

[Letter from Sarah Hinsdale Dwight Riggs, HOD's sister]

Marsovan, April 2, 1893

Dear Friends & Children,

I know you are all anxious to know all about what has been happening here during the last two months while we have been writing so briefly and so carefully on account of the uncertainties of the mails. Tomorrow Mr. Newberry leaves us for Cons'ple and I am going to write you as much as I can and send it by him as it will thus go safely. I can write only one letter and so I ask you all to accept a share in it, and pass it on and if some items are stale to some of you they are written for the benefit of others to whom they are not known, and if details are tedious to some of you, they will be welcomed by those who have lived here and know all the people.

Two months ago this morning at about one o'clock the half-finished new building for the Girls' School was burned to the ground. The cruel man who had been here for a week or two investigating an Armenian conspiracy supposed to have its centre in Marsovan had threatened to burn the college. We had been told of his threats by many of our people, but they were evidently panic stricken, afraid of a general massacre of the Christians, &c., and we thought that this was only bluster and that no government official would openly announce his intention to do such a thing, and then really do it. After it was done we continued to hear threats of burning the college itself and the missionary houses. We quadrupled our night watch-force, and for several nights one or other of the gentlemen was up and down all night, keeping watch of the watchmen and surveying the premises. We sent telegrams to Sivas, Constantinople, and Amasia, and got no answers. We sent a letter by private messenger to Mr. King in Amasia, and got an answer saying that he had rec'd our telegram and repeated it to Sivas and Cons'ple. We sent letters by private messenger (often hid in bags of flour) to Samsoun to be mailed by Austrian post from there, and those were the only letters to the minister that reached him from here for weeks. Our teachers Thoumaian and Kayayan were both in prison and their relatives felt that we might get them out if we were more efficient. The students made a disagreeable demonstration one night, in the same line, to add to the grief and care of the poor missionaries. Most of them apologized for the rude words afterward, however. We were rejoiced indeed to hear that the consul was coming to us. Before he got here the gentlemen presented a statement to the kaimakam, in regard to our lack of confidence in the local government and our own consequent appeal to our own government for protection. This had a good deal of effect in quieting things down as far as threats toward us were concerned.

Before making this statement however our carpenter Mr. Nerso was sent for to appear before the government. Everyone sent for in that way was at once thrown into prison, and as Mr. Nerso lives on our premises we felt he could not be carried off by force, so when a polite message in regard to it was not satisfactory, Mr. Riggs himself went over to answer such questions as they might wish to ask Mr. Nerso, and to state that we could not spare him to go into prison unless there was some evident crime for which he must go. We were glad enough to welcome our consul Dr. Jewett on Sunday Feb. 12. He has been with us now nearly two months, living in our family, and we have liked him more and more all the time. While not a very demonstrative man

and not intimately acquainted with missionary work before coming to Turkey, he has put himself at once into sympathy with it and does all in his power to encourage and help us. He has worked steadily ever since he came, examining witnesses and writing careful reports, sending his report (by private messenger to Samsoun) to our minister and other brief reports to the British consul in Trebizond. Dr. J. is British Vice-consul as well as American Consul. We fully expected that as soon as his careful reports reached our minister, our rights would be demanded and our honor vindicated. But we were bitterly disappointed. Not a line sent by the Minister reached the consul! The fact was telegraphed, and the telegram acknowledged, but nothing appeared to be done about that either! At last on March 12, the cruel Khosref-Pasha suddenly left for Sivas. The feeling of the city on the subject was expressed by our Greek letter-carrier, who said when asked where he had gone, Let him go and rot! We never knew until three or four days ago that that was the work of our legation, though we had hoped that it was.

The Public Prosecutor said repeatedly to those brought before him, "The seat of all this Armenian revolution is in the College and the American missionaries are at the bottom of it. They have deceived you, pretending to come into the country for a spirited work, but really wishing to gain our territory. The great mistake made by our Sultan was in ever letting them come; and now they must be turned out as soon as possible!" I do not mean that he said just those words repeatedly; but he expressed all the sentiments. What was our chagrin, then, and that of the consul, who had not been politely treated at all by the officials, to receive on March 14 a telegram from the Minister bidding him to write with suitable persons under the direction of the Public Prosecutor to investigate the origin of the fire and of the placards and to search the premises of the college to see if firearms were found there!

After consultation with the missionaries the consul decided that he could not possibly act on this telegram without word by letter from the Minister, and as he had waited in vain nearly six weeks for a letter, he decided he must go to Cons'ple to talk the matter over. For our safety he left the dragoman here. Dr. Herrick and Miss Jane Smith accompanied him, and they started on Thursday morning. We felt afraid to have the consul go lest we should have more trouble, but to have him stay much longer waiting in darkness! On Sunday came a telegram for Dr. Jewett in reply to his announcing his departure for Cons'ple, saying that Mr. Newberry 1st Secretary of our Legation was coming here and Dr. Jewett must not leave. We transmitted the telegram to him to Samsoun and soon received a telegram from Dr. J. saying that he was coming to Cons'ple with Dr. Herrick and Miss Smith and would return with Mr. Newberry after twelve days! Dr. Jewett cannot imagine how the telegram could have been written so by Dr. Herrick. He did not go to Cons'ple and was expecting to return here even sooner than he did. (I suspect the telegram was tampered with.) So we waited. In the meantime our two teachers with about thirty other prisoners were suddenly taken away from here in the night, handcuffed and in open wagons without beds or bedding in a snowstorm. We had word of it when the zabtichs arrived in town who were to take them, and Mr. Montesants, the dragoman, at once went to the Public Prosecutor and protested against their being taken away since he had promised that everything should be left as it was until Dr. Jewett's return. The protest did no good, however, except perhaps to stop the prisoners at Chorum, where they have been ever since. We waited until Monday, ten days after our friends had left us for Samsoun, and wondered why we got no telegram from them from Cons'ple. It seemed hard to have them all slip away into the darkness too. Suddenly at about 3 p.m. the Consul's cavass appeared and announced that he and Mr. Newberry had come to town

