

A WORD ABOUT THE ARMENIANS.

BY HESTER DONALDSON JENKINS.

AS Armenian immigrants are coming to this country in larger and larger numbers—many of them having acquired an interest in the United States through American missionaries and schools in Turkey, and all attracted by the freedom and opportunity of our land—a brief consideration of some of the characteristics of these new citizens of ours is pertinent.

Of all the dwellers in cosmopolitan Constantinople and Asia Minor, perhaps the most thoroughly Oriental are the Armenians. Their appearance is definitely eastern; swarthy, heavy-haired, black-eyed, with aquiline features, they look more Oriental than Turk, Slav or Greek. In general type they come closer to the Jew than any other people, sharing with them the strongly marked features, prominent nose and near-set eyes, as well as some gestures that we think of as characteristically Jewish. The type is so pronounced that to those who are akin to them they seem often very handsome, while to westerners they seem rather too foreign looking. Of course the type is not always preserved; white skins, even an occasional rosy cheek may be seen, and there is a small number of blue-eyed and fair-haired Armenians.

The resemblance to the Jews does not stop with physical features, for the fate of the two peoples has been sufficiently similar to bring out common traits. Like the Jew the Armenian has been oppressed and persecuted, and has developed a strength of nationality, a love for his own people and a persistence of type rarely seen elsewhere. Like the Jew he has learned to bend, not break, before the oppressor and to succeed by artifice when opposed by force. How else has he survived? Like the Jew he has developed strong business instincts, and like him he has a talent for languages, a power of concentration and unusual artistic gifts.

These resemblances have made many scholars question whether

the two races are not akin, whether the Armenian may not be descended from the lost ten tribes of Israel, but the philological basis for such a hypothesis is lacking. The Armenian language, say scholars, is Aryan and not Semitic. It is a rich language but harsh and guttural. Its alphabet is unique, consisting of thirty-six letters, most of them looking like capital U's, with added quirks, standing right side up or upside down or on their sides.

The Armenians boast a "golden age" of literature when for a brief cycle of fifty years a millenium ago their writers burst into poetry and song, translated the Bible into Armenian, and left a



ARMENIAN GROUP AT CONSTANTINOPLE COLLEGE.*

precious heritage of literature to their descendants. This literature is still studied in all the Armenian schools, and the church services are conducted in the language of this period. There is to-day a revival of Armenian literature, modeled in part on their revered classics and in part on French and English modern writings. The Armenian has a sense of style, a flow of language that often makes for oratory and fine writing.

Armenian names illustrate the sound of the language somewhat, such names as Këghanoush, Heygouhee, Aghavni. As among

* Armenians have no distinctive national costume. The young women in these illustrations are representatives of Armenia in Constantinople College where Miss Jenkins was a teacher for some years.

all Christian folk, scriptural names are common, such as Mariam (Mary), Hagup (Jacob) and Bogos (Paul); there is also a tendency to use French names such as Madelaine and Eugénie, but the most characteristic names are those definitely Armenian, such as Armen, Krikor and Muggerditch for men, and Armenouhee, Nouvart, Astrig and Mannig for women. The use of the family name is just coming into vogue. Hitherto a man has been known as the son of his father; thus Bogos is Bogos Meenasian, *ian* meaning "son of," and his son in turn becomes Hagop Bogossian. But the tendency to keep one's grandfather's name and thus establish a



ROUMELIE HISSAR (FORTRESS OF EUROPE) ON THE BOSPHERUS.*

family name is growing in favor. Often the family name is a Turkish root with the vernacular suffix, which is also the case with Greek and Slavic subjects of Turkey. Thus *Boyadjee* means "painter" or "boot-black" in Turkish, and one finds among the Christians of Turkey the Armenian form of Boyadjian, the Bulgarian Boyadjieff, and the Greek Boyadjoglou, all meaning "the son of the painter." Shishmanian, or "son of the fat man," Shandanjian or "son of the man from Damascus," and even the rather comic name of Shishkebabian, "the son of the fat mutton-chop," are all to be found among Armenian names.

*The towers were built by Mahomet II. Constantinople College is a few miles south of this fortress.

Although most of the Armenians have lived for centuries among the Turks and many have been brought up in the Turkish rather than the Armenian language, they very seldom speak Turkish without a strong Armenian accent amounting to a mispronunciation. It is merely one of the ways in which they have preserved their national individuality. They learn many languages early, in cultured homes generally speaking French and Turkish as easily as their own tongue, and now they are eagerly taking up English for its commercial as well as for its literary value.

The Armenians boast a church which is the oldest in Christendom, having been founded by Gregory the Illuminator some years before Constantine established the church in Byzantium. The mummied hand of Gregory is still laid on the head of each bishop at his consecration, thus carrying on the most perfect apostolic succession in the world. The church services and music are naturally very primitive.

