

THE DOCUMENTS REGARDING THE ATROCITIES OF THE ARMENIAN POPULATION OF THE VILAYET OF BITLIS IN 1915

**Extracted from "THE TREATMENT OF ARMENIANS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE
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III. VILAYET OF BITLIS.

The Vilayet of Bitlis lies due west of Van, across the Lake. The chief Armenian centres in the province were the town of Bitlis itself, commanding the principal pass leading from the lake-basin to the upper valley of the Tigris; the town and villages of Moush, situated in the only considerable plain along the course of the Mourad Su or Eastern Euphrates; and the semi-independent highland community of Sassoun, a group of Armenian villages in the massif of mountains which separates Moush from the headwaters of the Tigris and the lowlands of Diyarbekir.

The extermination of the Armenians in these three places was an act of revenge for the successful resistance of the Armenians at Van and the advance of the Russian forces to their relief. There was no pretence here of deportation, and the Armenians were destroyed, without regard for appearances, by outright massacre, accompanied in many cases by torture.

21. THE NORTH-EASTERN VILAYETS: STATEMENT COMMUNICATED BY THE REFUGEE ROUPEN, OF SASSOUN, TO THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY AT MOSCOW; PUBLISHED IN THE RUSSIAN PRESS, AND SUBSEQUENTLY REPRINTED IN THE "GAZETTE DE LAUSANNE." 13th FEBRUARY, 1916.

At the beginning of the European war, the "Dashnaktzoutioun" Party met in congress at Erzeroum in order to decide on the attitude to be observed by the Party. As soon as they heard of this congress, the Young Turks hastened to send their representatives to Erzeroum to propose that the Party should declare its intention of aiding and defending Turkey, by organising an insurrection in the Caucasus in the event of a declaration of war between Turkey and Russia. According to the project of the Young Turks, the Armenians were to pledge themselves to form legions of volunteers and to send them to the Caucasus with the Turkish propagandists, to prepare the way there for the insurrection.

The Young Turk representatives had already brought their propagandists with them to Erzeroum - 27 individuals of Persian, Turkish, Lesghian and Circassian nationality. Their chief was Emir Hechmat, who is at present organising bands of rebels at Hamadan (Persia). The Turks tried to persuade the Armenians that the Caucasian

insurrection was inevitable; that very shortly the Tatars, Georgians and mountaineers would revolt, and that the Armenians would consequently be obliged to follow them.

They even sketched the future map of the Caucasus.

The Turks offered to the Georgians the provinces of Koutais and of Tiflis, the Batoum district and a part of the province of Trebizond; to the Tatars, Shousha, the mountain country as far as Vladivkavkaz, Bakou, and a part of the province of Elisavetpol; to the Armenians they offered Kars, the province of Erivan, a part of Elisavetpol, a fragment of the province of Erzeroum, Van and Bitlis. According to the Young Turk scheme, all these groups were to become autonomous under a Turkish protectorate. The Erzeroum Congress refused these proposals, and advised the Young Turks not to hurl themselves into the European conflagration - a dangerous adventure which would lead Turkey to ruin.

The Young Turks were irritated by this advice.

"This is treason!" cried Boukhar-ed-Din-Shakir, one of the delegates from Constantinople: "You take sides with Russia in a moment as critical as this; you refuse to defend the Government; you forget that you are enjoying its hospitality!"

But the Armenians held to their decision.

Once more before the outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey, the Young Turks tried to obtain the Armenians' support. This time they opened their *pourparlers* with more moderate proposals, and negotiated with the Armenian representatives of each Vilayet. At Van, the *pourparlers* were conducted by the provincial governor Tahsin Bey, and by Nadji Bey; at Moush, by Servet Bey and Iskhan Bey (this latter is at present a prisoner of war in Russia); at Erzeroum, by the same Tahsin Bey and by others.

The project of an Armenian rising in the Caucasus was abandoned. Instead, the Ottoman Armenians were to unite themselves with the Transcaucasian Tatars, whose insurrection was, according to the Young Turks, a certainty.

Once more the Armenians refused.

From the moment war broke out, the Armenian soldiers had presented themselves for service at their regimental depots, but they refused categorically to form irregular bands. On the whole, up to the end of 1914, the situation in Armenia was quiet. But when the Turks had been expelled from Bayazid and driven back in the direction of Van and Moush, their fury turned upon the Armenians, whose co-religionists in the Caucasus had formed themselves into volunteer legions under the leadership of Andranik and other patriotic leaders, and had been giving aid to the enemy.

It was then that the disarming of Armenian soldiers, gendarmes and members of the other services began. The disarmed Armenian soldiers were formed into groups of a thousand each, and sent into different districts to build bridges, dig trenches and work at the fortresses.

At the same time the wholesale massacres began. The first victims fell at Diyarbekir, Erzeroum and Bitlis. Soldiers, women and children, both in the towns and villages, were slaughtered *en masse*. By the end of last January the massacres had

extended over the whole of Armenia. In the Armenian villages, the whole male population above the age of twelve was led out in batches and shot before the eyes of the women and children.

