

Germany Confesses in a Secret Record Her Turkish Partner's Crimes in Armenia

A hidden book printed at Potsdam wherein is put down the ghastly details of the wanton Turkish attempt to destroy a whole people

The truth about the partial extermination of the Armenian nation told for the first time by a German—this is the import of the book "Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in der Türkei," an exhaustive report of investigations conducted on the spot by Dr. Johannes Lepsius, chairman of the German Orient Mission and of the German-Armenian Society. This volume, printed as a manuscript in Potsdam in 1916, was, up to the revolution, not permitted to reach the general public. It was circulated confidentially and the German newspapers were enjoined from referring to it.

All the charges brought against the government of the Young Turks in connection with the wholesale deportation, murder, rape and pillage of the unfortunate Armenians are corroborated and supplemented here by an investigator whose impartiality is vouched for by his nationality and quasi official standing. The anti-Armenian measures carried out with ruthless efficiency in 1915 were revealed in this book as items in a colossal campaign of the Young Turkish gang of Enver and Talat for the extermination of the most progressive Christian people of Western Asia; and the author's silence on the relation of the imperial German government to the crimes of its Turkish ally is an eloquent condemnation of the former.

The contents of the book, in copious extracts, will be reproduced here for the first time in a series of three articles, of which the following is the first.

By Eugene S. Bagger

THE MOST colossal crime in the history of the world. This somebody has characterized the extermination by the Turkish government of more than 1,000,000 of its own Armenian subjects, or over two-thirds of this peaceful and industrious people of Asia Minor. Opinion in civilized countries concurs in the verdict, even though not forgetting Belgium. And opinion in civilized countries does not forget either about the share of the Imperial German government in this murder of a nation; it does not forget that the crime was perpetrated with the connivance, if not active encouragement, of the Prussian standard bearers of Kultur.

So far the evidence in the case has rested mainly on the reports of American consular officials and missionaries and on the narratives of Armenian refugees who succeeded in escaping into Allied territory. All this material has been incorporated in a report compiled by a British committee, headed by Viscount Bryce. Needless to say, the Turkish government has, up to the surrender last fall at least, always studiously protested against the greater portion of the charges, and inasmuch as it was forced to admit them in part it endeavored to throw the blame on the Armenian people themselves, who, the Turkish government said, had engineered a tremendous conspiracy against the safety of the Turkish Empire. The measures enacted against them were a pure matter of self-defense, the world was asked to believe.

And the "Christian" government of Imperial Germany, the ally of Turkey, either observed silence on the matter or supported the self-justification of Constantinople. German public opinion was never allowed to learn even a fragment of the truth of the matter.

The German Indictment

Nevertheless, it was reserved for a German to present the supreme indictment against Turkey and, implicitly, against the German government itself. This indictment is contained in a volume entitled "Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in der Türkei" (Report on the Condition of the Armenian People in Turkey), by Dr. Johannes Lepsius, chairman of the German Orient Mission and of the German-Armenian Society. The volume was published in Potsdam in 1916 by the Tempelverlag, and printed at the office of the "Reichsbote," in Berlin.

But this book—one of the most amazing documents produced by the world war—was not meant for the enlightenment of the German public. Across its cover runs the warning: "Printed as manuscript. Strictly confidential."

The warning is repeated on the title page, and the line is added: "Reproduction and use in the press prohibited."

The report itself is a model of that

thorough scientific presentation which was once the pride of German scholarship. Its assertions are always carefully and exhaustively documented. It covers the ground completely. Its tone is cool and detached throughout, except in the last chapter, where the author exposes and denounces with a violent sarcasm the lies circulated in the German press. It completes its case as few cases have ever been completed before that "world tribunal" which is, in Schiller's words, world history.

The findings of this investigation, as set forth by Dr. Lepsius in his confidential report, can be summed up as follows:

1. That the accounts forwarded by American witnesses, constituting the main bulk of evidence, are substantially correct, and that they understate rather than overstate the case.

2. That the charge, based on this evidence, that over 1,000,000 Armenians were deported into the desert and that hundreds of thousands of this number were slaughtered, left to perish by disease, or starved to death, corresponds to the facts.

