

ARMENIA:

A YEAR AT ERZERROOM, AND ON THE FRONTIERS OF RUSSIA, TURKEY, AND PERSIA.

BY THE HON. ROBERT CURZON,
AUTHOR OF "VISITS TO THE MONASTERIES OF THE LEVANT."

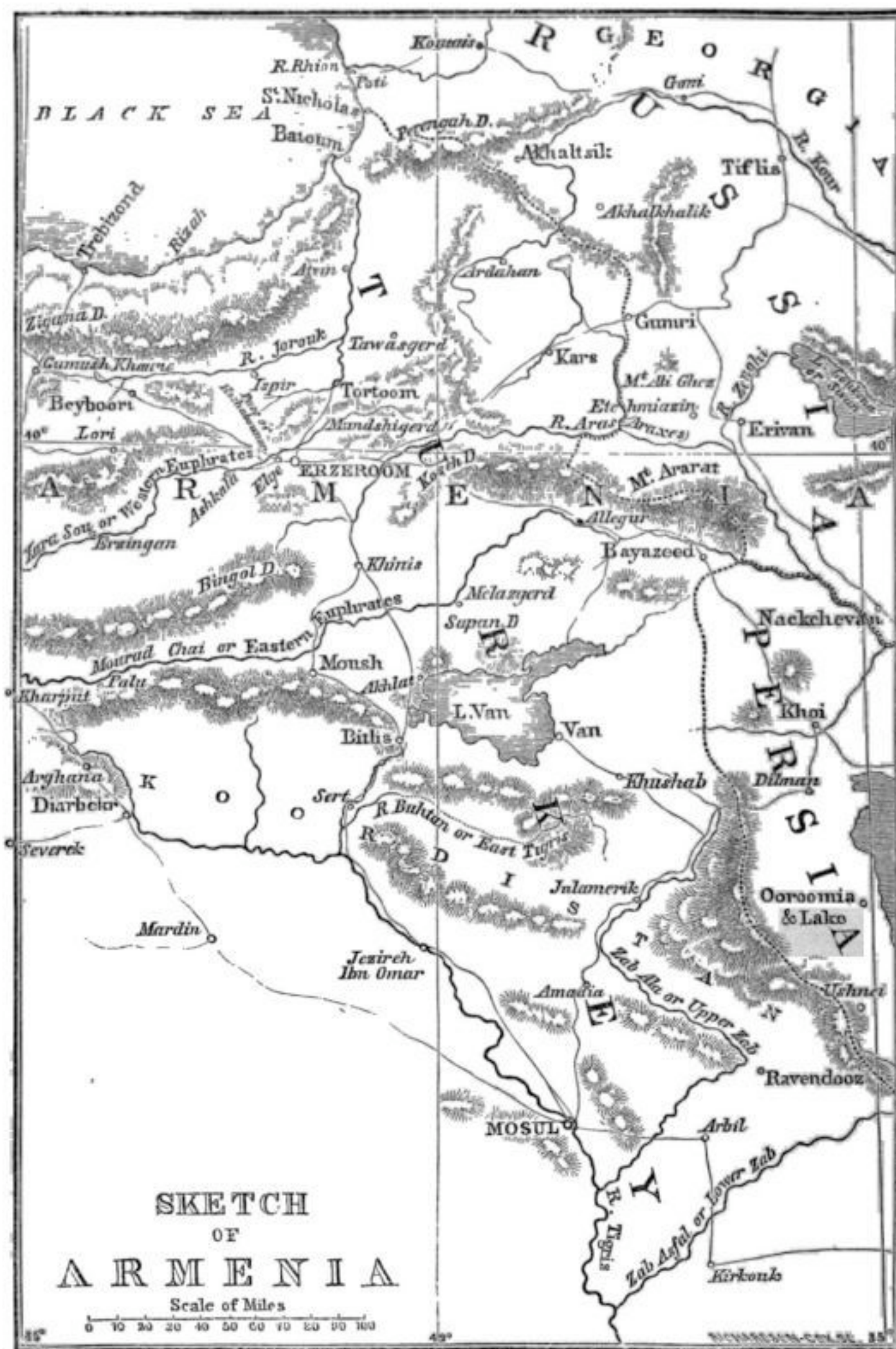


Ruined Armenian Church near Erzerroom.

