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The Armenian Problem

Alexander Atabekian

March 1894

The Armenian problem is a phenomenon that has its historical and social reasons. If we want to investigate the material causes of the Armenian problem in order to reach a definite and direct conclusion, we are obliged to follow the various stages of the development of Asian civilization, where only we can find the reasons for the existence of that problem and the way to solve it. And on the contrary, if we consider the Armenian issue as a local, private and national problem, we will all go to its source and fall into absurd mistakes in the proposed plan for it.

In the ancient historical ages, when Europe was immersed in the thick darkness of ignorance, Western Asia shone with the progress of its civilization, the proofs of which are the many sad ruins that are considered magnificent monuments today. Barbarian Europe received the first rays of enlightenment from Asia. Asia taught him to smelt copper, to forge iron, to keep domestic animals, and to raise many boys. European languages, customs, various tools and crafts, domesticated animals and the most useful animals spread from Asia, in a word, the knowledge that forms the basis of civilization and progress, the detailed mention of which would take us far.

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But thanks to the merciless accidents of a merciless fate, we have been forced to learn again from the Europeans the ingenious methods of raising the boys that we had lent them, the best ways of caring for the animals that we had introduced into their country. Finally, we are obliged to turn to them in order to acquire all the sciences useful for human society.

The current of righteous civilization, which was advancing from east to west, is now making a giant leap from west to east.

Ancient Asia is influenced by European civilization. The Asian coastal countries are more and more exposed to this influence day by day and are more closely connected with Europe. The flow of that European civilization has started to slowly penetrate deep into the earth. This is the current that is preparing the revival of the East — a revival that will be the cause of violent storms and bloody revolutions, because it will give the death blow to the infernal organization of the oppressors of Asia. Every nation has been subject to that civilized current and progressed to the extent of its own conveniences and the circumstances surrounding it. Sometimes that progress is made voluntarily and gradually, which avoids our review, but even so, there is a real progress everywhere.

Summing up my words about the Armenians, we see a huge change, a bottomless difference between our current situation and the situation we were in, not only hundreds, but several dozen years ago. Today, Armenia has its own literature, its own press, which supplies it with European civilizing ideas. It has its own educational institutions, the number of which is increasing day by day and which are constantly developing with European methods. Visitation also plays a civilizing role in the life of our Armenians. Returning to their homeland, Armenian farmers from capital cities and foreign countries take with them new views, new ideas. Our mercantile relations with Europe, and their introduction into us, have turned our daily life upside down, our tastes are refined, and our demands are

daily increasing, although the means of satisfying them do not exist.

A few telegraph wires, a few highways serve our country, facilitating relations and accelerating the revolution of its former life. Finally, the revolutionary propaganda, which is developing and spreading, plays a huge role in the life of the Armenian people. The living voice combined with the printed word transforms the people's mental world. It is not believed that we are optimistic or satisfied with the progress made. We know very well that our literature, firstly, does not have the necessary volume and height, and secondly, which is more important, the majority of people do not use it. We don't want to talk about the sleazy newspapers that lick the feet of rapists and extortionists. We see every day that our schools are far from satisfying the needs of the people in terms of their number and direction, and the majority of our working people do not know how to read and write.

We are convinced that the trade relations of Armenians with Europe have become a new way to accumulate wealth in the lives of Armenian and European merchants selling their conscience. We know very well that the few telegraph wires and roads were built for war purposes. We also know that our enemy is using these wires and roads to oppress and rob us by transporting rifles and bullets to Kar, Alashkert to catch a barrage of bullets, and towing cannons to bombard Sassoon. Finally, we know that the various prejudices of our people are still alive and the spirit of slavery dominates the heart of the people.

Yes, we know all this, but we are also happy to notice the change, the movement that is the beginning and the root cause of the rebirth of the Armenian people. We see that change, that movement more or less in other countries of Western Asia as well. The renaissance of West Asia is imminent. A tremendous revolution that will explode on the head of the Ottoman Empire will give birth to the freedom of all the nations and peoples

that make up that broken state. The Eastern problem, which after exhausting the brains of the European statesmen so much, had no solution, no way out, will be solved by the hands of the native nation. A great revolution will break that Kordian arrangement and will grant absolute freedom to all peoples constrained by that arrangement. Under the influence of European civilization, this movement started in the hearts of other peoples, as well as in the heart of the Armenian people. Under the influence of that current, the Armenian people are moving towards a revolution, which has no other goal, if not absolute economic freedom, which is the only ideal of the European civilizing current.