

[STATEMENT BY ELVESTA T. LESLIE
AINTAB-OURFA]*

Personal Observations

Being in Aintab most of the time of the deportations, I was not an actual eye-witness of many of the hard things myself. Also because of my being rather new to Turkey, many things were not told to me, either before or after the birth of my baby, for some time.

Not many of the horrible things that happened in other places happened in Aintab itself, though the things that were happening seemed bad enough. I saw from my room perhaps sixty or seventy different parties of refugees passing through Aintab, but I was never down to any of the camps. It seemed to make the treatment from the gendarmes worse if foreigners came to try to help. They often drove away the native Aintab Armenians with whips. At that time the Aintab people had no idea that they also would be sent away, and they did all they could to help those others passing through the city. Mrs. Merrill and Dr. Hamilton were able to do considerable work in the camps of refugees at different times and we heard many stories from them.

An Armenian girl was brought by an Arab to the College gate in Aintab. Mrs. Merrill took her in and made a bed for her in a small room. One day she took me in to see the girl. She had delicate refined features but looked nearly starved. In spite of good care she became worse and wildly delirious. If any one approached she cowered away in fear unless she noticed that the person wore European shoes (the bed was on the floor). Finally she died, shrieking to her last breath. One could but vaguely imagine the treatment she had been through. This incident merely illustrates what Armenian girls have suffered. But few had the boon of dying among friends, and many there are who would gladly die anywhere if they could have the privilege.

Most of the Aintab Protestants were sent away from Aintab after the 1st of December in 1915. Many of them had to start out on cold rainy days walking, and some even started out with snow on the ground and snow falling. With their poor native foot-gear their going in the mud and water and without anything for tents, was a great hardship and entailed untold misery. A number of the Aintab parties were robbed before they had gone a day's journey from the city.

Many of the refugee parties coming in to Aintab told of robberies on the way. One party of Gurun people (Gurun is near Sivas I think) came in to the city in a very bad condition. They had been attacked on the way. Dr. Hamilton and nurses went down to see what could be done. Finally permission was obtained from the government to bring the worst cases to the hospital and about twenty or twenty-five were brought up, among them several old men and women and some children. Some of the women became separated from their children in this way, permission being refused for well members of a family to remain behind with the sick. The wounds were from bullets, stones, sticks, and various projectiles. There were broken arms, cut heads (one child's head was cut to the brain), and injured faces. One woman who afterwards was able to stay on and work in the hospital had her nose nearly cut off. After several weeks those who had recovered most were sent on by the government. By one way or another animals were provided for these. I remember distinctly how they rode out of the hospital yard, with heads, faces, or arms bound up in bandages. All with heavy hearts saw them go to an unknown fate. The remaining ones were able to stay in Aintab for many months and then finally part of them were sent to near-by villages. Some still remain on the American Hospital premises as servants or dependents.

The remaining facts fall under the second heading of things I heard from others but of whose truth I have no more doubt than if I had seen or heard myself.

*. SOURCE: NA/RG256/Special Reports and Studies/ Inquiry Document 814. For the original copy of this report, as submitted to Barton, see Leslic to Barton correspondence, dated Northport, Michigan, 24 October 1917, Houghton Library (Harvard University), ABC 16.9.5, vol. 25C, doe. 103.

Things Heard from Others

In the last part of November 1915, Mr. Ernest Riggs and family, Miss Mary Riggs, Miss Campbell, and Mr. Pierce and family of Kharpoot arrived in Aintab in carriages coming by way of Diarbekir and Ourfa. I did hear all they told and much I do not remember except these things about their journey between Diarbekir and Ourfa. One night's stopping place was a khan quite in the wilderness, merely a post stop on the road. Before coming to this, they came upon the naked bodies of Armenians lying scattered all around. They said that sometimes there was scarcely room for the carriage to pass without clearing the way. So they spent the night in this lonely khan, with the dead lying outside and one surviving child sat inside the courtyard crying all night. They did what they were allowed to for the child; they were being sent back to their homes. But as the carriages passed on farther the occupants saw some men killing one of the stragglers before their eyes and then strip the body of its clothing. The fate of the party just passed was all too plain, but it seemed terrible that they must pass by the victims of the massacre by the khan. Mr. Pierce said their own gendarme was often absent from them for hours at a time, presumably hunting for loot on dead bodies.

Last year on the 11th of October, 1916, as Dr. Merrill and I were going from Aintab to Ourfa, the conductor on the train running between Jerablus on the Euphrates to Ras-El-Ain, the end of the road for regular trains, told us that the year before, or in the fall of 1915, that on the road between Ourfa and Racca on the Euphrates--a regular refugee route--between 400 and 500 children had been buried alive, all at one time. I understood, Mr. Jacob Kunzler, a Swiss of the German Orient Mission in Ourfa, told us the same thing. Others also told us the same story, so it was very commonly known. This same conductor told us that at Ras-El-Ain, 30,000 Armenians had been massacred. In Aintab we had heard this same story from some one coming from Aleppo, who had said that employees on the railroad were not to repeat what had happened at Ras-El-Ain on pain of being discharged, and that some had been.

