

80. SIVAS: NARRATIVE OF A NATURALISED OTTOMAN SUBJECT, DATED NEW YORK CITY, 10th MARCH, 1916; COMMUNICATED BY THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR ARMENIAN AND SYRIAN RELIEF.'

When the majority of the Armenian people were exiled from Sivas, I was in Talas, but when I heard what had happened I started back at once, thinking of course that my relations' would also be sent away, and wishing to accompany them. It was with great difficulty that I obtained permission from the officials in Kaisaria to go back; they daimed that the road was very dangerous, and that it would be impossible for a woman alone to travel over it. Finally, the head official of the Military Transport, who was living in Sivas and had taken possession of Dr. {Sewney}'s house there, telegraphed to Kaisaria that I might travel under the protection of the Menzel, and I started with two officers who were in a wagon behind me and who warned me that I must keep close to them, as the road was very dangerous. The road until we reached Sharkishla, two days' journey from Kaisaria, was very quiet, and we met almost no one. At Sharkishla the plain was black with exiles from different parts of Anatolia; they had been waiting there for about a week and new recruits were coming in every day. At that time they did not seem very unhappy. The weather was beautiful, the plain was covered with trees, and many of the wealthy people had tents and wagons, while there were a great many boys and men in the party.

Later, when they reached Malatia, or even before, the men were separated from them, their wagons and goods were taken from them, and they were only allowed to take what they could carry on their backs over the narrow mountain pass through which they went. I know this because Miss Graffam met these same people later on, while she was on the road with the Sivas people. I was not very near them, but I could see them from the han window. The handji, an Armenian, told me he was sure they were all to be killed, and the officers told me the next day that they had visited them at night, and that the men were to be killed; they said they were sorry for the women and children, but one of them added: "This is what happens to people that want a kingdom of their own."

I had a few unpleasant experiences on the road, but I will not stop to tell them. I found my relations* safe, and the Vali had told them they might stay—I believe because of the influence of some powerful Turkish friends they have in Constantinople, who had telegraphed to the Vali to save Dr. {Sewney} and his wife. The prisons at that time were filled with our Sivas men—several thousand; these men we visited every day, taking food to some of them and trying to cheer up the others. Their wives and children had gone with the exiles, and it was pretty hard work to be brave when they did not know their

Utter written by Mrs. Sewny, an American by birth, but an Ottoman subject by her marriage to Dr. Sewny, an Armenian physician in Sivas. {Copy of letter was sent to James L. Barton by Lillian S. Sewney. PRO/F096/209/246. —A.S.}

{For relations" read "father-in-law, Dr. Sewny, and his wife."}

{For relations" read "father-in-law and mother-in-law."}

fate, but it was surprising how really brave they were. Some of the gaolers were very brutal men, and would be as disagreeable as possible to us, but others were polite and willing to let us see the prisoners, even allowing selected ones to come into the yard and talk with us. About a month later these men were taken out in batches of a hundred at night; they were told that they were to be taken to the railway near Angora to work on it; the rich men were allowed to hire wagons from Turks, at a big price, to travel in. They were all taken very early in the morning, several hours before daylight, and they were seen, those on foot, to go over the mountain into the valley, where we are pretty sure they were killed, as the soldiers returned with clothes, and the wagons always came back three or four hours later filled with clothes. The soldiers, moreover, described how many of the men met their fate, some bravely, some otherwise, and we think they spoke the truth, for they told of men we knew intimately, and who would have been apt to do and say just what they said they did, in the face of death. It was hard to see so many of our fine young men go off in this way, and many of them had no idea they were going to their death. Some of them took money with them, thinking they might meet their wives and children. When they heard that Miss Graffam was returning, they were so anxious to see her and hear of their families. Most of them were gone when she got back, but she was allowed to go into the prison and tell those that were left something about the journey she had made. They were thankful to hear that their wives and children were still alive, as they had heard they had all been massacred a few days' distance from Sivas. Miss Graffam said that although they were robbed on the road and almost everything they had was taken from them, still the girls and women were not outraged or treated badly as far as Malatia. After that, we heard from boys that had escaped from the party and come back to Sivas that many of the girls were carried off by the Kurds a few days after Miss Graffam left them.

After all our Sivas men had been taken from the prisons, other men kept coming in from other cities and towns like Angora and Yozgad. They were kept in prison for a few days and then taken out as our men had been. We were not permitted to see these men. Many of them when they reached Sivas were in carriages. We heard that they, too, were killed in the mountains, and that Sivas was being called the "Great Slaughter House.

