

(EXTRACTS FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AMERICAN HOSPITAL AT KONIA,  
TURKEY FOR THE YEAR 1917 WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE TREATMENT OF  
BRITISH PRISONERS IN KONIA)\*

Mr. Morgenthau, the American Ambassador, was a tower of strength in those days. Time after time he foiled the Turkish and German officials in their plots for oppression or reprisal upon the British and French citizens living in Constantinople. Once, when the tide seemed to be turning against the Turks, and the straits were in serious danger, Wangenheim, the German Ambassador, was all for gathering up all the French and English women and children in the city and putting them on the bows of the transports which were carrying the Turkish troops to the Dardanelles. But our vigilant Ambassador was able to frustrate this by arguments and entreaties, and finally, in truly Oriental fashion, the Turks made a bargain with him to release the women and children and to allow their places to be taken by three hundred men, afterwards reduced to twenty by clever bickering, and these were merely escorted to the theatre of war by the first secretary of our Embassy and a few days later all brought safely home.

Simultaneously with the second phase of the Dardanelles campaign a proclamation was issued permitting military commanders to deport the civilian population from one part of the Empire to another as "military necessity" might arise. Soon it became evident that this apparently harmless maneuver was the death warrant of the Armenian nation. With the entrance of Armenian troops into the eastern provinces and the danger to the capital arising from the Dardanelles campaign, the Young Turks found an excuse to carry out their long cherished plan for the extermination of the Armenians. Arrests of prominent Armenians in all cities of the Empire followed. Men were thrown into prison and their houses searched for arms; and a general accusation of secret plotting against the Empire made against all Armenians. Here and there as might be expected a few arms were found, and often arms and rifles were left in houses and churches by examining officials and then "discovered" on a later visit. Tortures followed. An expert on torture visited the prisons in the neighborhood of Constantinople. Men were burned, their finger nails torn out, their hair pulled out by the roots, and other nameless outrages perpetrated in order to extract incriminating information. Soon deportation began. It was declared that the purpose of the government was simply to remove the Armenian population in the Western part of Asia Minor from the war zone, and from the neighborhood of the main railroads, to the Mesopotamian plain where they would have no chance for plotting and where the government could supervise and at the same time provide for them; but it soon became manifest that destruction and not deportation was the real object. The usual method was to name a day on which all the Armenian population of a town or village must vacate and proceed by rail to their appointed destination, but long before the day arrived gendarmes would ride at midnight into the towns and villages, set fire to several houses, order the people out at once, rob and loot and assault, and put to death, as occasion might arise. Women were abducted and outraged, children were scattered and kidnapped, and many old people put to death in the early stages of the deportation. Resistance was impossible. The able-bodied men were all in the military service, for the most part unarmed and in the labor regiments, and whole companies of Armenian soldiers were shot at the beginning of the persecutions. The victims of the deportation were mostly old men, women and children. The terrified crowds were hurried to the railroad stations, forced to pay their own fare, if any money had been left to them, or driven along the highways on foot if they had none. In a few instances the deportation was carried out with a certain degree of regularity and consideration, but for the most part the people were crowded into cattle cars, two layers of them in each car, and many of them crowded on the tops as well. The trainloads of human misery were rushed eastwards day after day and night after night. Babies were born in indescribable conditions and many

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of them flung from the cars while their mothers often insane with grief leaped after them. Along the highways tens of thousands were being driven from every town and village, quickly spending what little money they had and then left to perish by the wayside, or, what was more merciful, shot or stabbed to death by the gendarmes.

Side by side with the deportation of the Armenians as a nation came a great persecution against them as Christians. The proclamation of the holy war which failed to unite all Islam against the Entente, nevertheless had the effect of arousing the old fanatical spirit of the Turks themselves and they prosecuted the holy war within their own Empire with a zeal exceeding that of their forefathers. In many places the government issued proclamations offering the people liberty if they would renounce their faith and become Moslems, but it is to the credit of the Armenian nation that as a whole they stood firm and preferred a martyr's death to a life under the degraded system of polygamy and cruelty to which they were invited. A few there were who publicly and officially became Moslems to avoid persecution and deportation, but these, whether men or women, were promptly forced to turn traitor to their own people, to tell of those in hiding, to bring up accusations against them, and in general to act as the tools of the officials in their horrible plans for robbing the Armenians of all they possessed, forcing their young women and girls to concubinage, and ruthlessly disposing of the rest of the population.

Month after month of this horrible deportation continued, while all the time the Anglo-French forces thundered at the very gates of the Empire. We Americans in Constantinople went through every phase of hope and despair during those terrible days. We longed for the deliverer to break through and crush the malevolent power that was bringing a whole nation to destruction. It was difficult to serve with true neutrality the hosts of wounded Turks who kept pouring into the capital, but after all they were not the ones to blame, for the fault lay with the Young Turk Committee and its German advisers. But as week after week dragged by our hopes sank lower and lower, and suddenly towards the end of 1915 the British mysteriously disappeared from the peninsula on a misty night in December, and we realized the sad truth that the Dardanelles campaign had come to an end and that there was no deliverance for the Armenians.

