

WILLIAMS OF KARS

MAXWELL VESEY

WHEN the Soviet made a recent demand upon Turkey for cession to it of the Kars Plateau, an area south of the Black Sea and adjoining the Iranian Province of Azerbaijan, the word "Kars" reappeared in the news. It was a word made memorable in the Crimean War, when it rang around the world in much the same way as did Tobruk and Bataan not long ago. For Kars also was an heroic defence against great odds, when Turkish forces under British command held the Russian army at bay until disease and hunger forced surrender.

Few now realize that in that war of a past era, in which Great Britain was engaged, the name of a Nova Scotian soldier stood for the same qualities which illumine those of the great generals of our time. This Nova Scotian was General Sir William Fenwick Williams, Bart., K.C.B., known to his generation as Williams of Kars. His defence of the town of Kars in Turkish Armenia, not far from Mount Ararat, was considered one of the most notable in British annals, and he was acclaimed for it in much the same manner as was General Douglas Mac's Arthur for his stand at Bataan.

Look on the map of New Brunswick and observe the name Kars applied to a parish in King's County. It links the Province with the far-off Caucasus region, important as it was in the Crimean War time, because of its strategic position in regard to Turkey. Kars Parish got its name from Williams of Kars, chiefly because the General had a strong personal link with King's County in its principal town of Sussex. On the ridge which rises above Sussex town and looks out over beautiful Sussex Valley stands "The Knoll," which Sir Fenwick built for his sisters more than ninety years ago. None of his connection remain in the old house, which now sadly lacks the quality that so distinguished it when it was occupied by the family of Major Roswell Arnold, nephew of Sir Fenwick.

To "The Knoll" came the hero of Kars, after his landing in Halifax in 1859 to receive the acclaim of that city. He is said to have been at "The Knoll" when he received word of his appointment to be Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's forces in America, which took effect in 1859. During his term as Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, 1865-67, many visits were paid by the great soldier to the Arnolds and to his other nephew,

James F. Robertson of Saint John. In 1879 he was at "The Knoll" during his last visit to Canada.

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Fenwick Williams left the shore of Nova Scotia an unknown youngster of fifteen. He returned as one of the foremost military commanders of his age. Add to this that he had distinguished himself in diplomatic service where he was created a Pasha, and made Ferik (Lieutenant-General) of the Turkish forces; that he became a member of the British House of Commons; Commandant of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich; Governor of Woolwich; Governor of Gibraltar. He died in harness as Constable of the Tower of London. An idea is thus gained of Williams's long and noteworthy career.

It was in 1799 that he entered the world in the little old garrison town of Annapolis Royal where his father, Captain Thomas Williams, was Commissary and Ordnance Storekeeper of the Imperial troops stationed there. His mother was the daughter of Captain Thomas Walker, Barracks Master of the Annapolis Royal garrison. His elder brother, Lieutenant Thomas Gregory Williams, had distinguished himself in the Spanish campaign under the Duke of Wellington, and a paternal uncle was a Major in the British Army. His mother's sister, Maria Walker, was married to Colonel William Fenwick, A.D.C. to the Duke of Kent, and Commander at Portsmouth. On every side young Fenwick Williams was surrounded by military life and tradition.

He was a handsome and promising lad, and his aunt and her husband felt it would be worth while to help him to a start in the Army. Colonel Fenwick used his influence to place his namesake at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, although he always gave the credit to his wife. In any case, it appears that it was Mrs. Fenwick who paid many of the bills for her nephew's education. It was at the Fenwick home in England that young Williams spent his holidays with his cousin Augusta Julie, who had been born in Halifax in 1800, and was named Augusta for the Duke of Kent who was her god-father, and Julie for the Duke's mistress of the heart, Madame Julie de St. Laurent.

By the time that Fenwick Williams had completed his course at Woolwich, the outlook for an ambitious and youthful officer was highly unpromising. With the end of the Napoleonic

Wars there had come a reduction of the forces, and it was several years before he received the long hoped-for commission:

Office of the Ordnance, September 25, 1825, Royal Regiment of Artillery, Gentleman Cadet William Fenwick Williams to be 2nd Lieutenant.

