

# Turkish Barbarities

## From Time to Time Fanaticism Challenges Civilization, as in the Russian-Turkish War of 1877

Helena P. Blavatsky



The battle of the bridge over the river Skit, in November 1877, during the Turkish-Russian War. Partial view of a painting by Henryk Dembitzky (1830-1906).

### **A 2021 Editorial Note:**

The article “Turkish Barbarities” is reproduced from the “Collected Writings” of H. P. Blavatsky.<sup>1</sup> The founder of modern esoteric movement describes and discusses in the text the level of cruelty performed by followers of the so-called “radical Islam”. H.P.B. did admire aspects of the Sufi tradition - the mystic side of Islam - and had respect for Islamic philosophy. As to religious violence and intolerance, however, she wrote in her book “The Secret Doctrine”:

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<sup>1</sup> “Collected Writings”, H. P. Blavatsky, TPH, Wheaton, Ill., USA, volume I, with 570 pp., third edition, 1988, see pp. 255-260. (CCA)

“Verily, the fiendish spirits of fanaticism, of early and mediaeval Christianity and of Islam, have from the first loved to dwell in darkness and ignorance; and both have made ‘... *the sun like blood, the earth a tomb, / The tomb a hell, and hell itself a murkier gloom!*’ Both creeds have won their proselytes at the point of the sword; both have built their churches on *heaven-kissing hecatombs of human victims.*”<sup>2</sup>

In her article “Answer to a Russian Philosopher”, HPB refers to Russia as “*the only country where the pure ideal of Christ is still preserved*”.<sup>3</sup> In “Turkish Barbarities”, she gives her testimony about the crimes committed by Muslims during the 1877-1878 war with Russia. Significantly enough, the Pope and the Vatican supported Turkey against the Christians.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1967 edition, says about the war:

“The Turkish Parliament, which met in March [1877], declared that there was no need for Russian protection over Ottoman Christians. Russia in exasperation declared war on Turkey on April 24. The Rumanians joined Russia, and Austria declared its neutrality. Public opinion in Europe was anti-Turkish, especially in England, because of the financial repudiation and the sanguinary repression of the Bulgarian revolt, and not a single voice was raised in favour of Turkey. The Turks were defeated both in Europe and in Anatolia, and the Russian Army reached Edirne where both a truce and the preliminaries of peace were signed on January 31, 1878.”<sup>4</sup>

History teaches us lessons, and one of them is that preserving a civilization means having love and respect for life, including the life of one’s adversaries. HPB writes in the present article:

“I regard this war not as one of Christian against Moslem, but as one of humanity and civilization against barbarism.”

(CCA)

## Turkish Barbarities

**Helena P. Blavatsky**

[*The World*, New York, August 13, 1877]

To the Editor of *The World*.

Sir:

The Sublime Porte<sup>5</sup> has had the sublime effrontery to ask the American people to execrate Russian barbarity. It appeals for sympathy on behalf of helpless Turkish subjects at the seat of

<sup>2</sup> See volume I, Introductory, p. xli in “[The Secret Doctrine](#)”, by H.P. Blavatsky. (CCA)

<sup>3</sup> See in the associated websites: “[Answer to a Russian Philosopher](#)”. The sentence is present in the last (long) paragraph of the article, which starts with the words “This should”.(CCA)

<sup>4</sup> The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1967 edition, volume 22, entry “Turkey”, p. 382. (CCA)

<sup>5</sup> *Sublime Porte* - or *Porte*, the government of the Ottoman Empire. (CCA)

war. With the memories of Bulgaria and Servia still fresh, this seems the climax of daring hypocrisy. Barely a few months ago the reports of Mr. Schuyler and other impartial observers of the atrocities of Bashi-Bazouks sent a thrill of horror through the world. Perpetrated under official sanction, they aroused the indignation of all who had hearts to feel. In today's paper I read another account of pretended Russian cruelties, and your able and just editorial comments upon the same. Permit one who is, perhaps, in a better position than any other private person here to know what is taking place at the front, to inform you of certain facts derived from authentic sources. Besides receiving daily papers from St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tiflis and Odessa, I have an uncle, a cousin and a nephew in active service <sup>6</sup>, and nearly every steamer brings me accounts of military movements from eyewitnesses. My cousin and nephew have taken part in all the bloody engagements in Turkish Armenia up to the present time, and were at the siege and capture of Ardahan. Newspapers may suppress, color or exaggerate facts; the private letters of brave soldiers to their families rarely do.

