

62. ERZINDJAN: STATEMENT BY TWO RED CROSS NURSES OF DANISH NATIONALITY, FORMERLY IN THE SERVICE OF THE GERMAN MILITARY MISSION AT ERZEROUH;\* COMMUNICATED BY A SWISS GENTLEMAN OF GENEVA.<sup>f</sup>

In March, 1915, we learnt through an Armenian doctor, who died later on of typhus, that the Turkish Government was preparing for a massacre on a grand scale. He begged us to find out from General Passelt whether the rumour were true. We heard afterwards that the General (a gallant officer) had his own fears of it, and asked, for that reason, to be relieved of his post . . . . We fell sick of typhus and . . . . in consequence of a number of changes in the hospital staff. . . . we were obliged to leave Erzerouh. Through the good offices of the German Consul at Erzerouh, who also possessed the confidence of the Armenians, we were engaged by the Red Cross at Erzindjan, and worked there seven weeks.

At the beginning of June, the head of the Red Cross Mission at Erzindjan, Staff-Surgeon A., told us that the Armenians had revolted at Van, that measures had been taken against them which would be put into general execution, and that the whole Armenian population of Erzindjan and the neighbourhood would be transported to Mesopotamia, where it would no longer find itself in a majority. There was, however, to be no massacre, and measures were to be taken to feed the exiles and to secure their personal safety by a military escort. Wagons loaded with arms and bombs were reported, he said, to have been discovered at Erzindjan, and many arrests were to be made. The Red Cross staff were forbidden to have any relations with the exiles, and prohibited any excursions on foot or horseback beyond a certain radius.

After that, several days' grace was given to the population of Erzindjan for the sale of their property, which was naturally realised at ridiculous prices. In the first week of June,<sup>†</sup> the first convoy started; the rich people were allowed to hire carriages. They were to go to Harpout. The three succeeding days, further deportations followed; many children were taken charge of by Moslem families; later on, the authorities decided that these children must go into exile as well.

They were at work in the German hospital at Erzerouh from October, 1914, to April, 1915 — EDITOR.

+ (Statement by Miss Flora A. Wedel Yarlesberg (see Doc. 7), a Danish nurse formerly in the service of the German Red Cross at Erzerouh, recording events witnessed by herself and a Danish colleague to M. Leopold Favre by Dr. Lepsius). (ORIGINAL: Copy of German report, Schuchardt to German Foreign Office communication dated Frankfurt, 21 August 1915. Auswärtiges Amt—Politisches Archiv, Türkei 183/38, A24724 . —A.S.)

<sup>†</sup> 7th June—*Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, November, 1915.

Amounting to about 20,000-25,000 people in all—*Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, November, 1915.

The families of the Armenians employed in our hospital had to go with the rest, including a woman who was ill. A protest from Dr. Neukirch, who was attending her, had no effect except to postpone her departure two days. A soldier attached to our staff as cobbler said to Sister B.: "I am now forty-six years old, and yet I am taken for military service, although I have paid my exemption-tax regularly every year. I have never done anything against the Government, and now they are taking from me my whole family, my seventy-year-old mother, my wife and five children, and I do not know where they are going.'" He was especially affected by the thought of his little daughter, a year and a half old; "She is so sweet. She has such pretty eyes"; he wept like a child. The next day he came back; "I know the truth. They are all dead." And it was only too true. Our Turkish cook came to us crying, and told us how the Kurds had attacked the unhappy convoy at Kamakh Boghaz,' had pillaged it completely, and had killed a great number of the exiles. This must have been the 14th June.

Two young Armenian teachers, educated at the College of Harpout, whose lives were spared, related that the convoy had been caught under a cross-fire by the Kurds on the flanks and the Turkish irregulars in the rear. They had thrown themselves flat on the ground and pretended to be dead; afterwards they succeeded in finding their way back to Erzindjan by circuitous paths, bribing some Kurds whom they met on the way. One of them had with her her fiance in woman's clothes. He had been shielded by a Turkish class-mate. When they reached Erzindjan a gendarme tried to abduct the girl and her fiance interfered. He was killed, and the girls were carried off to Turkish houses, where they were treated kindly but had pressure put upon them to change their religion. They conveyed this news to us through a young doctor who attended some Armenian patients in our hospital, and was thereby enabled to get into touch with us; he brought us an appeal from them to take them with us to Harpout. If only they had poison, they said, they would poison themselves. They had no information whatever as to the fate of their companions.