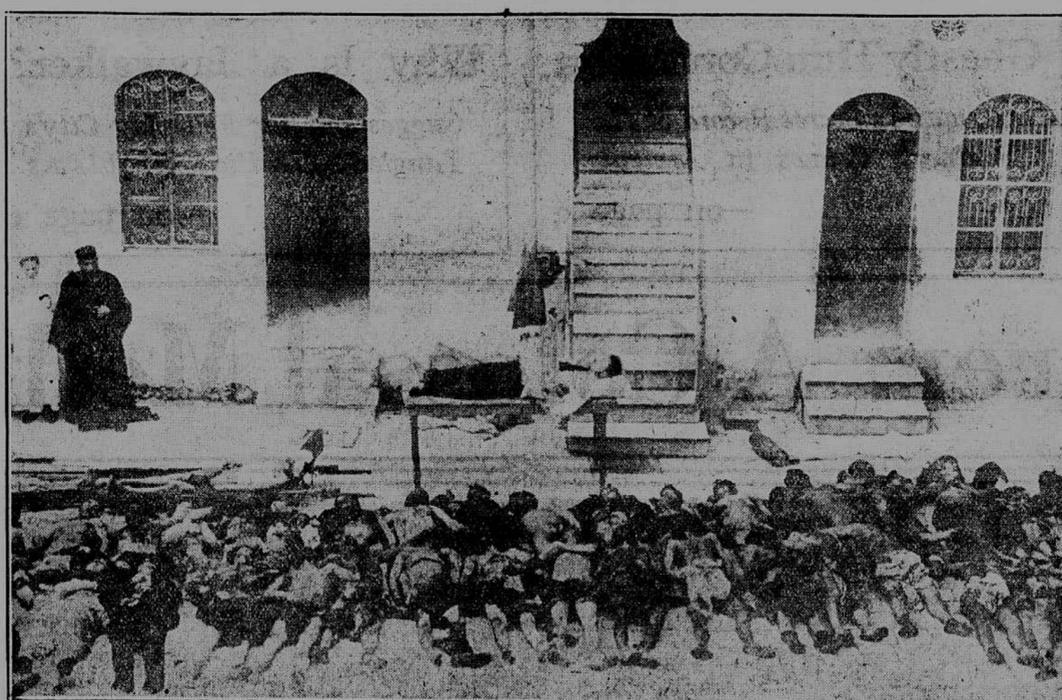
3. That the most appalling methods of wholesale massacres, torture, plunder and rape were practised, not as individual crimes of local officials and commanders, but as promulgated from Constantinople in the orders of the Young Turk government.

4. That the Armenian people must be acquitted of every charge of disloyalty against the Turkish Empire. That the attack on them was launched without the slightest provocation on their part. That the Young Turks' accusation about plans of an Armenian rebellion, fostered by England and Russia, was completely unfounded.

5. That the persecutions were carried out by way of realization of the Young Turks' plan to exterminate the Armenian Christians and supplant them with a Moslem population—that, in fact, the war of extermination was waged as a phase of the pan-Islamic "revival."

6. Most important, perhaps, of all: Dr. Lepsius's report contains the implicit admission of the German government's share of responsibility. It is unthinkable, in face of the thoroughness of Dr. Lepsius's manner, his sympathetic attitude to the Armenians, and the bearing of the issue involved, that the report should have included the efforts of the German government to save the Armenian people from its terrible fate, had there been such efforts.

All Dr. Lepsius has to say on the subject is as follows: "It was impossible for America to know that Germany (not the German government) has repeatedly entered emphatic protest against the proceedings of the



Forty Armenian Christians slaughtered by the Turks last February after the signing of the armistice, in a remote section of Asia Minor. From a photograph recently received in this country.

Turkish government. It has achieved thereby just as little as has America with her protests. The reason for this ill success cannot be expounded here." Of course not.

Such a defence amounts almost to an accusation, if we consider that the German government had very effective means at its disposal to back up "emphatic protests" at Constantinople, means outside of the reach of any other power. Also, through his indictment of German press methods, Dr. Lepsius makes sufficiently clear what he thinks of the question of co-responsibility.