The first movement of revolt declared itself towards the beginning of February, at Koms. Seventy Turkish gendarmes had arrived there with orders to massacre the chief men of the place, and among them Roupen and Gorioun. When the Armenians learned their purpose, they threw themselves upon the gendarmes and killed them all. They proceeded to take the local governor prisoner, and found on him the following order from the governor of Moush: -

"Execute the decision communicated verbally to you."

On the same day the leading Armenians retired into the mountains, where they were joined by the young men under arms from the district of Moush.

Two thousand Turks, commanded by Mehmed Effendi, took the offensive against them, but were annihilated by the Armenians.

This was how the revolt in Armenia began.

The Government saw that the insurrection was spreading and announced the suspension of the process of disarmament, rescinding at the same time the order for the deportation and extermination of the people of Sassoun. A commission of enquiry was appointed, consisting of Essad Pasha, the Kaimakam of Boulanik, the President of the Military Tribunal at Moush, and Mr. V. Papazian, an Armenian member of the Ottoman Parliament.

The commission found that the gendarmes were the whole cause of the trouble between the Armenians and the Turks, and the Government promised to put an end to the reprisals. Talaat Bey telegraphed from Constantinople that the representatives of the Armenians were not to be molested.

Quiet was re-established for the moment, but in the month of May the Turks attempted to force their way into Sassoun, and at the same time the massacres began again without warning at Harpout, Erzeroum and Diyarbekir. The Armenians repulsed the Turks and took up a position round the town of Moush, where a large number of Turkish troops were concentrated. This was the situation when the Turks perpetrated the great massacre of Moush at the end of June. Half the inhabitants of Moush were massacred, the other half were driven out of the town. The Armenians never knew that at that moment the Russian troops were only two or three hours' distance from Moush.

The massacres extended over the whole plain of Moush. The Armenians, who had managed to retreat on to the heights of Sassoun with a remnant of their forces and a slender supply of munitions, attacked the Turks in the valleys and gorges of Sassoun, and inflicted considerable losses upon them. A fraction of the Armenians who escaped the massacre broke through the Turkish lines and reached Van, which was already in the hands of the Russian troops.

The number of Armenian victims is very large. In the town of Moush alone, out of the 15,000 Armenian inhabitants there are only 200 survivors; out of the 59,000 inhabitants of the plain hardly 9,000 have escaped.

22. BITLIS, MOUSH AND SASSOUN: RECORD OF AN INTERVIEW WITH ROUPEN, OF SASSOUN, BY MR. A. S. SAFRASTIAN; DATED TIFLIS, 6th NOVEMBER, 1915.

At the moment of writing, there is very little doubt that during the months of June and July last the Turks have almost completely wiped out about 150,000 Armenians of Bitlis, Moush and Sassoun.

When a detailed account of the horrors which accompanied these massacres is fully disclosed to the civilised world, it will stand out in all history as the greatest masterpiece of brutality ever committed, even by the Turk. A short description of these horrors was given to me by Roupen, one of the leaders in Sassoun, who has miraculously escaped the Turkish lines after long marches across Moush and Lake Van and has been here for the last few days; As soon as the Turks went into the war, they entered into negotiations with the Armenian leaders in Moush and Sassoun with a view to co-operating for the common defence. The Turkish representatives, however, laid down such conditions as a basis for agreement that the Armenians could scarcely entertain them as serious. Until January things had gone on fairly smoothly, and the Armenians were advised by their leaders to comply with all legitimate demands made by the authorities. On the failure of negotiations, the Turks adopted hard measures against the Armenians. They had already ruthlessly requisitioned every commodity they possibly could lay hands on, and now they demanded the surrender of their arms from the peasantry. The Armenians said that they could not give up their arms while the Kurds were left armed to the teeth and went about unmolested. Towards the end of January, a Turkish gendarme provoked a quarrel in Tzeronk, a large Armenian village some 20 miles west of Moush, where some 70 people were killed and the village destroyed. Soon afterwards, another quarrel was started by gendarmes in Koms (Goms), a village on the Euphrates, where the Turks wanted to raise forced labour for the transport of military supplies. As a previous batch of men employed on similar work had never returned home, the peasants grew suspicious and refused to go. Local passion ran high, and the Turks desired to arrest one Gorioun, a native of considerable bravery, who had avenged himself upon Mehmed Emin, a Kurdish brigand, who had ruined his home in the past. All such conflicts of a local character were settled in one way or another by negotiation between the authorities and the leaders of the Dashnaktzoutioun party. In the meantime, Kurdish irregulars and Moslem bands, who were just returning from the battle of Kilidj Geduk, where they had been roughly handled by the Russians, began to harry the Armenians all over the country to the limit of their endurance. In answer to protests, the authorities explained away the grievances and gave all assurances of good-will towards the Armenians, who naturally did not believe in them.

