

(Editorial from The Literary Digest of April 15th)

Sentenced To Die

TWELVE MEN, with grave faces, were met to decide an issue of life or death.

No burly criminal stood there to receive punishment for his crimes—only a little child, begging for life.

Her sin was hunger and nakedness.

She trembled, and almost fell, as she stretched out thin, bare arms in supplication.

"Hunger!—Bread!" were the only words she spoke.

A long time passed, while those men fought to escape the verdict they must render. But then the words came:

"We have not found any one who will give you bread, little girl. We have told a great many people about you, but they have given to so many other boys and girls that they are tired of giving. There is not enough bread, now, to go around—no, not even a crust. We are very sorry, dear little girl, but—*we must let you die.*"

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A cruel jest? No! A cruel fact, multiplied thousands upon thousands of times! If only one such pleading child were condemned to die because we are "tired of giving" it would be enough to blanch the cheeks of every man and woman who reads this page. But upon many thousands of boys and girls the sentence of death has just been passed.

In Armenia a Christian race is being blotted out—while the world looks on. In Armenia peace did not come when the rest of the world stopped fighting. Last year 140 villages were destroyed; thousands of mothers and grown daughters were violated and slain; fathers were herded into buildings and burned; multitudes of orphaned children were driven into the wilderness to wander and die, unless, perchance, they might be gathered, like lost lambs, into folds of safety by the Near East Relief. Conditions are worse than at any time since the armistice. Frantic appeals for *more* food to save the children, for *more* clothing to cover their naked bodies, for *more* hospitals and orphanages to give them refuge come surging over the cables to "kind, generous America," the hoped-for savior of Armenia.

And in the moment of this crisis, when the question of life or death for unnumbered thousands of children must be answered, the tender charity of American mothers and fathers *has begun to fail*. Their answer to the multitude of little orphans whose only sin is hunger and nakedness and immeasurable grief has been—in December and January and February and March—not more money and more clothing and more food, *but less*. And so the cruel order has gone forth from the offices of the Near East Relief to *reduce* all expenditures twenty-five per cent. Twenty-five children from every hundred now receiving care must be turned away. Among the many thousands whose wails of hunger and sickness and cold have not yet been answered *not one* can be satisfied.

And now the cries of terror and dismay are reaching America:

CABLEGRAM via Paris: "Thousands of deportees filling Near East threshold, receiving crust of bread, hoping for summer peace. *Shall we push them off our doorstep?* Order of twenty-five per cent reduction necessitates closing March first all general relief."

CABLEGRAM, Constantinople: "Appalling increase of need for general relief throughout Anatolia, Caucasus. Reduction in already inadequate appropriations *cuts off multitudes who are hopeless without American aid.*"

CABLEGRAM from American Women's Hospital, Erivan: "We have eight hundred and fifty-two cases in the hospital, and children dying in all corners of Erivan. All day long we can hear the wails and groans of little children outside the office buildings hoping we can and will pick them up. If the sun shines a little while they quiet down; when it rains they begin again. One day when the rain turned into snow it was awful to listen to them. The note of terror that came into the general wail was plainly perceptible upstairs, and I had the windows closed. They well know what a night in the snow would mean to them. We are picking them up as fast as possible, but it is fatal to crowd them to such a point that we would lose even those already in orphanage."

Erivan—that one-time prosperous city of Armenia, not far from Mount Ararat, famous, in days of peace, for the peach orchards and vegetable gardens that surrounded it on every side. Walk through its streets today and here is what you will see: "Children walking through the muddy gutters hunting for bits of orange peels, apple cores or anything that once resembled food; little boys and girls sleeping in stables, with straw and manure spread over their bodies to keep them from freezing to death; or, in the early morning, deserted children lying in the doorways of the buildings, wrapped in old burlap bags, some silent, perhaps already dead, others sobbing unconsciously in their sleep. They have been placed there during the night by their mothers who, unable to feed them any longer, have resorted to desertion as a final chance to save their children's lives. There is always a chance that they will be rescued by the Americans, and it is with this one hope that the mothers leave their little children, praying to God that they will be saved by the 'kind and generous Americans.'"

Has that story of unutterable suffering, of passionate love and gratitude for what has been given, that trusting, prayerful appeal for rescue of children whose lives now depend on us—has it all grown wearisome to us? Are we tired of being "kind and generous?" Is there no longer any sacrificial tenderness for little children in our hearts? Is it time to be rid of the burden, to stop our giving, and so, through the Board of Trustees of the Near East Relief, *who must act as we dictate*, to pronounce the sentence of death on these thousands of boys and girls who have believed to the last moment that *we* would save them?