On this same trip as we were riding in our carriage from the railroad station at Tel-Ebiad to Ourfa, a distance of 35 or 40 miles, we came to the end of the made carriage road leading out of Ourfa and intended to extend to the station. We noticed some hummocks and mounds and the driver, a refugee Armenian from the Konia region, pointed them out to us as the place where the 600 Armenians, mostly Ourfa people had been buried after they had been killed there in the summer of 1915, in August. They had been a regiment of Armenian men called to be soldiers and then put to work making a carriage road, which had nothing to do with military operations. One or two of our own Mission workers at Ourfa lost their lives in this company. When we reached Ourfa, Mr. Kunzler asked us if we had noticed this spot as we came along and then told us the same facts. Mr. Leslie had written me of the occurrence at the time of happening, but in a veiled way as was only possible. All the remaining people of Ourfa know this as a common fact.

Upon arriving at Ourfa, we learned the story of the Armenians there, though in a general way we had known it before. The following facts we had from Herr Kunzler and Pastor Ephraim Jernazian of the Syrian church (Protestant). The latter was interpreter in the government all the spring, summer, and fall of 1915, the time of the deportations and knew many of the inside things. Many of these things I talked over with Herr Eckart, a German of the same German Orient Mission, and there was no question with him but what these facts were true. On the 17th of May, 1915, sixty soldiers came to the American Mission and took Soghoman Knadjian, our bookkeeper and head of the handkerchief work, a man who was one of the foremost Protestants, to prison. Mr. Leslie was never able to see him again. Several prominent Gregorian men were also imprisoned. In spite of all efforts on the part of Mr. Kunzler, Mr. Eckart, Mr. Leslie, and Dr. Shepard, who was in Ourfa at the time, the surrender many men were taken just outside the city, scarcely a stone's throw from the houses in one quarter which is outside the city walls, and killed in various ways. This place was just across the road from Mr. Kunzler's house and over a slight rise of ground. They could hear the operations going on there. In the night they were aroused by a sound at their door and found there a man, naked, covered with blood. They had intended to cut

his head off but had not finished their work. Mr. Kunzler took the man into the German Hospital and when he was recovered sufficiently, he was taken out and hanged. The second night those killed were taken a little farther away and also on following days. Meantime the soldiers were hunting out of the Armenians houses, caves, wells, etc., those who had tried to hide. Mr. Eckart had occasion to go to the American premises one day and some of the people who had taken refuge there during the revolution had succeeded in hiding themselves in the cellar of our kitchen, among them our half-blind gatekeeper. He rushed out and begged Mr. Eckart to save him. That was impossible, however, and Mr. Eckart had to go away leaving these people to their fate. Outside in the street he met an Armenian running to escape. A few seconds later there were shots so it was evident that he had run into the soldiers who were patrolling that street. Mr. Kunzler said that the arms of our ironshop foreman were cut off before he was killed. because they had accused him of making bombs in the forage of the iron-shop. Those who were supposed to have been involved in instigating the revolution were tried before a court-martial and were hung after about two weeks. Among these were the pastor of the Armenian Protestant Church, and a young man who had had charge of the boys in our American Orphanage and who had been Mr. Leslie's chief native helper during the summer of 1915. The city had not been cleaned up when Dr. Shepard of Aintab visited there three weeks after the Armenians surrendered. He was not allowed to go through that part of the city but he did not wish to for he said the stench was unbearable.

Many of the Ourfa women and children died in the khans in Ourfa before they were sent on the road. These places were hot-beds of typhus. Gendarmes, soldiers, officers, and civilians came to these khans and picked out the girls they wanted and carried them away. In Ourfa there are great number of Armenian girls in Moslem houses. Mrs. Kunzler has assisted a number of these girls to run away by finding places for them in Syrian homes or with other Moslems till they could find opportunity to get away to Aleppo. The day I left Ourfa an officer came to search our carriage to see if we had a girl hidden in it who had run away from his house. Many of the people contracted typhus in the khans and then died along the road after they were sent away. Some few escaped into Arab villages along the way. However very few, less than a hundred, reached Racca on the Euphrates, I was told by the wife of our bookkeeper, Soghoman Knadjian (above mentioned) who was in Racca at the time and was looking out for the Ourfa people. She said that the girls who arrived there in the company were in a terrible condition. The women had told her that on the journey they would be turned back towards Ourfa, being told that they could return to their homes. After a day or two, they would again be turned towards Racca. In this way they were obliged to travel over the same road five or six times. It was just to wear them out. The number became smaller all the time. It was said that the Ourfa Armenians were treated worse because they rebelled. But one can not censure them for resisting. The tide of deportation had been through Ourfa from both east and west all summer and people had ample opportunity to see the treatment and condition of these refugees, and to hear their stories. Women and girls arrived there with little or no clothing, half starved and dumb with despair. An Englishman, Mr. Ritzo, one of the interned belligerents of Ourfa told one of the Aintab missionaries, Miss Foreman, that he was obliged to spend several days and nights at the railroad station near Ourfa on his way to Aleppo. He said he could not sleep for nights because of the sights he saw at this place. Little children dragged behind their mothers and then sat down on the ground and died in that sitting posture. The mothers had become so numb from all the horrors, that they did not even turn their heads when a child dropped behind.

