

**INCIDENTS DURING THE DEPORTATION OF ARMENIANS FROM
ERZROOM, TURKEY, IN JUNE AND JULY, 1915, KNOWN PERSONALLY
TO DR. IDA S. STAPLETON (MRS. ROBERT)¹
[by IDA SALMOND STAPLETON]**

The first group of people told to leave consisted of some forty families, some 250-300 souls. These were allowed to choose the road they should travel, one leading by a caravan route only or the wagon road. They were not told where they were to go, nothing, simply to go. Most were well to do so they bought donkeys or horses or employed Turkish caravans, consisting usually of a muleteer with from three to five animals.

Except for repeating the order very insistently every day during the five in which they were to get ready, they were not particularly annoyed until after they left the city and had passed the first night in safety some twenty miles from the city. They traveled the next day and the drivers began to demand money and goods and to threaten with death the travelers. The second night all being much frightened they camped in a Kurdish stable, very much crowded but not daring to do otherwise. They sought to buy protection from the Kurdish chief of the village and paid him \$880 and stayed in the stable for three days. The air was stifling and now the drivers and soldier police who had accompanied them began to conciliate and make offers of protection and urged them to continue their journey. In fear and trembling they left the village and proceeded scarcely a mile when whistles sounded and a motley crowd of Kurds, Turks, soldier police began to attack the caravan with guns, swords, scythes, clubs, fists and everything that could be carried off was taken. All the men were killed outright except one who was wounded and made his way to Harpoot where he became a Moslem to save what was left of his life.

This information came back to Erzroom in a letter written to Mrs. Dr. Tashdjian by Zabelle Tashdjian who had been taken by a Turk. Mrs. Tashdjian was her step-mother and had been allowed to remain with us in Erzroom until she in turn was forced to leave February 13th, 1916, just three days before the Russians entered the city.

Mrs. Tashdjian and daughter Zabelle Hovhanian had actually been sent away the previous July but as the governor had given her a pledge that she might stay because of the very unselfish service that Dr. Tashjian had rendered during the terrible typhus epidemic, he sent men to bring her back, but the military were determined she should go and at the last moment bundled her into a carriage without any supplies of clothes or food, but in spite of the vicissitudes of the journey they did arrive safely in Sivas. A few others of this party also actually reached Harpoot and after months of wretchedness got back to Erzroom by the aid of Derseem Kurds.

1. SOURCE: NA/RG256/Special Reports and Studies/ Inquiry Document 821.

Story of Mrs. Papazian

The second large party of Armenians to leave Erzroom consisted of 500 families who left early in June by the regular road to the interior by way of Baibort and Erzingan. They were allowed to take ox carts, wagons or any other animals they could get. Many also driving their cows along with them.

Mr. Papazian was a photographer, a one time teacher in our school, a faithful helper in the Sunday School, and early in the spring had been imprisoned some two weeks with ten or more other members of the Protestant Church. They were not treated particularly badly in the prison and were released without a hearing. When the order to go was served on Mr. Papazian he came to the missionaries for aid and we gave him our station horse and three gold pieces (\$13.20). He loaded a mattress, a little food, his mother and two babies on the horse while his wife and a six-year-old walked alongside and they joined a small caravan that left the wagon road some fifteen miles from Erzroom, taking a short cut to Erzingan. Not long after they left the wagon road and had come to an isolated valley, the Turkish caravangee or muleteer demanded their money and got it. Then they continued their journey but when almost in sight of a village they were beset by Chetas or guerilla soldiers and after stripping the clothes from Baron Alexander, as we had always called him, stoned him to death. The smallest child, a babe in arms, was also dashed against a rock. Then the wife fainted and was dragged some distance from the scene of her husband's murder. After some time she came to and found herself alone on the mountain side from where she was rescued by a mounted officer and taken to the village where she was violated and again became unconscious for three days. She came to herself and remembered that the little boy of four and sister of six had been taken to the village with her mother-in-law and she begged permission to seek for them and found one in one house and one in another. The little girl said, "One day a man came and took Nannie or grandmother away and she kissed me good-bye and I never saw her again."

