

The Horrors of Aleppo

Seen by a
GERMAN EYEWITNESS

Dr. Martin Niepage



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of
"The Horrors of Aleppo"

IS ALSO DESIGNED TO
COMMEMORATE THE

60th Anniversary
of the
Armenian Genocide



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The President Speaks

"Mr. Speaker, with mixed emotions we mark the 50th anniversary of the Turkish genocide of the Armenian people. In taking notice of the shocking events in 1915, we observe this anniversary with sorrow in recalling the massacres of Armenians and with pride in saluting those brave patriots who survived the attacks to fight on the side of freedom during World War I.

"The stouthearted Armenian people who escaped the terror, murder, and carnage set an example for the free world by their devotion to the cause of freedom and by their tremendous personal sacrifices. I join my colleagues in pausing to extend our deep sympathy to thousands of Americans whose Armenian forefathers fought for freedom with our war allies and who have given so much of themselves to make this a better country, and a strong one." — Congressional Record, pg. 8890.

From an address delivered on April 29, 1965 in the House of Representatives by the Hon. Gerald R. Ford.

Armenian Eyes!



Parents murdered. A boy from Tokat tails the caravan of deportees.

The HORRORS of ALEPPO

SEEN BY A GERMAN EYEWITNESS.

*A word to Germany's Accredited
Representatives by Dr. Martin
Niepage, Higher Grade Teacher
in the German Technical School at
Aleppo*

WHEN I returned to Aleppo in September, 1915, from a three months' holiday at Beirut, I heard with horror that a new phase of Armenian massacres had begun which were far more terrible than the earlier massacres under Abd-ul-Hamid, and which aimed at exterminating, root and branch, the intelligent, industrious, and progressive Armenian nation, and at transferring its property to Turkish hands.

Such monstrous news left me at first incredulous. I was told that, in various quarters of Aleppo, there were lying masses of half-starved people, the survivors of so-called "deportation convoys." In order, I was told, to cover the extermination of the Armenian nation with a political cloak, military reasons were being put forward, which were said to make it necessary to drive the Armenians out of their native seats, which had been theirs for 2,500 years, and

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to deport them to the Arabian deserts. I was also told that individual Armenians had lent themselves to acts of espionage.

After I had informed myself about the facts and had made enquiries on all sides, I came to the conclusion that all these accusations against the Armenians were, in fact, based on trifling provocations, which were taken as an excuse for slaughtering 10,000 innocents for one guilty person, for the most savage outrages against women and children, and for a campaign of starvation against the exiles which was intended to exterminate the whole nation.

To test the conclusion derived from my information, I visited all the places in the city where there were Armenians left behind by the convoys. In dilapidated caravansaries (hans) I found quantities of dead, many corpses being half-decomposed, and others, still living, among them, who were soon to breathe their last. In other yards I found quantities of sick and starving people whom no one was looking after. In the neighbourhood of the German Technical School, at which I am employed as a higher grade teacher, there were four such hans, with seven or eight hundred exiles dying of starvation. We teachers and our pupils had to pass by them every day. Every time we went out we saw through the open windows their pitiful forms, emaciated and wrapped in rags. In the mornings our school children, on their way through the narrow streets, had to push past the two-wheeled ox-

carts, on which every day from eight to ten rigid corpses, without coffin or shroud, were carried away, their arms and legs trailing out of the vehicle.

After I had shared this spectacle for several days I thought it my duty to compose the following report :—

“ As teachers in the German Technical School at Aleppo, we permit ourselves with all respect to make the following report :—

“ We feel it our duty to draw attention to the fact that our educational work will forfeit its moral basis and the esteem of the natives, if the German Government is not in a position to put a stop to the brutality with which the wives and children of slaughtered Armenians are being treated here.

“ Out of convoys which, when they left their homes on the Armenian plateau, numbered from two to three thousand men, women and children, only two or three hundred survivors arrive here in the south. The men are slaughtered on the way; the women and girls, with the exception of the old, the ugly and those who are still children, have been abused by Turkish soldiers and officers and then carried away to Turkish and Kurdish villages, where they have to accept Islam. They try to destroy the remnant of the

convoys by hunger and thirst. Even when they are fording rivers, they do not allow those dying of thirst to drink. All the nourishment they receive is a daily ration of a little meal sprinkled over their hands, which they lick off greedily, and its only effect is to protract their starvation.