While I was in Constantinople, Dr. and Mrs. Dodd and Miss Cushman were conducting a most active work for Armenian relief in Konia, and I returned in September of 1915 to assist them. All along the way I saw the crowds of wretched and despairing people camping along the railroad or else being driven and beaten by the gendarmes as they were forced along, while train after train of cattle cars packed with the people as above described lay on the side tracks waiting for an opportunity to be sent eastward. When I arrived in Konia there was a vast encampment, for the most part without tents, of about 50,000 Armenian exiles in the fields about the railroad station. The governor of Konia, Djellal Bey, was a Turk of the better sort and he had done his best to arrest the deportation, care for the people, and to obtain an order from Constantinople permitting their return. He allowed us to go freely among the refugees and distribute food and money to the limit of our ability. The condition of the people was wretched beyond description. Wealthy merchants and businessmen, preachers, professors, doctors, lawyers, men in every walk of life, women handsomely dressed in Paris gowns side by side with rough peasants from the villages—all crowded together on the hot, dusty fields with the oriental sun pouring upon them by day and the cold dews of the high interior plateau settling upon them at night. Friendless and desolate bands of Armenians wandered up and down the streets carrying what remained to them of rugs, lace, jewelry and other possessions endeavoring to sell them for bread and for transportation on the railroad in order to avoid the whip and club of the gendarmes if they had to go afoot. Needless to say, our little hospital of fifty beds was packed to the limit. We were already caring for Turkish soldiers, but took in as many of the more desperately sick of the refugees as we could. Six hundred people crowded into our little hospital garden daily for bread and soup. Dr. Dodd and I and our assistants had to literally fight the hungry crowds outside who were clamoring for admission. We conducted the clinic as best we could, but most of the cases needed food rather than medicine. In addition to the spectacle of all this suffering

came hourly the harrowing tales of murder and outrage in nearby villages where our good Armenian friends had been deported from the city. In desperation the Turkish governor went to Constantinople in hopes of obtaining permission to send the people to their homes, but with diabolical cleverness the officials in Konia plotted in his absence and one day the larger part of that great crowd of 50,000 was driven off on foot with whip and cudgel, with curses and kicks and blows. Women in labor were thrown on the tops of baggage carts and rushed off into the plains about the city where numbers perished, and the rest were thrown into the crowded cars and hurried away. Two German officers of the better sort who were living near the station and were eye witnesses to the horrible scene protested to the government against the manner of the deportation, but they were promptly warned by the higher authorities in Constantinople to mind their business and not to interfere with the carrying out of the decree. And one terrible afternoon a Turkish policeman rushed gleefully into our pharmacy and cried: "We've won! The Governor has been deposed and we have sent all the people into the wilderness and they are going to die of hunger to a man."

It was true: our good friend Djellal Bey had to resign and in his place a new official was appointed who saw to it that the deportation was carried out in the way appointed. But all of this was mild in comparison with what happened beyond. The people who survived the early days of the deportation had to travel through mountains infested with wild Kurdish tribes who fell upon the helpless exiles and robbed, outraged and murdered to their hearts' content. Probably not ten percent of the people who were officially "deported" ever reached Mesopotamia, and those who did perished rapidly from starvation. When the British prisoners from Kur el Amara came to Konia I asked one of the officers if he saw any Armenians in Mesopotamia as he came through. "Yes," he said, "plenty of them, but only dead Armenians."

And the British themselves had their share of cruel treatment from the Turks. Another officer told me of how the prisoners from Kut, utterly exhausted by the long siege, had been forced to march day after day over the baking Mesopotamian deserts under a summer sun, were fed on wretched fare and forced to drink filthy water. Many a prisoner dropped out of the ranks to lie down and die, only to be prodded to his feet by the bayonets of the guards or beaten with a whip and so forced to continue the march a few more weary miles until death mercifully intervened and neither whip nor bayonet could any longer stir the gaunt forms that strewed the sands all along the march. Only a few survived the journey; there was one week when 300 perished from dysentery or exhaustion.

Insult was added to injury for a handful of the survivors who eventually reached Konia. The American Consul at Adana, apparently unaware of the fact that our hospital in Konia had been closed by Government order after a year of untiring labor for wounded Turkish soldiers, telegraphed me that about forty British prisoners were being brought to Konia and said that the local military authorities at Adana were willing that I should assume medical charge of them on their arrival in Konia. But this would mean reopening the American hospital, which though a Red Cross and neutral institution, had been too humane towards the Armenians and must be suppressed. All my efforts and arguments with the Government were useless. The exhausted soldiers were marched right past our hospital, where every comfort and care awaited them, and put into an improvised hospital across the square. They were fed on wretched food, had no adequate medical treatment, and within six weeks more than half the forty or thereabouts were dead. Sometimes I was permitted to visit them but it was small comfort for them and torture to me. They would implore me to get them out of their filthy, vermin invested beds and into our clean and well-equipped hospital; too sick to speak some of them would stretch out their gaunt arms and point to the windows, from which our hospital could be clearly seen not three hundreds yards away, and whisper, "We're dying; take us there!" But I was powerless. All I could do was to send a little food and medicine but later this was stopped and the strong lives of Britishers just in their prime ebbed out before our eyes while Turkish officials already glutted with Armenian blood rejoiced to see the dying agonies of their prisoners and the sorrow of their American benefactors.

[Signed] Wilfred M. Post, Lawrenceville, N.J., April 11, 1918.