



THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH

By Nevart Artzrouni

*Translated by Antranig Chelobian
(see his letter of Jan. 21, 1969.)*

(Armenian Catholicosate Press, Antilias, Lebanon, 1965)

I am from Sivaz, in central Turkey. My father was killed by the Turks with an axe before the deportations. We were four sisters: Zavik, Zarouhi, Hayganoush and I, Nevart. When we grew up my mother sent us to the American High School of Sivaz.

After graduating from the high school, Zavik continued her education in Harput College and got married later in the States. Zarouhi got married with an Armenian doctor in Tokat and had four children. Hayganoush graduated from the American High School and got a job in the Aramian School as teacher. Daniel Varoujan, the famous poet, was a teacher in the same school. Later he left for Istanbul.

I graduated from the same high school in 1912. We moved to Tokat and settled there. Hayganoush and I started teaching.

June, 1915. Final exams were approaching. It was a Friday, and, as usual, the students assembled into the big hall. There was a program - songs, declamations and a short play.

The janitor entered and said, "The gendarmes are here and they want the Prelate." He had hardly finished the sentence when the gendarmes burst in, guns in their hands. They said to the Prelate, "The governor wants you", and they led him out.

The managers of the school told everybody to go home. We entered the classrooms and dispersed the students in small groups. We were overtaken by fear and anxiety.

As soon as we entered the street, our suspicions turned into reality. Hundreds of young men, hands tied behind on their backs, heads bent forward, were marching forward. Women and children, weeping, were following them and trying to approach their dear ones, but the gendarmes, hitting them with their guns, were keeping them away.

My sister Hayganoush and I were teaching in the same school. Together we reached home. We locked the doors and for days we didn't dare go out. Looking through the windows, we could see gendarmes everywhere. They were rounding up all Armenian men.

One day they knocked at our door. A gendarme dashed into the house, searched the rooms, and, finding my mother, hauled her out. My sister and I, weeping, followed her. They entered into a khan near the serai. We wanted to go in, but they didn't let us. By and by they filled the khan with women. Waiting there until evening in vain, we went to my elder sister Zarouhi's house and told her the story.

We passed the night at my sister's house without being able to sleep. In the morning we went to the khan taking some provisions to my mother. There were lots of people trying to get in by bribing the guard. We paid one gold Pound and went in. There was terrible noise. Hundreds of women were packed in a dark little hall. They were weeping and uttering prayers. Finally we found our mother. She looked pale and exhausted. All the women detained in the khan were above 30 or 35 years of age. Younger girls and women were to stay at home. My mother insisted that we return back to my elder sister Zarouhi's house, but we refused. We stayed there for a week. They were boarding the women in wagons and carts and taking them to unknown destinations.

After some days it was our turn. They hauled my mother out. We ran after her but were whipped back. She implored us to go to my sister's house.

Next day we received a note from her:

"My dear girls,

"When the governor has heard that I am your mother, he sent somebody saying that if I allow you to be married to his sons, he will spare my life. He wants to see you. Do not show up to him. Don't renounce your faith, because, if you do, God will renounce you in Heaven in front of the angels."