“ Opposite the German Technical School at Aleppo, in which we are engaged in teaching, a mass of about four hundred emaciated forms, the remnant of such convoys, is lying in one of the hans. There are about a hundred children (boys and girls) among them, from five to seven years old. Most of them are suffering from typhoid and dysentery. When one enters the yard, one has the impression of entering a mad-house. If one brings them food, one notices that they have forgotten how to eat. Their stomach, weakened by months of starvation, can no longer assimilate nourishment. If one gives them bread, they put it aside indifferently. They just lie there quietly, waiting for death.

“ Amid such surroundings, how are we teachers to read German Fairy Stories with our children, or, indeed, the story of the Good Samaritan in the Bible? How are we to make them decline and conjugate irrelevant words, while round them in the yards adjoining the German Technical School their starving fellow-countrymen

are slowly succumbing? Under such circumstances our educational work flies in the face of all true morality and becomes a mockery of human sympathy.

“And what becomes of these poor people who have been driven in thousands through Aleppo and the neighbourhood into the deserts, reduced almost entirely, by this time, to women and children? They are driven on and on from one place to another. The thousands shrink to hundreds and the hundreds to tiny remnants, and even these remnants are driven on till the last is dead. Then at last they have reached the goal of their wandering, the ‘New Homes assigned to the Armenians,’ as the newspapers phrase it.

“‘Ta’alim el aleman’ (‘the teaching of the Germans’) is the simple Turk’s explanation to everyone who asks him about the originators of these measures.

“The educated Moslems are convinced that, even though the German nation discountenances such horrors, the German Government is taking no steps to put a stop to them, out of consideration for its Turkish Ally.

“Mohammedans, too, of more sensitive feelings—Turks and Arabs alike—shake their heads in disapproval and do not conceal their tears when they see a convoy of exiles marching through the city, and

Turkish soldiers using cudgels upon women in advanced pregnancy and upon dying people who can no longer drag themselves along. They cannot believe that their Government has ordered these atrocities, and they hold the Germans responsible for all such outrages, Germany being considered during the war as Turkey's school-master in everything. Even the mollahs in the mosques say that it was not the Sublime Porte but the German officers who ordered the ill-treatment and destruction of the Armenians.

"The things which have been passing here for months under everybody's eyes will certainly remain as a stain on Germany's shield in the memory of Orientals.

"In order not to be obliged to give up their faith in the character of the Germans, which they have hitherto respected, many educated Mohammedans explain the situation to themselves as follows: 'The German nation,' they say, 'probably knows nothing about the frightful massacres which are on foot at the present time against the native Christians in all parts of Turkey. Knowing the German love of truth, how otherwise can we explain the articles we read in German newspapers, which appear to know of nothing except that individual Armenians have been deservedly shot by martial law as spies and traitors?' Others

again say: 'Perhaps the German Government has had its hands tied by some treaty defining its powers, or perhaps intervention is inopportune for the moment.'

"I know for a fact that the Embassy at Constantinople has been informed by the German Consulates of all that has been happening. As, however, there has not been so far the least change in the system of deportation, I feel myself compelled by conscience to make my present report."

At the time when I composed this report, the German Consul at Aleppo was represented by his colleague from Alexandretta—Consul Hoffmann. Consul Hoffmann informed me that the German Embassy had been advised in detail about the events in the interior in repeated reports from the Consulates at Alexandretta, Aleppo and Mosul. He told me that a report of what I had seen with my own eyes would, however, be welcome as a supplement to these official documents and as a description in detail. He said he would convey my report to the Embassy at Constantinople by a sure agency. I now worked out a report on the desired lines, giving an exact description of the state of things in the han opposite our school.

Consul Hoffmann wished to add some photographs which he had taken in the han himself. The photographs displayed piles of corpses, among which children still alive were crawling about.