The day after, " Friday, the 11th June, a party of regular troops (belonging to the 86th Cavalry Brigade) were sent out "to keep the Kurds in order."

We heard subsequently from these soldiers how the defenceless Armenians had been massacred to the last one. The butchery had taken four hours. The women threw themselves on their knees, they had thrown their children into the Euphrates, and so on. "It was horrible," said a nice-looking young soldier; "I could not fire, I only

One of the two authors of the present statement, which has been drafted in the first person by the other witness, but represents the experiences of both. The Editor is in possession of the drafter's name, but does not know the identity of Sister B., Dr. A., or Mr. G. —EDITOR. 1"Dr A." is Dr. Colley, "Mr. G." is Herr Gehlsen. —A.S.I

A defile, 12 hours' journey from Erzindjan, where the Euphrates flows through a narrow gorge between two walls of rock.

<sup>T</sup> e., after the departure of the last convoy of exiles from Erzindjan (10th June), *not* after the narrators were informed of the massacre by their cook and by the two Armenian girls. The passages about the cobbler, the cook, and the two girls are evidently in parenthesis, and interrupt the sequence of the narrative.—EDITOR.

pretended." For that matter, we have often heard Turks express their disapproval and their pity. The soldiers told us that there were ox-carts all ready to carry the corpses to the river and remove every trace of the massacre.

Next day there was a regular *battue* through the cornfields. (The corn was then standing, and many Armenians had hidden in it.)

From that time on, convoys of exiles were continually arriving, all on their way to the slaughter; we have no doubt about their fate, after the unanimous testimony which we have received from many different quarters. Later, our Greek driver told us that the victims had their hands tied behind their backs, and were thrown down from the cliffs into the river. This method was employed when the numbers were too great to dispose of them in any other fashion. It was also easier work for the murderers. Sister B. and I, of course, began at once to think what we could do, and we decided to travel with one of these convoys to Harpout. We did not know yet that the massacre on the road had been ordered by the Government, and we also thought that we could check the brutality of the gendarmes and stave off the assaults of the Kurds, since we speak Kurdish and have some influence over the tribesmen.

We then telegraphed to the Consul at Erzeroum, telling him that we had been dismissed from the hospital, and urging him, in the interests of Germany, to come to Erzindjan. He wired back: "Impossible to leave my post. Expect Austrians, who are due to pass here the 22nd June. . . ."

On the evening of the 17th June, we went out for a walk with Mr. C., the druggist of the Red Cross Staff. He was as much horrified as we were at the cruelties that were being perpetrated, and expressed himself very plainly on the subject. He also received his dismissal. On our walk we met a gendarme, who told us that, ten minutes' distance away, a large convoy of exiles from Baibourt had been halted. He narrated to us, with appalling vividness, how one by one the men had been massacred and cast into the depths of the gorge: "Kezze, kezze, geliorlar! (Kill, kill, push them over)." He told how, at each village, the women had been violated; how he himself had desired to take a girl, but had been told that already she was no longer a maid; how children had had their brains battered out when they cried or hindered the march. "There were the naked bodies of three girls; I buried them to do a good deed," was his concluding remark.

The following morning, at a very early hour, we heard the procession of exiles pawing in front of our house, along the high road leading in to Erzindjan. We followed them and kept up with them as far as the town, about an hour's walk. Mr. G. came with us. It

The further details are given in the *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*, November, 1915:—"When we exclaimed in horror: 'So you fire on women and children!' the soldiers answered: 'What could we do? It was our orders.' One of them added: 'It was a heart-breaking sight. For that matter, I did not shoot.'" —EDITOR.

