

Harrison Griswold Dwight Papers: Box 10, F9.

Letters from his father, Henry Otis Dwight and other missionaries regarding the massacre of the Armenians in 1893-6. With an introductory letter (1941 Sep 11) from Mary W. Riggs to HGD, written when she sent him the letters.

[HOD's copy of his letter to Judson Smith]

Cons'ple March 8, 1893
Rev. Judson Smith, D.D.

Dear Sir,

The full information at last received from Marsovan raises almost to certainty the probability that Khosref Pasha, the Military Commandant, Ibrahim Turkman Bey, the Chief of Police, and perhaps the Kaimakam (Governor) of Marsovan, planned and ordered the burning of the new Girls' School building.

A number of persons heard Khosref's declarations that the colleges must be burned; it was known beforehand in Amasia that it was to be burned; while it was burning the common people in the streets were talking of the dangers of going to the fire, because Kohsref Pasha with armed men was burning the college: five men, some of them armed, were seen to be sent by Khosref Pasha up the street toward the building shortly before midnight (the fire broke out about one o'clock.) The first missionary to reach the fire after the alarm was given met two men wearing the uniform overcoat, and armed with military rifles, who were coming from the direction of the burning building, and who passed out of the direct gate of the Girls School yard. They had not been admitted at any gate. Two sets of foot-tracks in the snow were found to lead from the south wall of the premises to the burning building. The deduction is inevitable which connects these tracks with these two men, whose presence in the premises cannot otherwise be accounted for. Almost immediately afterwards, within ten or fifteen minutes after the outbreak of the fire, Ibrahim Turkman Bey entered the premises of an adjoining house, and going to the little locked gate in the main wall below the burning building, he broke it open and admitted Khosref Pasha. Khosref passed around the burning house, looked about, arrested the night watchman, and immediately left, although the danger was at its height that the fire would reach the other buildings on the premises. His presence then with an armed guard of 30 men (whom however he left lying under the wall outside), as soon after the outbreak of the fire makes it physically impossible that he could have been as far away as his quarters on hearing the alarm of fire. His singular proceeding in forcing a gate on an unused alley instead of going to the main gate and asking admittance as usual, his arresting the watchman, and leaving immediately seemed an inexplicable freak. But it is no longer inexplicable if we suppose that he had sent his men to fire the building who came in over the wall and passed out while the missionaries were trying to see what armed men were in the premises and to find their commander. In that case he would naturally wish to make for them a private way of escape, to have on hand a force large enough to overpower anyone who might seek to arrest them in case they were discovered. He would naturally in that case come into the premises, look about and see that they had somehow disappeared, and then leave, taking however the precaution of getting into his power the only man in the college likely to have seen them, the night watchman. As soon as by cross-examination he had satisfied himself that the watchman had seen no one he released the man.

The Chief of Police was with Khosref in all the operation of the night, and the two were seen in consultation with the kaimakam before the men were sent toward the college earlier in the evening. Altogether the evidence makes a strong prima facie case against these officials as the responsible incendiaries. It is certainly enough to base a demand by our government for their immediate arrest for trial. If Consul Jewett's report is desired at Washington to justify these statements, there is no reason why such a demand should not be peremptory and firmly adhered to. This Khosref Pasha is an ex-convict. He was a brigand a few years ago and was sentenced to penal servitude for life for murder. Moreover when he was appointed to Marsovan a month or more ago, he was officially reported to the War Department by one of his brother officers as an incendiary, with remonstrances against his being sent on this mission to Marsovan. But he is a Circassian, and it is one of the beauties of the Harem system that Circassian convicts not seldom have female relatives in high places who can secure for them an exchange of the convict's stripes for the Colonel's shoulder straps.

The Turkish Government appears to have adopted two main theses for its defense against any demands for redress by the missionaries: 1. The building which was burned was not American property and therefore the U.S. Gov't. has no right of interference. 2. The college is the centre of a revolutionary conspiracy, and had an active share in the posting of the placards. The first of these theses has not been advanced in any official form, but the Porte has caused it to be telegraphed to the ends of the earth. But it is entirely disposed of by facts. It is true that the lot where the burned building was erected was purchased by the mission through an Ottoman subject, Dr. Altoonian, in order to avoid paying double price. It is true that the deeds held by the mission are in his name, the missionaries having been slack in causing the property to be transferred from his name. It is probably true that the building permit given after the missionaries appeared as principals is in the name of Dr. Altoonian, since a building permit receives the name of the person found in the deeds. On the other hand (a) Dr. Altoonian is well known to be a member of the college faculty, one of its managers, and usual agent of the missionaries in transacting important business with the Government. He was known to be their agent in this transaction as soon as the bargain was completed. (b) When the building permit was taken out, the Americans appeared as principals in dealing with the municipal officers, explaining what they wished to build, pointing out where it was to be, and how it was to be connected with the other buildings on the premises, in the meantime proceeding to extend the main wall of the mission so as to include the new addition in the mission premises. (c) The building was constructed by the Americans, Mr. Riggs supervising the work, and the college carpenter (residing on the premises) acting as foreman of the works, and the material for building reached the works through the main gate of the college grounds. In all this there was not the slightest room for anyone to frame an idea that the house was an Ottoman property. (d) The mission enclosure was made to include the lot, as noted above, as soon as the place was purchased. It had a small back gate of its own, which was kept always locked, and no one could reach the new addition when the building was erected save by passing through the main gate of the mission premises of the college campus.