From that time on Degin Anna (Mrs. Papazian) was passed from one officer to another on the road from Ashkalla to Baibort until twelve had had her but she kept her children with her during those awful eight months and at last when the news reached the army that the Russians were coming she with many other women and three children who had been kept for the same vile purpose were gathered in a room in Ashkalla to be sent on before the army. In the dark of that night early in February Degin Anna with her children and two other women escaped from the house and barefooted fled across the snow to a village where they begged shelter from some Kurds who put them in a grain cellar, a pit with an opening at the top. There they were kept and fed until Armenian volunteers in the Russian Army came to the village and discovered these poor things cowering there. The Kurd who had sheltered them was ordered to bring them to Erzroom and from them they had a few pieces of clothing and were brought to our house not eight days after Erzroom had been occupied and Degin Anna told me the story with tears rolling down her face. The children had sores on hands and faces and feet were black

and cracked. We sheltered and fed them for two weeks, made them clothes and bought shoes in the market and sent them on to Kars where Mrs. Papazian had relatives.

The Story of a Patient

A near neighbor was confined just the night before the family was to be deported and I had delivered her of twins, one dead and the other living but a few hours. She was so weak and utterly incapacitated for travel I begged the Governor that the family be allowed ten days until this woman be recovered sufficiently at least to sit up. Two Turkish doctors were sent to examine her and I was present. They were not quite convinced even at my assertion that she was not attempting to gain time by fraud but demanding to see where the babies had been buried. Then reluctantly the permission to stay was granted but on the eighth day the police appeared and forced them to leave at once.

At least three other patients for whom I begged time were treated in the same way and went out to meet their death on the long road after their ox carts had been taken away from them fifty miles from Erzroom on the bank of the Euphrates beyond Erzingan.

A young Armenian officer of engineers disguising himself by assuming a Turkish name was designated to collect the carts to transport food for the army and brought 3,000 of them back to Erzroom from the place where the Armenians had been forced to abandon them and told us about it on one of his trips to the city.

The Story of an Erzroom Boy

When rumors of the approach of the Russian Army reached Erzroom some fifty Armenian artisans who had been retained to build a Turkish club house in Erzroom from grave stones taken from the Armenian cemetery, were sent under guard to Erzingan and imprisoned there. This boy was already in prison and recognized some of the men and also a tailor who had been retained to work for the government seven or eight months after the general deportation. When Kiamil Pasha, the commander-in-chief of the Erzroom forces, reached Erzingan, the first thing he did was to order the massacre of these above-mentioned artisans.

With an escort of fifteen soldiers they were sent at dusk to the bank of the Euphrates that flows through Erzingan and bunched together and shot and besides being ordered to shoot them they were ordered to cut their throats and throw their bodies into the river.

They wearied of their horrible job and in the course of it picked up the limp body of the boy of sixteen, searched his pockets and let him fall, saying, "He is dead, and let us leave them until morning when we can more easily search the others." After they had left, Mugarditch and two others who had fallen uninjured crawled out from among their dead comrades and away into the night. After twenty-two days of traveling by night, eating roots and a bit of bread begged from Kurdish villages through which they passed, they reached Erzroom and Mugarditch came to the missionaries with the details of the story.

We had known the boy for many years. His sister had been in our girls' school and he had been a servant in a prominent family.

Story of Eritsgeen, the Priest's Wife

This old lady of seventy-five had lived alone with a demented son for many years adjoining our boys' school. The son had been sent to Russia just before the war and Eritsgeen continued to live alone. Her daughters and their families went out with the deported but she, thinking from her age and solitude might be allowed to remain, stayed in her house. She had a little money with Mr. Stapleton and came one day to get it should she be obliged to go. That very night the police came and without ceremony forced her to leave her home without food or any bedding or clothing except what she had on and in that condition was taken on an oxcart outside the city and we have every reason to believe she was soon dumped by the side of the road to totter to her death from starvation.

[Signed and dated] Ida Salmond Stapleton M.D., Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children 1898, 321 E. 15th St., New York City, April 18th, 1918.