On the evening of the 11th, we saw soldiers returning to town laden with loot. We heard from both Kurds and Armenians that children's corpses were strewn along the road.

' Every day ten or twelve of the men had been killed and thrown into the ravines.—*Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*.

was a very large gang—only two or three of them men, all the rest women and children. Many of the women looked demented. They cried out: "Spare us, we will become Moslems or Germans or whatever you will; only spare us. We are being taken to Kamakh Boghaz to have our throats cut," and they made an expressive gesture. Others kept silence, and marched patiently on with a few bundles on their backs and their children in their arms. Others begged us to save their children. Many Turks arrived on the scene to carry off children and girls, with or without their parents' consent. There was no time for reflection, for the crowd was being moved on continually by the mounted gendarmes brandishing their whips. On the outskirts of the town, the road to Kamakh Boghaz branches off from the main highway. At this point the scene turned into a regular slave market; for our part, we took a family of six children, from three to fourteen years old, who clutched hold of us, and another little girl as well. We entrusted the latter to our Turkish cook, who was on the spot. She wanted to take the child to the kitchen of Dr. A.'s private house, and keep her there until we could come to fetch her; but the doctor's adjutant, Riza Bey, gave the woman a beating and threw the child out into the street. Meanwhile, with cries of agony, the gang of sufferers continued its march, while we returned to the hospital with our six children. Dr. A. gave us permission to keep them in our room until we had packed our belongings; they were given food and soon became calmer. "Now we are saved," they had cried when we took them. They refused to let go of our hands. The smallest, the son of a rich citizen of Baibourt, lay huddled up in his mother's cloak; his face was swollen with crying and he seemed inconsolable. Once he rushed to the window and pointed to a gendarme: "That's the man who killed my father." The children handed over to us their money, 475 piastres (about £4), which their parents had given them with the idea that perhaps the children, at any rate, would not be shot.

We then rode into the town to obtain permission for these children to travel with us. We were told that the high authorities were in session to decide the fate of the convoy which had just arrived. Nevertheless, Sister B. succeeded in getting word with someone she knew, who gave her the authorisation to take the children with her, and offered to give them false names in the passport. This satisfied us, and, after returning to the hospital, we left the same evening with baggage and children and all, and installed ourselves in a hotel at Erzindjan. The Turkish orderlies at the hospital were very friendly, and said: "You have done a good deed in taking these children." We could get nothing but one small room for the eight of us. During the night there was a frightful knocking at our door, and we were asked whether there were two German ladies in the room. Then all became quiet again, to the great relief of our little ones. Their first question had been, would we prevent them from being made Mohammedans? And was our cross (the nurses Red Cross) the same as theirs? After that they were comforted. We left them in the room, and went ourselves to take our tea in the hotel cafe. We noticed that some discharged hospital patients of ours, who had always shown themselves full of gratitude towards us, behaved as if they no longer recognised us. The proprietor of the hotel began

to hold forth, and everyone listened to what he was saying: "The death of these women and children has been decreed at Constantinople." The Hodja (Turkish priest) of our hospital came in, too, and said to us, among other things: "If God has no pity on them, why must you have pity? The Armenians have committed atrocities at Van. That happened because their religion is *ekzik* (inferior). The Moslems should not have followed their example, but should have carried out the massacre with greater humanity." We always gave the same answer—that they ought to discover the guilty and do justice upon them, but that the massacre of women and children was, and always will remain, a crime.

Then we went to the Mutessarif himself, with whom we had not succeeded in obtaining an interview before. The man looked like the devil incarnate, and his behaviour bore out his appearance. In a bellowing voice he shouted at us: "Women have no business to meddle with politics, but ought to respect the Government!" We told him that we should have acted in precisely the same way if the victims had been Mohammedans, and that politics had nothing to do with our conduct. He answered that we had been expelled from the hospital, and that we should get the same treatment from him; that he would not stand us, and that he would certainly not permit us to go to Harpout to fetch our belongings, but would send us to Sivas. Worst of all, he forbade us to take the children away, and at once sent a gendarme to carry them off from our room.

