

STATEMENT OF THE MISRULE OF TURKEY AND HER CRUEL
TREATMENT OF NON-MOSLEM SUBJECTS [ARTHUR C. RYAN,
CONSTANTINOPLE]*

A. Personal Observations

1. In March 1914 while I was doing relief work in Thrace I saw many things which were evidence of the misrule of the Turks and of their cruel treatment of their non-Moslem subjects. Much of this evidence was written to Boston during the spring and summer of 1914. The armies of the Turks which retook Adrianople and such portions of Thrace as they recaptured in 1913 devastated the non-Moslem regions and carried away much of their movable property and imprisoned many of the male members of these communities. I saw prisons in Malgara and other villages that were full of men and filthy beyond description. The prisoners were not given trials in many cases and often were left without food other than such as their relatives or friends might get to them. I saw Moslem subjects with Turkish officers go to villages and demand the return of animals whom they claimed the non-Moslems had stolen. The claim, in most cases, was evidently false but this gave the Moslems a plea for driving off practically all, if not all, of the animals which they found in the community. Moslems even boasted of having secured food, clothing, animals and other property from their non-Moslem neighbors without pay. In one instance a village of Bulgarians were dispossessed of their homes and much of their moveable property and deported, via Malgara, Rodosto, Constantinople and Varna to Bulgaria. I saw many of these people in Malgara and Rodosto and know of the ill-treatment given them by the Turkish officials. Many of them were forced to walk about forty miles to the seaport, Rodosto, and were forced from time to time to buy even this privilege.

During this same spring I saw the working of the official boycott against the Greeks in Thrace and along the lateral of the sea of Marmora. Not only were Moslems forbidden to buy from these Greeks, but they were encouraged to take their goods and then walk off without paying for it. Moslems were forbidden to sell anything to the Greeks. Many Greek merchants were financially ruined by this boycott.

2. In April 1915 it was reported that 485 leading Armenians living in Constantinople were arrested and deported to the interior of Asia Minor. I saw and talked with three of the men who were arrested at that time, but who succeeded in being freed after weeks or months of deprivation and suffering. One of these men was one of the men engaged as translator for our Publication Department at the Bible House. His name was Keropian. He told us of the large number of prisoners that were exiled and their hardships during the trip to the interior of Asia Minor and of the ill-treatment of some of the prisoners while on the way and after arriving at their destination. The second man was a Bible colporteur connected with the American Bible Society's work in Constantinople. His story was similar to that of Mr. Keropian. These two men were released after some weeks because of the work of the American Embassy. The third man was Dr. Nakashian, a prominent physician and surgeon in Constantinople. He was taken to Sultania, near Konia, and for months was kept in very close confinement, with terrible suffering owing to bodily punishment and illness and the filth of the prison. He was released in October or November of 1915 and came to Constantinople in a very serious physical condition. He told us of the terrible treatment of the prisoners and of the death of many of his companions. Dr. Nakashian said that all except 20 of the men who were arrested and deported from Constantinople in April had died before he was released. A fourth man who was deported from Constantinople in April in 1915 was Mr. Garabedian, an Armenian priest who was educated in Robert College and in Union Theological Seminary in New York. He was a priest in the Gregorian Church and was in charge of a church near our home in Stamboul. He was one of the 485 who did not return.

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3. In October 1915 I went to Bardizag, Turkey and there saw the empty houses where some 5,000 or more Armenians had lived until August of that year. The whole population, save some 60 persons had been deported in August. Of the 60 who remained about thirty were unable to move. These helpless people were gathered into houses near our school compound and were cared for by some Armenian women who were not sent into exile at that time. The Americans furnished the funds to keep these people from starving to death. At least twelve of these persons had died before November 20, 1915. I spent much of the time between October 6th and November 20, 1915 in Bardizag. While there I saw Turkish officials collecting the moveable property of the deported Armenians. After gathering this property into the Gregorian church, it was transported to the sea shore and placed on steamers. I suppose it was sent to Constantinople. One day these officials came to our compound and broke into one of the houses in which Professor Hagopian had lived and carried away all the goods which remained in the house. I watched them break open the house and carry away the goods. My protest was laughed at by the officials and I was told that these articles belonged to an Armenian before he had been deported and that the government was to take care of them in his absence. Before I left Bardizag about 60 Moslem families had been brought to the town and placed in some of the houses. The shops had been looted and some Moslems had appropriated some of the best buildings and were attempting to run some kind of a shop.