On the other hand, the report is very specific in regard to instances—none too numerous—where individual German residents have aided or mitigated the sufferings of Armenian victims. Charges of complicity in the persecutions brought against individual Germans are also expressly and specifically repudiated. In view of the overwhelming impression of truthfulness and sincerity one gains of Dr. Lepsius's methods and personality there is no reason why his statements in such cases should not be given credence.

Dr. Lepsius, also, is unstinting in his praise of the work of American officials and missionaries, whose reports he quotes in extenso and with full indorsement. His approval of the British committee of inquiry, whose impartiality and trustworthiness he emphasizes, is equally remarkable and speaks in his favor.

The report itself is divided into three parts. The first bears the caption "The Facts." The second is entitled "The Responsibility." The third section deals with the economic and religious effects of the persecutions, presents statistical data and contains a sweeping denunciation of the German press, both because of its commissions and omissions.

The Deportations

"The deportation of the Armenian population was carried out in three different areas, and in three subsequent periods," Dr. Lepsius begins his story. The three areas correspond to the three main groups in which the Armenian population of Asiatic Turkey is distributed, to wit:

1. Cilicia and Northern Syria, comprising the vilayets of Adana and Aleppo, the districts of Antiochia, Suediye, Kessab, Alexandrette, Killis, Aintab and Urfa.

2. The seven vilayets of Eastern Anatolia: Trapezunt, Ezerum, Siwas, Kharput, Diarbekr, Van, Bitlis.

3. In Western Anatolia: The district of Izmid and the vilayets of Broussa, Kastamuni, Angora and Konia. In these territories the Armenian population forms 10 to 40 per cent of the total.

In Cilicia the deportations started in the end of March, 1915, and continued through April and May. In Northern Syria and Mesopotamia they were going on till October. In the second area the persecution began in the end of May. In the third area it began in August and continued through September.

The deportations in Cilicia (vilayet of Adana and Marash, district of the vilayet of Aleppo) began with the events in Zeitun, in the Taurus Mountains. This prosperous city of 35,000 Armenians, mostly of Gregorian faith, was for a long time a thorn in the side of the Turkish authorities, who remembered the heroic resistance offered by the population in the Hamidian massacres in 1895-'96.

According to Dr. Lepsius, from the very beginning of the European war the Turkish authorities were eagerly awaiting the opportunity to "settle accounts" with the mountaineers. At the time of the general mobilization in August, 1914, all able-bodied male

residents of Zeitun were inducted into service without difficulty.

In October, 1914, the Mayor of the city, Nazaret Tehausi by name, went to Marash, the seat of the district governor, to arrange some official matters. Notwithstanding his safe conduct, he was put into jail and tortured to death. Afterward Turkish gendarmes came to the city and committed all sorts of atrocities, plundered houses, beat up innocent men and violated women. In spite of these occurrences the inhabitants retained full composure.

In December, 1914, the government ordered surrender of all weapons in the possession of Armenians. The Moslem population was permitted to retain arms. The surrender was made without an incident. In March a large military force arrived, and on next day the deportation began. It lasted for several weeks, and in the end there was not one Armenian family left in the city. The deported were ordered to leave all their belongings behind, and when in July about 25,000 Turkish settlers arrived they took possession not only of the houses but also of livestock, fixtures and other property. The name of the city was changed to Sultanieh.

Driven and Beaten

As to the manner of the proceedings, Dr. Lepsius quotes the letter dated May 10, of an eyewitness, who says, in part:

"I saw the people on the way. An endless procession, accompanied by gendarmes who drove them forward with truncheons. Only half clad, starved, emaciated, they dragged themselves along rather than walked. Old women collapsed, but rose again when they saw a gendarme approaching with his baton raised above his head. Others were pushed forward like donkeys. I saw a young woman collapse, a gendarme gave her two or three hard blows and she got up. Her husband walked in front of her, with a three-year-old baby on his arm. A little further an old woman was staggering along. Suddenly she fell. The gendarme gave her two or three blows. She did not stir. He began to kick her with his boot, but she lay there without moving. Finally the Turk gave her a terrible kick, so that she rolled into the ditch. I hope she was dead."

A similar fate befell the inhabitants of the Dört-Jöl and a number of villages in the Taurus and Amanus. People were told those who adopted the Moslem faith were allowed to remain. The churches were transformed into mosques even as the inhabitants were getting under way.

