

## THE EXILING OF THE ARMENIANS; ADANA DISTRICT\*

[ELIZABETH S. WEBB]

The story of the Adana deportation has been fully given in Lord Bryce's book "The Treatment of the Armenians." I wish to testify as an eye-witness that this account is true in every particular.

About 20,000 Armenians were deported from Adana, only the families of soldiers and of those working in Government factories and work shops and in some cases widows with small children being exempt. A pastor 80 years old and nearly blind was among those compelled to go from Adana. The exiles were allowed to dispose of household goods in so far as was possible in the short time allowed between the giving of the notice and the time of starting. In most cases this was one or two days but sometimes only a few hours. Since the buyers were usually Turks things had to be given for almost nothing. All had to pay their fare on the train or walk, and in some cases they hardly had money for the first stage of the journey except as helped by relief. The law compelling all to go was very rigid, notices being posted in the various quarters of the city that any trying to escape deportation would be shot. As soon as houses were vacated they were sealed by the Government. Later everything they contained was gathered by the Government and sold at auction, only Moslems being allowed to buy.

Greeks were not allowed to come near while the things were being sold. Printed notice was sent out that any in whose hands Armenian property was found would be severely punished. Gold and other property deposited both in the Imperial Ottoman Bank and in the German Bank by Armenians was taken by the Government. Later a list of all Armenian houses and vineyards was made and these were rented to the people, Turks, Greeks or others, by the Government. In order to keep possession of our Mersine church building and Adana cemetery we are obliged to rent them from the government although the former has a charter (ferman) from the Sultan. When the Mersine pastor went to the local governor to seek exemption for the church property the answer given was "So far as the Government is concerned there is no Armenian people." "The only way to retain possession is to pay rent for it." The houses and vineyards rented by Turks are in many cases being almost destroyed. Fruit trees are being cut down, and the houses themselves used for fire-wood.

One of our Turkish neighbors all last winter used the flooring of her house for cooking her food.

The exiled Armenians from the Adana region fared much better than most others in Turkey. Many of them on personal application to Jamal Pasha were sent to the Damascus region, reached their destination in safety, and have not been massacred since. Some families however were never heard of after leaving Adana. The death rate on the road was fearful, and they were at the mercy of the gendarmes who were conveying them. Springs by the road-side were usually taken possession of by some Turk who obliged every one to buy all the water needed. In a case near Marash of which I heard where good water was found on one side of the exile camp and sewerage water on the other side guards were placed to shoot any who should try to go to the good water and so they were compelled to drink the other. This I know to be true.

At night a common way of robbing the people in camp was to throw a lasso over any box or bundle the robbers might wish and drag it away. No one would dare make the least resistance or even go out of the tent to see who was doing it. Girls and young women were at the mercy of any Turk who might set his eyes on her.

No one was allowed to work to earn money. In the camp near Osmania a young fisher-man whom I know had caught a fish from the stream while in camp there and was trying to sell it. A gendarme snatched it from his hand and threw it on the ground saying "Don't you know you are not allowed to work?"

---

\*. SOURCE: NA/RG256/Special Reports and Studies/ Inquiry Document 819

We in Adana did not see any very large companies of exiles from the north as most were sent through direct by rail from Tarsus to Mamoure the end of the line on the Adana side of the Amanus mountains. Small companies however were constantly passing through. Never shall I forget the ragged, lame, despairing women I passed one night between Tarsus and Adana limping along in the darkness, or the wagons full of the old, the blind, the lame and the little children, stopping for half an hour at a khan by the road-side. These companies usually did not stay more than one day in Adana, but we always tried to learn when one came and helped them through native agents. We would not have been allowed to visit them personally.

The breaking up of the concentration camp at Mamoure was one of the tragic incidents of those tragic days. Owing to difficulty of transportation at this end of the line something like 60,000 exiles from the constantly coming stream had congregated there. Every day the gendarmes passed through the camp cutting tent ropes and urging the people to move on. But how could they go? Animals or wagons for transportation could not be found, and if they started on foot most of their food, bedding and household goods must be abandoned. Many of them were starving, many sick, and the sanitary conditions can be imagined. Finally Von der Goltz Pasha was to pass through, and something must be done to remove this eye-sore. I have the story from an eye-witness and know it to be true. One afternoon just before sundown soldiers were sent out to charge upon them with drawn bayonets. The witness said "one moment the tents were all in place, the next moment all that could be seen was a mass of fleeing people. Some were pierced by the bayonets and killed, families were separated and lost each Other, babies and old people were abandoned. Of course all their property was lost. What was done with those left I never heard. but Von der Goltz Pasha passed through in state."

Through the fall and winter of 1915 and the whole of 1916 refugee companies containing from a dozen to several hundred were constantly passing through Adana on foot or in wagons going east. Later individuals and small companies began to drift back. The condition of these became more and more pitiful. All were in rags and filthy beyond description. Their skin was burned and dried to the color of a mummy, very many were nearly blind as a result of a hunger, and most seemed dazed or mentally affected. I will give the story of a few of these as they told it to me.

Osanna Hanum was from Ismed near Constantinople. Her husband had been away from home serving as a soldier for more than a year when the exiling began. Still she was forced to leave her home in Ismed and start into exile, alone with her four little children,—the oldest only eight years of age. Obligated to go on foot, she made a bundle of absolutely necessary clothing and food. Taking this on her back she had the second child (a boy of three) climb on top of it. Then taking the baby in her arms she made the other two children (five and eight years of age) run along ahead of her. But on reaching Konia she saw that her strength was giving out. Fearing she herself would die and all the children be left without a protector she decided to give the little three year old boy to a Creek woman there. She took a written promise however from the woman that if ever she should return and claim the child he would be given up. Relieved of this burden she succeeded in reaching Adana. Here she managed to escape from the caravan. But where in that great city could she find a refuge? The eye of the police was every where searching for just such as she. In desperation she came begging me to save her. The baby had died, and finally we were able to put the two remaining children in a safe place. The mother is now working for a Persian family, and when the war is over we hope the father, mother and children may be reunited again.

