

**A VISIT TO THE EXILE CAMP IN MEZEREH  
(THE TITLE REFERS TO FIRST PARAGRAPH).<sup>\*</sup>  
[BY RUTH A. PARMELEE, HARPOOT]**

This particular camp was located in the yard of the Gregorian Church which was surrounded by a high wall. We found the people themselves were either ravenously hungry or sick from diseases resulting from their sufferings and filthy conditions. The guards allowed us to enter the yard, although they were keeping close watch on the wretches in their charge. When the people saw the American ladies entering, they crowded around us begging for something to eat. They had come from distant places to the north, Trebizond, Erzroom, Ordo, etc. After going on the road for some days, their men had been separated from them and taken away to be killed. In this camp were to be found only a few decrepit men. In the middle of the premises a square trench had been built into which from time to time was placed the body of someone who had died. When one layer had been completed, they would cover it with some earth and wait for further bodies to furnish the next layer. The people told us that they had heard on the road that Protestants and Catholics were to be freed, but the order had not been carried out. A few individuals, by bribing their guards succeeded in escaping and remaining in Harput, but those who had not been able to save any of their money were obliged to stay with their company, later to be pushed on, probably to some slaughtering ground, there to be disposed of. The people seemed almost like animals, as they crowded around us and begged for food. Their experiences seemed to have caused their human feelings to deteriorate. The government furnished a small amount of bread which was not adequate to keep them alive. Those that have saved a little money could send out and buy a little bread; some of the poor creatures had attempted to make a fire and cook something with what they had bought. A woman who had come all the way from the coast (Ordo) told me of the ways in which the women tried to hide their money-in the bottom of their water jugs, by swallowing pieces of gold, by inserting into the vaginal orifice, etc. The guards would suspect these tricks and would pour out the drinking water on the ground, and in some cases went so far as to examine the women internally or to search all of their clothes. This same woman, whose word I have every reason to believe, told me that she hid some money in her monthly napkin and when the men examined her clothes, she succeeded in convincing them that she was in an unclean condition, according to the Mohammedan law, and they went no further in their examination. She herself escaped dishonor at the hands of the guards, but many girls were kidnapped from their company and many outrages were committed every night upon some of their number. From Erzroom came three women in pregnant condition, who came to us for care during their confinement. They had started out from their home with their husbands and some property; along the road their husbands had been killed and their property had been robbed from them. The 2½ year-old boy of one of these women had received a bullet wound during one of these attacks that had been made on their company. One of these women came near being kidnapped by a Kurd. They arrived in Harput without sufficient clothing and utterly destitute of everything they had taken with them on the road. Most of the way they had been obliged to come on foot, their animals having been stolen from them.

Among the groups of men to be gathered up and imprisoned in Harput during June 1915 was one group of middle-aged and old men. What a shout of anguish arose from the neighborhood when they saw this group of men being taken down the hill to the prison at Mezereh. Among this number was one man, by name Hagop Bennayan, a man so feeble that a trip to the market and back was sufficient to tire

\*. SOURCE: NA/RG256/Special Reports and Studies/ Inquiry Document 811. For the original copy of this report, as submitted to Barton, see Houghton Library (Harvard University), ABC 16.9.7, vol. 25C, doc. 270.

him; when the officers came to arrest him in his home, he begged them to kill him right there, for he said he could not take the journey. But they obliged him to go to prison with them and then out on the road. He left behind him an aged wife and three daughters of rather feeble health. When the families of this quarter of the city were sent into exile, these four feeble women had to go with them. Word came back afterwards that the two older women of the family, the mother and the oldest daughter, had succumbed by the roadside and the two younger daughters who had been teachers in our school, had last been seen wrapped about each other, utterly naked, on a burning plain near Oorfa.

In this same company of elderly men was a middle aged man, well known to me, Minas Berberian, who was suffering from hernia and not fit to take a long journey on foot. No very definite news came from this company, but we had every reason to fear that their fate was the same as that of every other company of men sent out under similar conditions.

The most authentic news that we had of the slaughter of a company of men sent out from prison was brought by our own druggist. His group of 800 men had been taken out not many hours from Harput, bound together in groups of four, and under strong guard. This man (brother of Professor Melkon Lulejian) found himself cut loose from his bonds and escaped from the midst of the killing. His companions who were not able to escape like himself were being deliberately killed by their own guards.

On May 1, 1915 the first group of influential Armenian men were gathered up and put onto prison. This company included merchants, priests, college professors etc. The names of the latter were Tenekejian, Boujicanian, Lulejian, Soghigian. The first three of those mentioned suffered terrible torture. Prof. Tenekejian had the hairs of his beard extracted. Beating was a very common method of torture. One procedure which was used to torture Professor Lulejian was to throw him into a fearfully ill-smelling Turkish closet, after having beaten him unconscious.

At the time of the deportation of the families from our portion of the city, the old uncle of one of our Protestant women, (Badaskhan Jincuzian) was left in their house, being considered by the family too feeble to go on the road. His eyesight was very poor, and he was nearly bent over double, leaning on a stick when he walked. At the time of the departure of these families the houses were scaled by the government. Mr. Ernest Riggs, desiring to care for this old man left behind, went to obtain permission for the mayor of the city for the house to be opened and the man to be taken out. The mayor however did not accede to the plan and ordered the police to take the old man out and to deport him. They got him down to the foot of the hill with considerable difficulty, and then seeing the difficulty of their task, they set him free allowing him to crawl back up the hill and find his way to the American premises.

In our school we had a little girl of 11 years of age who had suffered rape at the hands of a Turk in whose house she was being sheltered. I do not remember whether she was kidnapped from the road or whether she was being saved from exile by these Turks. Feeling that she could not stand these things any longer, she ran to the Danish orphanage; she came under my care for bladder trouble following her maltreatment.

One of our educated Protestant ladies who had been a teacher before her marriage told me that her little motherless niece had been brought to her with her sisters from Malatia had been raped on the way to Harput. This child was nine years old.

On November 5, 1915 the people of Harput were summoned to appear before the governor, (that is the Armenians). The guards used more than the necessary force and harshness to make the people comply with these orders. With my own eyes I saw one grey-haired woman being dragged along the street in a harsh manner. Our neighbor, Anna Dingilian, was sick in bed with kidney trouble. Early in the morning the guards roused her up and obliged her to take her little children scantily clothed and without time to get their breakfast, to the government building. One of the pregnant women who had come from Erzroom was living in the same house. She was beaten and dragged around by her hair; when

we arrived upon the scene, she was in a very excited and hysterical state from the fear which she had been suffering.

(Fortunately the orders for exiling these people were cancelled, as far as the city of Harput was concerned, and the people after all their scare and maltreatment were allowed in the afternoon to return to their homes.)

[signed and handwritten note appended below] Ruth A. Parmelee, M.D.

The following story was told me by a woman who had been exiled from Hassan Kali (near Erzeroom). She and her children were sent on beyond Harpoot, with a company of exiles, to Lake GeoIjuk-a region where thousands were slaughtered. There she received a wound of the head and fell unconscious. When she came to, she found herself among the many dead bodies of her fellow Armenians, no living being in sight. She washed the blood off her face and looked for her little children. Having convinced herself that they had been killed (finding their dead bodies), she made her way to a Kurdish village, and later came to Harpoot.

R.A.P.