There were British garrisons from The Rock to the Far East. Lieutenant Williams went out to Gibraltar, then to Ceylon, and back to England in the next sixteen years. It was as a captain that he was sent in 1841 to Constantinople to superintend the arsenal of the boy Sultan Abdul-Medjid, and to lend a hand in the reorganization of the practically defunct Turkish army. This move followed the Conference of Vienna which placed Turkey under the guarantee of the Great Powers as a means of solving the problems caused by the disputes between Russia and the Porte over the Christian subjects of the Sultan and the Holy Places in Palestine. Captain Williams's ability, combined with his knowledge of languages, made him admirably fitted to become British Commissioner for the settlement in 1843 of disagreements between Turkey and Persia.

Accompanied by the Turkish Envoy, Captain Williams left Constantinople by an Austrian steamer which plied around the southern shore of the Black Sea to Trebizond, gateway to the main road between the Black Sea and Persia, and one of the ancient trade routes of the world. One hundred and forty miles across the mountains was Erzerum, the most important town of Turkish Armenia, where a Commission was meeting to conduct negotiations.

Over a mile above sea level, Erzerum lies in a valley through which wind the upper reaches of a branch of the Euphrates River. In 1843 it was a gloomy town of some fifty thousand inhabitants, with dark, winding and ill-paved streets of a quite incredible filthiness. The flat-roofed buildings of dark grey stone were cemented with mud, and the homes of the poorer classes were little more than roofed-over dugouts. The climate was very severe, with wood scarce and prepared cow-dung the chief source of fuel. A more depressing or uncomfortable location for the headquarters of an International Commission could scarcely have been selected.

When the Treaty was finally signed at Erzerum, Williams, who had survived the discomforts of life there, was still British Commissioner, as he was also in the settlement of the Turko-Persian boundary in 1848. For the successful carrying out of

these diplomatic tasks he was brevetted Major and then Colonel, and in 1853 he was made a Companion of the Bath.

Then there loomed the sinister shadow of the conflict known to history as the Crimean War.

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The Crimean War is one which seems to have left but a scant impression behind it, excepting the name of Florence Nightingale and the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava. Recollection was too painful for the British.

The army was in no fit shape to fight a major war, for its experience did not extend much beyond the parade ground. Equipment was scanty, officers were in many cases badly trained and inefficient, and the generals were as a rule old and incapable. The war should never have been fought. It was to dawn upon the English people that they were engaged at great expense in lives and money in pulling chestnuts out of the fire for Emperor Napoleon III, even though they may have believed at first propaganda to the effect that it was a war fought for the defence of ideals and the reaffirmation of principles.

The clear-sighted perceived the hollowness of such banalities. Thomas Carlyle entered in his diary, "Seems to me privately I have never seen a madder business." Disraeli observed blandly, "I thought we were going to war to prevent the Emperor of all the Russias from protecting the Christian subjects of the Sultan of Turkey." And when, after many discouragements and reverses, it was proposed that the nation observe a Day of Humiliation, John Bright remarked, "It is wonderful what an amount of hyprocrisy there is in this proceeding."

The Eastern Question

What was known at that time as the Eastern Question was to the forefront overshadowing every other consideration of Britain's foreign policy. This question concerned the state of affairs brought about by the presence of the Turks in Europe as a sovereign power. They controlled not alone the Dardanelles, but the Danubian Provinces of Romania and Bulgaria, with their territory stretching across the Balkan Peninsula to the Adriatic. The population of this area, now the Balkan States, was partly Christian, and provided all the racial and religious animosities and conflicting interests that might be expected to develop from a situation.

There was also the bitter dispute between the Latin and Greek Churches over the guardianship of the Holy Places in Jerusalem. When at last Turkey, striving as in the late war to

preserve a precarious neutrality, rendered what Czar Nicholas considered an indecisive judgement, the Czar demanded that he be given a protectorate over the Sultan's Christian subjects. At the same time, Nicholas, in conversation with the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, referred to the Sultan as "the sick man" and made the tentative suggestion that should the Turkish Empire by any chance dissolve, England and Russia should proceed to divide it up. But the British Governement did not fall in with the suggestion. It could not sit idly by and see one of the Great Powers absorb Turkey's European possessions, and the country partitioned as had been Poland. Such a dismemberment would threaten the peace of the world. Russia must abandon any such ideas.