The Massacres at Sairt and Bitlis. - Towards the end of May, Djevdet Bey, the military governor, was expelled from Van, and the town was captured by the native Armenians and then by the Russo-Armenian forces. Djevdet Bey fled southwards and,

crossing the Bohtan, entered Sairt with some 8,000 soldiers whom he called "Butcher" battalions (Kassab Tabouri). He massacred most of the Christians of Sairt, though nothing is known of the details. On the best authority, however, it is reported that he ordered his soldiers to burn in a public square the Armenian Bishop Yeghishé Vartabed and the Chaldean Bishop Addai Sher. Then Djevdet Bey, followed by the small army of Halil Bey, marched on Bitlis towards the middle of June. Before his arrival, the Armenians and Kurds of Bitlis had agreed upon scheme for mutual protection in case of any emergency, but Djevdet Bey had his own plans for exterminating the Armenians. He first raised a ransom of £5,000 from them, and then hanged Hokhigian and some 20 other Armenian leaders, most of whom were attending the wounded in field hospitals. On the 25th June, the Turks surrounded the town of Bitlis and cut its communications with the neighbouring Armenian villages; then most of the able-bodied men were taken away from their families by domiciliary visits. During the following few days, all the men under arrest were shot outside the town and buried in deep trenches dug by the victims themselves. The young women and children were distributed among the rabble, and the remainder, the "useless" lot, were driven to the south and are believed to have been drowned in the Tigris. Any attempts at resistance, however brave, were easily quelled by the regular troops. The recalcitrants, after firing their last cartridges, either took poison by whole families or destroyed themselves in their homes, in order not to fall into the hands of Turks. Some hundred Armenian families in the town, all of them artisans or skilled labourers badly needed by the military authorities, were spared during this massacre, but since then there has been no news of their fate.

It is in such "gentlemanly" fashion that the Turks disposed of about 15,000 Armenians at Bitlis; and the Armenian peasantry of Rahva, Khoultig, and other populous villages of the surrounding district suffered the same fate.

The Massacres in Moush. - Long before this horror had been perpetrated at Bitlis, the Turks and Kurds of Diyarbekir, followed by the most blood-thirsty tribes of Bekran and Belek, had wiped out the Armenians of Slivan, Bisherig, and of the vast plain extending from Diyarbekir to the foot of the Sassoun block. Some thousands of refugees had escaped to Sassoun, as the only haven of safety amid a sea of widespread terror. They told the people of Sassoun and Moush of the enormities which had been committed upon themselves. The line of conduct to be adopted by the Armenians was now obvious. The Turks were resolved to destroy them, and therefore they had to make the best of a hopeless situation by all means at their disposal. Roupen tells me that they had no news whatever as to the progress of the war on the Caucasian front, and that the Turks spread false news to mislead them. The general peace was maintained in the Province of Bitlis until the beginning of June, when things came to a climax. The outlying villages of Boulanik and Moush had already been massacred in May. Now Sassoun was attacked in two main directions. The Kurdish tribes of Belek, Bekran, and Shego, the notorious Sheikh of Zilan and many others were armed by the Government and ordered to surround Sassoun. The 15,000 Armenians of these

mountains, re-inforced by some other 15,000 from Moush and Diyarbekir, repelled many fierce attacks, in which the Kurds lost heavily, both in men and arms; whereupon the Government again entered into negotiations with the Armenian leaders, through the Bishop of Moush, and offered them a general amnesty if they laid down their arms and joined in the defence of the common fatherland. And, as a proof of their genuineness, the authorities explained away the massacres of Slivan, Boulanik, &c., as due to a deplorable misunderstanding. Oppressions suddenly ceased everywhere, and perfect order prevailed in Moush for about three weeks in June. A strict watch, however, was kept over the movements of the Armenians, and they were forbidden to concentrate together. In the last week of June, one Kiazim Bey arrived from Erzeroum with at least 10,000 troops and mountain artillery to reinforce the garrison at Moush. The day after his arrival strong patrols were posted on the hills overlooking the town of Moush, thus cutting all communication between Moush and Sassoun. Kurdish bands of "fedais" and gendarmes were commissioned to sever all intercourse between various villages and the town of Moush, so that no one knew what was going on even in the immediate neighbourhood.

Early in July, the authorities ordered the Armenians to surrender their arms, and pay a large money ransom. The leading Armenians of the town and the headmen of the villages were subjected to revolting tortures. Their finger nails and then their toe nails were forcibly extracted; their teeth were knocked out, and in some cases their noses were whittled down, the victims being thus done to death under shocking, lingering agonies. The female relatives of the victims who came to the rescue were outraged in public before the very eyes of their mutilated husbands and brothers. The shrieks and death-cries of the victims filled the air, yet they did not move the Turkish beast. The same process of disarmament was carried out in the large Armenian villages of Khaskegh, Franknorshen, &c., and on the slightest show of resistance men and women were done to death in the manner described above. On the 10th July, large contingents of troops, followed by bands of criminals released from the prisons, began to round up the able-bodied men from all the villages. In the 100 villages of the plain of Moush most of the villagers took up any arms they possessed and offered a desperate resistance in various favourable positions. In the natural order of things the ammunition soon gave out in most villages, and there followed what is perhaps one of the greatest crimes in all history. Those who had no arms and had done nothing against the authorities were herded into various camps and bayoneted in cold blood.

