

INTRODUCTION

The clinical laboratory at Walter Reed General Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland had been the scene of my war effort. The armistice had been signed, but the prospect of demobilization of the hospital services seemed poor indeed. The year that had passed had been challenging to me, a chemist, devoted as it was to the establishment of modern biochemical procedures for the examination of blood. Overseas duty, which each of us in the laboratory desired, seemed no longer possible while hospital facilities for the returning veterans continued to be needed.

Working near me in the biochemical laboratory were Captain Richard Bell and Lt. Edward Doisy, formerly associates of Harvard's Professor Otto Folin, famed for his methods of analysis applied to small specimens of blood. My own training in this field after enlistment had been at the Rockefeller Institute, ^{where} methods developed by Benedict of Cornell University and Van Slyke of the Rockefeller Institute ^{were used,} hence there was friendly rivalry between us.

Passing my desk one morning Captain Bell paused to chat. "Kerr", he began, "I've been offered two chances to go abroad! An expedition is going to Russia, and another to Turkey, and each of them needs a chemist."

"You are lucky", I replied, "Which one are you going to accept?"

"I can't make up my mind. Which do you think would be the more interesting?"

"The one to Turkey would appeal more to me", I said.

Two days later Captain Bell stood watching me set up the Van Slyke apparatus for determining the urea in blood samples



which had just come from the hospital.

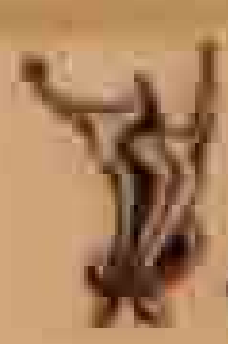
" I have decided to accept neither one of those offers. Would you like me to suggest your name for the expedition to Turkey?"

"Yes, I would!" was my reply, and only then did I begin to inquire about the purpose of the expedition.

Henry Morgenthau represented the United States as ambassador in Turkey from 1914 to 1916, and consequently was in close touch with the Turkish officials and the foreign diplomats in Constantinople at the outbreak of World War 1. Early in the summer of 1915 he began to receive reports that a mass deportation of Armenians was in progress all over Anatolia. Caravans of the deportees were being herded towards the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts. In Constantinople itself, about six hundred of the Armenian elite were arrested -- two hundred and twenty five of them on April 24 -- and deported to the towns of Ayash, Chankiri, and Kalejik, near Ankara. Many were held in the prison at Ayash before execution. One who escaped was Aram Andonian, of whom we shall hear later. The remainder of the Armenian community in Constantinople were not molested, presumably so that the foreign residents and officials might not understand what was going on. Nevertheless reports reached the American embassy in Constantinople from missionaries in the interior, and from consular officers in various cities concerning the deportations. Morgenthau passed these reports on to the State Department.

The story was made available to the western world by the publication of "Ambassador Morgenthau's Story" in October 1918. The deportations, which had begun as early as April 1915, continued throughout that summer. Until the end of the war in the fall of 1918 little was known outside of Turkey about the fate of the Armenians. *

* In 1916 Viscount James Bryce had presented to the British Parliament a series of documents about the deportation and massacre of the Armenians, based on reports from eye-witnesses. This was published as "The Blue Book", entitled "The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. London, 1916.



Reports gleaned from German officers, from certain missionaries and from Consul Jackson in Aleppo all indicated oppression and death from hunger, exhaustion and actual massacre on a scale unknown in modern times.

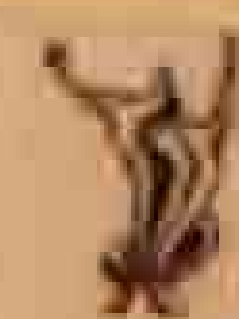
Ambassador Morgenthau cabled to the State Department in September 1915 urging that a committee be formed to raise funds and to provide means for saving the Armenians. His cable ended with the statement:

"The destruction of the Armenian race in Turkey is rapidly progressing."

This message was forwarded to Dr. James L. Barton, Foreign Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Boston, which already had an important program of activity in Asia Minor. Dr. Barton immediately telegraphed Cleveland Dodge in New York, asking him to convene those individuals who knew the Near East and were capable of taking action in this emergency.

Those who met in Mr. Dodge's office the next day, September 16, included representatives from every American educational institution and Mission in the Near East. This group agreed to raise immediately \$100,000 to be administered by Ambassador Morgenthau for relief of the refugees. But before the Committee disbanded some eight years later, \$91,000,000 in cash and \$25,000,000 worth of food and supplies had passed through its hands. The need had proved to be far greater than the Ambassador had estimated.

When the Allied armies under General Allenby won their great victory in Palestine in the fall of 1918 and advanced northwards to Aleppo, the Turks agreed to an armistice. At this news 200,000 Armenians in Syria who had survived the massacres and the hardships of the migration from Anatolia, and finally the famine in Syria during three years of war, appealed to the British and French for help.