With this attitude of their Government the English people were generally in agreement, for it was felt that "the public law of Europe should take steps against a wanton aggressor." The Russian demand for a protectorate was accordingly rejected by Turkey; Russia moved into the Balkan States, and Turkey declared war upon Russia in 1853. Late in March, 1854, France and England declared war on Russia, and two weeks later the Czar made his own war declaration against the Allies.

The allied fleets moved into the Black Sea in June and disembarked at Varna on the Bulgarian coast, where the troops were struck down with cholera in great numbers amid scenes of indescribable anguish. When the Crumea was occupied in September, 1854, as a prelude to getting on with the siege of Sevastopol, the occupation was carried out by sick men. But occupy it they did.

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It was in this distressful summer of 1854 that Colonel Fenwick Williams, accompanied by Major Sir Christopher Teesdale, was despatched to Turkish Army Headquarters at Erzerum as an observer. He found, however, that he had to be much more than an observer for the Allied High Command now at Sevastopol. The task at hand for him was to hold together the remains of a Turkish army that was woefully lacking in discipline, and was ragged, hungry and unpaid. To organize this dejected remnant into a serviceable fighting force, and to inspire it with resolution and courage, seemed an almost impossible undertaking, but Fenwick Williams proved himself capable of it.

Instead of this army melting away and Anatolia falling into enemy hands, the Turks pulled themselves together under

his leadership. The Sultan conferred upon Williams the title of Pasha and made him Ferik, or Lieutenant-General, of the forces. With this authority Williams whipped his army into some sort of fighting trim to meet the large and well equipped Russian force that was stationed at Alexandropol in the Caucasus Mountains just across the Turko-Russian border, and bent on the conquest of the whole of Asia Minor.

After strenuous labours at Erzerum all that summer of 1854, General Williams went in September to Kars, a fortified town one hundred and thirty miles northeast on the Russian frontier. Here reorganization and strengthening of the town's defences went on hastily. He then left Colonel Lake in charge of the Turkish garrison and returned to Erzerum.

During all the hard, dreary winter of 1854-55 he struggled to equip the troops at Erzerum with the scanty materials available, meanwhile sending message after message to the British Command imploring pressure on the Turks to send him supplies of ammunition, clothing and money. The Caucasian front must be held, he declared, or the enemy would sweep over Asia Minor.

The Siege of Kars.

The spring of 1855 found Williams working frantically to strengthen Erzerum's antiquated fortifications. But little time was left for such preparations. On June 1st a courier arrived from Kars with a message from Colonel Lake. The Russian army under General Mouravieff was advancing upon that town from Alexandropol where it had wintered. On receipt of this unwelcome intelligence, General Williams set out at once for Kars. He arrived after a week's journey, and just ahead of the enemy.

The Russian commander with his well trained and well equipped force attacked on June 10th. But under General Williams and other British officers the Turkish garrison put up a magnificent defence, repulsing the Russians with heavy losses. A blockade of the town was established.

When news reached the Allies in the Crimea that Kars was under siege, Osman Pasha, the Turkish commander, who has an unemployed army before Sevastopol, urged that he be allowed to take it to the Caucasian front. There was, however, delay and hesitation, for no one in authority at headquarters was willing to make a move that would involve so difficult a campaign. At last, on August 25th, the Allies came to the

decision that it would be unwise to reduce the Turkish forces at Sevastopol. Kars must take care of itself. Meanwhile the garrison, buoyed up by hope of relief, had successfully stood off another attack on August 7th, and were confidently awaiting the arrival of reinforcements. None appeared. In September the cold began on the high plateau where Kars is situated, and disease made its appearance. Food was already running low, fuel correspondingly so, and the hospital was choked with wounded. Little imagination is required to realize the condition of that hospital, and the wretched civilians died at home or on the streets. Still the garrison held out with the same determination as was shown in the sieges of the late war. On September 29th there came another desperate attack on the heights of Kars, when the Russians were again heavily defeated, losing nearly a quarter of their force. The blockade, however, remained effectual.