In its revised form the report was signed by my colleague, Dr. Graeter (higher grade teacher), and by Frau Marie Spiecker, as well as by myself. The head of our institution, Director Huber, also placed his name to it and added a few words in the following sense: "My colleague Dr. Niepage's report is not at all exaggerated. For weeks we have been living here in an atmosphere poisoned with sickness and the stench of corpses. Only the hope of speedy relief makes it possible for us to carry on our work."

The relief did not come. I then thought of resigning my post as higher grade teacher in the Technical School, on the ground that it was senseless and morally unjustifiable to be a representative of European civilisation with the task of bringing moral and intellectual education to a nation if, at the same time, one had to look on passively while the Government of the country was abandoning one's pupils' fellow-countrymen to an agonising death by starvation.

Those around me, however, as well as the head of our institution, Director Huber, dissuaded me from my intention. It was pointed out to me that there was value in our continued presence in the country, as eye-witnesses of what went on. Perhaps, it was suggested, our presence might have some effect in making the Turks behave more humanely towards their unfortunate victims, out of consideration for us Germans. I see now that I have remained far too long a silent witness of all this wickedness.

Our presence had no ameliorating effect whatever, and what we could do personally came to little. Frau Spiecker, our brave, energetic colleague, bought soap, and all the women and children in our neighbourhood who were still alive—there were no men left—were washed and cleansed from lice. Frau Spiecker set women to work to make soup for those who could still assimilate nourishment. I, myself, distributed two pails of tea and cheese and moistened bread among the dying children every evening for six weeks; but when the Hunger-Typhus or Spotted-Typhus spread through the city from these charnel houses, six of us succumbed to it and had to give up our relief work. Indeed, for the exiles who came to Aleppo, help was really useless. We could only afford those doomed to death a few slight alleviations of their death agony.

What we saw with our own eyes here in Aleppo was really only the last scene in the great tragedy of the extermination of the Armenians. It was only a minute fraction of the horrible drama that was being played out simultaneously in all the other provinces of Turkey. Many more appalling things were reported by the engineers of the Bagdad Railway, when they came back from their work on the section under construction, or by German travellers who met the convoys of exiles on their journeys. Many of these gentlemen had seen such appalling sights that they could eat nothing for days.

One of them, Herr Greif, of Aleppo, reported corpses of violated women lying about naked in heaps on the railway embankment at Tell-Abiad and Ras-el-Ain. Another, Herr Spiecker, of Aleppo, had seen Turks tie Armenian men together, fire several volleys of small shot with fowling-pieces into the human mass, and go off laughing while their victims slowly perished in frightful convulsions. Other men had their hands tied behind their back and were rolled down steep cliffs. Women were standing below, who slashed those who had rolled down with knives until they were dead. A Protestant pastor who, two years before, had given a very warm welcome to my colleague, Doctor Graeter, when he was passing through his village, had his finger nails torn out.

The German Consul from Mosul related, in my presence, at the German club at Aleppo that, in many places on the road from Mosul to Aleppo, he had seen children's hands lying hacked off in such numbers that one could have paved the road with them. In the German hospital at Ourfa there was a little girl who had had both her hands hacked off.

In an Arab village on the way to Aleppo Herr Holstein, the German Consul from Mosul, saw shallow graves with freshly-buried Armenian corpses. The Arabs of the village declared that they had killed these Armenians by the Government's orders. One asserted proudly that he personally had killed eight.

In many Christian houses in Aleppo I found Armenian girls hidden who by some chance had escaped death; either they had been left lying exhausted and had been taken for dead when their companions had been driven on, or, in other cases, Europeans had found an opportunity to buy the poor creatures for a few marks from the last Turkish soldier who had violated them. All these girls showed symptoms of mental derangement; many of them had had to watch the Turks cut their parents' throats. I know poor things who have not had a single word coaxed out of them for months, and not a smile to this moment. A girl about fourteen years old was given shelter by Herr Krause, Depôt Manager for the Bagdad Railway at Aleppo. The girl had been so many times ravished by Turkish soldiers in one night that she had completely lost her reason. I saw her tossing on her pillow in delirium with burning lips, and could hardly get water down her throat.