In the town of Moush itself the Armenians, under the leadership of Gotoyan and others, entrenched themselves in the churches and stone-built houses and fought for four days in self-defence. The Turkish artillery, manned by German officers, made short work of all the Armenian positions. Every one of the Armenians, leaders as well as men, was killed fighting; and when the silence of death reigned over the ruins of churches and the rest, the Moslem rabble made a descent upon the women and children and drove them out of the town into large camps which had already been prepared for the

peasant women and children. The ghastly scenes which followed may indeed sound incredible, yet these reports have been confirmed from Russian sources beyond all doubt.

The shortest method for disposing of the women and children concentrated in the various camps was to burn them. Fire was set to large wooden sheds in Alidjan, Megrakom, Khaskegh, and other Armenian villages, and these absolutely helpless women and children were roasted to death. Many went mad and threw their children away; some knelt down and prayed amid the flames in which their bodies were burning; others shrieked and cried for help which came from nowhere. And the executioners, who seem to have been unmoved by this unparalleled savagery, grasped infants by one leg and hurled them into the fire, calling out to the burning mothers: "Here are your lions." Turkish prisoners who had apparently witnessed some of these scenes were horrified and maddened at remembering the sight. They told the Russians that the stench of the burning human flesh permeated the air for many days after.

Under present circumstances it is impossible to say how many Armenians, out of a population of 60,000 in the plain of Moush, are left alive; the one fact which can be recorded at present is that now and then some survivors escape through the mountains and reach the Russian lines to give further details of the unparalleled crime perpetrated in Moush during July.

The Massacres in Sassoun. - While the "Butcher" battalions of Djevdet Bey and the regulars of Kiazim Bey were engaged in Bitlis and Moush, some cavalry were sent to Sassoun early in July to encourage the Kurds who had been defeated by the Armenians at the beginning of June. The Turkish cavalry invaded the lower valley of Sassoun and captured a few villages after stout fighting. In the meantime the reorganised Kurdish tribes attempted to close on Sassoun from the south, west, and north. During the last fortnight of July almost incessant fighting went on, sometimes even during the night. On the whole, the Armenians held their own on all fronts and expelled the Kurds from their advanced positions. However, the people of Sassoun had other anxieties to worry about. The population had doubled since their brothers who had escaped from the plains had sought refuge in their mountains; the millet crop of the last season had been a failure; all honey, fruit, and other local produce had been consumed, and the people had been feeding on unsalted roast mutton (they had not even any salt to make the mutton more sustaining); finally, the ammunition was in no way sufficient for the requirements of heavy fighting. But the worst had yet to come. Kiazim Bey, after reducing the town and the plain of Moush, rushed his army to Sassoun for a new effort to overwhelm these brave mountaineers. Fighting was renewed on all fronts throughout the Sassoun district. Big guns made carnage among the Armenian ranks. Roupen tells me that Gorioun, Dikran, and 20 other of their best fighters were killed by a single shell, which burst in their midst. Encouraged by the presence of guns, the cavalry and Kurds pushed on with relentless energy.

The Armenians were compelled to abandon the outlying lines of their defence and

were retreating day by day into the heights of Antok, the central block of the mountains, some 10,000 feet high. The non-combatant women and children and their large flocks of cattle greatly hampered the free movements of the defenders, whose number had already been reduced from 3,000 to about half that figure. Terrible confusion prevailed during the Turkish attacks as well as the Armenian counter-attacks. Many of the Armenians smashed their rifles after firing the last cartridge and grasped their revolvers and daggers. The Turkish regulars and Kurds, amounting now to something like 30,000 altogether, pushed higher and higher up the heights and surrounded the main Armenian position at close quarters. Then followed one of those desperate and heroic struggles for life which have always been the pride of mountaineers. Men, women and children fought with knives, scythes, stones, and anything else they could handle. They rolled blocks of stone down the steep slopes, killing many of the enemy. In a frightful hand-to-hand combat, women were seen thrusting their knives into the throats of Turks and thus accounting for many of them. On the 5th August, the last day of the fighting, the blood-stained rocks of Antok were captured by the Turks. The Armenian warriors of Sassoun, except those who had worked round to the rear of the Turks to attack them on their flanks, had died in battle. Several young women, who were in danger of falling into the Turks' hands, threw themselves from the rocks, some of them with their infants in their arms. The survivors have since been carrying on a guerilla warfare, living only on unsalted mutton and grass. The approaching winter may have disastrous consequences for the remnants of the Sassounli Armenians, because they have nothing to eat and no means of defending themselves.

23. MOUSH: STATEMENT BY A GERMAN EYE-WITNESS OF OCCURRENCES AT MOUSH; COMMUNICATED BY THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR ARMENIAN AND SYRIAN RELIEF.

Towards the end of October (1914), when the Turkish war began, the Turkish officials started to take everything they needed for the war from the Armenians. Their goods, their money, all was confiscated. Later on, every Turk was free to go to an Armenian shop and take out what he needed or thought he would like to have. Only a tenth perhaps was really for the war, the rest was pure robbery. It was necessary to have food, &c., carried to the front, on the Caucasian frontier. For this purpose the Government sent out about 300 old Armenian men, many cripples amongst them, and boys not more than twelve years old, to carry the goods - a three weeks' journey from Moush to the Russian frontier. As every individual Armenian was robbed of everything he ever had, these poor people soon died of hunger and cold on the way. They had no clothes at all, for even these were stolen on the way. If out of these 300 Armenians thirty or forty returned, it was a marvel; the rest were either beaten to death or died from the causes stated above.

