

73. TREBIZOND: EXTRACTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH COMM. G. GORRINI, LATE ITALIAN CONSUL-GENERAL AT TREBIZOND,* PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL "IL MESSAGGERO," OF ROME, 25th AUGUST, 1915.

For over four years I was Consul-General at Trebizond, with jurisdiction over practically the whole Black Sea littoral, from the Russo-Turkish frontier to the neighbourhood of Constantinople, and over five provinces in the interior of Asia Minor (Eastern Anatolia, Armenia and Kurdistan)—districts chiefly inhabited by Turks, Armenians and Kurds, with a considerable sprinkling of Persians, Russians, Greeks and Arabs. For the last ten months, moreover, I had also been responsible for the protection of the very numerous Russian subjects and Russian interests, as well as the Greek and Montenegrin, and also, to some extent, the French, the English, and the American, with others of minor account. . . .

As for the present internal condition of the Ottoman Empire, I can only answer for my own district. In my district the present condition of things is almost desperate. The population is showing true Moslem resignation in the way it is bearing the existing situation—the ruin and desolation of individuals and community, the holocaust of all and everything for a war which no one desired, but which was forced upon them by Enver Pasha, and which will lead to the ruin and dismemberment of all that still remains of the Ottoman Empire. But the Moslem and Christian populations can do nothing more—they have reached the extreme limit of their effort. The oxygen is being administered by the Germans, who are trying to prolong the agony of the dying Empire, but will not be able to perform the miracle of restoring life to a corpse. Apart from a few lunatics, a speedy peace, even if it involves the foreign occupation of Ottoman territory, is the prayer of all. There is no courage for a rebellion. The Germans and the "Committee of Union and Progress" are hated and detested by all, but only in the intimacy of the heart and in confidential conversation, for the Germans and the Committee constitute the one genuine, solid organisation at present existing in Turkey—a masterly and most rigorous organisation, which does not hesitate to use any weapon whatever; an organisation of audacity, of terror, and of mysterious, ferocious revenge. . . .

As for the Armenians, they were treated differently in the different vilayets. They were suspect and spied upon everywhere, but they suffered a real extermination, worse than massacre, in the so-called "Armenian Vilayets." There are seven of these, and five of

Signor Gorrini left Trebizond on the 23rd July, 1915, in the interval between the Italian declarations of war against Austria-Hungary and against Turkey. He hired an open motor-launch with a Lazic skipper and crew, and took with him two servants and the Montenegrin Kavass of the local branch of the Ottoman Bank. The coastwise voyage from Trebizond to Constantinople took seven days and nights. They touched at Kerasond, Samsoun, Sinope, Ineboli, Kidros, Zonguldak, Zacharia, Chile and Faro d'Anatolia, without landing, however, at any of these places. From Constantinople Signor Gorrini travelled via Dedeagatch and Palermo to Rome, where he gave this interview to the representative of "Il Messaggero."

them (including the most important and most thickly populated) unhappily for me formed part of my own Consular jurisdiction. These were the Vilayets of Trebizond, Erzeroum, Van, Bitlis and Sivas.

In my district, from the 24th June onwards, the Armenians were all "interned"—that is, ejected by force from their various residences and despatched under the guard of the gendarmerie to distant, unknown destinations, which for a few will mean the interior of Mesopotamia, but for four-fifths of them has meant already a death accompanied by unheard-of cruelties.

The official proclamation of internment came from Constantinople. It is the work of the Central Government and the "Committee of Union and Progress." The local authorities, and indeed the Moslem population in general, tried to resist, to mitigate it, to make omissions, to hush it up. But the orders of the Central Government were categorically confirmed, and all were compelled to resign themselves and obey.

The Consular Body intervened, and attempted to save at least the women and children. We did, in fact, secure numerous exemptions, but these were not subsequently respected, owing to the interference of the local branch of the "Union and Progress Committee" and to fresh orders from Constantinople.

It was a real extermination and slaughter of the innocents, an unheard-of thing, a black page stained with the flagrant violation of the most sacred rights of humanity, of Christianity, of nationality. The Armenian Catholics, too, who in the past had always been respected and excepted from the massacres and persecutions, were this time treated worse than any—again by the orders of the Central Government. There were about 14,000 Armenians at Trebizond—Gregorians, Catholics, and Protestants. They had never caused disorders or given occasion for collective measures of police. When I left Trebizond, not a hundred of them remained.

From the 24th June, the date of the publication of the infamous decree, until the 23rd July, the date of my own departure from Trebizond, I no longer slept or ate; I was given over to nerves and nausea, so terrible was the torment of having to look on at the wholesale execution of these defenceless, innocent creatures.

The passing of the gangs of Armenian exiles beneath the windows and before the door of the Consulate; their prayers for help, when neither I nor any other could do anything to answer them; the city in a state of siege, guarded at every point by 15,000 troops in complete war equipment, by thousands of police agents, by bands of volunteers and by the members of the "Committee of Union and Progress"; the lamentations, the tears, the abandonments, the imprecations, the many suicides, the instantaneous deaths from sheer terror, the sudden unhingeing of men's reason, the conflagrations, the shooting of victims in the city, the ruthless searches through the houses and in the countryside; the hundreds of corpses found every day along the exile road; the young women converted by force to Islam or exiled like the rest; the children torn away from their families or from the Christian schools, and handed over by force to Moslem families, or else placed by hundreds on board ship in nothing but their shirts, and then capsized and drowned in the Black Sea and the River Deyirmen Dere—these are my last ineffaceable memories of Trebizond, memories which still, at a month's distance,

torment my soul and almost drive me frantic. When one has had to look on for a whole month at such horrors, at such protracted tortures, with absolutely no power of acting as one longed to act, the question naturally and spontaneously suggests itself, whether all the cannibals and all the wild beasts in the world have not left their hiding places and retreats, left the virgin forests of Africa, Asia, America and Oceania, to make their rendezvous at Stamboul. I should prefer to close our interview at this point, with the solemn asseveration that this black page in Turkey's history calls for the most uncompromising reproach and for the vengeance of all Christendom. If they knew all the things that I know, all that I have had to see with my eyes and hear with my ears, all Christian powers that are still neutral would be impelled to rise up against Turkey and cry anathema against her inhuman Government and her ferocious "Committee of Union and Progress," and they would extend the responsibility to Turkey's Allies, who tolerate or even shield with their strong arm these execrable crimes, which have not their equal in history, either modern or ancient. Shame, horror and disgrace!