A German I know saw hundreds of Christian peasant women who were compelled, near Ourfa, to strip naked by the Turkish soldiers. For the amusement of the soldiers they had to drag themselves through the desert in this condition for days together in a temperature of 40° Centigrade, until their skins were completely scorched. Another witness saw a Turk tear a child out of its Armenian mother's womb and hurl it against the wall.

There are other occurrences, worse than these

few examples which I give here, recorded in the numerous reports which have been sent in to the Embassy from the German Consulates at Alexandretta, Aleppo and Mosul. The Consuls are of opinion that, so far, probably about one million Armenians have perished in the massacres of the last few months. Of this number, one must reckon that at least half are women and children who have either been murdered or have succumbed to starvation.

It is a duty of conscience to bring these things into publicity, and, although the Turkish Government, in destroying the Armenian nation, may only be pursuing objects of internal policy, the way this policy is being carried out has many of the characteristics of a general persecution of Christians.

All the tens of thousands of girls and women who have been carried off into Turkish harems, and the masses of children who have been collected by the Government and distributed among the Turks and Kurds, are lost to Christendom, and have to accept Islam. The abusive epithet "giaour" is now heard once again by German ears.

At Adana I saw a crowd of Armenian orphans marching through the streets under a guard of Turkish soldiers; their parents have been slaughtered and the children have to become Mohammedans. Everywhere there have been cases in which adult Armenians were able to save their lives by readiness to accept Islam.

Sometimes, however, the Turkish officials first made the Christians present a petition to be received into the communion of Islam, and then answered very grandly, in order to throw dust in the eyes of Europeans, that religion is not a thing to play with. These officials preferred to have the petitioners killed. Men like Talaat Bey and Enver Pasha, when prominent Armenians brought them presents, often tempered their thanks with the remark that they would have been still better pleased if the Armenian givers had made their presents as Mohammedans. A newspaper reporter was told by one of these gentlemen: "Certainly we are now punishing many innocent people as well. But we have to guard ourselves even against those who may one day become guilty." On such grounds Turkish statesmen justify the wholesale slaughter of defenceless women and children. A German Catholic ecclesiastic reported that Enver Pasha declared, in the presence of Monsignore Dolci, the Papal Envoy at Constantinople, that he would not rest so long as a single Armenian remained alive.

The object of the deportations is the extermination of the whole Armenian nation. This purpose is also proved by the fact that the Turkish Government declines all assistance from Missionaries, Sisters of Mercy and European residents in the country, and systematically tries to stop their work. A Swiss engineer was to have been brought before a court-martial

because he had distributed bread in Anatolia to the starving Armenian women and children in a convoy of exiles. The Government has not hesitated even to deport Armenian pupils and teachers from the German schools at Adana and Aleppo, and Armenian children from the German orphanages, without regard to all the efforts of the Consuls and the heads of the institutions involved. The Government also rejected the American Government's offer to take the exiles to America on American ships and at America's expense.

The opinion of our German Consuls and of many foreigners resident in the country about the Armenian massacres will some day become known through their reports. I can say nothing about the verdict of the German officers in Turkey. I often noticed, when in their company, an ominous silence or a convulsive effort to change the subject when any German of warm sympathies and independent judgment began to speak about the Armenians' frightful sufferings.

When Field-Marshal von der Goltz was travelling to Bagdad and had to cross the Euphrates at Djerablus, there was a large encampment of half-starved Armenian exiles there. Just before the Field-Marshal's arrival, so I was told at Djerablus, these unhappy people, the sick and dying with the rest, were driven under the whip several kilometres away over the nearest hills. When von der Goltz

passed through, there were no traces left of the repulsive spectacle; but when I visited the place shortly afterwards with some of my colleagues, we found corpses of men, women and children still lying in out-of-the-way places, and fragments of clothes, skulls and bones which had been partly stripped of the flesh by jackals and birds of prey.