Let me say then that during this campaign the Turkish troops have been guilty of such fiendish acts as make me pray that my relatives may be killed rather than fall into their hands. In a letter from the Danube, corroborated by several correspondents of German and Austrian papers, the writer says: "On June 20th we entered Kozlovetz, a Bulgarian town of about two hundred houses, which lies three or four hours distant from Sistova. The sight which met our eyes made the blood of every Russian soldier run cold, hardened though he is to such scenes. On the principal street of the deserted town were placed in rows 140 beheaded bodies of men, women and children. The heads of these unfortunates were tastefully piled in a pyramid in the middle of the street. Among the smoking ruins of every house we found half-burned corpses, fearfully mutilated. We caught a Turkish soldier, and to our questions he reluctantly confessed that their chiefs had given orders not to leave a Christian place, however small, before burning it and putting to death every man, woman and child."

On the first day that the Danube was crossed some foreign correspondents, among them that of the *Cologne Gazette*, saw several bodies of Russian soldiers whose noses, ears, hands, etc., had been cut off, while the genital organs had been stuffed into the mouths of the corpses. Later three bodies of Christian women were found - a mother and two daughters - whose condition makes one almost drop the pen in horror at the thought. Entirely nude, split open from below to the navel, their heads cut off; the wrists of each corpse were tied together with strips of skin and flesh flayed from the shoulder down, and the corpses of the three martyrs were similarly bound to each other by long ribbons of flesh dissected from their thighs.

A correspondent writes from Sistovo:

"The Emperor continues his daily visits to the hospitals and passes whole hours with the wounded. A few days ago His Majesty, accompanied by Colonel Wellesley, the British military attaché, visited two unfortunate Bulgarians who died on the night following. The skull of one of them was split open both laterally and vertically, by two sword-cuts, an eye was torn out, and he was otherwise mutilated. He explained, as well as he could, that several Turks seizing him, demanded his money. As he had none, four of the party held him fast

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<sup>6</sup> These were General Rostislav Andreyevich de Fadeyev, brother of H.P.B.'s mother; Alexander Yulyevich de Witte, son of H.P.B.'s aunt, Katherine Andreyevna de Witte; and Rostislav Nikolayevich de Yahontov, son of H.P.B.'s sister, Vera Petrovna, by her first marriage. (Boris de Zirkoff, the compiler)

while the fifth, brandishing his sword, and repeating all the time, ‘There, you Christian dog, there’s your cross for you!’ first split his skull from the forehead to the back of the head, and then crosswise, from ear to ear. While the Emperor was listening to these details the greatest agony was depicted upon his face. Taking Colonel Wellesley by the arm, and pointing to the Bulgarian, he said to him in French, ‘See the work of your protégés!’ The British officer blushed and was much confused.”

The special correspondent of the London *Standard*, describing his audience with the Grand Duke Nicholas, Commander-in-Chief, on the 7th of July, says that the Grand Duke communicated to him the most horrifying details about the cruelties committed at Dobruja. A Christian, whose hands were tied with strips of his own skin cut from the length of both his arms, and his tongue cut out from the root, was laid at the feet of the Emperor, and died there before the eyes of the Czar and the British agent, the same Colonel Wellesley, who was in attendance. Turning to the latter, His Majesty, with a stern expression, asked him to inform his Government of what he had just seen for himself. “From the beginning of the war”, says the correspondent, “I have heard of quite a number of such cases, but never witnessed one myself. After the personal assurances given to me by the Grand Duke, it is no longer possible to doubt that the Turkish officers are unable to control their irregular troops.”

The correspondent of the *Syeverniy Vestnik* had gone the rounds of the hospitals to question the wounded soldiers. Four of them, belonging to the Second Battalion of Minsk Rifles, testified with the most solemn asseverations that they had seen the Turks approach the wounded, rob them, mutilate their bodies in the most cruel way and finish them with the bayonet. They themselves have avoided this fate only by feigning death.

It is a common thing for wounded Turks to allure Russian soldiers and members of the sanitary corps to their assistance and, as they bend over them, to kill with a revolver or dagger those who would relieve them. A case like this occurred under the eye of one of my correspondents in Turkish Armenia and was in all the Russian papers. A sergeant’s assistant (a *sanitar*)<sup>7</sup> was dispatched under such circumstances; thereupon a soldier standing by killed the assassin.

My cousin, Major Alexander Y. Witte, of the Sixteenth Nizhegorodsky Dragoons, one of the most gallant soldiers in the army of Loris-Melikoff, and who has just been decorated by the Grand Duke, under the authority of the Emperor, with a golden sword inscribed “For Bravery”, says that it is becoming positively dangerous to relieve a wounded Turk.<sup>8</sup> The people who robbed and killed the wounded in the hospital at Ardahan upon the entry of the Russian troops were the Karapapahs, Mussulmans and the supposed allies of the Turks.

