

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS
CONGREGATIONAL HOUSE, 14 BEACON STREET
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

January 17, 1918.

Rev. James L. Barton, D.D.,
14 Beacon St.,
Boston, Mass.

My dear Dr. Barton:*

Knowing your deep concern over the peoples of Turkey and your interest in the Turkish race, I take the liberty of writing to you in regard to the President's recent peace terms, especially those sections which touch on the problem of Turkey.

The world at large seems to take it for granted that the Turks would like their present government to remain in power. While volumes are being written on behalf of the oppressed Christian subjects of the Sultan, and while those who read must know that the Arabs and Moslem Syrians, in fact all Moslems who are not Turks, hate with bitterness even greater than that existing among the Christian populations of Turkey the Turkish Government, no one has risen up to speak on behalf of the Turks themselves. As a matter of fact, the peasant Turks of Anatolia have suffered misery and injustice at the hands of their own Government, and among them there is an unspeakable discontent, with things as they are. If it would be unjust and cruel to leave the Armenians, and the Greeks, the Syrians and Arabs in the hands of this corrupt Government, it is just as wrong to leave the Turkish peasants under such rule.

There is a clear cut distinction between the official class in Turkey and the peasant class. All travelers and writers acknowledge this distinction and those of us who live in the country realize it even more. The peasant class numbers some four and a half Millions, while the official class at the most does not number more than a few hundred thousand. The peasants are ignorant, prone to fanaticism and can be stirred to acts of unspeakable violence and cruelty. Under corrupt leadership which preys upon their fanaticism and ignorance they never fall to respond.

On the other hand these peasants are peace-loving, industrious and teachable people. Oppressive taxation, systematic robbing of their rights and wretched provision for education by the Government, has kept them in degradation and poverty. That they aspire to higher things is not to be doubted. That they are sick of the existing Government is a fact. I have been stopped not once but many times, when traveling in the interior, while these peasants discussed with me their attitude toward the existing Government. As one man said to me, "When will the English come here? Then we shall have good buildings; good streets; good schools. Everything fine. Now look—nothing but mud—mud houses, mud streets—nothing beautiful." One old Turkish farmer, with whom I talked and who had expressed

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himself rather forcibly regarding the existing Government, when I remarked, "Yes, it is something like a thief," turned to me and said fiercely, "Don't say like a thief. It is a thief."

At that time a wide wholesale requisition for "war purposes" was going on, including the requisitioning of such things as corsets, women's silk stockings, children's toys, candy and perfumery. To leave these peasant Turks under such a Government as they have suffered under for generations, would be an act of untold injustice.

There is another class in Turkey which suffers even more than the peasant Turk from the existing rule in Turkey. I now refer to that large number, ever increasing, who are educated, who love justice, who are not corrupt and would give their lives for liberty,~ Hundreds of them have paid the penalty of their desire for righteousness and freedom with their lives. Countless numbers of them have languished and are languishing in terrible Turkish prisons. Many of them bear on their bodies marks of torture. They look to this present world situation as the only hope of relief from their suffering which are more mental and spiritual than they are physical. They are men who have the same spirit that glowed in our Pilgrim Fathers that shed blood at Lexington and Concord, and are fighting today against autocracy. They are Turks and they are Moslems but their hatred of the existing Government in Turkey exceeds the hatred of all other groups who have suffered from the tyranny of Turkish misrule. Among this group of men I count many friends. Let me mention one of them though I might mention others as well. Because of his education he was appointed Governor of a certain district. Massacre broke out under orders from Constantinople in one of his largest cities. Mounting his horse he rode in haste to quell the massacre. An American missionary in that city was holding a wild mob back from the missionary's premises where several hundred Armenians were gathered. The mob had slain hundreds along the city streets. The Governor rode through the mob and took his stand opposite the missionary and was able to disperse the crowd. The missionary presented the Governor with his walking stick which he held in his hand at the time. The Governor treasures that stick as his most precious possession, so he told me, as he held it up for me to see.

The Government of Constantinople immediately removed him to a lesser post. There again he sought to do justice. He was removed to a post of less significance. Once more he sought to give a righteous administration. This time he was thrown into prison. While in prison, bound in irons, I was able to get messages through to him. This man has shown me his legs, with terrible scars made by his tortures in prison.

I might remark that Turkey's greatest poet of the past century died two years ago of a broken heart from the cruelty and injustice which reigned in power throughout the country. One time he too, at the risk of his life, saved the Armenians in one of the villages of the Bosphorus from massacre. Are we to leave such men as these to their sufferings? Shall no one speak a word for them when justice is being sought for all the world? Under any form of Turkish Government they have no hope. They will never appeal to fanaticism; they will not prey on ignorance. That dooms them. Under the suzerainty of Great Britain or the United States such men would be given posts high in the Government. They could be counted upon to throw themselves enthusiastically into the administration of Turkish affairs wisely and justly. But if when this war is over, we leave the Turkish peasant and these libertyloving Turks in the hands of such a Government, a Government which has no more love for the Turkish peasant than for the Armenian; which will as readily rob its Moslem subjects as its Christian; which seeks only its own wealth; which glories in autocratic power, I say, if we leave such a Government in control over any portion of the people of Asia Minor we are betraying our trust and we are permitting an injustice to continue in the world which will be a canker sore in the heart of Asia Minor. Far better would it be to establish a negro republic in the heart of the Southern States. It would be governed more wisely; it would be administered far more justly; it would produce less friction among its neighbors than to leave a Turkish regime bordering on an autonomous Armenia and on a liberated Syria.

It is not better to face these things now than to repent of them in blood again, when another crisis shall surely arise if this question is not settled right?

I write these things as one who loves the Turks and above all else desires to see justice done them as a people.

Very respectfully yours,
[signed] S. Ralph Harlow