

7. LETTER FROM THE SAME SOURCE, DATED CONSTANTINOPLE, 2/15th AUGUST, 1915, AND ADDRESSED TO THE SAME ARMENIAN RESIDENT BEYOND THE OTTOMAN FRONTIER.

Since I wrote my last letter (of which you have acknowledged the receipt), we have been able to obtain more precise information from the provinces of the interior. The information with which we present you herewith is derived from the following witnesses: an Armenian lady forcibly converted to Islam, and brought by an unforeseen chance to Constantinople; a girl from Zila, between nine and ten years old, who was abducted by a Turkish officer and has reached Constantinople; a Turkish traveller from Harpout; foreign travellers from Erzindjan, and so on. In fine, this information is derived either from eye-witnesses or from actual victims of the crimes.

It is now established that there is not an Armenian left in the provinces of Erzeroum, Trebizond, Sivas, Harpout, Bitlis and Diyarbekir. About a million of the Armenian inhabitants of these provinces have been deported from their homes and sent southwards into exile. These deportations have been carried out very systematically by the local authorities since the beginning of April last. First of all, in every village and every town, the population was disarmed by the gendarmerie, and by criminals released for this purpose from prison. On the pretext of disarming the Armenians, these criminals committed assassinations and inflicted hideous tortures. Next, they imprisoned the Armenians *en masse*, on the pretext that they had found in their possession arms, books, a political organisation, and so on—at a pinch, wealth or any kind of social standing was pretext enough. After that, they began the deportation. And first, on the pretext of sending them into exile, they evicted such men as had not been imprisoned, or such as had been set at liberty through lack of any charge against them; then they massacred them—not one of these escaped slaughter. Before they started, they were examined officially by the authorities, and any money or valuables in their possession were confiscated. They were usually shackled—either separately, or in gangs of five to ten. The remainder—old men, women, and children—were treated as waifs in the province of Harpout, and placed at the disposal of the Moslem population. The highest official, as well as the most simple peasant, chose out the woman or girl who caught his fancy, and took her to wife, converting her by force to Islam. As for the children, the Moslems took as many of them as they wanted, and then the remnant of the Armenians were marched away, famished and destitute of provisions, to fall victims to hunger, unless that were anticipated by the savagery of the brigand-bands. In the province of Diyarbekir there was an outright massacre, especially at Mardin, and the population was subjected to all the afore-mentioned atrocities.

In the provinces of Erzeroum, Bitlis, Sivas and Diyarbekir, the local authorities gave certain facilities to the Armenians condemned to deportation: five to ten days' grace, authorisation to effect a partial sale of their goods, and permission to hire a cart, in the case of some families. But after the first few days of their journey, the carters abandoned them on the road and returned home. These convoys were waylaid the day after the start,

or sometimes several days after, by bands of brigands or by Moslem peasants who spoiled them of all they had. The brigands fraternised with the gendarmes and slaughtered the few grown men or youths who were included in the convoys. They carried off the women, girls and children, leaving only the old women, who were driven along by the gendarmes under blows of the lash and died of hunger by the roadside. An eye-witness reports to us that the women deported from the province of Erzeroum were abandoned, some days ago, on the plain of Harpout, where they have all died of hunger (50 or 60 a day).

The only step taken by the authorities was to send people to bury them, in order to safeguard the health of the Moslem population.

The little girl from Zila tells us that when the Armenians of Marsovan, Amasia and Tokat reached Sari-Kishila (between Kaisaria and Sivas), the children of both sexes were torn from their mothers before the very windows of the Government Building, and were locked up in certain other buildings, while the convoy was forced to continue its march. After that, they gave notice in the neighbouring villages that anyone might come and take his choice. She and her companion (Newart of Amasia) were carried off and brought to Constantinople by a Turkish officer. The convoys of women and children were placed on view in front of the Government Building at each town or village where they passed, to give the Moslems an opportunity of taking their choice.

The convoy which started from Baibourt was thinned out in this way and the women and children who survived were thrown into the Euphrates on the outskirts of Erzindjan, at a place called Kamakh-Boghazi. Mademoiselle Flora A. Wedel Yarlesberg, a Norwegian lady of good family who was a nurse in a German Red Cross hospital, and another nurse who was her colleague, were so revolted by these barbarities and by other experiences of equal horror, that they tendered their resignations, returned to Constantinople, and called personally at several Embassies to denounce these hideous crimes.

The same barbarities have been committed everywhere, and by this time travellers find nothing but thousands of Armenian corpses along all the roads in these provinces. A Moslem traveller on his way from Malatia to Sivas, a nine hours' journey, passed nothing but corpses of men and women. All the male Armenians of Malatia had been taken there and massacred; the women and children have all been converted to Islam. No Armenian can travel in these parts, for every Moslem, and especially the brigands and gendarmes, considers it his duty now to kill them at sight. Recently Messieurs Zohrab and Vartkes, two Armenian members of the Ottoman Parliament, who had been sent off to Diyarbekir to be tried by the Council of War, were killed, before they got there, at a short distance from Aleppo. In these provinces one can only travel *incognito* under a Moslem name. As for the women's fate, we have already spoken of it above, and it seems unnecessary to go into further particulars about their honour, when one sees the utter disregard there is for their life.

* See Docs. 59, 60, 61, 62. The witnesses at Erzindjan were not Norwegians but Danes—EDITOR.

