

Armenian Genocide Resource Center, 2005
Dr. Leon Picon, retired historian (USA)

One of the most eye-opening and reliably informative books regarding the false Armenian Genocide on record. Too bad it's not written by a Westerner, in case there are those of you who believe (justifiably) a writer's origin can determine his or her bias. However, there are more than enough excerpts taken from Western sources to set your minds at ease.

**The Armenian File: The Myth Of Innocence Exposed, by Kamuran Gurun
Reviewed by Dr. Leon Picon**

Armenian Genocide Resource Center, 2005
Dr. Leon Picon, retired historian (USA)

One of the most eye-opening and reliably informative books regarding the false Armenian Genocide on record. Too bad it's not written by a Westerner, in case there are those of you who believe (justifiably) a writer's origin can determine his or her bias. However, there are more than enough excerpts taken from Western sources to set your minds at ease.

**"We can easily state that propaganda is one of the weakest points of the Turks."
[Gurun, File, p. 36]**

With this simple, declarative sentence political scientist and former Ambassador Kamuran Gurun introduces us to one of the most concise but informative exposes ever written of the seldom-discussed, insidious role of the British anti-Turkish propaganda machine in spreading the Armenian "genocide" myth, during and for a period after World War I. The statement also points a finger at Turkey's complete apathy to the vast propaganda onslaught from the West. Most people who follow "The Armenian Question" with anything more than a passing interest are hazily aware that the Western Imperialist

Powers were somehow involved in the spread of the exaggerated tales of unilateral massive atrocities in Anatolia. The degree to which the falsifications were actually an integral part of the Great Powers' policies and the instrumentalities which they used in disseminating their propaganda are usually glossed over or only vaguely hinted at by those who treat the history of the 1915-23 era in the Levant.

How successfully the Turks could have warded off the resultant stigma through counter-propaganda will never be known. But it is certain that in 1922 Sultan Mohammed VI put it quite succinctly and pointedly, when he told the American writer E. Alexander Powell:

“If we sent one, your newspapers and periodicals would not publish an article written by a Turk, if they published it, your people would not read it, if they read it, they would not believe it. Even if we sent a qualified person to America, to convey to you in your language, the Turkish point of view, would he find an impartial audience?” [Gurun, File, p. 37]

It was true throughout Ottoman history, and it remains almost as true today. Ottoman Turks obviously had never really felt the need to develop a propaganda machine. Turks today still retain an abiding contempt for propaganda. Turks of the Republic have on occasion tried to counteract with information programs the malicious falsehoods about their history and culture — and even this they have done only lately and with minimal successes. Blend together the normal Turkish reticence with the deftness of the English propaganda factory “Wellington House,” add the zeal of the Western missionaries in exaggerating what had happened in Eastern Anatolia, and a monumental myth is born.

The Armenian File supplies us with fascinating insights into the activities of Wellington House, the distortions of truth which it circulated, and its relationship to British policy objectives. Throughout Gurun's book there are numerous useful illustrative quotations. Startling, but characteristic, is the following admission from *The Armenians*, published in 1916 by an Englishman, C. F. Dixon-Johnson:

“We have no hesitation in repeating that these stories of wholesale massacre have been circulated with the distinct object of influencing, detrimentally to Turkey, the future policy of the British Government when the time of settlement shall arrive. No apology, therefore, is needed for honestly endeavouring to show how a nation with whom we are

closely allied for many years and which possesses the same faith as millions of our fellow subjects, has been condemned for perpetrating horrible excesses against humanity on 'evidence' which, when not absolutely false, is grossly and shamefully exaggerated." [Gurun, File, p. 45]

"Wellington House," sometimes known also as the Masterman Bureau, turned out a mass of publications, authored by such famous British writers as Max Aitken, James Bryce, Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, Arnold Toynbee, and H. G. Wells. Such was the caliber of the propagandists whose writings flooded Western Europe, the Scandinavian nations, Russia, and America. Among their publications was a "blue book" on the Armenians published in 1916. In its first form it was a pamphlet entitled Armenian Atrocities, The Murder of a Nation. Since the original Wellington House edition of this pamphlet is no longer available, it cannot be compared with the reprint done in the United States in 1975 by an Armenian publishing house. Gurun points out that it is impossible for us to know today whether the Toynbee who wrote The Western Question in Greece and Turkey would have permitted the 1975 edition if he had been alive at the time of the reprint.

