

MASSACRE OF CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA.



A Maronite Gentleman. A Maronite Priest. A Maronite Bishop. An Initiated Druze. A Druze Woman and Child.

THE intelligence of the terrible massacres in Syria, conveyed to this country from week to week, has justly excited feelings of horror and indignation in the minds of all classes of the community. Some of the atrocities committed were scarcely equalled by the very worst scenes in the great Indian tragedy. Not only have the Druzes, the hereditary enemies of the Christians, been engaged in this work of carnage, but they have been aided and abetted by the Mohammedans. The Turkish regular troops, in most instances, looked on with their customary indifference, muttering, doubtless, a hearty *hamdillah* (God be praised) at the death of each *kafir*. In some cases they seem to have even betrayed helpless Christians into the hands of their foes, and in one or two instances at least, they aided the Druzes in their wholesale murders. It has been asserted, too, that the Pashas of Damascus and Sidon were privy to a foul conspiracy for the total extermination of the whole Christian population. Such is the opinion of some of our own countrymen resident on the spot. But be this as it may, their acts hitherto have only been calculated to fan the flame of war and bloodshed. Details are still wanting. The accounts which have reached us are vague, and many of them are, doubtless, exaggerated. I shall endeavour to give the leading facts in this sad history, so far as they are known.

The question is frequently asked, "Who are

these Druzes?" A brief answer is necessary to the full understanding of the present state of matters.

In the beginning of the eleventh century, a Persian, called ed-Derazy, settled in Wady et-Teim, at the base of Mount Hermon, and founded a new sect. He taught a kind of semi-materialism, affirming that the Deity, during different periods, had resided in a number of men, the last of whom was the notorious Khalif Hâkim of Egypt; and that He has five superior ministers always existing, the chief of whom is Christ. To this was added the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, and a number of tenets more political than religious in their bearing. His followers took the name *Druzes*. They are divided into two classes, *Initiated* and *Ignorant*. With the former, all the rites and forms, peculiar to their faith, remain strictly secret. They assemble in their chapels every Thursday evening, and not only refuse admission to all others, but establish a strict guard outside so as to prevent the possibility of being seen or overheard. The figure of a calf has been found in their places of worship, but what it is used for none can tell. It appears that these secret meetings are more for the purpose of obtaining and communicating political information than for religious exercises. They are closely knit together by the ties of brotherhood, and the rapidity with which news is propagated throughout the whole

body is astonishing. Their religion, at least outwardly, is very accommodating. With the Mohammedans they live as Mohammedans, that they may benefit from their alliance, but they curse and revile them in private, as the writer can testify from personal knowledge. With the Christian officers of England they were willing, not many years ago, to profess Christianity, that they might get the protection of this country. They are industrious and hospitable when at peace, but in war they are noted for their daring ferocity. Being thus united in one firm body, being trained to arms from childhood, and possessing all the ardour, activity, and robust strength of mountaineers, they constitute one of the strongest parties in Syria. They occupy that section of the chain of Lebanon which lies south of the Damascus and Beyrout road. They also abound in villages on the eastern and western declivities of Hermon, and in Haurân. The total number of the Druzes is about 80,000.

The *Maronites* are Papists. They inhabit, almost exclusively, the northern section of Lebanon, and they have besides many scattered villages in the Druze country. Their number amounts to more than 200,000 souls. The Maronites and Druzes are hereditary enemies, a blood-feud having existed between them for many generations. Of this the Turkish authorities have frequently taken advantage, fanning the flame of discord so as to weaken both parties. Of this, too, Moslem fanatics take advantage, so as to secure an opportunity of murdering the Christians.

In the present war the Maronites are said to have been the aggressors, and it is more than hinted that they were urged on by French agents, so as to secure for France a plea for interference. It is believed that the Druzes were excited on the other hand by the Turks, and it is certain that the first battle between them took place in presence of an encampment of regular troops, who could easily have prevented it had they wished to interfere.

When the signal was given, the Druze population rose to a man. Nearly the whole of the Christian villages in their country were captured and burnt. Deir el-Kamr, a small town about six hours from Beyrout, is the capital and key of Southern Lebanon. It contains a large palace or castle, strongly situated, and occupied by a garrison of nearly 1000 regular soldiers. The town is inhabited by Christians, who defended themselves nobly for many days against the whole Druze forces. Their provisions at length failed. Their critical position being known in Beyrout, the foreign consuls and merchants volunteered to go if the Pasha would give them a small escort, and conduct the Christians of Deir el-Kamr to their city. This was refused. The Turkish garrison now offered them protection if they would give up their arms. They did so; and that very day the Druzes, invited it is said by the soldiers, rushed upon their now helpless victims, and massacred the whole male population!

Many of the Christians of Southern Lebanon fled to Sidon for refuge. The Moslems rose against them, and, aided by the soldiers in the garrison, murdered more than two hundred of them in the streets and at the gates. The whole Christian

population of that town would unquestionably have fallen a sacrifice to this outburst of Moslem fanaticism, had it not been for the timely arrival of Her Majesty's war-steamer "Fire-Fly."