The attitude of the Turkish authorities is illustrated by a quotation from a government order issued to commanders of army corps and divisions:

"Article II. The commanders may, in case of military necessity, and wherever they suspect (!) treason or espionage, deport the inhabitants of cities and villages, individually or en masse, and settle them down in other regions."

The exclamation point is Dr. Lepsius's own.

The chapter on the deportations from Cilicia and Northern Syria ends with a reproduction of the report of Jackson, the American Consul at Aleppo. Dr. Lepsius remarks that "this report contains nothing which has not been corroborated by German sources."

Alone from Cilicia, we are told, 100,000 persons were deported. In the one month of July 16,255 deportees passed through Aleppo.

The second chapter deals with the deportations from the seven vilayets of Eastern Anatolia.

On April 24 and 25, 1915, occurred the wholesale arrests of Armenian leaders and intellectuals at Constantinople. Three days earlier a general round-up of Armenian notables began all over the empire. On April 21 870

prominent Armenians were arrested and carried off in different cities. Before the end of May over 3,000 leaders—professional and business men, writers, priests—were seized and deported. Dr. Lepsius comments, in italics:

"As the seizure of leaders extends over all areas inhabited by Armenians, it must be assumed that we are faced here by a general measure whose object was to rob the Armenian people of its leaders and spokesmen, so that the subsequent deportations could be executed without resistance and protest. It was also necessary to prevent the early spread of news from the interior. From the beginning of June all Armenian officials were dismissed from civil service and the Armenian physicians and surgeons who from the beginning of the war had rendered faithful service in the Turkish military hospitals were imprisoned.

"All these arrests, embracing thousands of Armenians of the highest standing and education, deputies, writers, publicists, poets, lawyers, notaries, officials, physicians, merchants, financiers and all wealthy and influential elements, were effected without being preceded or followed by any regular legal proceedings. Not even the charge that these men had planned or participated in activities against the safety of the state was proffered. The aim was simply to cut off the head of the Armenian body before the members were shattered. The orders were forwarded from Constantinople to the local authorities and were, in spite of occasional resistance on the part of individual Turkish officials and, in a few instances, even of the Turkish populace, executed with the utmost rigor and ruthlessness."

The second phase of the measures, Dr. Lepsius says, in advance of the mass deportations proper, affected the male population only, which had been drafted for the army previously, or was to be drafted in the course of events. He writes:

"Armenians inducted into military service, who, according to the testimony of the Minister of War himself, had fought bravely, and not only at the Dardanelles, but even in the Caucasian campaign against Russia, were, for the most part, disarmed and employed as stevedores or road laborers. From almost all provinces reports are at hand to the effect that not only in individual cases were such Armenian laborers murdered by their Mahometan comrades, but that whole detachments of eighty, one hundred or more were shot by gendarmes or the military on orders of their superior officers."

The extent of this mass murder within the army itself will perhaps never be fixed, Dr. Lepsius adds, and continues:

Shot Without Trial

"Under the pretext of draft all remaining male residents of many cities and villages, between the ages of sixteen and seventy, were now taken away, notwithstanding the fact that many had paid the legal exemption tax and others were totally unfit. These columns were led off into the mountains and shot down wholesale, of course, without any kind of trial, as circumstances made legal proceedings impossible."

Simultaneously the wholesale disarming of the Armenian populations was ordered. Dr. Lepsius explains that not only was the carrying of arms for self-defence general in all Turkey on account of the total lack of public safety, but in many cases Armenian populations had been armed by the Committee of the Young Turks itself. The constitutional political organization of the Armenians, called "Dash-nakagan," literally "confederates," had been the staunchest and most efficient ally of the Young Turks in the long struggle for constitutional reform, and after the convocation of the

first parliament whole Armenian communities received arms and ammunition from the Young Turks, who counted upon their assistance in case of a counter revolutionary coup.

All these arms were now withdrawn, and in the overwhelming majority of cases the Armenians delivered their weapons without resistance, in many cases obtaining receipts from the authorities. Nevertheless, in the outlying districts this measure led to the most terrible acts of violence. A detachment of gendarmes arrived in a village and demanded that a chance number of firearms be turned in, 200 or more. Naturally, in many cases, there was nothing like this large number of guns in the possession of villagers. If, however, the full number was not delivered instantly the gendarmes arrested the mayor and the elders and mistreated them under the pretext that they had the weapons concealed.