Thus the cruel month of October passed, then the weeks of an even more cruel November, and still there was no relief. It was apparent that the Allied Command as well as the British and Turkish governments—even though Sevastopol had fallen in September—felt little interest in what was taking place in the starving, disease-ridden Turkish town in the remote region of Trans-Caucasus. As for General Williams during this time, his A. D. C. Sir Christopher Teesdale, has recorded that he would walk alone for hours, working out plans in his mind. Once he had settled on a course, action must follow to the very letter. Teesdale says of him that he was “gifted with a marvellous self-reliance and a perfect fearlessness of responsibility.”

Responsibility for the soldiers and hapless civilians at Kars rested now upon his shoulders. He must hold out, for relief would surely come and Asia Minor be saved. That was all-important. But November wore on, and distress increased to an almost unbearable degree. The snow fell and fell, blocking the mountain roads. It was on November 19th that General Williams sent out his last despatch before the food shortage forced capitulation:

“We divide our bread with the starving townspeople,” it read. “No animal food for seven weeks. I kill horses in my stable secretly and send meat to the hospital.”

Three days later a messenger from the British Consul at Erzerum

managed to get through the blockade with the bitter news that no relief was available.

General Williams summoned his officers, English and Turkish, to a council. All realized that only one decision was possible. The troops were too exhausted by hunger to attempt a retreat under winter conditions in that mountainous region. Surrender was inevitable, and once decided upon General Williams despatched a flag to General Mouravieff with his terms. These declared that if honorable treatment was not accorded the garrison, he would have every gun burst, every trophy destroyed and every standard burnt, and that he and his men would fight until soldiers and civilians alike, unconquered by force of arms but in a dying state from starvation, could not offer the feeblest resistance. But in the meantime they would take a heavy toll of the attackers.

To this desperate challenge General Mouravieff returned a chivalrous reply. Vengeance on his part would be unworthy, he said, and he had not the slightest desire to wreak it on brave and sorely tried man. General Williams and his army had covered themselves with glory, and famine had conquered them. In his own words to Williams:

You have made yourself a name in history, and posterity will stand amazed at the courage, the endurance and the discipline which the siege of Kars has called forth in the remnants of an army.

On November 25th General Williams surrendered Kars, he and his officers retaining their swords. Two days later they were guests of General Mouravieff at dinner. The Russian army entered Kars on November 28th, and the garrison marched out with the honours of war.

In parliament Lord Palmerston paid tribute in these words:

A greater display of courage or ability, or perseverance under difficulties, or inexhaustible resources of mind, than was evinced by General Williams never was exhibited in the course of our military history.

With unrestrained grief the people of Kars saw him depart, their Ferik Williams who was always so kindly, so lacking in arrogance. Always he had been at the point of danger during the dreadful months, never sparing himself, but always inspiring them with courage. They had loved and trusted him, those Turkish people, and had stood by him staunchly, knowing from

experience what Major Teesdale afterwards wrote of him, "Firm as a rock on duty, he had the gentlest, kindest heart that ever beat."

Following the capitulation of Kars, General Williams was taken to Riazan in Central Russia where he was treated with every consideration, and was received in audience by the new Czar Alexander who had just succeeded his father, Czar Nicholas. He remained a prisoner until March 30th, 1856, when the *Treaty of Paris*, which formally ended the Crimean War, was signed.

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In due course General Williams reached an England that was furious over the conduct of a war in which loss of life, wealth and reputations had been heavy, and was smarting over the terms of the Peace Treaty. By it Kars was restored to Turkey, and Sevastopol and other places taken by the Allies went back to Russia. The Black Sea was made a neutral waterway, and the Danube River an open one. Neither Turkey nor Russia was allowed to build or operate arsenals or military dockyards on the Black Sea, and warships of foreign powers were not permitted to enter the Dardenelles while Turkey was at peace. The signatory Powers guaranteed the continuance of Ottoman suzerainty in the Principalities (Balkan States). There was not a word in the Treaty concerning the Holy Places in Palestine which had been one of the ostensible causes of the War. As it was said of this document, "When one reads the Treaty there is nothing to show who is the victor and who the vanquished." Indignation in England ran high, and signs of disapproval were openly manifested by placards displayed on the night of the Peace Celebration in London. But there was one whose record was untarnished by incompetence, and that was Williams of Kars. The country was eager to show its gratitude. He was received as *the hero of the War*, and engulfed in a flood of honours.