Gulenia was a little girl about 13 years old from Teker Daghu near Constantinople. She with her mother and the rest of the family were sent into exile to Resul Ain. Here one afternoon while coming from her sister's tent an Arab seized her and carried her off before her mother's eyes. The Arab sold her for about \$2.00 to a Turk who carried her to Aleppo. Here she succeeded in escaping and took refuge in an Armenian orphanage where she thought herself safe. But one day a Turk from Adana came to the orphanage wanting a girl. He marched through the place to choose the most promising, and alas the

choice fell on Gulenia. Those in charge tried to save her. But on the Turk threatening to scatter the orphanage and send them all into exile they did not dare oppose him, and finally to save the others they sacrificed Gulenia. Thus she was brought to Adana and for months kept in this Turk's house, none of us knowing any thing about it. Again and again they tried to persuade her to become a Moslem, but without avail. Finally, however, she found that they were planning to compel her to marry the son of this man, and she decided to run away. My first knowledge of her existence was when she appeared at my door begging for protection. I took her in and succeeded in spiriting her away from the city to a place where she will be kept safe until the war is over. A public crier called "Lost gir" in the streets and offered quite a reward for finding her but without avail.

Mariam and Khatoon were from a Sivas village, and had been wandering for six months between Sivas and Adana. When brought to me both were nearly dead and half crazed by the experiences through which they had passed. Only after months of medical treatment and good food did they in a measure regain physical and mental equilibrium. Mariam had left a baby in a dying condition by the road-side unable to carry it farther.

Mariam from Moosh together with a woman and two children from Erzroom, escaping from Kurdish captors as they were passing through, came to me for protection. All relatives had been killed. Mariam had been taken as wife by one of the Kurds, and a baby had been born dead on the road. During the journey she had tried to escape from the man and he had shot her through the right arm. It not having been properly set she was incapacitated for work. She was in every way such a wreck that she was under the doctor's care for months. Finally I had to take her into my own home for several weeks before she finally made a start toward recovery.

Luder was a boy of about 15 from Trebizond. He had walked most of the way from Trebizond to Adana carrying a younger brother on his back. When I saw him he was shaking all over with what seemed to be palsy, and seemed dazed with fear. A company of 17 women and children were found in a khan in Adana. They like all the others were sick, dazed and utterly destitute. They said they were all that remained of Kara Kcoy, a village in the Hadjin region. When I visited their village the summer of 1914 this was a prosperous place of several thousand, having two churches and two schools (Protestant and Gregorian). Now all that remains are these 17 women and children.

The boys from Mr. Wingate's school in Talas were brought to Adana and put in a Turkish school. Great effort was made to force them to become Moslems. On their refusing the younger boys were given Turkish names and put in a separate school. Then about a dozen of the older boys were told they were going to be sent to Turkish school in a distant town. They were sent under guard together with some Turkish boys. At a station on the way the Christian boys were told that here they were to separate from the others and go through the mountains to another place. Feeling sure they were to be killed the boys determined to try to escape. Succeeding in this they reached a construction camp of the Bagdad railroad where they tried to earn their living by work. But contracting typhus and malaria half of them again drifted back to Adana. One a pastor's son died of typhus while five were nursed back to health again. They are now where I hope they will be safe until the war is over. A young Armenian from Adana who at the instigation of their mother stole two of the smallest of these boys soon after they came from Talas and returned them to their mother, was caught by the Government and beaten until almost dead.

We often hear of Christian girls in Turkish houses or villages, but can do nothing for them except as they run away of themselves and throw themselves on our protection. A company of Christian girls, said to be orphans are now in a Turkish school in Adana. A Christian woman whom I know succeeded in talking with them, but only with Turks present.

The Armenian orphanage in Adana started by Jernal Pasha in 1909 after the Adana massacre, at the time of the exiling became a Turkish orphanage. The Armenian man at the head of it was imprisoned and finally hung. I heard the charge against him was the possession of two pernicious Armenian books the leaves of neither of which had been cut.

Pressure was brought to bear to make the children become Moslems, but only a few of the younger yielded. The rest escaped from the orphanage, some finding homes with relatives and some becoming servants in Greek or Jewish houses. I called upon the German consul at Adana for help in this connection. He was friendly, but unable to do any thing. (I wished to get some of them to the German orphanage near Baghche.) In talking over the exiling with me he said, "If Berlin wished to stop it they could." The remark seemed to me worth mentioning.

In our region though a few became Moslems no general attempt was made to proselytize. In one case only did I hear of extreme pressure being used. This was an Oorfa man long resident at Adana. He had been sent at the time of the general exiling, but his wife being a Greek was allowed to remain in Adana with their family of small children. On reaching Resul Ain he decided that if he stayed there he would surely die. By a free use of money he was finally able to go to Aleppo. Being a stone mason he finally succeeded in getting some kind of an exemption paper and with wife came to Adana. Later he was told that either he must go again into exile (this time with his wife and children) or become a Moslem. It was a fierce struggle, but having experienced the horrors of exile he finally yielded.

A company of exiles from Hadjin were kept in camp eighteen miles from the city for more than a week. Then, when their provisions began to be exhausted, they were told they would be allowed to return home if they would become Moslems. I think none of them accepted. I was in Hadjin soon after and heard of it from those who knew.

These incidents might be multiplied hundreds of times from the exiles with whom we came in contact in Adana.

[signed and dated] Signed Elizabeth S. Webb, June 1st, 1918.