NO, MR. GUL, IT WAS TRUE THEN; IT IS TRUE NOW!

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Category: Opinions

By Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia, PA, 6 September 2008

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I refer to the "massacres of the Bulgarians," in 1876. It was big in those days, and some politicians got their unmentionables in a twist about it. But, like all matters concerning Turkish atrocities, it was short-lived.

However, one politician--"Statesman," really, since he is among the last to truly deserve the title--did something. He was William E. Gladstone, who was later to take up the cause of another people who were victims of Turkish atrocities. Not satisfied with speaking against it, he wrote a damning pamphlet which "flew off the presses," and sold upwards of 40,000 in just a few days. It is said only the much-anticipated "Childe Harold," by Lord Byron, earlier in the century, sold more copies faster.

One writer, André Maurois, was to write of the massacres: ". . .the Turks, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. . .there was not a criminal in European jails, not a cannibal. . .whose indignation would not rise at the recital of what had been done." I am indebted to Prof. Vahakn Dadrian for that quote.

But, there was another writer who also noted the event.

Readers may get an insight into the workings of what passes for my mind, when I try to explain why I am, now, delving into history--and literature. Earlier this year--or late last year--after Ankara had successfully defeated HR106 (the ill-fated Genocide-recognition bill, which the Dummycrats in Washington mishandled badly), Turkey's President Abdullah Gul joyfully announced the death of the measure by saying something along the lines of "We Turks would never do such things , and we Turks have never done these things."

I knew from my knowledge of history that the Turks have always done such things. Over the centuries, they have, in one way or other, mistreated every one of the minorities who have had the misfortune to be a subject people. To their credit, the Turks are non-discriminating equal-opportunity murderers--they have killed Christians, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims. But, I wander.

I recalled that Fyodor Dostoyevsky had something to say about the Bulgarian massacres. It has taken me this long to stop pushing the note around my desk and to seek it out. Give me a break, Folks, it's a long book.

It is the cynical brother Ivan Karamazov speaking to his holy brother Alexey, in "The Brothers Karamazov," first published in 1880:

"By the way, not so long ago a Bulgarian in Moscow told me," Ivan went on, as though not bothering to listen to his brother, "of the terrible atrocities committed all over Bulgaria by the Turks and Circassians who were afraid of a general uprising of the Slav population. They burn, kill, violate women and children, nail their prisoners' ears to fences and leave them like that till next morning when they hang them, and so on--it's impossible to imagine it all. And, indeed, people sometimes speak of man's 'bestial' cruelty, but this is very unfair and insulting to the beasts: a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so ingeniously, so artistically cruel. A tiger merely gnaws and tears to a piece, that's all he knows. It would never occur to him to nail men's ears to a fence and leave him like that overnight, even if he were able to do it. These Turks, incidentally, seemed to derive a voluptuous pleasure from torturing children, cutting a child out of a mother's womb with a dagger and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on a bayonet before the eyes of their mothers. It was doing it before the eyes of their mothers that made it so enjoyable. But one incident I found particularly interesting. Imagine a baby in the arms of a trembling mother, surrounded by Turks who had just entered her house. They are having great fun: they fondle the baby, they laugh to make it laugh and they are successful: the baby laughs. At that moment the Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs happily, stretches out his little hands to grab the pistol, when suddenly the artist pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows his brains out. . . . Artistic, isn't it? Incidentally, I'm told the Turks are fond of sweets."

(Isn't that last sentence a gem, an absolute gem? That's the mark of a genius!)

Just think of the workings of the writer's mind--Dostoyevsky's that is. He wants to put words in the mouth of a brother who is trying to shake the faith of his younger brother. Does he use abstract arguments? He does not. He refers to an actual event, he refers to actual barbarisms perpetrated by one people on another people. Coming out four years after the events, the book's reference was fresh in the minds of the readers. And, therefore, they could relate to Ivan's argument, but also appreciate the basic goodness and innocence of Alexey.

And, also, forever give the lie to any statement by any Turk (and apologists) denying the inherent evil that is the Turkish mind.

Now, I can finally throw away the note.