MAP AND WOODCUTS.

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
82 BEEKMAN STREET.

1854.



CHAPTER VII.

Spring in Erzeroom.—Coffee-house Diversions.—Koordish Exploits.
—Summer Employment.—Preparation of Tezek.—Its Varieties and
Uses.

WHEN the snows of winter have melted, and the air becomes more temperate, the population of Erzeroom begin to revive. The women and children, who, like the bears, lemmings, and marmottes, have hybernated all the winter, now peep with red eyes out of their subterranean habitations; those streets situated upon hills, as most of them are, become torrents of melted snow, which cut deep ravines through the frozen mass which is piled up many feet on each side; narrow paths are gradually dug out from the low doors of the Armenian man-burrows toward the central river of the street; the winking children creep out to blink their eyes at the sun, and enjoy the fresh air; fusty cows, who have been buried for eight months, come slowly staring out; every now and then a more adventurous infant is carried away by the stream, and its body quickly devoured by the ravenous dogs at the outskirts of the town; wolves, it is said, though I never saw one, prowl about, and eat the dog that ate the child, that came out to see the weather so mild, in the street by the house that (not) Jack built. Women now scream to each other in shrill voices, as they pitch down large wooden spadefuls of half-melted snow upon the heads of those who are passing in the street; knots

of Tartars, Circassians, and Lazes, and Koords, in iron-heeled boots and white woolen trowsers, tell lies to each other at the doors of the coffee-houses, which are answered with dignified exclamations of Wullah! Billah! nobody believing his neighbor's lie, but considering straightway how he can invent a deliberate falsehood to lay before the other liars in his turn. Every now and then one of these stories is true, when a cadaverous-looking Koord, hung round with arms and leaning on his lance, with the black ostrich feathers at the top, being a practical man with very little imagination, coolly relates the history of the sacking of a defenseless village, where murder unresisted, rapine, sacrilege in the burning of the mosque, and spearing the children who run shrieking from the flames of their homes, bear with it the impress of truth, with the conviction on the part of any honest man (if there should be one in the party) that, although the rest are liars, the only truthful narrator is a brute of that atrocious kind, that the falsehoods of the rest are trifles, like chaff before the wind, in comparison with the real and true experiences of this infernal child of hell. Such as this are the Koords; their only virtue is that they are not cowards; but, although they *subscribe to* a nominal adherence to the Mohammedan religion, the most *liberal* Imaum would be ashamed to own them. The Yezedis, who worship the devil, are angels in comparison. Yet they are superstitious to a curious degree, as the foregoing anecdote of the Koord who was hung through giving evidence about himself testifies.

At the commencement of the summer the whole city of Erzeroom is engaged, even to desperation, in making

seem to wonder quietly at those who pass by, taking a header, or sunnerset, down their holes if you stop suddenly to look at these curious little beasts.

A soft, cozy, fat little quadruped, called cara guz (black eyes), about the size of a young Guinea-pig, and much of the same shape—only his color is gray, and he has a most wonderfully soft coat—comes out, too, about this time. He is so fat that he can not walk very fast, and is easily taken, and in his captivity prefers almonds and raisins to any other bill of fare which I was able to put before him. This little fellow eats his breakfast, luncheon, dinner, and supper slowly and respectably, without testifying any alarm for mankind. I could not make out his scientific name; he is probably some kind of little *marmotte*, and he falls readily into the manners and habits of the society in which Providence has placed him.

After cara guz, the gerboa comes out of his hole, and hops about on his long tail and hind legs; a miniature kangaroo, in whose acquaintance I have rejoiced in the burning deserts of Africa as well as in the frozen regions of the highlands of Erzerroom. In this country the number of quadrupeds is very limited; the fox is occasionally seen, as well as the gray beaver (*kondooz*), badgers, and wolves. At the melting of the snow the wolves come even into the towns, and devour the dogs with which every town is amply supplied. There are awful stories of their carrying off the little, peeping, blear-eyed children, who creep out of their holes in the beginning of spring, and who are occasionally washed away in the torrents of melted snow—the only washing attended to hereabouts. Wolves are not very un-