CURRYING OTTOMAN FAVOR BY DENIGRATING ARMENIANS

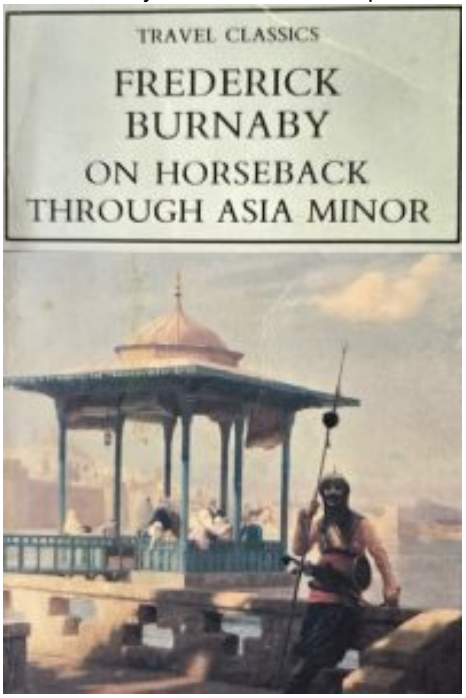
Posted on May 31, 2026 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 29 May 2026

In our May 18 issues, we published *Turks Not the Issue of The Grey Wolf* about England romancing the Ottomans in the 17th century. A century later, the affair had cooled because of the decline of the Ottomans. The romance bloomed again in the 19th century. A platoon of British writers made a beeline to Constantinople to burnish the image of the Ottomans and improve British relations with the corrupt, sickly, and lumbering Ottoman giant. One of their strategies to win the hearts of the Turks was to denigrate the Ottoman minorities, especially the Armenians and the Greeks. Among the slew of 19th century British Turcophile writers whose mission was to elevate the image of the Ottoman Turks was anti-Armenian writer Frederick Burnaby. Below is a sample of his anti-Armenian and pro-Turkish propaganda from his *On Horseback Through Asia Minor* published in 1898, a few years after the Hamidian massacres which resulted in the killing of 200,000 to 300,000 Armenians. *The New* York Times described it as "holocaust," forty-five years before the Jewish experience.



Armenian Wedding
In many instances, an Armenian was not permitted to see his wife before marriage, and had to take her, as the Yankees say, "on spec."

"From her earliest childhood an girl is brought up to consider herself as a slave in her father's house: until the Armenians abandon these barbarous customs, their so-called Christianity will not do them much good."

Armenian Church
"Later in the day I walked into an Armenian church…It must sometimes have been bitterly cold inside, for there were no stoves in the building. I was informed that the upper classes who came to pray all wore furs. As the lower order are not able to pay for any such warm garments, they must occasionally be half frozen when listening to their priest's oration."

Another church visit:
"From the market, I went to the Armenian church. It consists of several rooms, one of them being very like a wooden barn…there was nothing to be seen in the building save a few tawdry pictures of saints.

Armenian Character

"…but when I changed the conversation to the Armenians, I found that the company looked upon them as being quite as ignorant as the Turks, and much more deceitful."

Armenian Business Ethics

"The Armenian merchants who employed the telegraph were able to make large sums by buying out all the gold in the district, and pocketing the difference between the actual exchange and that which passed current at Sivas."

"There was no very active trade in Divriki. The Armenians supplied the people of the town with the few goods which might require exorbitant prices. In addition to this, most of the Christians were usurers. Any Mohammedan who chanced to require a loan had to pay his Armenian fellow citizen a very high rate. In some instances, old Turkish families had been entirely ruined; their descendants were lying in goal at the suit of Armenian money lenders."

Popular Turkish Authorities

"I now learned that Isaak Pasha was very popular among the villagers. I must say I was a little surprised at this, after the way the Armenians in Sivas had abused their governor."

Armenian Newspapers

"The Armenian newspapers, probably instigated by Russian agents, had declared that the Turkish troops stationed in Van had first set fire to the bazaar, and then pillaged it in the confusion…Armenians kept petroleum and Lucifer matches in their warehouses."

Armenians and Hygiene

"The Turks did not willingly receive Armenians into their houses, but when they did so, subsequently threw their mattresses out of the window, saying that they had been defiled by the contact of a giaour's body. This was mentioned to show the fanaticism of the Turks. However, during my subsequent travels in Armenia, the impression gradually dawned upon my mind that the Turks were, first of all, very wise not to wish to receive the Armenians into their houses; and, secondly, if they had been good-natured enough to do so, to destroy the mattresses after the departure of their guests. The Armenians in their habits of body are filthy to the last degree. Their houses and clothes are infested with vermin. The Turks, on the contrary are much cleaner, and are most particular about the use of the bath.

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Comments



Cassandra – 2026-06-14 17:43:06
Dalita, if you do an internet image search for what Turkish and Kurdish rural peasant brides looked like circa 1900, you will see that they were "bound up like wrapped parcels" even more than the Armenians were. So the question becomes, why would the Brits and French find that practice offensive only if it were found among the Armenians? In a Muslim society in the 1900s, it could not be otherwise.



Dalita – 2026-06-13 10:16:45
The Britons' love of Turkey as well as some disgusting French writers' like Pierre Loti is well known among us. Sure enough, it isn't nice for us to read these descriptions of Armenians - probably living in remote places. Now are they lies, though, we may wonder? I have got old (French) engravings showing Armenian bride and groom taken to church to get married : the way the bride is "dressed" - wrapped like a parcel, I should say - is actually shocking. The way my own maternal grand-ma was treated as a fiancée and then a young wife in 1912 is a burden for me I still can't accept it.. If her own ancestors were treated like the girl on the etchings I think I will want to scream! But I'm not sure, fortunately.