The author of the present report considers it out of the question that, if the German Government is seriously determined to stem the tide of destruction even at this eleventh hour, it would find it impossible to bring the Turkish Government to reason. If the Turks are really so well inclined to us Germans as people say, cannot they have it pointed out to them how seriously they compromise us before the whole civilised world, if we, as their Allies, have to look on passively while our fellow-Christians in Turkey are slaughtered in their hundreds of thousands, their women and daughters violated, their children brought up as Mohammedans? Cannot the Turks be made to understand that their barbarities are reckoned to our account, and that we Germans will be accused either of criminal complicity or of contemptible weakness, if we shut our eyes to the frightful horrors which this war has produced, and seek to pass over in silence facts which are already notorious all over the world? If the Turks are really as intelligent as is said, should it be impossible to convince them that,

in exterminating the Christian nations in Turkey, they are destroying the productive factors and the intermediaries of European trade and general civilisation? If the Turks are as far-sighted as is said, can they blind themselves to the danger that, when the civilised States of Europe have taken cognisance of what has been happening in Turkey during the war, they may be driven to the conclusion that Turkey has forfeited the right to govern herself and has destroyed once for all any belief in her tolerance and capacity for civilisation? Will not the German Government be standing for what is best in Turkey's own interest, if it hinders Turkey from ruining herself morally and economically?

In this report I hope to reach the Government's ear through the accredited representatives of the German nation.

When the Reichstag sits in Committee, these things must no longer be passed over, however painful they are. Nothing could put us more to shame than the erection at Constantinople of a Turco-German palace of friendship at huge expense, while we are not in a position to shield our fellow-Christians from barbarities unparalleled even in the blood-stained history of Turkey. Would not the funds collected be better spent in building orphanages for the innocent victims of Turkey's barbarities?

After the massacres of 1909 a kind of reconciliation banquet was held at Adana, in which the heads of the Armenian clergy took part

as well as high Turkish officials. The German Consul, Büge, who was present, related that an Armenian ecclesiastic got up and said in his speech: "It is true that we Armenians have lost much in these days of massacre—our men, our women, our children and our goods. But you Turks have lost more; you have lost your honour."

If we persist in treating the massacres of Christians as Turkey's internal affair, which is not important for us except as making us sure of the Turks' friendship, then we must change the whole orientation of our German culture policy. We must stop sending German teachers to Turkey, and we teachers must give up telling our pupils in Turkey about German poets and philosophers, German culture and German ideals—to say nothing of German Christianity.

Three years ago I was sent by the Foreign Office as higher grade teacher to the German Technical School at Aleppo. The Prussian Provincial School Board at Magdeburg specially enjoined upon me, when I went out, to show myself worthy of the confidence reposed in me in the grant of furlough to take up this educational post at Aleppo. I should not be fulfilling my duty as a German official and an accredited representative of German culture, if I consented to keep silence in face of the atrocities of which I was a witness, or to look on passively while the pupils entrusted to me were driven out to die of starvation in the desert.

If anyone enquires into the motives which induced the Young Turkish Government to decree and carry out these frightful measures against the Armenians, one might give the following explanation :—

The Young Turk has the European ideal of a united national state always floating before his eyes. He hopes to turkify the non-Turkish Mohammedan races—Kurds, Persians, Arabs, and so on—by administrative methods and through Turkish education, reinforced by an appeal to their common interests as Mohammedans. The Christian nations—Armenians, Syrians and Greeks—alarm him by their cultural and economic superiority, and he sees in their religion an obstacle to turkifying them by peaceful means. They have, therefore, to be exterminated or converted to Mohammedanism by force. The Turks do not suspect that, in doing this, they are sawing off the branch on which they are sitting themselves. Who is to bring progress to Turkey if not the Greeks, Armenians and Syrians, who constitute more than a quarter of the population of the Empire?

The Turks, the least gifted of all the races living in Turkey, are themselves only a minority of the population, and are still far behind even the Arabs in civilisation. Where is there any Turkish trade, Turkish handicraft, Turkish manufacture, Turkish art, Turkish science? Even their law, religion and language, so far as it

can be given literary form, have been borrowed from the conquered Arabs.