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<sup>7</sup> Sanitar - a male nurse, a paramedic. CCA)

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Yulyevich de Witte (1846-1877) was the second son of Yuliy Feodorovich de Witte and Katherine Andreyevna de Fadeyev, sister of H.P.B.’s mother. He was a younger brother of Serguey Yulyevich de Witte who became Prime Minister of Russia. According to Vera P. de Zhelihovsky, in her brief biographical account of H.P.B.’s life (See Preface to the Russian edition of H.P.B.’s “Enigmatical Tribes of the Blue Hills”, p. xv), he was at the time a Major in the Nizhegorodsky Dragoons and suffered a painful contusion in an engagement on Oct. 2, 1877. This developed into heavy migraines, and he died in 1884 from the aftereffects of the injuries. (Boris de Zirkoff, the compiler)



During the siege they prudently awaited the issue from a safe distance. As soon as the Russians conquered, the Karapapahs flew like so many tigers into the town, slaying the wounded Turks, robbing the dead, pillaging houses, bringing the horses and mules of the fleeing enemy into the Russian camp, and swearing allegiance to the Commander-in-Chief. The Cossacks had all the trouble in the world to prevent their new allies from continuing the greatest excesses. To charge, therefore, upon the Russians the atrocities of these cowardly jackals (a nomadic tribe of brigands) is an impudent lie of Mukhtar Pasha, whose falsifications have become so notorious that some Parisian papers have nicknamed him "Blageur Pasha". His dispatches are only matched in mendacity by those of the Spanish commanders in Cuba.

The stupidity of charging such excesses upon the Russian army becomes apparent when we remember that the policy of the Government from the first has been to pay liberally for supplies, and win the goodwill of the people of the invaded provinces by kindness. So marked and successful has this policy proved in General Loris-Melikoff's field of operations, that the anti-Russian papers of England, Austria and other countries have denounced it as Russian "craft".

With the Danubian forces is the Emperor in person - liberator of millions of serfs, and the mildest and most just sovereign who has ever occupied the throne of any country. As he won the love of his whole people and the adoration of his army, by his sense of justice and benevolent regard, I ask you, if he is likely to countenance any cruel excesses? While the cowardly Abdul-Hamid hides in the alcoves of his harem, and of the Imperial Princes none have taken the field, the Czar follows his army step by step, submits to comparatively severe and unaccustomed hardships, and exposes his health and life against all the remonstrances and prayers of Prince Gortchakoff. His four sons are all in active service, and the son of the Grand Duke Nicholas was decorated at the crossing of the Danube for personal courage, having exposed his life for hours under a shower of bullets.

I only ask the American people to do justice to their long-trying and unfaltering friends, the Russians. However politicians may have planned, the Russian people have entered this war as a holy crusade to rescue millions of helpless Slavonians - their brothers - of the Danube from Turkish cruelty. The people have dragged the Government to the field. Russia is surrounded by false neutrals, who but watch the opportunity to fly at her throat; and, shameful fact! the blessing of the Pope rests upon the Moslem standards, and his curse against his fellow Christians has been read in all the Catholic churches. For my part, I care a great deal less even than my countrymen for his blessings or curses, for, besides other reasons, I regard this war not as one of Christian against Moslem, but as one of humanity and civilization against barbarism.

This is the view of the Catholic Czechs of Bohemia. So great was their indignation at what they rightly considered the dishonor of the Roman Catholic Church, that on the 4th of July - anniversary of the martyrdom of John Huss<sup>9</sup> - notwithstanding the efforts of the police, they repaired in multitudes to the heights of Smichovo, Beraun and other hills around Prague and burnt at the stake the portraits and wax effigies of the Pope and the Prince Archbishop Schwartzberg, and the Papal discourse against the Russian Emperor and army, singing the

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<sup>9</sup> In 1415. (Boris de Zirkoff, the compiler)

while Slavonian national songs, and shouting, “Down with the Pope!” “Death to the Ultramontanes!” “Hurrah for the Czar-Liberator!”

All of which shows that there are good Catholics among the Slavonians, at least, who rightly hold in higher estimation the principles of national solidarity than foolish dogmas of the Vatican, even though backed by pretended infallibility.

Respectfully,

H.P. BLAVATSKY. August 9. [1877]

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See [“Occult Roots of Religious Violence”](#), [“Il’in and Tolstoy on the Use of Force”](#) and [“Slavophilism and Theosophy”](#).

Examine [“The World War in Our Minds”](#).

You might want to read [“Theosophy and the Second World War”](#) and [“A Psychoanalysis of Religions”](#).

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