The center of the Gregorian church is at Etchmiadzin, in the Caucasus mountains, where are the sacred cathedral, the relics, and the head of the church, the Catholicos. Corresponding to archbishops in the Western church are the patriarchs in each great political state. The patriarch of Constantinople is the political and national head of the Armenians and their representative at the Porte. Thus his position is largely a political one, and it is uncommon, although not unknown, for him to be a man of religious character. He must be diplomatic and able rather than spiritual. The danger in so old a church and one so connected with politics is that it shall be spiritually dead. But the influence of Protestantism through its missionaries has been not so much to take out a body of Protestants from the national church, as to infuse a new life into this old body and awaken the Gregorian church, which is changing rapidly to a live and thoughtful institution.

The Armenians had once a kingdom among the mountains and table lands of Asia Minor, where they fought bitterly but vainly against the conquering Byzantines. Nine centuries ago they lost their independence to the Greeks despite the heroic struggles of their kings and their great national hero, Vartan. As the Byzantine conquerors were in their turn conquered, the Armenians passed under the yoke of Turkey and of Russia. In this last century when there have been so many national reversals in southern Europe; when with the aid of northern powers Greece, Roumania and the Slavic states have broken away from Turkey; when even the small body of mountaineers in Albania have been given their own govern-



ARMENIAN STUDENTS IN COSTUME FOR A "PAGEANT OF THE NATIONS."

ment, there has been little thought of establishing the Armenians as an independent power. They have revolutionaries, have had their own societies, and have joined in the Young Turk movement; they have called pitifully on Europe, especially England, to free them from oppression, but they and their sympathizers have laid no real plans for self-government.

None of the powers have any interest in reviving an independent Armenia, for it would mean simply making a gift of it to Russia, who already has a large Armenian population. Poor bewildered Albania was erected not for the benefit of her wild peas-



ARMENIAN STUDENTS IN CHEMICAL LABORATORY.

antry but for the convenience of the Triple Alliance and the discomfiture of Servia. There is no such reason for making Armenia independent.

A good many Armenians in eastern Turkey, enraged against Turkish misrule, have in these last weeks joined the Russian army. This seems short-sighted, for Turkish government is far less efficient, and hence less deadly than Russian. For centuries the Gregorian church has been maintained in complete security in Turkey, but when Russia took the Caucasus and rich Elchmiadzin fell into

her hands, she promptly looted it of its greatest treasures and suppressed much of its activity. An American missionary visiting the desecrated sanctuary ten years ago asked one of the priests:

"Don't you wish you were still under Turkey?"

"Yes," was the reply, "for Turkey lopped off our branches but Russia digs us up by the roots."

But within the last decade Russia has changed her policy and has allowed the Armenians within her borders such liberty that they have prospered greatly and now find Russian rule preferable to Turkish.

There is little if any racial antagonism between the Armenians and the Turks; had religion and politics never come in to antagonize them, they could live together in essential harmony. For centuries the Armenians were excellent citizens of Turkey and served as officials, often of the highest rank. But as Europe took up the question of reform and attempted to protect the "Rayahs," or Christian subjects of the Porte, the Turkish government grew resentful, and for political considerations and to show her independence of Europe, wreaked vengeance on the helpless Armenians. The frequent massacres of Armenians have not been the outcome of natural antipathy, nor often of religious fanaticism, but usually have been purely political, sometimes brought on by zealous Armenian revolutionaries themselves in their desire to call the attention of Europe to their wrongs.

Let us illustrate this point by the massacres of 1909. Abdul Hamid had stirred up a counter-revolution against the Young Turks. It was failing and his power was lost. In a mood such as inspired Samson to pull down the temple in his fall, he decided to discredit Young Turkey with the world by a series of massacres of the Christian population of many a district. In most cases the governors refused to execute his orders and in the case of Constantinople the army of the Young Turks arrived in time to stop it; but as all know, in Cilicia the orders were executed and thousands of Armenians went like sheep to the slaughter.

The Rayahs of Turkey were peculiarly helpless to resist attack, for they were not allowed to bear arms, and instead of the military service paid to the state by all Moslems they were called on for a monetary tax called *haradj*. Thus their warlike qualities were suppressed for centuries. But with the changes brought about by the beneficent revolution of 1908, the Rayahs were put on the same footing as the Moslems and were expected to enter the army. Although this appealed to the Armenian's sense of fairness it did

not in many cases please the individual who was drafted, and complaint, evasion and emigration have followed the effort to make the untrained Armenian fight for Turkey.

