in danger of extinction. For them it is now, or soon will be, a choice between extermination and an abandonment, with peace in sight, of the cause to which they have been faithful through the war.

This is not an alternative to which any loyal Englishman would willingly see his friends put. It is a hard thing to say, but the troops in the Caucasus, conscripts as they are, should not be withdrawn until they have been replaced by new British voluntary troops, or, better still, by troops from the mandatory Power. It would be still harder if, by their withdrawal, a whole race were threatened with extinction. We believe that if the facts were put to the English People—and why there should be any suppression of them we cannot conceive—many of those who feel most strongly about the retention of our compulsory service men on foreign service would be the first to say that, at any rate, they will wait until they are relieved by others who will prevent their fine work from being thrown away. The strongest argument is that of justice and humanity. But the salvation of Armenia is not a remote crusade. The country is a bridge of civilization on which not only the security of India but the authority and reputation of the League of Nations may rest. All the arguments which bind up Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, and Serbia with our political hopes for the future apply with similar force to Armenia. It would be a lasting disgrace to the League of Nations if these high ideals were to disappear ignominiously in the interstice between the rule of war and the rule of law which was announced to succeed it. The test of an ideal is in its application and in our willingness, and that of our Allies and Associates, to make sacrifices for it.

In many quarters it will be resented that these sacrifices should so often fall upon us. There is a limit, after all that we have done and suffered in this war, to the extent of our contributions to the ideal, however noble, and with so much on our hands already we are approaching that limit. But we are practical people, too, and must recognize facts. We are in the Caucasus because at present we are the greatest of Asiatic Powers, and have so much to lose by failure here. Occupation is in this case not a privilege, but it does create a presumption of responsibility until fresh arrangements are made, and we are against running away from the responsibility. At the same time the United States, too, have a responsibility, for the conscience of the Allies has singled them out as the appropriate mandatories in Armenia; and while they are free to reject or decline the honour, the enthusiasm of their representatives for the ideals of the League and the honourable part they have taken in drafting the Covenant make it more difficult for them to decline a duty. Alike in Poland, in Czecho-Slovakia, and in Armenia one charge can justly be

brought against the Allied councils. Their ideals have been excellently defined; but between the ideals and their realization the Allies have for various reasons, not all creditable, left exceedingly dangerous gaps. Nowhere is the gap so terrible as in Armenia, and, while we urge that we should still bridge it, we would also ask those who may undertake the duty of the mandatory Power to make ready to relieve and succeed us. And in the period of preparation for that duty, it would be a great advantage if the Allied powers were to declare that they will treat any crime against Armenians as a crime against themselves. The name of the League of Nations, while it is one of hope for the loyal and the down-trodden, should also be a name of terror for malefactors.

Parliamentary Debates.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

August 12th & 13th, 1919.

[OFFICIAL REPORT.]

Tuesday, 12th August, 1919.

Armenian Massacres.

Mr. CAIRNS (*Morpeth, Lab.*) asked the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs whether he has any knowledge of fresh massacres of Armenians by Turks and Tartars in Asia Minor and the Caucasus; and whether he can give any information on the matter?

Mr. CECIL HARMSWORTH: Recent disturbances in the Mosul area have resulted in the murder of a number of Christians, some of whom, at least, were probably Armenians. Massacres of Armenians in the Caucasus are reported, but have not, so far, been confirmed. There can, I am afraid, be no doubt that the present position of the Armenians is very far from satisfactory, and His Majesty's Government are anxious to see their future determined and a mandatory Power, if there is to be one, appointed at the earliest possible date.

Colonel YATE (*Melton, C.U.*): Would it not be better to maintain the garrison in those territories until this question has been settled?

Mr. CECIL HARMSWORTH: That is a question for the War Office.

Mr. F. THOMSON (*Aberdeen, Scotland, C.U.*): Is it not the case that the Allied Representatives in Armenia stated that, if the troops of occupation are withdrawn, massacres of the Christians on a large scale may be immediately expected?

Mr. CECIL HARMSWORTH: No, Sir. The facts may be as stated, but I am not aware of them myself.

Wednesday, 13th August, 1919.

Trans-Caucasia (British Forces).

Mr. A. WILLIAMS (*Consett, L.*): I desire to put to the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs a question of which I have given him private notice, as a matter of special urgency: Whether the British forces in Trans-Caucasia are to be withdrawn immediately, and, if so, whether any arrangements have been or can be made to prevent bloodshed among the different races inhabiting that region; whether he has information that the Kurds, Tartars, Turks, and Georgians are attacking, or preparing to attack, the Armenian Republic of Erivan, and, if so, whether the Armenians, having been our friends in the late War, will be rendered any assistance or left to their fate; further, whether the Italian Government has withdrawn its promise to send troops to Armenia to prevent massacre after the withdrawal of British troops; whether the Government of the United States has accepted a mandate for that region, and, if not, what steps have been taken to bridge the interval between the withdrawal of our troops and the establishment of some other separate government in the country?

Mr. CECIL HARMSWORTH: My hon. Friend gave me notice of this question only since the House assembled, and I have, therefore, not been able to refresh my memory in regard to all the questions. I can, however, assure him that this very important matter is under the immediate consideration of the Peace Conference at Paris.

Mr. T. P. O'CONNOR (*Liverpool, Scotland, Nat.*): May I ask my hon. Friend whether he will communicate to the Powers in Paris what I think would be the universal feeling of horror excited if the Armenians, who have already lost 1,000,000 people in this War by massacre, be handed over once more without protection to the same people who were guilty of those foul and wholesale massacres?

Mr. CECIL HARMSWORTH: I will certainly convey that message to our representatives in Paris.

Mr. NEIL MACLEAN (*Glasgow, Govan, Lab.*): Is this not a case where the League of Nations ought to act in a prompt manner to safeguard the people in Armenia?

Mr. CECIL HARMSWORTH: I should not like to give an answer off-hand to that question.

Lord R. CECIL (*Hitchin, C.U.*): Will the hon. Gentleman say whether the Government have any hope of anything being done to relieve these unhappy people, and whether our obligations to the Armenians are not at least as strong as those to General Denikin?

Mr. CECIL HARMSWORTH: I am sure that all those considerations are in the mind of the Government.

Lieut.-Commander KENWORTHY (*Hull, Central, L.*): The Armenians are not aristocrats.