The winter was most severe in Moush; the gendarmes were sent to levy high

taxes, and as the Armenians had already given everything to the Turks, and were therefore powerless to pay these enormous taxes, they were beaten to death. The Armenians never defended themselves except when they saw the gendarmes ill-treating their wives and children, and the result in such cases was that the whole village was burnt down, merely because a few Armenians had tried to protect their families.

Toward the middle of April we heard rumours that there were great disturbances in Van. We have heard statements both from Turks and from Armenians, and as these reports agree in every respect, it is quite plain that there is some truth in them. They state that the Ottoman Government sent orders that all Armenians were to give up their arms, which the Armenians refused to do on the ground that they required their arms in case of necessity. This caused a regular massacre. All villages inhabited by Armenians were burnt down. The Turks boasted of having now got rid of all the Armenians. I heard it from the officers myself, how they revelled in the thought that the Armenians had been got rid of.

Thus the winter passed, with things happening every day more terrible than one can possibly describe. We then heard that massacres had started in Bitlis. In Moush everything was being prepared for one, when the Russians arrived at Liz, which is about 14 to 16 hours' journey from Moush. This occupied the attention of the Turks, so that the massacre was put off for the time being. Hardly had the Russians left Liz, however, when all the "districts inhabited by Armenians were pillaged and destroyed.

This was in the month of May. At the beginning of June, we heard that the whole Armenian population of Bitlis had been got rid of. It was at this time that we received news that the American Missionary, Dr. Knapp, had been wounded in an Armenian house and that the Turkish Government had sent him to Diyarbekir. The very first night in Diyarbekir he died, and the Government explained his death as a result of having overeaten, which of course nobody believed.

When there was no one left in Bitlis to massacre, their attention was diverted to Moush. Cruelties had already been committed, but so far not too publicly; now, however, they started to shoot people down without any cause, and beat them to death simply for the pleasure of doing so. In Moush itself, which is a big town, there are 25,000 Armenians; in the neighbourhood there are 300 villages, each containing about 500 houses. In all these not a single male Armenian is now to be seen, and hardly a woman either, except for a few here and there.

In the first week of July 20,000 soldiers arrived from Constantinople by way of Harpout with munitions and eleven guns, and laid siege to Moush. As a matter of fact, the town had already been beleaguered since the middle of June. At this stage the Mutessarif gave orders that we should leave the town and go to Harpout. We pleaded with him to let us stay, for we had in our charge all the orphans and patients; but he was angry and threatened to remove us by force if we did not do as instructed. As we both fell sick, however, we were allowed to remain at Moush. I received permission, in the event of our leaving Moush, to take the Armenians of our orphanage with us; but when

we asked for assurances of their safety, his only reply was: "You can take them with you, but being Armenians their heads may and will be cut off on the way."

On the 10th July Moush was bombarded for several hours, on the pretext that some Armenians had tried to escape. I went to see the Mutessarif and asked him to protect our buildings; his reply was: "It serves you right for staying instead of leaving as instructed. The guns are here to make an end of Moush. Take refuge with the Turks." This, of course, was impossible, as we could not leave our charges. Next day a new order was promulgated for the expulsion of the Armenians, and three days' grace was given them to make ready. They were told to register themselves at the Government Building before they left. Their families could remain, but their property and their money were to be confiscated. The Armenians were unable to go, for they had no money to defray the journey, and they preferred to die in their houses rather than be separated from their families and endure a lingering death on the road.

As stated above, three days' grace was given to the Armenians, but two hours had scarcely elapsed when the soldiers began breaking into the houses, arresting the inmates and throwing them into prison. The guns began to fire and thus the people were effectually prevented from registering themselves at the Government Building. We all had to take refuge in the cellar for fear of our orphanage catching fire. It was heart-rending to hear the cries of the people and children who were being burnt to death in their houses. The soldiers took great delight in hearing them, and when people who were out in the street during the bombardment fell dead, the soldiers merely laughed at them.

The survivors were sent to Ourfa (there were none left but sick women and children); I went to the Mutessarif and begged him to have mercy on the children at least, but in vain. He replied that the Armenian children must perish with their nation. All our people were taken from our hospital and orphanage; they left us three female servants. Under these atrocious circumstances, Moush was burnt to the ground. Every officer boasted of the number he had personally massacred as his share in ridding Turkey of the Armenian race.

We left for Harpout. Harpout has become the cemetery of the Armenians; from all directions they have been brought to Harpout to be buried. There they lie, and the dogs and the vultures devour their bodies. Now and then some man throws some earth over the bodies. In Harpout and Mezre the people have had to endure terrible tortures. They have had their eye-brows plucked out, their breasts cut off, their nails torn off; their torturers hew off their feet or else hammer nails into them just as they do in shoeing horses. This is all done at night time, and in order that the people may not hear their screams and know of their agony, soldiers are stationed round the prisons, beating drums and blowing whistles. It is needless to relate that many died of these tortures. When they die, the soldiers cry: "Now let your Christ help you."

