

Harpoot, June 27, 1915.

My dear Mr. Peet:-

Faced by one of the most awful and ghastly tragedies in history, we look about for some faint hope of deliverance for the people for whom we have given the labor of our lives. If the orders issued yesterday are carried out unchanged, it means the inevitable extinction of the entire Armenian population of this region, except for a few who may have the hardiness or the good fortune to survive the ordeal. But I should begin at the beginning.

Last Sunday the Armenian prisoners, who have been under examination for weeks in the Harpoot prison, were transferred to Mezireh. Some of these men including our Professors, had been subjected to indescribable tortures, and were unable to walk. Others had been arrested, swelling the number of prisoners from the city to something like 150. I saw one company of about a hundred taken away, and the rest were transferred at night. For a time we breathed easier about them, as it was said that their cases were to be submitted to a jury who would discharge those who were undoubtedly guiltless and send the doubtful ones to court martial.

On Wednesday, however, without any warning whatever, and without giving any opportunity for the prisoners to provide food or clothing or shoes for the journey, practically the entire group of prisoners in the Mezireh prison were hustled out on the road toward the south. The method of their departure led to the conclusion that they were going forth to die, and rumor was not slow to bring back gruesome details. Rumors of course are to be discounted, but the Vali himself today admitted that the Diarbekir road was very unsafe, and that those prisoners had encountered some Kurds, and there had been some

"unpleasantness." Whether any of them survived or not I suppose we may never know. The group contained a large percentage of the Armenian men of any standing at all, and most of those had had no form of examination or trial of any sort; they were simply arrested and sent to their doom.

Since then the police have been making wholesale arrest of all Armenian men who showed their faces, and have been from house to house arresting men whose names were on a list that seems to have been prepared. On what basis the list has been prepared no one has been able to hint. Whether it is anything less than the entire male population no one knows, as yet. Those arrested were herded into prison, and it would appear that when the prison is full it will be cleared out in the same fashion again.

In the meanwhile there have been persistent rumors that the women and children are also to be deported. These rumors also were discredited, though they came from Turkish sources, till yesterday, the order was published, the entire Christian population, Armenian and Syrian alike, are to be expelled from this region within a few days. The officials have been very glib in their promises of better treatment for these than for the first group of exiles. But the extent of their promises brands them as false. They have promised wagons enough and animals for all, a palpable impossibility, as there are not animals enough in the country for any such undertaking, even if every available animal were not already needed for military purposes.

If the order is carried out, it will mean that a large proportion of the women and children must die from the hardship of the journey even if no worse fate overtook them. The road to Ourfa, - which the Vali states to be their destination, - is for the most part waterless, and there are many places where it would be impossible for such a party to travel in one day from one source of portable water to

the next. Food cannot be obtained along the road, even for a small party with money to spend, but for thousands of people without means, it seems impossible to provide for them, even if the government intended to do so. But the worst fears are that a fate awaits them similar to that "unpleasantness" referred to by the Vali, only infinitely worse in that the victims now will be for the most part women and girls. The Vali states that they are to be sent under the care of gendarmes, but naturally the gendarmes now available are undisciplined recruits. What will be the fate of these thousands of women and children if they are actually started out on that journey is too horrible for the mind to imagine.

We know not which way to look for help. The local officials give no sign of relenting, and no local influence seems strong enough to turn the tides. I have telegraphed to you somewhat as follows; "Our entire constituency ordered to leave at once. Plead for delay, in carrying out order; to save many lives. Relief will be needed at destination." (This telegram was never received. W.W.P.) This was to be put into French, so I cannot give the exact wording. How much probability there is of its going through of course we do not know.

What can be done to avert this catastrophe? If you can bring any influence to bear, I trust you will leave no stone unturned. The pretext is, of course, that there were seditious plans among the Armenians. Whether there was anything at all of that sort in this region or not, of course I am not in a position to judge. But if there were, it was only in the minds of a few hair-brained fools, who, I hope have been duly punished. The innocent population, who are thus condemned to die, knew nothing of anything seditious.

We are waiting, with our hearts in prayer, and doing what little we can to relieve the awful suffering.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) Henry H. Riggs.

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