On our way back to the hotel we actually met them, but they were hurried past us so quickly that we had not even a chance to return them their money. Afterwards we asked Dr. Lindenberg to see that this money was restored to them; but, to find out where they were, he had to make enquiries of a Turkish officer, and just at the moment of our departure, when we had been told that they had already been killed, and when we had no longer any chance of making a further search for them, the aforementioned Riza Bey came and asked us for this money, on the ground that he wanted to return it to the children! We had already decided to spend it on relieving other Armenians.

At Erzindjan we were now looked askance at. They would no longer let us stay at the hotel, but took us to a deserted Armenian house. The whole of this extensive quarter of the town seemed dead. People came and went at will to loot the contents of the houses; in some of the houses families of Moslem refugees were already installed. We had now a roof over our heads, but no one would go to get us food. However, we managed to send a note to Dr. A., who kindly allowed us to return to the hospital. The following day, the Mutessarif sent a springless baggage cart, in which we were to do the seven days journey to Sivas. We gave him to understand that we would not have this conveyance, and, upon the representations of Dr. A., they sent us a travelling carriage, with the threat to have us arrested if we did not start at once. This was on Monday, the 21st June, and we should have liked to wait for the Austrians, who were due to arrive on the Tuesday morning, and continue the journey in their company; but Dr. A. declared that he could no longer give us protection, and so we started out. Dr. Lindenberg did us the kindness of escorting us as far as Rifahia. During the first days of our journey we saw five corpses. One was a

This was not the route followed by the convoys of exiles.

woman's, and still had clothes on; the others were naked, one of them headless. There were two Turkish officers on the road with us who were really Armenians, as we were told by the gendarme attached to us. They preserved their incognito towards us, and maintained a very great reserve, but always took care not to get separated from us. On the fourth day they did not put in an appearance. When we enquired after them, we were given to understand that the less we concerned ourselves about them the better it would be for us. On the road, we broke our journey near a Greek village. A savage-looking man was standing by the roadside. He began to talk with us, and told us he was stationed there to kill all the Armenians that passed, and that he had already killed 250. He explained that they all deserved their fate, for they were all Anarchists—not Liberals or Socialists, but Anarchists. He told the gendarmes that he had received orders by telephone to kill our two travelling companions. So these two men with their Armenian drivers must have perished there. We could not restrain ourselves from arguing with this assassin, but when he went off our Greek driver warned us: "Don't say a word, if you do . . ." —and he made the gesture of taking aim. The rumour had, in fact, got about that we were Armenians, which was as good as to say condemned to death.

One day we met a convoy of exiles, who had said good-bye to their prosperous villages and were at that moment on their way to Kamakh Boghaz. We had to draw up a long time by the roadside while they marched past. The scene will never be forgotten by either of us: a very small number of elderly men, a large number of women—vigorous figures with energetic features—a crowd of pretty children, some of them fair and blue-eyed, one little girl smiling at the strangeness of all she was seeing, but on all the other faces the solemnity of death. There was no noise; it was all quiet, and they marched along in an orderly way, the children generally riding on the ox-carts; and so they passed, some of them greeting us on the way—all these poor people, who are now standing at the throne of God, and whose cry goes up before Him. An old woman was made to get down from her donkey—she could no longer keep the saddle. Was she killed on the spot? Our hearts had become as cold as ice.

The gendarme attached to us told us then that he had escorted a convoy of 3,000 women and children to Mamahatoun (near Erzeroum) and Kamakh Boghaz. "Hep gildi, bildi," he said: "All gone, all dead." We asked him: "Why condemn them to this frightful torment; why not kill them in their villages?" Answer: "It is best as it is. They ought to be made to suffer; and, besides, there would be no place left for us Moslems with all these corpses about. They will make a stench!"

We spent a night at Enderessi, one day's journey from Shabin Kara-Hissar. As usual, we had been given for our lodging an empty Armenian house. On the wall there was a pencil scrawl in Turkish: "Our dwelling is on the mountains, we have no longer any need of a roof to cover us; we have already drained the bitter cup of death, we have no more need of a judge."