One old priest was tortured so cruelly to extract a confession that, believing that the torture would cease and that he would be left alone if he did it, he cried out in his

desperation: "We are revolutionists." He expected his tortures to cease, but on the contrary the soldiers cried: "What further do we seek? We have it here from his own lips." And instead of picking their victims as they did before, the officials had all the Armenians tortured - without sparing a soul.

Early in July, 2,000 Armenian soldiers were ordered to leave for Aleppo to build roads. The people of Harpout were terrified on hearing this, and a panic started in the town. The Vali sent for the German missionary, Mr. Ehemann, and begged him to quiet the people, repeating over and over again that no harm whatever would befall these soldiers. Mr. Ehemann took the Vali's word and quieted the people. But they had scarcely left when we heard that they had all been murdered and thrown into a cave. Just a few managed to escape, and we got the reports from them. It was useless to protest to the Vali. The American Consul at Harpout protested several times, but the Vali makes no account of him, and treats him in a most shameful manner. A few days later another 2,000 Armenian soldiers were despatched via Diyarbekir, and, in order to hinder them the more surely from escaping, they were left to starve on the way, so that they had no strength left in them to flee. The Kurds were given notice that the Armenians were on the way, and the Kurdish women came with their butcher's knives to help the men. In Mezre a public brothel was erected for the Turks, and all the beautiful Armenian girls and women were placed there. At night the Turks were allowed free entrance. The permission for the Protestant and Catholic Armenians to be exempted from deportation only arrived after their deportation had taken place. The Government wanted to force the few remaining Armenians to accept the Mohammedan faith. A few did so in order to save their wives and children from the terrible sufferings already witnessed in the case of others. The people begged us to leave for Constantinople and obtain some security for them. On our way to Constantinople we only encountered old women. No young women or girls were to be seen.

Already by November¹ we had known that there would be a massacre. The Mutessarif of Moush, who was a very intimate friend of Enver Pasha, declared quite openly that they would massacre the Armenians at the first opportune moment and exterminate the whole race. Before the Russians arrived they intended first to butcher the Armenians, and then fight the Russians afterwards. Towards the beginning of April, in the presence of a Major Lange and several other high officials, including the American and German Consuls, Ekran Bey quite openly declared the Government's intention of exterminating the Armenian race. All these details plainly show that the massacre was deliberately planned.

In a few villages destitute women come begging, naked and sick, for alms and protection. We are not allowed to give them anything, we are not allowed to take them in, in fact we are forbidden to do anything for them, and they die outside. If only permission could be obtained from the authorities to help them! If we cannot endure the sight of these poor people's sufferings, what must it be like for the sufferers themselves?

¹ 1914.

It is a story written in blood. Two old missionaries and a younger lady (an American) were sent away from Mardin. They were treated just like prisoners, dogged continually by the gendarmes, and were brought in this fashion to Sivas. For missionaries of that age a journey of this kind in the present circumstances was obviously a terrible hardship.

24. MOUSH DISTRICT: NARRATIVE OF A DEPORTED WOMAN, RELATED BY HER TO MR. VARTKES OF MOUSH^{2*}, RECORDED BY HIM ON THE 25th JULY, 1915, AND PUBLISHED SUBSEQUENTLY IN THE ARMENIAN JOURNAL "VAN-TOSP."

To-day I heard a terrible story. All the Armenians who were deported from Moush were either killed or drowned in the Mourad River³. Among these were my mother and three sisters with their children. This news was brought to us by a woman who came here at midnight. We thought she was a ghost, as she seemed like one coming from the grave. She had saved her two-year-old boy.

She immediately asked for bread. We had not any, as we were living on raw grain and meat, but we gave her what we had. After she had had enough, we asked her all kinds of questions. She was from the village of Kheiban, and was one of the deported. This is what she told us:

"The Turks collected all the women and children of the villages of Sordar, Pazou, Hassanova, Salekan and Gvars, and after keeping them for five days they brought them to Ziaret. Here the inhabitants of Meghd, Baghlou, Ourough, Ziaret and Kheiban joined them, and they were all taken towards the bridge over the Mourad River. On the way the families from the villages of Dom, Hergerd, Norag, Aladin, Gomst⁴, Khashkhal-doukh, Souloukh, Khoronk, Kartzor, Kizil Agatch, Komer, Shekhlan, Avazaghpur, Plel and Kurdmeidan joined the party, making altogether a company of 8,000 to 10,000 people.

"All the old women and the weak who were unable to walk were killed. There were about one hundred Kurdish guards over us, and our lives depended on their pleasure. It was a very common thing for them to rape our girls in our presence. Very often they violated eight or ten-year-old girls, and as a consequence many would be unable to walk, and were shot.

"Our company moved on slowly, leaving heaps of corpses behind. Most of us were almost naked. When we passed by a village, all the Kurdish men and women would come and rob us as they pleased. When a Kurd fancied a girl, nothing would prevent him from taking her. The babies of those who were carried away were killed in our presence.

² At that time in hiding in the forests of Sourp Garabed.

³ Eastern Euphrates.

⁴ Koms.

