

AMERICAN EMBASSY*
CONSTANTINOPLE

July 26, 1915

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith copy of a report prepared by one of the American teachers at College of Marsovan who desires that his name shall not be mentioned in connection therewith.

The report deals with the lamentable events surrounding the wholesale deportation of the Armenian population of the city of Marsovan by Turkish Government officials.

The writer calls attention to the fact that he has necessarily embodied in his report some information of a hear-say and exaggerated character but that he has endeavored to distinguish between what he knows and what has been told to him.

However, I think the Department may find this account very useful for future reference, when general conditions are being examined for the purpose of establishing the exact facts in connection with the treatment of the Armenians in this Empire.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

[signed] Morgenthau

Enclosure: copies of the above-mentioned despatch in duplicate.

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/106

CONDITIONS IN MARSOVAN*

(Note) In these troubled times, the air is so full of rumors that it is sometimes hard to distinguish between fact and fiction, but undoubtedly some of the rumors have foundation in fact and should be mentioned. I have tried to distinguish between what I know and what I have only heard by putting the latter in parenthesis.

The trouble for the Armenians began as for all other nationalities with the collection of soldiers. The government swept off all men possible for military service. Hundreds of the bread winners marched away leaving their wives and children without means of support. In many cases the last bit of money was given to fit out the departing soldier leaving the family in a pitifully destitute condition. A number of Armenians were quite well off and paid their military exemption fee. A much larger number escaped in one way and another so there were more Armenians than Turks left in the city after the soldiers had gone. This made the government suspicious and fearful. The discovery of Armenian plots against the government in other places added to this feeling. The special Armenian troubles began in the beginning of May in the middle of the night [when] about twenty of the leading men of the national Armenian political parties were gathered up and sent to Sivas where they have been imprisoned ever since. In June the government began looking for weapons. Some of the Armenians were seized and by torture the confession was extracted that a large number of arms were in the hands of different Armenians. A second inquisition began. The bastinado was used frequently as well as fire torture (in some cases eyes are said to have been put out). Many guns were delivered but not all. The people were afraid that if they gave up their arms, they would be massacred as in 1895. Arms had been brought in after the declaration of the Constitution, with the permission of the Government, and were for self-defense only. The torture continued, and under its influence one fact after another leaked out. Under the nervous strain and physical suffering, many things were said, which had no foundation in fact. Those inflicting the tortures would tell the victim what they expected him to confess, and then beat him until he did it. The College mechanic had constructed an iron "shot" for the athletic games, and was beaten terribly in an effort to fasten the making of bombs on the College. Some bombs were discovered in the Armenian cemetery, which aroused the fury of the Turks to white heat. But it should be said that it is very probable that these bombs had been buried there in the days of Abdul Hamid.

On Saturday June 26th at about 1 A.M., the gendarmes went through the town gathering up all the Armenian men they could find, old and young, rich and poor, sick and well. In some cases houses were broken into, and sick men dragged from their beds. They were imprisoned in the barracks, and during the next few days were sent off towards Sivas in groups of from thirty to one hundred and fifty. They were

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/106

sent on foot, and many were robbed of shoes and other articles of clothing. Some were in chains. The first group reached Sivas and sent word from various places. (It is said that this was a scheme of the Government in order to encourage the rest. None of the rest have been heard from. Various reports have been circulated, the only one generally accepted being that they were killed. One Greek driver reported seeing the mound under which they were buried. Another man, in touch with the Government, in answer to a direct question, admitted that the men were being killed.)

Through the intervention of a Turk, the College was able to free those of its teachers already taken, and obtain a stay of proceedings against all of its teachers and employees, by the payment of the sum of two hundred and seventy-five Turkish Liras. Later this same Turk said that he believed that he could obtain the permanent exemption of the entire College group by the payment of a further sum of Three Hundred Liras. The money was promised, but after some negotiations which showed that no definite assurance of exemption would be forth-coming, the matter was dropped.

Following the sending of the groups of Armenians in the direction of Sivas, criers went through the streets of the town, announcing that all male Armenians between the ages of fifteen and seventy years, were to report at the barracks. The announcement further stated that their refusal to obey would result in their being killed, and their houses being burned. The Armenian priests went from house to house, advising the people to obey this announcement. Those reporting at the barracks were sent away in groups, the result being that within a few days practically all of the Armenian men were removed from the city.

On the 3rd or 4th of July the order was issued that the women and children should be ready to leave on the following Wednesday. The people were informed that one ox-cart was to be provided by the Government for each house; and that they could carry only one day's food supply, a few piastres, and a small bundle of clothing. The people made preparation for carrying out these orders by selling whatever household possessions they could in the streets. Articles were sold at less than 10% of their usual value, and Turks from the neighboring villages filled the streets, hunting for bargains. In some cases these Turks took articles by force, but the Government punished all such cases when detected.