The last of our young men that remained in prison were three young doctors. One of them, Dr. {Apekian}, had been educated by Mrs. {Harris}; he had been brought up in the Orphanage at {Marsovan}, and was a splendid young man, full of enthusiasm for his work, which was in the military hospital. Another of the three was the son of a wealthy Divrig family, who had been educated in Germany and had many strong German friends among the high German officials in Constantinople, who either would not or could not do anything to save him. They were executed while I was in Constantinople. I had taken with me letters to a high German official from Dr. {Hiarian}, asking him to save them; and later Miss Graffam telegraphed to me that they were in great danger, and begged me to do all I could to save them—to go to the Germans. I did so, but was told they had gone to Enver Pasha before, and that he would do nothing for them.

{Mrs. Harris of New London}.

About thirty or forty families in Sivas, all of them wealthy, had become Moslems, having the promise that, if they did so, their lives and property would be safe. A few weeks later, all of them, with the exception of two or three merchants, were told they had to go, and, as soon as they left, their property was confiscated by the Government. The Vali's family doctor, an Armenian, was told that he was to stay, and he asked if that meant he was to become a Moslem. The Vali said: "No, I am tired of these people becoming Moslems."

At two different times our orphanage children were ordered out; both times Dr. {Clark} went to the Vali and begged that they might stay, telling him how small many of them were, only three or four years old, and how they would certainly die on the road, for at that time even ox-carts could not be found. He seemed to be touched and said they might. There seemed always to be friction between the police and the Vali; he would give permission for them to stay and the police would come and say they were to go; several of the police officers came to the older girls and teachers, and asked them to become their wives and stay, saying that they would be carried off on the road anyway, and that they might as well accept them and remain. Many hundreds of little girls were being brought back to Sivas before I left; some were being placed in Moslem families and some in empty houses. We were not allowed to see them. Many of the Turkish officers had seized one or two of these little girls and were planning to take them on to Constantinople with them. Some of our orphanage teachers were able to interview some of the older girls that were brought back from Kara-Hissar (one of the places where the Armenians tried to defend themselves). These girls tell horrible tales of what they saw there. A great many of these girls were being married to Turks; the Turks were saying they were not forcing them; they wanted them to become their wives willingly. A number of women and children who had been in hiding were also beginning to come out of hiding when I left, and the Missionaries were taking them into the orphanage and the hospital, trying to save them.

Several Armenian soldiers from the Samsoun region had also fled to the hospital for protection; they had started with their regiments from Samsoun, and the Armenians, who numbered a thousand or more, had been attacked by the guards and the majority killed or left for dead. The men that came to Dr. {Clark} had been among those left for dead; one of them had a horrible wound across the back of his neck, where he had been cut by an axe; they usually used axes, saying they did not want to waste powder and shot on them. Some others came from a lonely barracks on the Marsovan road, where they and their comrades, all Armenians (soldiers), had been shut up for three days without food or water. Finally a young Turkish officer heard the noise as he passed, and came and let them out. These men said that they were put in this building towards evening. They were tied together by threes and called out in succession. Those that went out never returned, and they found that they were being butchered with axes. One of the men succeeded in untying the cord that he and his two companions were tied with; they closed and barricaded the door, and when the soldiers, who were only a few in number (Turkish), found that they could not get in, they fastened it on the outside so that the Armenians should not get out. They were afraid, indeed, to go out even after the Turkish

soldiers had left, until this officer appeared and sent them on to Sivas; he said that the men that did these things would be punished, but they were not. We believed that they were allowed to do pretty much as they pleased with the Armenians, and so, when they happened to be brutal, they did this kind of thing, with the result that many of the Armenians that had gone through it had become nervous wrecks. Dr. {Clark} had seen and talked with a number of these men, and I also saw those who had fled to the hospital.

In Tokat the girls, small and large, were left in the houses alone. The daughter of the Badvelli there managed to send a letter to her uncle, who was a nurse in our hospital (a soldier), saying that she and her four little sisters were in the house alone and had nothing to live on, and that the city was full of girls in the same condition; up till that time, which was a month after their parents had left them, they had not been injured by the Turks. A Turk brought the letter.

On the 1st October, when I left Sivas to go up to Constantinople I had some difficulty in getting permission to start, as the Vali was away. I had to wait until he returned. He said he would see that I got as far as Talas safely, and he told me which places to stop at; but because of some trouble with the driver, I was unable to stop at the hans he told me to stop at, and the first night the han was filled with Armenians who were being deported from {Marsovan}, both men and women. They were wealthy people who had become Moslems. My driver told me that they had not become true Moslems and for that reason were being sent away. The soldiers with them were very evil-looking men. I noticed that they had many beautiful rugs and carpets in their wagons. In the next room there were some Turks who were talking of the killing of the Armenians; however, nothing happened to them that night. The second night I had to stop at a han which had been very prosperous a few months before, but was now half wrecked and deserted. It was dark and we could not go on, and we found that the son and brother of the former handji had become Moslems, and that the Government had allowed them to take charge of the han on condition that they turned over all the money they made to the Government. These two men were in the most pitiable condition from fear, and they both told me horrible tales of how the men of Gemerek had been killed; this han was outside the town of Gemerek. They said they had hidden in the mountains for three weeks until driven out by starvation, and then had given themselves up to the Government and become Moslems, but they added: "We are only Moslems with our mouths, but Christians in our hearts." Still, they were very fearful, and not at all sure that they would not be killed later. In the village of Gemerek, they said, most of the girls had been forced into marriage with the Turks, and many of the old women had been killed and the rest deported. I had seen them on my way to Sivas going out, so I knew this to be true. The next night I heard two hodjas talking, under my window, of a terrible massacre of the Armenians that had just taken place in the mountains; they seemed to be very sorry about it and spoke of it with horror; they did not know, of course, that I was listening. When I reached Talas, the people had almost all gone from there and from