"They gave us bread once every other day, though many did not get even that. When all our provisions were gone, we gathered wheat from the fields and ate it. Many a mother lost her mind and dropped her baby by the wayside.

"Some succeeded in running away, and hid themselves in the fields among the wheat until it was dark. Those who were acquainted with the mountains of that region would thus escape and go back to seek their dear ones. Some went to Sassoun, hearing that it had not yet fallen, others were drowned in the Mourad River. I did not attempt to run away, as I had witnessed with my own eyes the assassination of my dear ones. I had a few piastres left, and hoped to live a few days longer.

"We heard on our way from the Kurds that Kurdish Chettis (bands of robbers) had collected all the inhabitants of Kurdmeidan and Shekhlan, about 500 women and children, and burnt them by the order of Rashid Effendi, the head of the Chettis.

"When we reached the Khozmo Pass, our guards changed their southerly direction and turned west, in the direction of the Euphrates. When we reached the boundary of the Ginj district our guards were changed, the new ones being more brutal. By this time our number was diminished by half. When we reached the boundary of Djabaghchour we passed through a narrow valley; here our guards ordered us to sit down by the river and take a rest. We were very thankful for this respite and ran towards the river to get a drink of water.

"After half-an-hour we saw a crowd of Kurds coming towards us from Djabaghchour. They surrounded us and ordered us to cross the river, and many obeyed. The report of the guns drowned the sounds of wailing and crying. In that panic I took my little boy on my back and jumped into the river. I was a good swimmer and succeeded in reaching the opposite shore of the Euphrates with my precious bundle unnoticed, and hid myself behind some undergrowth.

"By nightfall no one remained alive from our party. The Kurds left in the direction of Djabaghchour. At dusk I came out from my hiding place to a field in the vicinity and found some wheat, which I ate; then I followed the Euphrates in a northerly direction, and after great difficulty I reached the plain of Moush. I decided to go to the mountains of Sourp Garabed, as I had heard that there were many Armenians there. During the nights my boy was a great comfort to me. I felt that a living being was with me and fear lost its horror. I thank God I have seen the faces of Armenians again."

The poor woman ended her story, and our hearts were stricken with sorrow, for we had loved ones among the unfortunate people of her convoy. Two days later her boy died from lack of nourishment, and after five days she was found by a party of patrolling Kurds and killed.

25. MOUSH: RESUME OF INFORMATION FURNISHED BY REFUGEES IN THE CAUCASUS AND PUBLISHED IN THE CAUCASIAN PRESS, ESPECIALLY IN THE ARMENIAN JOURNAL "MSCHAK"; COMPILED BY MR. G. H. PAELIAN, AND COMMUNICATED BY HIM TO THE ARMENIAN JOURNAL "ARARAT," OF LONDON, MARCH, 1916.

The following reports concerning the massacres and deportations in the region of Moush and Sassoun have come to hand from completely independent sources, yet it is remarkable to note how they confirm one another.

The massacres of Moush began on the 28th June (11th July), Sunday morning, and lasted until Monday night. They were organised by the Governors of Van and Bitlis and carried out in the presence of their representatives, among whom were Abdoullah Bey of Sipuk, Topal Ibrahim of Moush (tax collector), Hassan (tax collector), and the police Hakim. Before the massacres, all the prominent Armenians underwent indescribable sufferings. They were flogged and their limbs twisted until their thumbs began to bleed. The day the peasants were arrested they wished to take Holy Communion first, but were refused. The monks of Saint Garabed and the prominent Armenians of the villages of Gvars, Sortra and Pazou were assassinated in the monastery. The perpetrators opened the tomb of Bishop Nerses Kharakhanian, with the hope of finding money. They took his shroud and put the body back in the tomb. Mehmed Effendi, the Ottoman deputy for Gendje⁵, collected about 40 women and children and killed them. Two hundred of the inhabitants of Moush were brought to the village of Shekhlan and thrown into the Mourad River. One hundred men from Sassoun, who surrendered, were imprisoned without food or drink. "Then they begged for bread, the Turkish inhabitants could not stand their wailing, and asked the Government either to give them bread or kill them. They were all killed about the middle of November.

Then the Government looked for the Armenians who had found refuge with some Kurds, and finding about 2,000 of them massacred them all. The fact is confirmed that Kegham Der Garabedian, the Ottoman deputy for Moush, was hanged. The property of the Armenians of Moush and Bitlis was sold by the Government, and all their sheep and cattle which were left with the Kurds were requisitioned by the army of Halil Bey.

According to reports from the Caucasus, the Turks gathered together about 5,000 Armenians by treachery and deception from 20 Armenian villages round the monastery of Saint Garabed at Moush and massacred them. This took place near the wall of the monastery. Before the massacre began, a German officer stood on the wall and harangued the Armenians to the effect that the Turkish Government had shown great kindness to, and had honoured, the Armenians, but that they were not satisfied and wanted autonomy; he then, by the report of a revolver, gave the signal for the general massacre. Among the massacred were two monks, one of them being the father superior of Sourp Garabed, Yeghishe Vartabed, who had a chance of escaping but did not wish to be separated from his flock and was killed with them. From the Sahajian

⁵ Ginj (?).

district about 4,000 Armenians found refuge in the forests of the monastery, and fought against the attacking Turks and Kurds. They kept themselves alive on wheat, raw meat without salt, turtle, frogs, etc. Some of them finally surrendered, but no one knows the fate of the remainder. The monastery of St. Garabed was sacked and robbed. The Turks opened the tomb of St. Garabed and destroyed everything. They also discovered some secret chambers. Turkish chiefs took up their quarters in the monastery with imprisoned Armenian girls.