We teachers who have been teaching Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, Turks and Jews in German schools in Turkey for years, can only declare that the pure Turks are the most unwilling and incapable of all our pupils. When, for once in a way, a Turk achieves something, in nine cases out of ten one can be certain that one is dealing with a Circassian, an Albanian, or a Turk with Bulgarian blood in his veins. From my personal experience I can only prophesy that the Turks proper will never achieve anything in trade, manufacture or science.

We are told now in German newspapers of the Turks' hunger for education and of how they are thronging eagerly to learn German. There are even reports of language courses for adults which have been started in Turkey. They are certainly started, but with what results? They go on to tell one of a language course at a Technical School which opened with twelve Turkish teachers as pupils. The author of this story forgets, however, to add that, after four lessons, only six pupils put in an appearance; after five lessons, five; after six lessons, four, and, after seven lessons, only three, so that after eight lessons the course came to an end, through the laziness of the pupils, before it had properly begun. If the pupils had been Armenians they would have persevered until the end of the school year, learnt patiently, and

come away with a respectable mastery of the German language.

What is Germany's duty and, indeed, the duty of every civilised Christian nation in face of the Armenian massacres? We must try every means of saving the half million of Armenian women and children who may still be alive in Turkey to-day, and who are abandoned to death by starvation, from an end which would be a disgrace to the whole civilised world. The hundreds of thousands of deported women and children who have been left lying on the borders of the Mesopotamian desert, and on the roads leading thither, can only maintain their miserable existence a short time longer. How long can people really support life by picking grains of corn out of horse-dung and depending for the rest upon grass? Months of insufficient nourishment and the prevailing dysentery will have brought countless numbers into a state past help. But at Konia a few thousand Armenians are still alive—educated people from Constantinople, who were in easy circumstances before their deportation, doctors, writers, merchants—and these could still be helped before they too succumb to the fate that threatens all. There are 1,500 Armenians in good health—men, women and children, including grandmothers sixty years old and many children of six and seven—who are still at work on a section of the Bagdad Railway between Eiran and Entilli, near the big tunnel, breaking stones

and shovelling earth. For the moment they are being looked after by Herr Morf, Superintendent Engineer of the Bagdad Railway; but the Turkish Government has registered their names too. As soon as their work is finished, as it will be in perhaps two or three months' time from now, and they are no longer wanted, "new homes will be assigned to them,"—that is, the men will be taken off and slaughtered, the pretty women and girls will find their way into harems, the remainder will be driven hither and thither without food through the desert until all is over.

The Armenian nation has a claim to German help. When Armenian massacres threatened to break out in Cilicia several years ago, a German warship appeared off Mersina. The Commander called on the Armenian Katholikos at Adana and assured him that, so long as Germany had any influence in Turkey, massacres like those under Abd-ul-Hamid would be impossible. The same assurance was given by the German Ambassador, von Wangenheim, to the Armenian Patriarch and to the President of the Armenian National Council in an interview last April.*

Even apart from our common duty as Christians, we Germans are under a special obligation to stop the complete extermination of the half-million Armenian Christians who still survive. We are Turkey's allies and, after the elimination of the French, English and Russians, we are the

* 1915.

only foreigners who have any say in Turkish affairs. We may indignantly refute the lies of our enemies abroad, who say that the massacres have been organised by German Consuls. We shall not be able to dissipate the Turkish nation's conviction that the Armenian massacres were ordered by Germany, unless energetic steps are at last taken by German diplomatists and officers. And even if we cleared ourselves of everything but the one reproach that our timidity and weakness in dealing with our ally had prevented us from saving half a million women and children from slaughter or death by starvation, the image of the German War would be disfigured for all time in the mirror of history by a hideous feature.

It is utterly erroneous to think that the Turkish Government will refrain of its own accord even from the destruction of the women and children, unless the strongest pressure is exercised by the German Government. Only just before I left Aleppo last May,* the crowds of exiles encamped at Ras-el-Ain on the Bagdad Railway, estimated at 20,000 women and children, were slaughtered to the last one.

* 1916.



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Armenian Mother and Child
1915

*Courtesy of Harry S. Nakashian
and John K. Garabedian*

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