"In many cases torture was employed," Dr. Lepsius writes. "The favorite method of the gendarmes and jailers was the bastinado, which, applied ruthlessly, led frequently to the death of the victim. Also, the hair and nails of the victims were torn out; people were branded with glowing irons and all kinds of horrors were committed on women and children. Frequently the villagers were forced to purchase arms, at preposterous prices, from their Turkish neighbors or from Kurds and Circassians, in order to satisfy the requisitioning squads of gendarmes."

"Simultaneously with the disarming of the Armenian population the Turks were systematically armed. The local Young Turkish clubs organized armed gangs, called Tchetches, composed partly of convicts discharged for the purpose. Notorious Kurdish brigand chieftains were taken with their following into military service. These bands were given freedom to raid and pillage Armenian villages, to slaughter the men, to carry away the women and girls. Many caravans composed of deportees were exterminated, partially or completely, by these gangs. Through the carrying off of girls, women and children into Turkish harems and Kurdish villages tens of thousands of Christians were subjected not only to dishonor but also to forcible conversion to Islam.

Slaughter en Masse

"Wherever men were driven off together with the women and children they were often sorted out soon after getting under way, or else slaughtered en masse in the organized surprise attacks. As a result less than half of the total number arrived at the points of destination. The caravans that had started out in the north consisted, when they arrived in the south, mostly of children below ten, elderly women, invalids and old men. The men and boys had been slaughtered, the girls, young women and numberless children raped. The remnant are a helpless mob of beggars, delivered to want and misery and perishing through hunger and disease in the morasses and deserts of Mesopotamia."

Dr. Lepsius gives a detailed account of the mass deportations in the vilayets of Trapezunt and Erzerum, conducted under the above described methods. He quotes in extenso the report of the American Consul at Trapezunt, Oscar S. Heizer, dated July 28, 1915, according to which all inhabitants of the 1,000 houses in the Armenian quarters of Trapezunt were driven off and all their belongings confiscated. The authorities did not even pretend to bring any charges against them—to be an Armenian was sufficient reason for being deported. Women were raped wholesale—the consular reports that one member of the Young Turkish Club, which directed the proceedings, had ten of the

prettiest girls in his house, "for his and his friends' use."

The story of what happened in the village of Minn, in the vilayet of Erzerum, is only one of the many. On March 14 a detachment of gendarmes arrived, headed by a lieutenant, Suleiman Effendi. They first imposed a fine of 100 Turkish pounds without giving reasons or showing authority. A few firearms owned by the villagers were then confiscated, the owners being jailed. "But the lieutenant now insisted on finding bombs, and began to beat men, women and children. As no bombs were found, the lieutenant ordered the priest to be subjected to bastinado. The punishment was repeated five times. When they got through with the priest the lieutenant locked him up in his room and violated his wife. The gendarmes then started to shoot up the populace, just for fun. When they had enough they armed the priest and a few peasants to the teeth, so that they looked like brigands, and led the gang, thus artificially armed, into the Mahometan quarters of Kemach, the district seat, in order to inflame the populace against the Armenians. Then men were then jailed and finally sent to Erzerum."

Armenian priests, many of them of high rank, who interceded for their unfortunate flocks with the authorities, were brutally treated and in some cases jailed and tortured. The atrocities aroused the resentment of even the Moslem population. In May the Turkish inhabitants of Erzerum, on learning that the deportation of all Armenians had been ordered, sent a petition to Constantinople asking the government that the measure be cancelled in the vilayet of Erzerum. They said they were afraid that in case of a Russian occupation of their territory they would be subjected to retaliation.

"By May 15 all Armenian villages on the plain of Erzerum were evacuated," Dr. Lepsius continues. "They were filled with Mahometan settlers. In Erzerum alone 600 notables were arrested and deported. All 'Ittihadists' (members of the Committee of Union and Progress, the Young Turkish organization) gathered in Erzerum and directed the execution of the measures all over the province. The Vali, Tahsin Bey, who carried out the orders with reluctance, said, by way of excuse: 'What can I do? The Sublime Porte has ordered it.'"