Mothers and fathers of America, it is not true! You will not allow it! Your hearts have not turned to stone! What are a few paltry miles of distance! They cannot separate you from that famine-stricken land, where dead and dying children litter the city streets. They cannot shut out from your vision those hunger-pinched faces and outstretched hands! You can shut your windows, as they did, in very desperation, in the City of Erivan; but the wails and moans of little children, waiting in rain and snow, by day and night, to be "picked up" and clothed and fed, cannot be shut out of your heart.

From far-away stations, by the magic of science, our homes are being filled with song and story and music for the dance. But there are messages more wonderful than any controlled by the wizards of wireless. They are coming now from far away, and the story they bring is burdened with tears. The music is not for dancing, for those who make it can scarce stand upon their feet. The song, swelled to a chorus of woe by thousands of little voices that ought to be musical with laughter, is always the same: "Hunger!—Bread!" And with the pleading cry of the children there comes a voice, sweet and solemn, saying: "These are MY little ones; ye are My Shepherds; *Feed My Lambs.*"

To catch these messages, every American heart that has thrilled at the laughter of a little child or throbbed at its cry of pain is the receiving instrument, and the messages are broadcasted to us from the very throne of Heaven.

No mistake can be more tragic at this moment than for you to say, as you read, "The call is not to me; I cannot—I need not respond this time; others will give, and the children will not have to die."

There are no others—if *you* turn away. The appeal has gone throughout the length and breadth of this great land, and these "others" have heard it and some have given gladly; but too many have said, "I need not respond this time." During the past four months not enough has been given to continue the care even of those children already gathered into the hospitals and orphanages, while thousands more are waiting to be "picked up" from the streets and countryside.

There are no others—if *you* refuse. Armenia is surrounded by bankrupt nations, or nations struggling to keep themselves from bankruptcy. Europe is full of suffering and need. Armenia's only hope is America. *A Christian race will die if America fails at this crisis.*

There are no others to love and care for Armenia's little children—no others *but you*. The vast majority are orphans. Father is dead; mother, too, is dead; sister—if not dead is praying God for death; brother is dead; aunt and uncle, grandfather and grandmother—all dead, the home destroyed, and the lonely little girl or boy has *no one*—but *you*. You are father and mother and sister and brother—the *only one* in whose heart the sad little waif can now find refuge.

How splendidly you have given, perhaps, sometime in the past, and have brought health and laughter to some of Armenia's little sufferers! But for every one saved then, *at least* one other was left without food or shelter or friends. And the child to whom you gave one meal a day *last year* cannot live now if that meal is stopped. A year ago the delivery of supplies for the Alexandropol orphanage was interrupted between November and May by transportation difficulties. Before April the children had to be placed on half rations, and by the first of May, on the very morning the supply train arrived, the last meager ration was distributed. During those sad weeks, when there was so little food at Alexandropol, *more than two thousand children died.*

If you withhold your gift now, the boys and girls you fed last year may be the very ones "sentenced to die."

Revoke the cruel sentence! Stop the order to reduce all relief work twenty-five per cent! Thank God *it is in your power* at this Eastertime to give life in place of death, health in place of sickness, laughter in place of tears. *You* can speak the word of *Resurrection* which will call back some little child from the dark valley of shadow and flood its new life with sunshine.

Two things will fill your Easter Day with sweetest joy: the knowledge that Armenia's children did not wait for you and trust in you and appeal to you in vain; and the voice of the Risen Christ, the Lover of little children, speaking to your soul, and saying, "Ye have done it unto Me. Ye have done it unto *Me.*"

So deeply have we, as publishers of THE LITERARY DIGEST, been stirred by the tragedy impending among the innocent children of Armenia, that we would feel a heavy share of responsibility for the needless death of countless little ones if we did not do as we are urging you to do, and give, still again, a substantial contribution to save their lives. Therefore, although we have given several times before, we feel that we cannot—we *must not*—do less in the present crisis than add immediately another five thousand dollars to help save the children of Armenia from the death that threatens them.

Make checks payable to Asa S. Wing, treasurer, Near East Relief, and mail to Regional Headquarters, N. E. Cor. Broad and Locust streets, Philadelphia, Pa.