{After "Constantinople" insert "to do Red Cross Work."}

Kaisaria. The Kaisaria Protestants, or at least a number of Protestant families, were sent out to Talas and given houses there, while the Talas Protestants were sent to neighbouring villages; but their condition was much better than that of any of the Armenian people in our Sivas region. The Girls'-School was filled with girls from Kaisaria, most of them the daughters of wealthy Gregorian and Catholic families. The Kaisaria people had been allowed to leave their daughters behind. While I was there, a woman and two men arrived from one of the Kaisaria out-stations and told of the terrible massacre of the whole village. First the little boys up to ten were taken outside the village and killed. There were only a few men in the village, so the women dressed as men and held the village against the Kurds and Turks for three weeks, keeping them off with stones; they had fled to the hills. These people said that the Turks used to call to them to come down and become Moslems and their lives would be spared; this they refused to do. Later, the village Turks were reinforced by the soldiers from Kaisaria, who shot them down, only these three people escaping. They had been weeks reaching Talas, having to hide by day and travel very slowly at night for fear of being caught. This village had many of our Protestant people, and among those killed was the mother of one of the teachers and the wife of another. We heard that all the villages in that region were treated in this way, instead of being deported. While in Talas I had a telegram from Sivas asking me to wait for a professor of the Sanasarian College, who was coming from Sivas with his wife and little boy. The Vali had given them permission to go on to Constantinople; he had been educated in Vienna and his wife in this country; they were very fine people. I waited several days and they did not come. I found that they had left Sivas as they planned and disappeared between Sivas and Talas—they have never been heard from. I know a number of people that disappeared in just this way on that road, after the Vali had given them permission to travel and the promise of a safe escort.

The rest of the way from Kaisaria to the railway I went under the protection of the Military Transportation Company. I passed through many deserted towns, but saw no dead bodies on the road, only one between Sivas and Talas. On the railway we passed truck-load after truck-load of Armenians—exiles being sent into the interior. All were in cattle-trucks, huddled together like animals. We met these trucks every day; often they were shunted on the siding. All along the Konia plain were tens of thousands of people; some had tents, many of them had nothing. The weather at that time was warm, so they were not suffering specially from the cold. Later, while in Constantinople, we heard that these people on the Konia plain were being sent into the interior and not allowed to take any food with them, so that they would die quickly.

On the train, in the compartment with me, was the wife of the Mutessarif of Erzindjan. She had several Armenian girls with her—one of them in the compartment with us to wait on her children. She was kind to this child, who was only about nine years old, but she treated her like a little slave. She told another Turkish woman that her parents had been sent away and she had taken her from the streets. The Armenians in Constantinople had not been deported, only the men who were suspected of

1After "Catholic families" insert "who had never been in our schools before.")

revolutionary tendencies, but there is great suffering among them for lack of food, and they need work. Professor told me, the week before I left, that the Turks in Constantinople were saying: "The Armenians from Constantinople must go," and that great pressure was being brought to bear upon them by the Turks to become Moslems and stay. We had a number of Armenian young women employed in the Red Cross work, and they all showed a most beautiful Christian spirit, were always kind and gentle to the soldiers, and never showed in any way that they felt any bitterness toward them. Several of them had come from the interior and had relatives that had been deported; one of them was from Trebizond, where there had been that terrible massacre of children, and her little baby of seven months was, she fears, among them. This young woman went into exile with her husband, and lost everything and everyone in Trebizond. She was a most beautiful Christian, and was loved and respected by the people that worked with her.

{After last paragraph insert:—

"When the Red Cross work closed, many Armenians were left without work, and it is the desire of the Missionaries in Constantinople to start industrial work and open dispensaries and in this way give these people employment. If help is not sent quickly, many will die of starvation.

"I had letters from Sivas before I left, saying they could use any amount of money for relief work. They could not write very fully, but I understood that the people who had been in hiding in Sivas and the neighbourhood were beginning to come back, and that they have nothing left, as all their goods, as well as their property, have been confiscated by the Government, and many houses were torn down as soon as the people left. There is great need of relief everywhere."!