And in the Caucasus were 500,000 more who had fled from the Turks following Enver Pashs's campaigns against Russia during the winter of 1914 - 1915. The British forces which occupied this area after the Armistice reported that 200,000 of these refugees were on the verge of starvation, and that nothing less than \$12,500,000 would suffice to feed them during the next six months. *(Morganthau, p.122)

The salvation of these refugees and repatriation to their native villages became the immediate problem of the victorious Allied armies, but over a longer period that of the Near East Relief. Faced with this problem, Dr. Barton's committee decided to send expeditions to Turkey and Syria with the personnel, equipment and supplies needed for a massive effort in relief. Thus was born the American Committee for Relief in the Near East. Its symbol -- a white star with the letters ACRNE between its points -- became well known all over the Near East within the next few months. Later the name was abbreviated to "Near East Relief".

The Administrative Committee planned to establish fifteen centers in various areas, each with its own hospital. Two base laboratories were also to be set up, one in Caesarea (Anatolia), the other in Aleppo, to serve the outlying hospitals with special services. Dr. Robert A. Lambert of Yale University's Department of Pathology recruited the laboratory personnel for the fifteen hospitals and the base laboratories. For these he wanted two 'clinical chemists'.

A few days after my conversation with Captain Bell at Walter Reed Hospital an official invitation came to me by mail. I showed this to Major Nichols, chief of the laboratory services, and requested my release from the army. He objected, and insisted on accompanying me to the Surgeon General's office in Washington for a show-down. There he conferred with his own superior. Shortly afterwards he came out and



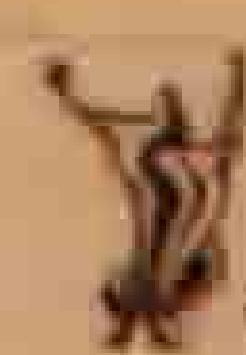
said "You win. They have orders to release everyone whom that organization asks for !"

My discharge papers were dated January 22, 1919. Before proceeding to New York for embarkation I visited my parents in Darby, Pennsylvania. They had been astonished, of course, when I wrote them that I was headed for Turkey, but were relieved at the thought that the war was over -- an idea that was soon to be dispelled. An elderly Armenian friend came to bid me goodbye, and said:

"Don't go to Constantinople. Dirty city! "

In New York the members of the expedition -- some two hundred and fifty-- assembled and waited for orders. Practically all of the men and the nurses had been recruited from the army. The very day before the party was to board ship, the men were ordered to discard their army uniforms and to wear civilian clothes. Because the time available would not permit any alterations after purchase, and no one had such clothes with him, all agreed to disregard the order, but of course replaced military insignia with the ACRNE star which was sewn onto shoulder and hat. In Turkey the uniform undoubtedly gave us prestige that we would not have enjoyed in civilian dress.

While the problem of transport for our party was being negotiated, the Executive Committee decided that a small Commission should proceed to Europe and Turkey to prepare the way for the larger group. This Commission of ten, led by Dr. Barton, sailed on the Mauretania for England on January 4, 1919. In London, aided by Viscount Bryce, they received assurances from the government officials that British officers in the field would cooperate in every way. They were also given the privilege of using, without charge, the huge warehouses at Derindje on the Gulf of Ismid, where the freight terminus of the Constantinople - Bagdad railway was located.



From London the Commission proceeded to Paris, leaving two of their number to maintain contact with the French government and with ^{Wilson} President/at the Peace Conference, which was then in session at Versailles. Mr. Arthur James negotiated with the French officials for rail transport to move the main party from Brest to Marseille, and with the British representatives he arranged for a ship to carry the same group from Marseille to Constantinople.

The other members of the Commission traveled to Rome, again to secure the cooperation of the Italian government, for the Allied forces had already assigned to Italy a portion of southern Anatolia. From Rome the commission^{ers} went on to Constantinople, where Dr. William Peet, for many years Treasurer of the American Board of Missions in Turkey, and Dr. Barton were on familiar territory.*

* Story of Near East Relief. James L. Barton, MacMillan, New York, 1930.

During January three ship-loads of supplies - the first of these being the Mercurius -- sailed from New York to the Gulf of Ismid and unloaded directly into the German warehouses at Derindje. Still earlier the S.S. Caesar had sailed for Beirut with food supplies for the Lebanese, who were dying of starvation in their villages and in the streets of Beirut. The French fleet had maintained a blockade of the eastern Mediterranean coast, all of which was Turkish territory. Although wheat was actually rotting in storage in Lebanon, the Governor -- Jemal Pasha -- withheld it from the market, possibly to punish the Lebanese, who were traditionally friendly to the French.. The French admiral agreed to allow the Caesar to pass through the blockade, with the understanding that the food would be distributed by the Americans.. At the last minute Jemal Pasha refused permission for the Caesar to dock at Beirut, ordering that it should unload at Jaffa, where he would direct the distribution. Mistrusting this



arrangement, those in charge of the operation sent the ship to Egypt, where the supplies were sold to the Red Cross.*

* On the Caesar were wedding presents for Miss Dora Eddy, who was to become the bride of Harold Close, Professor of Chemistry at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. Dora never learned who became the beneficiary of these gifts.