The Armenian is generally deeply attached to his homeland. He has not been allowed to feel that Turkey was his country in any real sense. More than one Armenian has told how patriotic songs of other countries made him grieve, because he could not say "my country" of any state. But they say it of the district where they live, being passionately attached to the village or stretch of country in which their families have grown up, and often after coming to America they are desperately homesick for the sunshine of Turkey.

When the revolution of 1908 seemed truly a national uprising not merely of Moslems but also of Christians and Jews, when the Armenians thought they had helped to put down the Hamidian tyranny and to found a new constitutional state which was theirs as well as the Turks', their joy was touching. One of the most affecting sights I have ever seen, I witnessed on the glorious day of the opening of the first parliament in Turkey, when through the gaily decorated streets of Constantinople moved a body of Armenian men carrying banners and singing a song that one of them had composed called *Vatanum* or "My Fatherland." As one looked on the solemnly joyful faces of the singers and realized that now for the first time in nine centuries they felt that they had a fatherland, one was deeply moved.

The revolution did not bring them all they hoped, although changes in their lot have been made for the better, and now many of these people are rejoicing in the probable break-up of the Ottoman empire. But the ruin of Turkey would not bring them independence, it would simply transfer them to another and heavier yoke. I feel that the best opportunity for the Armenian would come if the Turks, possibly confined to Asia Minor, should evolve an equitable government under which their Oriental subjects, Moslem and Christian, can live happily. And I still hope that Turkey will learn her lessons in government, and that the powers will leave her a kingdom where both Turks and Armenians may pursue their natural Oriental development. I think that the Armenians are happier and more at home in the East than in America.

There has been a considerable immigration of Armenians to the United States of recent years, although during the European war it has entirely stopped. Just how many Armenians have come to our land is impossible to learn, for in all immigration statistics the

Armenians are counted as subjects of Russia or Turkey. To one who knows the persistence of their racial characteristics in the Orient, it is surprising to see how they lose themselves in this country. As a little instance of their lack of insistence on their nationality, consider the names of their four restaurants in New York City, "The Constantinople," "The Cairo," "The Bosphorus," and "The Balkan," all of them Oriental, but none specifically Armenian names.

Their numbers in New York City have been variously estimated by themselves at from five to twenty thousand, but the latter number includes residents in Hoboken, Yonkers, Jersey City and other adjoining towns. There are also a good number of Armenians in Chicago, in Boston and its neighborhood, and in California. Very few go to the South.

The majority of the immigrants are single men, some of whom send home for good Armenian wives when they have become prosperous, and some of whom marry here. But a fairly large number of families come with their husbands and fathers to this country. By far the larger part of these Armenians belong to the national Gregorian church. They have two churches in the vicinity of New York City, one on Twenty-Seventh street which has just been purchased by Armenians and the other in West Hoboken, which has long been owned by them. The Protestant Armenians, although they are a much smaller number, are a more prosperous community because they devote more time and more money to their churches than do the Gregorians.

Most of the Armenian immigrants are peasants, either used to field work, or, when they are skilled laborers, being carpenters, cabinet-makers, brass or iron workers, tinsmiths, shoemakers, blacksmiths, weavers and silk workers. Hundreds of them are employed in the silk-mills of New Jersey. The Armenians who come from the Oriental cities are prepared to be clerks, bookkeepers, house men, waiters, butlers, tailors, jewelers and rug repairers. There are a few rich Armenian firms dealing in rugs and curios in New York and other great American cities.

When the Armenian immigrant arrives at Ellis Island, he is met by some member of the Armenian Colonial Association, who sees that he gets safely into the city, then furnishes him with temporary quarters, and as soon as may be finds him employment or sends him to some western farm. This society is entirely philanthropic, conducting a labor bureau, classes in English and lectures in American and United States history, hygiene and other useful subjects. Its object is to help the Armenian immigrant and develop

him into a good American citizen. The lectures they offer on Tuesday evenings and Sunday afternoons have an average attendance of five hundred. There are also a choral society and an orchestra within this friendly Colonial Association.

On Lexington Avenue there are several blocks where one may see the unique Armenian letters in many a window, showing that this is an Armenian locality. At number 69 there is a club called "S. D. H. Armenian Club." It has pleasant quarters where its members may read, write and smoke, and a membership of one hundred persons of both sexes. Another club of which the membership is largely Armenian is the Constantinople College Alumnae Association, where with Americans, English, an occasional Bulgarian, Greek, or Turk, are found some fifty Armenian women who have been students of the American College for Girls in Constantinople. Several papers are published in Armenian in Chicago, Boston, and Fresno, California, and one in New York City called *The Gotchnag*.

As I said before, I feel that the Armenians are so Oriental that they are as a rule happier to remain in the Orient, but if they come to us, we may find them good citizens, thrifty, industrious, eager to learn our customs and ideals, and willing to adapt themselves to our religious institutions.