The Queen bestowed upon him the Medal and Clasp of Kars, and created him a Baronet. As an additional honour, he was made Knight Commander of the Bath. His entrance into London to receive the Freedom of the City and a Sword of Honour was a triumph. Parliament voted him a thousand pounds a year for life. The Sultan of Turkey, who was certainly indebted to him for faithful service, awarded him the Order of the Medjidie, First Class, and Emperor Napoleon gave him the Grand

Cross of the Legion of Honor. Oxford University conferred upon him the honorary degree of D.C.L.

In General Williams's native province there was rejoicing at his conspicuous success. The Nova Scotia Legislature presented him with an address and a Sword of Honour, and King's College with an honorary D.C.L.

Sir Fenwick was Commandant of the Woolwich Garrison from 1856 to 1859, and during that time sat in the House of Commons as member for the riding of Calne in Wiltshire. He held these positions until 1859, when he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in America, and in 1860 he was Administrator of the Government of Canada. In that year the Prince of Wales visited this country, and Sir Fenwick accompanied him on his tour.

He was Commander-in-Chief until 1865, when he returned to Nova Scotia as Lieutenant Governor for two years and until Confederation in 1867, when he went back to England to live. There he was selected by Queen Victoria to accompany the Prince of Wales on many of his foreign tours.

In 1870 came another distinguished appointment, when Sir Fenwick went to Gibraltar as its Governor. He remained there six years. The Williams Gate still preserves his name at the fortress. During this period he received the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath.

The last appointment which came to him was that of Constable of the Tower of London in 1881. It was as Constable that he died in 1883, at the age of eighty-four.

No other colonial soldier or administrator has ever received so many and so great distinctions from the Sovereign and the British Government as General Sir William Fenwick Williams, the Nova Scotian.

Sir Fenwick never married; his family interests were bound up in his sisters and the children of the Arnold and Robertson families in New Brunswick. Two of these sisters married Anglican clergymen; one, the Rev. Horatio Arnold, was stationed at Sussex; the other, Rev. James Robertson, at Musquash near Saint John. The date, when General Williams built "The Knoll" is not accurately known, but it was probably not long after the death of Mr. Arnold in 1847.

When Sir Fenwick left Government House in Halifax at the completion of his term as Lieutenant Governor, he sent many of his personal belongings to "The Knoll," At his death, his

nephew, Major Roswell Arnold, was an executor of his estate, and more treasures came to the house, including the sword presented by the City of London when he became a freeman.

The sword had its handle studded with rubies and was encased in red plush scabbled with gold mountings. It now belongs to the great-great-nephew of Sir Fenwick, Roswell Arnold, Saint John.

Various portraits are in existence. One was in the Guildhall, London, one is in the Legislative Chamber at Halifax, another in the New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, and still another was the property of the late Mrs. James F. Robertson, Saint John. There is also one in Annapolis Royal, that was presented by Dr. J. Clarence Webster.

Major Sir Christopher Teesdale, who was an accomplished artist, painted a picture entitled, "General Williams Saying Farewell to the Citizens of Kars." This attained great popularity and was reproduced both in oils and in steel engraving. A copy of this is in the possession of Fenwick Armstrong of Rothesay, N. B.; another, a steel engraving, is in the Museum at Saint John.

Another picture painted by Sir Christopher shows Kars with its walls and buildings buried in snow. This was owned by the late Mrs. James F. Robertson.

While Governor-General of Canada, H. R. H. the Duke of Connaught unveiled a tablet to General Sir William Fenwick Williams at Annapolis Royal. On that occasion His Royal Highness said to Mrs. James F. Robertson, wife of the great-nephew of Sir Fenwick, "I believe, Mrs. Robertson, that I am the only man alive to-day who was on the staff of General Williams when he was Governor of Gibraltar."