Dr. Lepsius proceeds: "The caravans that had left Erzingan on June 8, 9 and 10, in apparent order (the children were riding in ox carts), were accompanied by soldiers. Nevertheless, only a fragment reached the next station."

"In a hollow road near the city the defenceless flocks of women and children were attacked by the troops of the escort and by Kurds summoned for the purpose. First they were robbed of everything they possessed, then slaughtered in the most abominable fashion, and their corpses were thrown into the Euphrates. Many thousands were massacred in this way only twelve hours' walk from the military fortress of Erzingan, seat of a mutesarrif (provincial governor) and headquarters of the Fourth Army Corps. All that happened here between June 10 and 14 happened with the knowledge and consent of the authorities. The German Red Cross sisters tell the story as follows:

"The floating rumors were confirmed to us by our Turkish cook. She said in tears that the Kurds mistreated and killed the women and hurled the children into the river."

Finishing the Job

On the following day, June 11, regular troops of the 86th Cavalry Brigade were dispatched to the Kemach Ravine in order—it was said—to punish the Kurds. The German nurses learned later from returned troopers that the Turkish military was ordered to kill

all those of the deportees—mostly women and children—who escaped the massacre of the day before. The Turkish soldiers told how women begged them for mercy on their knees and how they, when they saw it was vain, hurled their own babies into the river. A Young Turkish trooper said: "It was a horror. I could not shoot. Just pretended." Others, again, boasted to the German pharmacist, Herr Gehlsen, about the atrocities they had committed. The slaughter lasted four hours. The corpses were thrown into the Euphrates by the score. For several days afterward a regular hunt was conducted in the underbrush and all fugitives found were killed in cold blood.

From Baiburt 17,000 Armenians were deported. The Bishop, Wartabedjan Zarabedjan, and seven notables were executed a few days in advance. A wealthy Armenian widow, who, after she had been robbed of all her property, was also deported and saved her life, and that of her daughter by promising to embrace Islam, succeeded later in making her way to Constantinople. Her story of unspeakable horrors is reproduced in full by Dr. Lepsius. She concluded:

"The worst of all was awaiting us when we arrived in the Plain of Erzingan and near the banks of the Euphrates. The roadside was strewn with mutilated corpses of women and girls and little children. Also, the girls and women in our group were mistreated terribly by the bandits, and their wailing rose up to the skies. When we arrived at the river the gendarmes hurled all the remaining children under fifteen into the river. Those who tried to escape by swimming were shot in the water. When we reached Endergs on the way to Siwas all the slopes and meadows were thickly covered with black and swollen corpses whose smell poisoned the air."

The fate of the caravans deported from Baiburt and Erzerum and taken through Erzingan is described in another statement of the two German nurses there:

"On the evening of June 18 we were walking with our friend Gehlsen, the pharmacist, in front of our house. We met a gendarme who said that a flock of women and children, deported from Baiburt, were spending the night only about ten minutes' distance above the hospital. He was among the escort himself and told us about the fate of the deportees. 'Kesse, kesse, struflar,' 'Slaughtering, slaughtering, drive them.' Every day, he said, he had killed ten to twelve men, throwing their bodies into ravines. When the children cried and would not go further, their skulls were smashed. The women were robbed of all their clothes, and they were violated over again at every village. 'I have buried three naked corpses myself,' he concluded, 'God may reckon it to my credit!'

Many Driven Insane

"Next day," the nurses continued, "we heard the procession of the unfortunates pass by. We and Herr Gehlsen accompanied them for an hour's walk. Their misery was indescribable. It was a large flock. Only two or three men, the rest women and children. Many of the women were already insane. Others cried 'Save us! We want to become Moslem or German, or whatever you want, only save us. They take us to Kemach and cut our heads off! . . . Others entreated us to save their babies."

"As we neared the city we encountered a group of Turks, who came riding on horseback and seized young girls and children. At the city gate, where the German physicians had their residences, the procession halted. Here a regular slave market was held, only no prices were paid. The mothers seemed to give up their babies willingly and resistance would have been futile."



Nochemasar Varlerion, an eighteen-year-old mother, whose husband was killed before she was stabbed four times.



An Armenian woman who has lived through the Turkish horrors. She was left by the roadside supposedly dead from typhus.