and would soon be here! They thought Mr. Newberry would stay at the government office, however, I had been expecting Mr. N. as our guest. Since Susie had moved her room but not all her furniture to the Girls' School, we have her room for an extra guest. I put it in order at once and the consul's room too, and then waited. A special messenger to the place where they had stopped with a special invitation to Mr. N. to come to our house brought back the consul with the message that Mr. N. was not coming. He had come, sent by the Turkish government entrusted with the investigation of the whole question of the college and the missionaries. He was granted power to summon any witnesses he wished and to do what he pleased. The Minister of Foreign Affairs telegraphed ahead to all officials to do anything that Mr. N. wanted, and to treat him with just as much honor as they would himself. With him was the Private Secretary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jemal Bey, a young Turk who speaks French well but not English. Mr. Newberry wished to appear to have unbiased opinions and so he did not come to live with the missionaries. Well, the short of a long story is that although he appeared rather brusque first and seemed to expect to prove something different from the consul's report, yet now when his work is ended, he is going to bring in a report identical with what the consul sent (except in the matter of the teachers) and is going to demand indemnity for the burned building and the punishment of Khosref Pasha for arson. We have had the pleasure of seeing business done in an American way since he came. He had hardly alighted from his horse when he began investigations. He had already been to examine some witnesses when he came to see us in the evening. And he has worked steadily ever since. It is Ramagan, and he has worked until three or four o'clock in the morning in order to get at the Turks. He has listened kindly to all the petitions of all the people but has refused to do anything himself for the political prisoners because he has been convinced that there is a conspiracy against the government. He has got Bedrossian Hagop Agha released from prison who we were afraid would be detailed for months on a false charge of bribery. He has secured the release of Peghisapet Caloosdian's sister Marinos' husband on bail because his health was suffering. This morning he attended church in the Protestant chapel and I never saw such a jam there. A number of the small boys were put up in the pulpit to make room. The chapel has been crowded ever since these troubles began. Many have been there who never came before, but today it exceeded all previous crowding. As to the [Armenian] teachers the evidence against them is very strong as far as writing goes. Mr. Riggs was invited over to hear the evidence when it was brought before Mr. Newberry. He was appalled at the number of papers and the resemblance to the work of our two teachers. But the writing of the placards was almost exactly like his own in the Turkish words he has written in the college programmes. It took some time for the Public Prosecutor to get it through his head that Mr. Riggs himself wrote the Turkish on the programmes. They thought that someone else connected with the college had written those and the same man had written the placards. So our hope is that the letters written and signed as by our teachers may prove to have been written in imitation of theirs and signed with their names to screw the real writers. We have some reason for our theory besides the fact that the only alternative is to believe those two men guilty of the most bloodthirsty plans & of horrible lies about them. But to prove our theory will be most difficulty. Mr. N. believes the teachers guilty. We are assured however that they shall be tried in a just manner, probably at Angor, with Europeans to examine the evidence who shall have our theory before them. We can but pray and hope for their salvation. I am afraid they cannot be wholly cleared, but if they may only be saved from exile or death, and if only we may know they have not so horribly perjured themselves I shall be content. All the political prisoners are to be tried together. I believe Mihran Manissadjian is one of them in prison in Amasia and said to be cruelly beaten two or

three times a week. Gorgodian Bedros is one of those carried to Chorum. Stepan Azhderian is not yet released, nor Manoogian. We feel that the trouble with the Armenians is not over yet in this city and we do not know what may happen next. But we shall be glad to have our relations with the government righted, at least as they seem likely to be. We do not know how all this will affect our work, but no doubt in the end it will bring a blessing. At present our teaching force is very much overloaded and our outstation work is at a standstill. We are thankful to believe that we have your constant prayers. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world. From a human point of view there is great danger of injury to our college and our whole work from these complicated troubles. But God can prevent it. Pray that he may.

Affectionately,
(signed) S. D. Riggs

Please do not let any of this get into print or be reported back to this land. The real existence of a society for revolution was proved by the murder of a man who had reported to the government the names of some members of the society. This man purported to be a member himself and he turned State's evidence. He was shot by Armenians in the daytime close by the door of the Protestant chapel. He lived for two days after it. He accused the young husband of Parantgian Adabaqarli Hohanne's daughter – of being the one who fired the shot and that young man has now added himself to the number of fugitives belonging to this city. Harootuni Shoumanian is one of the fugitives. There are a good many of them and they did a good deal of mischief this summer and will probably continue their outlawry as soon as the weather grows warmer. They are supposed to be hiding in the city now, in the dress of women or otherwise disguised. Unless God prevents them we are afraid they will stir up trouble and cause bloodshed here yet. Another Armenian was shot in the streets about a week ago. He was a rich wicked man, Kiralian Hagop, and he was very intimate with the Turks. His wounds were not such as to kill him but he died immediately from a fit of apoplexy caused by fright and could not tell who shot him. The change of the Administration at Washington and the lack of experience of our minister in Cons'ple have caused most try delay in the righting of our wrongs. But if only now at last our government will do what Mr. Newberry wants, all may yet be well.