Or, consider still another prop in the building of the great Armenian myth: the role of the American missionary. Kamuran Gurun, in his study, has unearthed statement after statement drawn from the commentators of Russia, France, the United States, and Britain. Another quotation from E. A. Powell's writings states:

"The extent of the American missionary effort in the old Ottoman Empire is quite generally known, but its effect on American public opinion is not, perhaps, so widely recognized. Very early in their work the American missionaries discovered that Moslems do not change their faith, so, debarred from proselytism among the Turks, they devoted their energies to religious, educational, and medical work among the Christian minorities, particularly the Armenians. For half a century or more, these missionaries provided our chief sources of information on conditions in the Near and Middle East, and by them public opinion the United States on these subjects was largely moulded. Having been rebuffed by the Moslem Turks and welcomed with open arms by the Christian Armenians, it is scarcely surprising that they espoused the cause of the latter and the reports they sent home and the addresses they delivered, when in America on leave of absence, were filled with pleas for the oppressed Christians and with denunciations of their Turkish oppressors. The congregations which supported the missionaries accepted this point of view without question, and there was thus gradually developed, under the aegis of our churches, a powerful anti-Turkish opinion." [Gurun, File, p. 30]

This “powerful anti-Turkish opinion,” which Powell wrote about and which had been circulating all over America, makes it easier for us to understand Henry Morgenthau’s blind anti-Turkish attitude as reflected in his later book. His judgments were seriously colored by what he constantly heard unilaterally from missionaries at home and from those in Turkey when he was the American ambassador there. Although Gurun does not draw this direct connection in his treatment of Morgenthau, on pages 240-41 of Gurun’s book, there are revealed other fascinating political meetings which further show Morgenthau’s motivations and underlying bias against the Turks.

The foregoing paragraphs of this review, it must be noted, deal only with a tiny but characteristic fraction of the book’s contents. They were chosen simply to be illustrative of the mass of documentary material that appears in this concise book. In seven pages of introduction and 323 pages of text, indices, a bibliography, and notes, Kamuran Gurun delves into every factor that has led up to the development of the Armenian Myth, from defining the Armenians and their origins; through the onset of the Armenian “question;” their position in the Ottoman Empire; the numerous attempts at insurrection; the recurrent acts of treason and involvement with Russia, particularly when Russia was at war with the Ottomans; the treachery during World War I, the decision to relocate the insurgents, and the ensuing problems of implementing that decision; and, finally, the aborted civil war within the Turkish War of Independence. In treating the activities of the Armenians during the period surrounding World War I, Gurun describes the rise of the Dashnagtsutune, the territorial agreements the Armenians made with Russia over Turkey’s eastern provinces, and the beginnings of Armenian underground activities and terrorism. And every statement and event is thoroughly documented, frequently from Armenian sources. In short, this book tells the complete story concisely. One is tempted to say “too concisely,” for the volume seemingly has more documentation than narrative analysis. Anyone who takes up this book for bedtime reading makes a mistake; it is not a running account of the development of a people nor is it easy reading as history. The book is, however, what its title says it is: a file, a dossier, not of an individual, or even of a people. It is a file which undoubtedly constitutes the most compact, fully documented, chronological treatment of the birth of a malignant myth—a myth of innocence which has plagued the Western world for nearly a century. It is a source book of information, drawn not only from official and unofficial documents but also from the histories, commentaries, and other accounts written by Armenians as well as “outsiders.”

No one who ever deals with the Armenian issue in the future can fail to take this book into account. Difficult though it may be to get started reading *The Armenian File*, every Turkish-American should have access to it. It should be in the university libraries and in the public libraries. It tells the story more completely and honestly than anything

heretofore.

Published jointly by K. Rustem & Bro. and Weidenfield & Nicolson Ltd., London-Nicosia-Istanbul, it is not yet easily obtainable in American bookstores. Copies are obtainable now for \$29.95 +\$1.50 (shipping and handling) by calling Customer Service at 212-647-5151 or writing to:

St. Martin's Press

175 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10010

Readers of this review may wish to consider presenting copies to their local public and university libraries.

The book is that important.