

Chapter XIII

Armenia

During the same period of organizing the Caedmon memorial (1896-1897), Hardwicke travelled around England preaching on behalf of the Armenian Relief Fund, which aimed at helping four hundred thousand destitute Armenians. Their plight arose from the oppression of Armenian Christians under Turkish Islamic rule which began in 1878. Promised reforms did not materialize and persecution of unbelievable savagery was carried out. A scheme had been proposed where by a colony of Armenians should be established in Cyprus. This was supported by Lord Bryce, Mr. and Mrs. G F Watts, together with many others. A committee was formed in Keswick and a large amount of money was raised for the fund.

As well as preaching, Hardwicke produced a small book entitled, The Darkened West, an appeal to England for Armenia. It was dedicated to "His Grace the Duke of Westminster, President of the Armenian Relief Fund. With gratitude of Englishmen for his succour to the oppressed".

In the preface dated September 1896, Hardwicke describes the situation clearly and vividly pointing out that blame was attached to England and her fellow Powers.* The state of Kharpoot Villayet had suffered the most at that time, with one hundred and thirty eight towns and villages desolated; five thousand and sixty four houses burned and twelve thousand seven hundred and eight people killed, according to the information then available. Funds were urgently needed to support twenty relief depots. The British Ambassador distributed the funds under consular supervision. American missionaries, mostly, administered the depots, bravely holding on to their posts under terrible conditions.

* Appendix 13 "England's obligations to Armenia".

The Berlin Congress of 1878 contained legislation which granted Armenians the right to their lives and security of their persons and property. Turkey had agreed to all the reforms, but from then until 1891, persecution on a horrific scale had continued with the aim of exterminating the Armenians. Thirty million people had been reduced to three million, but still the cruelty continued. The Armenian Patriarchs had been banished, imprisoned or killed, so that the people had no leaders. They were as sheep without a shepherd.

£100,000 had been sent by America and England in six months, but Hardwicke worked out that it amounted to one halfpence for each of these destitute people, whereas the holiday money drawn out of the clubs in northern manufacturing towns for the holidays, greatly exceeded this, e.g. in Oldham the amount was £200,000, twice as much. Hardwicke appealed to every church and chapel to form committees for fund raising.

The only escape for the Armenians was to follow Islam or commit suicide. Many followed the latter course. Hardwicke described graphically the atrocities which took place. His appeal was very moving and in his preface to the second edition, he was able to say that a change had taken place over the whole country saying, " ... the conscience of England is now awake."

In this small book there are thirty three sonnets written by Hardwicke, ten of them being added to the second edition. Interspersed between the sonnets are pieces of information and words of support. In the first piece by G. F. Watts, the artist, is in favour of the project to carry the persecuted to a place under British protection.¹

The second piece deals with reliable information, received by the Duke of Westminster that one hundred thousand men, women and children were in a deplorable state.² There follows accounts of

¹Rawnsley, H.D., The Darkened West, Kcswick, 1896, p29

²Ibid p33

the horrendous massacre at Arabkir,¹ in which almost all the men perished and of the Oorfah massacre² of three thousand people, mostly women, who after taking refuge in the church, were killed and burnt. Their golden coin ornaments had melted into solid masses said to be worth £10,000.³ These massacres had the effect of the churches drawing together, " ... into closer bonds of brotherly loving-kindness."

The next piece concerns a supposed correspondence between Abgar, King of Edessa and Jesus of Jerusalem, with a reply purporting to come from Jesus, quoted by Eusebius at the end of Book I of his Ecclesiastical History.⁴ An account of drownings of Armenians in the Bosphorus follows.⁵ The last piece contains words written by the Right Hon. James Lowther to the Mayor of Margate,

"As to what action our own government should now adopt, I feel bound to say that in my judgement no Government would be justified in running the remotest risk of dragging this country into the horrors of war, unless it be in defence of some distinctly British interests."⁶

The appendix contains a Daily Prayer for Armenia; a Hymn to the tune "Dundee", for the Armenian Relief Fund and reprints of two letters Hardwicke wrote to the *Manchester Guardian*. The first, dated the 1 October 1896 is headed, "Is Armenia worth saving?" In it he refutes Mr. E.W. Beckett, M.P. for Whitby's letter, in which he says,

"Are we then to disturb the peace of Europe, or jeopardize our position in the world, for the sake of the Armenians? They are not worth it. No nation is worth it, but certainly not the Armenians."⁷

¹Ibid p35

²Ibid p37

³Ibid p39

⁴Ibid p43

⁵Ibid p47

⁶Ibid p51

⁷H.D.R., The Darkened West, p60

Hardwicke in reply, says the only evidence given for such a statement was that Mr. Beckett had met a traveller in India who had once been to Armenia. Continuing his reply, Hardwicke enumerates the good points of the Armenians which made them worthy of being saved, namely that they were hardworking; deeply religious, with pure morals and willing to die for their faith; brave and loyal; keen on educational progress; a good influence in Asia Minor and full of vigour. Finally, he stressed the need to act at once to save the Armenians, because within three months, due to the treatment they were receiving, there would be none to save.

The second appendix, written one week later (the 8 October 1896) also to the *Manchester Guardian*, is entitled, "England's Obligation to Armenia." In it he lays the blame at England's door for the present situation and outlines the events leading to it. The Armenians in 1853 could have gained reforms from the Turks, but rather than let the Russians secure the Treaty, England entered into the Crimean War. The Russo-Turkish War followed and Armenia could have gained reforms from the Turks after their defeat, through the Treaty of San Stefano, but England as the prime mover, had it replaced by the Treaty of Berlin with its sixty first article. Under it, reforms and conditions were to be carried out, but progress was to be monitored by the Powers. England, since abrogating the former Treaty, had the greatest responsibility, which she had failed to fulfil. This was largely due to the clause relating to the carrying of arms by Christians. Under the old law the penalty for being armed was death. This left the Armenian Christians defenceless, which could have been remedied by the insertion of a clause in the Berlin Treaty, giving them the right to bear arms. Lord Derby, as England's spokesman, protested against such an innovation.

Hardwicke continued his letter by describing the Cyprus Convention with the stress again on seeing reforms implemented. There was a moral obligation to aid the Armenians. Moslem law decreed that if the Armenian Christians overstepped the limits of

their so called privileges by calling upon foreign powers, their lives and properties would be forfeited. Hence the appalling situation which existed. If England did not honour its obligations then, Hardwicke suggested that the word "honour" be dropped from our dictionaries and language.

This small book was sent to W.E. Gladstone with the following letter:-

"Tyn-y-Ffynon,
Barmouth,
North Wales
Oct 24 1896

Please do not give your Secretary the trouble of acknowledging this. I will trust the post to bring it to you safely.

Dear Sir,

Will you let me give myself the pleasure of sending to you a second edition of a series of sonnets on Armenia entitled, "The Darkened West". One of which (54) was inspired by your brave and public spirited action in coming from your retirement at the Liverpool meeting.

I have the honour to remain,
yours gratefully,
W.D. Rawnsley"¹

¹British Library No 148 44524