The Armenian soldiers, too, have suffered the same fate. They were also all disarmed and put to constructing roads. We have certain knowledge that the Armenian soldiers of the province of Erzeroum, who were at work on the road from Erzeroum to Erzindjan, have all been massacred. The Armenian soldiers of the province of Diyarbekir have all been massacred on the Diyarbekir-Ourfa road, and the Diyarbekir-Harpout road. From Harpout alone, 1,800 young Armenians were enrolled and sent off to work at Diyarbekir; all were massacred in the neighbourhood of Arghana. We have no news from the other districts, but they have assuredly suffered the same fate there also.

In certain towns, the Armenians who had been consigned to oblivion in the prisons have been hanged in batches. During the past month alone, several dozen Armenians have been hanged in Kaisaria. In many places the Armenian inhabitants, to save their lives, have tried to become Mohammedans, but this time such overtures have not been readily accepted, as they were at the time of the other great massacres. At Sivas, the would-be converts to Islam were offered the following terms: they must hand over all children under twelve years of age to the Government, which would undertake to place them in orphanages; and they must consent, for their own part, to leave their homes and settle wherever the Government directed.

At Harpout, they would not accept the conversion of the men; in the case of the women, they made their conversion conditional in each instance upon the presence of a Moslem willing to take the convert in marriage. Many Armenian women preferred to throw themselves into the Euphrates with their infants, or committed suicide in their homes. The Euphrates and Tigris have become the sepulchre of thousands of Armenians.

All Armenians converted in the Black Sea towns—Trebizond, Samsoun, Kerasond, etc.—have been sent to the interior, and settled in towns inhabited exclusively by Moslems. The town of Shabin-Karahissar resisted the disarming and deportation, and was thereupon bombarded. The whole population of the town and the surrounding country, from the Bishop downwards, was pitilessly massacred.

In short, from Samsoun on the one hand to Seghert[†] and Diyarbekir on the other, there is now not a single Armenian left. The majority have been massacred, part have been carried off, and a very small part have been converted to Islam.

History has never recorded, never hinted at, such a hecatomb. We are driven to believe that under the reign of Sultan Abd-ul-Hamid we were exceedingly fortunate.

We have just learned the fate of some of the provincial bishops. Mgr. Anania Hazarabedian, Bishop of Baibourt, has been hanged without any confirmation of the sentence by the Central Government.[‡] Mgr. Bosak Der-Khoremian, Bishop of Harpout, started on his road to exile in May, and had barely left the outskirts of the town when he was cruelly murdered. But we have still no news of the Bishops of Seghert, Bitlis, Moush, Keghi, Palou, Erzindjan, Kamakh, Tokat, Gurin, Samsoun and Trebizond, or for a month past of the Bishops of Sivas and Erzeroum. It is superfluous to speak of the

^{*} See Docs. 23 and 62.

[†] Sairt (?)

[‡] See Doc. 59.

martyred priests. When the people were deported, the churches were pillaged and turned into mosques, stables, or what not. Besides that, they have begun to sell at Constantinople the sacred objects and other properties of the Armenian churches, just as the Turks have begun to bring to Constantinople the children of the unhappy Armenian mothers.

It appears that the massacres have been less cruel in Cilicia, or at least we have no news yet of the worst. The population, which has been deported to the provinces of Aleppo and Der-el-Zor and to Damascus, will certainly perish of hunger. We have just heard that the Government has refused to leave in peace even the insignificant Armenian colonies at Aleppo and Ourfa, who might have assisted their unhappy brethren on their southward road; and the Katholikos of Cilicia, who still remains at Aleppo, is busy distributing the relief we are forwarding to him.

We thought at first that the Government's plan was to settle the Armenian question once and for all by clearing out the Armenians of the six Armenian provinces and removing the Armenian population of Cilicia, to forestall another danger in the future. Unhappily their plan was wider in scope and more thorough in intention. It consisted in the extermination of the whole Armenian population throughout the whole of Turkey. The result is that, in those seven provinces where the Government was pledged to introduce reforms, there is not one per cent. of the Armenian population left alive. So far, we do not know whether a single Armenian has reached Mosul or its neighbourhood. And this plan has now been put into execution even in the suburbs of Constantinople. The majority of the Armenians in the district of Ismid and in the province of Broussa have been forcibly deported to Mesopotamia, leaving behind them their homes and their property. In detail, the population of Adapazar, Ismid, Gegvé, Armasha and the neighbourhood has been removed—in fact, the population of all the villages in the Ismid district (except Baghtchedjik, which has been granted several days' grace). The Principal of the Seminary at Armasha has also been removed with his colleagues in orders and his seminarists. They have had to leave everything behind, and been able to take nothing with them on their journey. Six weeping mothers confided their little ones to the Armenians of Konia, in order to save their lives, but the local authorities tore them away from their Armenian guardians, and handed them over to Moslems.

So now it is Constantinople's turn. In any case, the population has fallen into a panic, and is waiting from one moment to another for the execution of its doom. The arrests are innumerable, and those arrested are immediately removed from the capital. The majority will assuredly perish. It is the retail merchants of provincial birth, but resident in Constantinople, who are so far being deported—among them Marouké, Ipranossian Garabed, Kherbekian of Erzeroum, Atamian Karekin, Krikorian Sempad of Bitlis, etc. We are making great efforts to save at any rate the Armenians of Constantinople from this horrible extermination of the race, in order that, hereafter, we may have at least one rallying point for the Armenian cause in Turkey.

* See Doc. 99.

Is there anything further to add to this report? The whole Armenian population of Turkey has been condemned to death, and this decree is being put into execution energetically in every corner of the Empire, under the eyes of the European Powers; while, so far, neither Germany nor Austria has succeeded in checking the action of their ally and removing the stain of these barbarities, which also attaches to them. All our efforts have been without result. Our hope is set upon the Armenians abroad.