The ground floor rooms of the house were still tenanted by the women and children. The gendarmes told us that they would be exiled next morning, but they did not know that yet; they did not know what had become of the men of the house; they were restless, but not yet desperate.

Just after I had gone to sleep, I was awakened by shots in our immediate neighbourhood. The reports followed one another rapidly, and I distinctly heard the words of command. I realised at once what was happening, and actually experienced a feeling of relief at the idea that these poor creatures were now beyond the reach of human cruelty.

Next morning our people told us that ten Armenians had been shot—that was the firing that we had heard—and that the Turkish civilians of the place were now being sent out to chase the fugitives. Indeed, we saw them starting off on horseback with guns. At the roadside were two armed men standing under a tree and dividing between them the clothes of a dead Armenian. We passed a place covered with clotted blood, though the corpses had been removed. It was the 250 roadmaking soldiers, of whom our gendarme had told us.

Once we met a large number of these labourers, who had so far been allowed to do their work in peace. They had been sorted into three gangs—Moslems, Greeks and Armenians. There were several officers with the latter. Our young Hassan exclaimed: "They are all going to be butchered." We continued our journey, and the road mounted a hill. Then our driver pointed with his whip towards the valley, and we saw that the Armenian gang was being made to stand out of the highroad. There were about 400 of them, and they were being made to line up on the edge of a slope. We know what happened after that.

Two days before we reached Sivas, we again saw the same sight. The soldiers' bayonets glittered in the sun.

At another place there were ten gendarmes shooting them down, while Turkish workmen were finishing off the victims with knives and stones. Here ten Armenians had succeeded in getting away.

Later on, in the Mission Hospital at Sivas, we came across one of the men who had escaped. He told us that about 100 Armenians had been slaughtered there. Our informant himself had received a terrible wound in the nape of the neck and had fainted. Afterwards he had recovered consciousness and had dragged himself in two days to Sivas.

Twelve hours' distance from Sivas, we spent the night in a government building. For hours a gendarme, sitting in front of our door, crooned to himself over and over again: "Ermenleri hep kesdiler—the Armenians have all been killed!" In the next room they were talking on the telephone. We made out that they were giving instructions as to how the Armenians were to be arrested. They were talking chiefly about a certain Ohannes, whom they had not succeeded in finding yet.

One night we slept in an Armenian house where the women had just heard that the men of the family had been condemned to death. It was frightful to hear their cries of anguish. It was no use our trying to speak to them. "Cannot your Emperor help us?" they cried. The gendarme saw the despair on our faces, and said: "Their crying bothers

you; I will forbid them to cry." However, he let himself be mollified. He had taken particular pleasure in pointing out to us all the horrors that we encountered, and he said to young Hassan: "First we kill the Armenians, then the Greeks, then the Kurds." He would certainly have been delighted to add: "And then the foreigners!" Our Greek driver was the victim of a still more ghastly joke: "Look, down there in the ditch; there are Greeks there too!"

At last we reached Sivas. We had to wait an hour in front of the Government Building before the examination of our papers was completed and we were given permission to go to the Americans. There, too, all was trouble and sorrow.

On the 1st July we left Sivas and reached Kaisaria on the 4th. We had been given permission to go to Talas, after depositing our baggage at the Jesuit School; but when we wanted to go on from Kaisaria, we were refused leave and taken back to the Jesuit School, where a gendarme was posted in front of our door. However, the American Missionaries succeeded in getting us set at liberty.

We then returned to Talas, where we passed several days full of commotion, for there, as well as at Kaisaria, there were many arrests being made. The poor Armenians never knew what the morrow would bring, and then came the terrifying news that all Armenians had been cleared out of Sivas. What happened there and in the villages of the surrounding districts will be reported by the American Mission.

When we discovered that they meant to keep us there—for they had prevented us from joining the Austrians for the journey—we telegraphed to the German Embassy, and so obtained permission to start. There is nothing to tell about this part of our journey, except that the locusts had in places destroyed all the fruit and vegetables, so that the Turks are already beginning to have some experience of the Divine punishment.