On July 5th, before the order for the expulsion of the women was carried out, Dr. Marden went to the Government to protest against the execution of this order, in the name of humanity. He was told that this order did not originate with the local officials, but that the orders had come from those higher up not to leave a single Armenian in the city. The commandant, however, promised to leave the College to the last, and gave permission for all people connected with the American institutions to move into the College Compound. This they did, and at one time over three hundred Armenians were living on the College premises.

The Americans tried to communicate with the American Ambassador and the nearest American Consular Agent (at Samsoun) with reference to the existing

situation, but all telegrams were flatly refused by the Government. The Hospital had been doing Red Cross work in taking care of Ottoman soldiers all the year, free of charge. With the exception of a few Americans, the large staff of well-trained attendants were all Armenians. Sending them away would necessitate closing the Hospital. An exception was asked for in the case of these Armenians, because of the service of the Hospital to the Army, but this request was refused. This same request was telegraphed to the Vali at Sivas but no reply whatsoever was received.

The College undertook to do a little Relief work, by buying small articles from the poorest of the people, thus furnishing them with money for their journey. Many others brought their possessions to the College, and failing to sell them, sought to leave them as gifts. Some of these women made the statement that their first husbands had been killed in the massacre of 1895, their second husbands had just been disposed of, and now they and their children were ordered away. They wished the College to accept the gift of these household articles "lest these too should fall into the hands of our oppressors." Some jewels were taken on deposit by the College, but most articles were refused. In many cases the owners simply dropped them at various places on the College premises. Many bundles of clothing and other articles were thrown over the walls into the College Compound.

When it became known that the College was buying some articles hundreds of Armenians came with goods for sale. This aroused angry feelings among some of the Turks, who felt that thus a great deal of the booty was slipping through their fingers. Other Turks said "What's the difference. We'll get the College next." Following this, the Government sent up an order that we must stop receiving such articles, whereupon the gates were closed.

The population had been ordered to be ready to depart on Wednesday. But on Tuesday, about 3.30 A.M. the ox-carts appeared at the doors of the first district to be removed, and the people were ordered to depart at once. Some were dragged from their beds without even sufficient clothing on their backs. All the morning the ox-carts creaked out of the town laden with women and children and here and there a man who had escaped the previous deportations. The women and girls all wore the Turkish costume, that their faces might not be exposed to the gaze of drivers and gendarmes, a brutal lot of men brought in from other regions. In many cases, the husbands and brothers of these same women were away in the Army, fighting for the Turkish Government.

The panic in the city was terrible. The people felt that the government was determined to exterminate the Armenian race and they were powerless to resist. The people were sure that the men were being killed and the women kidnapped. Many of the convicts in the prisons of Angora and Chorum had been released, and the mountains around Marsovan were full of bands of outlaws. It was feared that the women and children were taken some distance from the city, and left to the mercy of these men. However that may be, there are provable cases of the kidnapping of attractive young girls by the Turkish officials of Marsovan. One Moslem reported

that a gendarme had offered to sell him two girls for a mejidieh. The women believed that they were going to worse than death, and many carried poison in their pockets to use if necessary. Some carried picks and shovels to bury those they knew would die by the way-side. During this reign of terror, notice was given that escape was easy; that anyone who accepted Islam would be allowed to remain safely at home. The offices of the lawyers who recorded applications were crowded with people petitioning to become Mohammedans. Many did it for the sake of their women and children, feeling that it would be a matter of only a few weeks before relief would come.

This deportation continued at intervals for about two weeks. It is estimated that out of about 12,000 Armenians in Marsovan, only a few hundred were left. Even those who offered to accept Islam were sent away. At the time of writing, no definite word has been heard from any of these groups. (One Greek driver reported that at a little village a few hours from Marsovan, the few men were separated from the women, were beaten and chained, and sent on in a separate group. A Turkish driver reported seeing the caravan two days journey from Marsovan. The people were so covered with dust that features were scarcely distinguishable). Even if the lives of these exiles are being protected, it is a question how many will be able to endure the hardships of the journey over the hot dusty hills, with no protection from the sun, with poor food, and little water, and the ever-present fear of death or some worse fate. (see note)

Most of the Armenians in the Marsovan district were absolutely hopeless. Many said that it was worse than a massacre. No one knew what was coming, but all felt that it was the end. Even the pastors and leaders could offer no word of encouragement or hope. Many began to doubt even the existence of God. Under the severe strain many individuals became demented, some of them permanently. There were also some examples of the greatest heroism and faith, and some started out on the journey courageously and calmly, saying in farewell "Pray for us. We will not see you again in this world, but sometime we will meet again."

Note. While journeying to Constantinople, we passed some of the Greek exiles from European Turkey. They did not seem to be in such a pitiful condition as the Armenians, as they had considerable property with them. Because they traveled by boat and rail, they were obliged to suffer less danger and hardship on the way.

Note. (see above) Those who do survive the hardships of the exile will be absolute paupers, as they were obliged to leave behind them all of their possessions. At least a dozen of these men were the owners of properties valued at over twenty-five thousand Turkish Liras.