At the western base of Mount Hermon lies the little town of Hasbeya, containing a mixed population of Druzes and Christians. The latter are not Maronites, and had, therefore, nothing to do with the war; yet they were attacked by the Druzes from Haurân. They took refuge in the palace of the native prince, and besought the Turkish garrison to save them. The Turks did nothing. The Druzes captured the palace, dragged the helpless Christians out in twos and threes, and *hewed them to pieces before the gate!* Two only escaped. One of these was a Protestant, who fled to Damascus, and gave a detailed account of this fearful tragedy to the Rev. Mr. Robson.

Zahleh, the largest town in Lebanon, containing a population of 12,000 Christians, was next attacked. After an obstinate defence it was taken, pillaged, partly burnt, and more than a thousand of its inhabitants put to the sword.

Bludân is a little village high up in Anti-Lebanon, far removed from the seat of war. It contains from three to four hundred quiet, inoffensive Christians, chiefly Greeks. It forms the summer quarters of the British consul of Damascus, and the missionaries. This village was suddenly surrounded by a large body of Druzes and Mohammedans, who brought out the whole male Christian population with their two priests, and at the sword's point forced them to declare themselves Mohammedans, and submit to the rite of circumcision!

When these tidings reached Damascus, they kindled all the hereditary fanaticism of the Moslem population. For weeks before, their insolence to the poor Christians had been intolerable. The latter were forced to abandon their businesses, close their shops, and shut themselves up in their houses. Day after day, and night after night, death seemed to stare them in the face. At length the rabble rose, and though the garrison consists of more than 6000 regular troops, with some thirty cannon, no effective means were taken to oppose them. Five hundred Christians are said to have been murdered; all the foreign consulates, except the English, were burnt. The Dutch consul was killed, and the American consul was wounded. The reason why the English consulate escaped, was probably the fact that it is in the Mohammedan quarter, and is situated close to the Great Mosque. The American consul is well known to many in this land. He was one of the first fruits of the Damascus mission. His great talents and influence have been devoted for more than ten years to the advancement of gospel truth among his countrymen. The announcement that *Dr. Meshakah* has been seriously wounded, and that his house has been burned to the ground, will be received with feelings of deepest sorrow by all who love the Lord Jesus in Britain.

Such are a few, and only a few of the leading facts in this terrible tragedy. One of the Damascus missionaries writes that the details have been unequalled for gross brutality and savage barbarity since the days of Tamerlane. Whole districts have been laid waste. Upwards of one hundred and

fifty villages have been burned to ashes. More than 70,000 persons have been left homeless and reduced to beggary. From twelve to fourteen thousand Christians have been murdered. Ten thousand widows and fatherless daughters are wandering in despair among the mountains, and through the streets of the great cities. Hundreds of others, after seeing husbands or brothers slaughtered, have been torn away to the harems of the brutal Moslems!

Can England sit calmly by and listen to these harrowing details? Will not common humanity constrain her people to call with one united voice for justice? Has not the blood of English soldiers, shed in the Crimea, bought for our Government a right to interfere for the prevention of such atrocities and the punishment of the perpetrators? Have we not a right to insist that Christianity should be no longer treated as a crime in the Turkish empire? If England do not interfere, and vigorously too, France and Russia will. The Turks will doubtless invent excuses, and make large and sweeping promises; but English politicians ought to know by this time, that Turkish excuses are uniformly lies, and that their promises have never been fulfilled. The blame may be laid on the Maronites. But even though they were the aggressors, surely this can never excuse or palliate the conduct of the Turkish troops and high officials. Why did the Mohammedans join in the massacre of Christians at Sidon, Deir el-Kamr, Hasbeya, and Damascus? Why are the whole Christian inhabitants of Beyrout, Jerusalem, Hums, Aleppo, and other places, kept in a state of constant alarm by the threats, insults, and unprovoked assaults of the Mohammedans? These are questions which England has a legitimate right to ask, and which Turkey ought to be compelled at once, and satisfactorily to answer. The conclusion of peace between Druzes and Maronites does not affect these questions. The lives of peaceable Christians must be protected now, and sufficient guarantees must be given for their future safety. Full compensation must be made for property wantonly destroyed, and such public order restored that Christian merchants shall be able to resume their business. Above all, those guilty of the unprovoked and cruel attacks on the Christians of Damascus, Bludân, Hasbeya, and Sidon, whether they be Turkish soldiers, or Syrian fanatics, must be summarily and publicly punished. Until this be done, there can be no peace or safety for the Christians of Syria.