While in Bardizag at least twenty persons came to me and asked for funds with which to buy bread for persons who had been deported to nearby villages and who were being refused bread because they refused to become Moslems. Women and children would steal back to the town and come to me to plead for their relatives and friends who were being held in these Moslem villages. One boy about 15 years of age had been kept by a Turk because he wished to have him drive his carriage. This boy's name was Garabed. He told me that the Turk had told him on several occasions that he must become a Moslem or he would be turned over to the police for exile or death. The last time I saw this boy he told me that the Turk had given him only seven more days in which to make up his mind to become a Moslem. On one occasion I heard the cries of a man who was being beaten in the police station. I could hear the blows and the cries of the man. This man told me that he was called to the station about once a week and beaten by the officials.

4. Between October 6th and November 20th it was necessary for me to be in Ismid on several occasions. In Ismid I saw the empty shops in the market and the ruins of some five hundred houses where the Armenians had lived before their deportation. This district had been set on fire and burned so as to prevent any Armenians from reoccupying the houses. Practically the whole Armenian population had been driven from this city. On three visits to the city I saw exiles being sent through the city on their way from Thrace to some unknown destination in Asia. These people were treated as if they were wild beasts who had to be watched every minute lest they should rend some person. They were all ages from small new-born babies to old grandparents. They were forced to sleep under freight cars and near the walls about the church yard and when it pleased the officials they were forced to pay second class fare to ride in freight cars and sheep cars to some unknown destination further on in Asia. On the three occasions I must have seen not less than 2,500 of these exiles.

5. In August 1915 the police of Ismid brought 19 boys to Constantinople from our High School at Bardizag. The boys were taken to police headquarters in Constantinople and confined in a small room until late at night when they were permitted to go to a native rooming house where I was obliged to pay for their lodging. The following day five of the boys were permitted to go to their homes. The other fourteen were held for six days. Two of them were Persian subjects and were released through the efforts of the Persian Legation. The other twelve boys were finally turned over to me to be cared for in Robert College. The two Persian boys were arrested on the Galata bridge one night and not seen in Constantinople for about a month. They had been sent to Eskishehr with 220 other Armenians from Constantinople. They were finally rescued by the Persian Consul and returned to Constantinople. They

told me that they were forced to walk from Ismid to Eskishehr and that 20 of the company died on the way. One night I met an Armenian boy, who was an Abyssinian subject, with a group of men who were being taken to the steamer for deportation. By appealing at once to the American Embassy I was able to save this boy from exile, but his release from the police was secured only after much work by the American officials at the Embassy.

B. Accounts of Treatment Believed to be True

1. I was told that all the Armenians in the villages about Bardizag and Ismid had been deported and their property taken. In some places the old and decrepit were left to perish. In some cases peasant Moslems who attempted to befriend these exiles were persecuted for their efforts. In one place near Bardizag a Moslem land owner had about 200 Armenian women and children gathered together to harvest his crop and when the harvest was over the officials sent the people away with less than they had when they came.

2. I was told of the mistreatment of Armenian soldiers in the Turkish Army. Some of our own students have given accounts of the poor food and the abuse of the officers in the army. They were forced to buy all their food except bread and a little soup and to replace their uniforms when they wore out. I was told that one of the Armenian soldiers that used to come often to my office in the summer of 1915 was court-martialed as a spy. Stories of the suffering of women and children whose breadwinner had been sent into exile were so common as to be our daily portion for months before I left Constantinople. Orphans whose parents had been killed or exiled were seen daily on the streets of the villages on the Bosphorus and in the main part of the city. The officials turned the orphans of the orphanage in Bebek out into the street one evening in the summer of 1915. The inmates of an old ladies home under the auspices of some foreign ladies were turned out one day and the building confiscated. Night arrests from the homes of the Armenians living in the region near our home were common. Night after night in the summer of 1915 I have seen the officers with groups of from three to sixty men under arrest. Many of these were non-Moslem subjects. Discrimination against the non-Moslem subjects in the distribution of bread and other food supplies was common during that summer and winter. The same was true of fuel and other necessities of life.

3. Laws were passed to make legal the confiscation of all the property of the deported people. Commercial houses were told to discharge their Armenian help and hire Turks. Firms were also ordered not to pay any money to Armenians regardless of the reasons for doing so. The Armenian Patriarch was practically a prisoner in his house and he was shamefully treated by the Turkish officials.

[Signed and dated], Arthur C. Ryan, Chicago, Ill., March 28, 1918.