In the Ourfa deportation, the servants were even taken out of the houses of the German missionaries there. Mrs. Kunzler's two were sent and died on the way of typhus as did also my own. She then took in some refugee women. These two were from Kharpoot. They had both lost children on the way. One had arrived in a village outside of Ourfa without any clothing. There she had procured a pair of bloomers. In these she came to the city. She told me how they came along weak from hunger and crazy with thirst, falling down every few steps. One little girl she left behind in a village because she was sick and could go no farther. The other she left because she could do no more for her and hoped that in a

village she would at least get something to eat. Afterwards she was always hoping she might find them, but up to the time I came away they had not been able to do so, though several clues had been followed up. This woman's husband, Garabed Bedrosian, is in the United States and a citizen. Mrs. Kunzler had several girls in her house that had run away from Moslem houses. She told me she was sure that there was not a girl in Ourfa or that had passed through there but that had [not] suffered abuse at the hands of gendarmes or soldiers or others.

Yevriege Knadjian, the wife of Soghoman Knadjian above mentioned, who was in Racca for over a year as a refugee, told me that conditions there were terrible. Many died of starvation and disease. The streets sometimes were lined with children sitting begging, or lying sick. When complaint was made of the condition of the streets, the answer was that they would be cleaned the next day. The next day the police took all the sick and helpless from the streets and threw them into the Euphrates. She told me that one night she heard the clinking of iron and the noise of people coming along the street and she went to the gate to see who they were. A group of naked men in hand-cuffs guarded by police were marching by. The men she recognized as some of those who had come from Ourfa to Racca with her husband. They were being taken to their death. Yevriege Knadjian and her children only escaped from Racca themselves in a starving condition. She said one terrible privation that the refugees suffered on the march was the lack of water. Often when they reached water, they would not be allowed to have any, but the villagers would torture them by pouring out water on the ground, but refuse to let them have a drop. I have heard the same thing from different people, so it must have been a common method of being cruel.

While in Aintab this last spring, the sister of one of the boys at college returned from exile from down the Euphrates. She was helped to escape by some Moslems from her own village near Aintab. I need not give her story but in her wanderings she had been obliged to leave her older children behind and finally to put down her baby to die because she could no longer carry it. Then she wandered back over her trail and finally met some carriages filled with children and guarded by police. In one wagon she recognized her own children. She was told they were being taken to an orphanage. One driver said she might go too. But an Armenian driver of one wagon advised her not to go. The wagons continued on their way and soon they turned down to the river and the police made them all drive in and so all were drowned. I can not tell whether this woman saw this happen before her eyes, but it happened so close to her that she knew of it almost immediately.

There will be several reports about the destruction of the Armenians at Der Zor, which will give the sources of information as I can not do so, as I heard these stories from these people. The one, to me, most terrible thing, was the shutting up of two thousand or more children in several houses and their being left there for several weeks and then the houses opened and the bodies taken out.

Dr. Hamilton and nurses sometimes went down to the refugee parties and assisted in cases of childbirth while the party remained. Mrs. Merrill said that the women told her that when a child was born they tried their best to conceal the fact by hiding the child in their waists, while they walked or rode along as before. If the gendarmes discovered the child they would throw it away or kill it immediately. Sometimes if they were more merciful, they would allow the woman to rest a couple of hours.

There are various other stories I might relate but they would not differ materially from the instances already told. The dispersion of Armenians at Intilly, a place on the railroad near the tunnel through the mountains, affected many in Aintab and our region. To be safe, many especially young men had gone there to get work on the tunnel in the employ of the railroad construction company. After some months of security on the plea that these young men had gathered there for a revolution, the government suddenly swooped down upon them and sent them off in different companies. A great many were robbed and killed before the parties reached Aintab. One Aintab college boy escaped and came to the college for refuge. He had been chained up with a number of others and on the way they were stood up

together and fired at. He fell with the rest and remained motionless as if dead until everyone had left the spot. Then he freed himself from other bodies and escaped to Aintab by coming unfrequented ways. A number of Aintab people lost their lives in these parties went from Intilly, but the most of the Aintab people who have perished, lost their lives down at Der Zor, in Mesopotamia or else in the wilderness near there, where they were driven.

[signed] (Mrs. E H.) Elvesta J. Leslie, April 11th, 1918.