Since the preceding lines were written, new and still more fearful intelligence has come from Syria. Every additional fact, every harrowing detail, tends to confirm the truth of the opinion expressed above, that the Turkish officials, from the highest to the lowest, have fostered this outburst of Moslem fanaticism. The tragedy at Damascus has been far more terrible than was at first supposed. The whole of the Christian and Jewish quarters of the city have been left in ashes. Six thousand houses have thus been burnt, and some thirty thousand inoffensive and industrious people have been made houseless and homeless beggars. The exact number of victims none can tell; but according to the latest advices, they amounted to from three to four thousand—all butchered in cold blood! Alas!

among these must now be reckoned one of the Irish Presbyterian missionaries, the Rev. Wm. Graham. Mr. Graham lay hid for a time in a Moslem house; but not considering himself safe there, he got an escort of Turkish soldiers, and attempted to reach the British Consulate. The mob came upon him; the soldiers basely deserted him without an attempt at resistance; and in a moment he was hewn to pieces. This is one among the many instances of Mohammedan gratitude to England for millions of treasure expended, and thousands of lives sacrificed in defence of a rotten throne, and of a barbarous and bloodstained race!

The Pasha of Damascus knew full well that the Christians were in danger, and that their total extermination had been planned. Mr. Brant, the English consul, and the Rev. Mr. Robson of the Irish Presbyterian Mission, at the risk of their own lives, went no less than six times to the palace, and besought the authorities to take steps for the defence of the Christians. It was in vain. The Governor had 6000 regular troops at his disposal, and not less than thirty pieces of cannon; and yet he did nothing!

On Monday, July 9th, at 2 o'clock P.M., some three hundred of the lowest Moslem rabble, accompanied by about as many more boys and women, rushed into the Christian quarter, shouting the well-known war-cry of their forefathers, *Ullahu Akbar!* A few of them had guns, and the rest swords, daggers, and sticks. It deserves special remark, that not a single Druze was then in or near the city. The work of plunder, burning, and slaughter immediately began. Late in the evening, about 300 soldiers and four guns were sent against the mob; but no sooner did they reach the scene, than they joined in plundering, and such as did not do so, actually used their arms to massacre the fleeing Christians. The whole Christian quarter was soon one mass of flames; and as the poor inmates of the houses, men, women, and children, tried to escape from the fire, they were thrust back on the burning piles by the bayonets of the Turkish troops! For this act of almost incredible barbarity, we have the positive authority of a European eye-witness who was hiding in the neighbourhood all that fearful night. An Englishman, who was likewise on the spot, writes, that from the very first, the mob cried out that the soldiers were on their side; and they used this as an inducement to their brother fanatics "to kill all the dogs of Christians, not to spare one; to burn their houses, dishonour their wives, and tear their children in pieces."

The following details and startling facts are from a private letter from the Rev. Smylie Robson. Mr. Robson's house fortunately stands within the Moslem quarter, and is the property of a family of high rank. To this he owes his safety, if indeed he be yet safe. The street which passes his door, is the main avenue from the very worst districts of the city to the Christian quarter, and along it rushed the great stream of blood-thirsty fanatics. He thus writes— "We have made a peep-hole over the street, from which we can see and hear without being seen; for if seen, we should probably very soon be disposed of. If my neighbours do not betray me, I may possibly escape,

but there are some of them not to be trusted. We are not in human hands, but in the hands of One infinitely good as well as infinitely powerful, and without his permission nothing can befall us. All this last fearful night, *Turkish soldiers* and Moslem men, women, and children, continued to pour past my door in one unbroken stream, all laden with spoil, most drunk with blood and rapine, all blaspheming the name of Christ and Christians, in shouts fearful to hear and too horrid to repeat.

. . . I believe it would not have needed a great effort on the part of the Government to prevent all this; but not the slightest effort has yet been made. There were soldiers in the Christian quarter, others were sent in the evening with four guns, and more this (Tuesday, 10th) morning, but they have not at all interfered with the ruffians. Yet a majority of the miscreants are actually women, boys, and girls. I could affirm that there are not in all more than a few hundred men—say 500—mostly the lowest of the low, and miserably armed, not one in twenty has a gun. Opposite my door is a sort of stopping-place for them, and we can overhear their talk; and I can affirm, that from the first, and all through, they have the greatest dread of the interference of the soldiers, and constantly ask one another, when they meet, whether the soldiers in such and such a direction are stopping the murderers or opposing them, and this although during seventeen hours the soldiers have been perfectly passive. I

believe firmly that 100, or at the most 200 soldiers, or armed resolute men not soldiers, could have put down the insurrection at the worst moment."

Such is the testimony of one of the most experienced and talented English residents in the East. It is hoped that his words will arrest the attention of the Government, and rouse the righteous indignation of the people of England. The Pasha of Damascus, and the Turkish garrison, are guilty before God and man of the blood of 4000 murdered Christians. They are doubly guilty of the blood of our countryman, whom they undertook to protect, and whom they basely and treacherously abandoned to his fate. A widowed mother, weeping over the untimely and cruel death of an only son, her only earthly support, calls for justice. And let it be remembered, the lives of several of our countrymen and countrywomen are still exposed to the fury of a lawless mob and a brutal soldiery. If vigorous measures be not immediately used by England and France, they and the whole Christian population of Damascus will unquestionably be massacred. The writer knows the Turks well, and he deliberately affirms that no faith can be put in any of their promises, from the Sultan to the meanest of his subjects: and he further affirms, that no Turk will ever act against his co-religionists until he is driven to it by fear of a foreign power.

J. L. P.



EBENDERS.