The need for relief in Lebanon after the Armistice was acute, hence the Near East Relief expanded its program to that area. David Zimmerman tells how that expedition reached Lebanon.

Journey to Beirut on the S.S. Pensacola.

"My group, headed by Dr. Clarence D. Ussher from the Mission at Van in Turkey, sailed from New York on January 19, 1919 on the S.S. Pensacola, a confiscated German freighter. Beirut was our destination, but we made a stop at Gibraltar. We were a motley crowd of about fifty. There were lawyers, doctors, missionaries, veterans of the European theater, adventurers and serious workers. *

* In this group were a number of Mennonite workers who proved themselves to be most valuable indeed. Among them were David Zimmerman and Will Stoltzfus.

Our cargo consisted of an assortment of relief supplies, some useful, others worthless: six Reo trucks, four Ford cars, an assortment of tires which were no good, and no spare parts for any of them. There were tons of canned milk, flour and rice, hospital supplies, an X-Ray unit and a delouser.

The food we served ourselves on the way out consisted mainly of horse meat, oatmeal full of rat-droppings, stale bread and bananas. We had a rough trip and practically everyone was seasick. This was fortunate for me, because I elected to do KP duty when no one else wanted to eat. I never skipped a meal.

We arrived in Beirut on February 18 half starved, and my immediate group descended on the Hotel Royal like a cloud of locusts. We ordered the full course dinner, which we wolfed down, and immediately ordered another complete dinner which we disposed of in like manner." *

* Personal communication to the author.

Journey to Brest on the S.S. Leviathan.

In New York our party of two hundred and fifty boarded the huge S.S. Leviathan on February 15, and early the next morning we were under way, bound for Brest. The deterioration of the former German liner 'Vaterland' during four years of use as a troop transport showed in the ruthless conversion of the luxurious salons to war-time hospitals, barracks -style dormitories, etc. for the accomodation of thousands of troops. The ship carried four eight-inch guns on the bow, and two in the stern. Mine-sweeps extended on each side of the bow in order to cut loose and sink any floating mines. After dark the ship sailed with complete black-out precautions, although an armistice had been signed.

At 8.30 on our first day at sea bugles signalled 'Abandon Ship'! "A good precaution to have boat drill". we thought, as each of us put on a life jacket and sought his boat station. Only when the ship filled with smoke did we realize that this was no drill -- there was a serious fire in the hold.

On board , in addition to our group, were a number of young women headed for Paris to serve in the YMCA, and others belonging to the Jewish Welfare Board. An orchestra provided music at dinner in the evenings, and for dancing. The dining room steward had seated us according to a list given him in alphabetic order. On my left was Miss Ethel Leck, later to become the bride of Will Stoltzfus, who at that moment was approaching the harbour of Beirut on the S.S. Pensacola.

It was apparent that much effort had been made in war-time to maintain the morale of the troops by means of good entertainment-- movies, music, athletic events, a good library, etc.

On February 20 we passed the S.S. George Washington with President Wilson on board, returning to America from the Peace Conference. The eight days at sea provided an opportunity for organization, group discussions and language study. Classes in Turkish, Greek, Arabic and Armenian were conducted by members of the group who had spent years of service in Turkey or Syria. Dr. Lambert brought all of his laboratory recruits together for discussion and the assignment of responsibilities.

Various members of the party began to discover relationships based on past association. Thus John Dunaway, Jim Magee, Dr. Byron Harman and I found that we were fellow alumni of the



University of Pennsylvania, and this brought us together on a number of occasions during our service in Turkey.

There was time, too, to learn more about the catastrophe which had befallen the Armenians. Our party included a number of individuals who had been engaged in educational or missionary work of various kinds in Turkey during the period of the deportations. Among these were eye-witnesses of the incidents at Van. Ambassador Morgenthau's Story included reports from Dr. Clarence Ussher, who had sailed on the Pensacola. Since certain Turkish writers *

* One of these was Talaat Pasha, in 'Talaat Pasha's Memoirs', (in Turkish). Bolayir Publishing House, Istanbul, 1958.

have justified the deportation of the entire Armenian population of Anatolia on the basis of the events at Van, this question is reviewed here in some detail, making use of sources not available in 1919. Indeed, historic events which were still to unfold within a year of our sailing on the Leviathan are better understood when viewed in perspective fifty years later. The same mistrust and hatred which lay beneath the relationship of Turk and Armenian at the beginning of war in 1914 were intensified by the attempted genocide of the Armenians in 1915, and caused the final conflicts which resulted in the expulsion of both Armenians and Greeks from Anatolia in 1920.