According to another report no one was spared in Moush, not even the orphans in the German Orphanage. Some of these were killed and others deported. The Rev. Krikor and Mr. Marcar Ghougasian, teachers in the German Orphanage, were killed, and only two escaped death, Miss Margarid Nalbandian and Miss Maritza Arisdakesian. These were graduates of the German Seminary at Mezré, and owe their lives to a kind German lady.

According to the reports of some Armenians who had found refuge in the forests of Sourp Garabed and finally made their way to the Caucasus, Hilmi Bey was appointed for the purpose of clearing the Armenian provinces of Armenians. This man reached Erzeroum on the 18th May, and then went to Khnyss, Boulanik, Khlata, etc., massacring every Armenian in these places. According to a letter, dated the 19th June (3rd July), written to one of these refugees, Hilmi Bey had three army corps (?) with him, a body of gendarmes, and the volunteers of Hadji Moussa Bey and Sheikh Hazret, who had come to Moush to massacre the Armenians. To these forces were added the Turkish mob of Moush, the Turkish refugees from Alashkerd and Badnotz, Keur Husein Pasha and Abd-ul-Medjid Bey. The massacres were directed by Governor Djevdet of Van, Commander Halil of Dillman, Governor Abd-ul-Khalak of Bitlis, and Governor Servet Bey of Moush. The order for massacre was given on the 28th June (11th July). According to Turkish Government statistics 120,000 Armenians were killed in this district.

26. BITLIS: LETTER DATED 14th OCTOBER, 1915, FROM A FOREIGN RESIDENT AT BITLIS TO A GERMAN OFFICIAL; COMMUNICATED BY THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR ARMENIAN AND SYRIAN RELIEF.

From having seen you yesterday, I am assured that you will receive with kindly consideration what I feel obliged to write to you. It is about the women and children who still remain with us.

It might be well to relate first a few of the recent events bearing on the matter.

On the 23rd June the Armenian men of the city, including those on our premises, were led to prison. A few days later, when they began to take the women from the city, I called on the Vali and told him that I could not give up the girls of our school and the women who had come to me for protection. He said that Halil Bey had decided the matter in regard to the women, and that he himself had no power to alter that decision, but that he would leave those on our premises till the last. I wrote a letter to Halil Bey with the consent of the Vali, to whom I sent a copy. I received no answer.

The women and girls are now employed in the hospitals, and by this means we have been able to keep them until now. We have spoken with Djevdet Bey recently, but he gives us no assurance of their ultimate safety, and says that the children must go. Of our Protestant community, we have twenty-five teachers and pupils, twenty-five women and twelve children. Apart from these there are other women who are employed in the hospital, and about thirty orphans. The first orphans whom we received were brought to the school by Turkish officials, and since it appeared that the Government did not disapprove, we have received others and provide them with food and shelter. Much as we should like to save them all, we feel that we can only insist on keeping those of our community.

My heart is full of this subject. It is not my desire in any way to oppose the Government. Our superiors give us very definite instructions on this point before we come out. We all agreed here that since the Government thought it a necessary war measure that the men should be taken into exile, we could not refuse to give them up. But since that time I have witnessed so many things that seemed unnecessary, that the giving up of those entrusted to my care now seems a different matter. I am not saying that we can prevent their being taken - some of our women have already been taken from us - no one realises more than we do our own helplessness. But we are trying by every means in our power to save them. I plead with you for your help in this. I have wanted very much to see the Vali, but owing to Miss A.'s being ill I have had no interpreter.

We received word recently from Constantinople that the Government had informed our Ambassador that Protestant communities would not be molested, and that he had notified the consuls to that effect. But such orders have not been carried out here.

These women and children who are with us cannot possibly do harm to the Government - why must they be sent away to such a fate? If the hospital were removed, we could then be responsible for their support, until such time as it would be fitting to take them with us to Harpout. My first plan, in the event of their trying to take our girls, was to barricade the school building, and compel them to force their way in or set fire to the building. Death in that form would have been welcome to the girls under those circumstances. The plan was not practicable, and I am telling you only that you may understand how much we dread the fate that awaits them. When I suggested the plan to my associates, I met with some opposition, but Sister B. said: "If I were in your place I would do the same thing," and suggested that she should take some of the women whom I could not accommodate in the school, to another building, and remain with them there. Her sympathetic understanding at that time was a great help to me. I have always had a great faith in Germany. Through Miss C. I learned to love her country. Somehow, I trust you as trusted her, and I feel that you will do for us what she would have done had she been able. Both Miss A. and myself entreat you most earnestly that you will use what influence you can exert here, that we may keep these women and children with us.

Your companions are here and inform us that you will leave to-morrow. We regret that we shall not see you again, but enjoyed the opportunity of meeting you the one time.