Consul Jewett has satisfied himself that there is no question that its American ownership was publicly proclaimed and acknowledged ever since the property came into American possession. It was because it was known to be American property that it was burned. The claim that it was Ottoman property is an afterthought and a subterfuge made contemptible by all the facts and by

the personal knowledge of every official, every business man and every street boy in Marsovan. As to the charge of sedition against the college we all know this to be nonsense. When men in the full possession of their senses undertake revolutionary schemes they do not post placards announcing their intention to do something great "in three days" as those placards did. One of the elaborate pieces of folly perpetrated by Khosref is the sober formulation of the hypothesis that the missionaries had arms and ammunition and seditious documents in the building which was burned, and set fire to it in order to destroy these articles before they were discovered by the vigilance of Khosref.

Setting this aside since it pleases the Turkish Government to make this charge, there must be an investigation. Only it must be an investigation by educated men not by brigands and rowdies. And it must be conducted in the presence of the Consul according to judicial methods.

Two weeks before the fire Dr. Herrick asked me to have all the calumnious stories put to rest by asking the minister to order a minute search of the mission premises by the Turkish officers of standing with the assistance of the Consul. All honest investigation will be welcomed. But at the same time it must be remembered that these suspicions do not justify the burning of the building by Turkish officials. That crime is the first question to be disposed of. Until the crime of burning is investigated and the punishment and due redress administered, there ought not to be attention by our Government to any side issues like the charge with which the Porte seeks to draw off attention from the evil doings of its own officers. I say nothing about the placard conspiracy, because there is little or nothing to it beyond the effort of certain Government officers in Asia Minor to make it appear that they have saved the Sultan from great danger. Some Armenians are disloyal, many of them are fools. But the mass of the people are not disloyal enough nor fools enough to risk their necks for the sake of seeing the Government fright at a placard. Unhappily many officials in this city as well as in the interior, knowing that there is no quicker road to promotion than through the discovery of an Armenian plot, make a livelihood out of fictitious plots cunningly contrived. One way in which this is done is seen in Khosref's action toward Prof. Thoumaian. The Prof. had received a letter from his wife in which she said "I have collected £300 for the hospital." Khosref took this letter, translated it to read, "I have collected £300 toward the purpose." Sending the translation to the Governor General he has convinced him that this is a dangerous plot. If the government would cease giving permissions for plots, there would be no more Armenian plots in all of the Eastern provinces at least, and the Empire would have an unwonted peace.

We have waited patiently for our government to learn the facts and it is now time that something was done. The fire took place a month ago, and all this time the families in the mission premises have been enduring the terrible strain of a forlorn hope in the midst of brutal animus with Miss Fritcher broken down and smitten with palsy since the varying terrors of that fearful night; with every day bringing new revelation of hostility gradually forcing them to see what they were loath to believe – that officials of the Turkish Government had deliberately planned to destroy their establishment, and are still moving heaven and earth to raise false testimony which shall forward the scheme, with trusted members of the college circle imprisoned and placed in jeopardy of their lives through the malice of these same conscienceless men. The missionaries have their faith in God unshaken, but the sense of utter removal from all human help has tested their faith to the utmost. The point which must appeal to sympathy is the fact that today to all appearances the

strain is no nearer to relief than it was three weeks ago. Consul Jewett's report will go today to Washington, I am told. I write with the concurrence of Dr. Green, Mr. Barnum, and Mr. Peet (Dr. Pettibone not being here today), to urge that a delegation go to Washington at once to see the Secretary of State, and if possible the President in the interest of securing an immediate consideration of the case and the presentation of such demands from Turkey as shall end the rule of ruffians and the consequent strain at Marsovan. I think you would do well to take Dr. Tracy or Mr. Barton along – they are both thoroughly posted and know the thorough loyalty to the Government of this empire of our acts and our teachings, together with the pains we take to meet all just requirements of the Turkish Government.

I would add that our friends in Marsovan owe much to Consul Jewett for his prompt grasp of the situation and his consequent decision to make the college his abode and their protection the first of his duties. Had he not done this the ruffians whom Khosref Pasha had imported into the town for the purpose would long ago have gone through the houses and college buildings tearing out floors and ceilings as they have done in the houses of the town, on pretense of searching for arms. One word about Consul Jewett's investigations. In the nature of the case it results merely in an ex parte statement, but one upon which our Gov't can stand in framing its demand for an investigation into the acts of the three men named at the beginning of this paper. No real investigation is possible in Marsovan at present. Khosref has done and is doing all in his power to destroy testimony, and the people, in fear of their lives, will not speak save under pledge that the Turkish Government shall know nothing of their testimony. The intimidation of witnesses extends even to their deportation as calumniators of the noble brigand and his friends. Hence after Khosref is arrested and some decent and responsible official with whom the consul can hold relations is sent there, there must be a real investigation with Dr. Jewett's assistance, and with the examination of the thirty or more men who were with Khosref on the night of the fire. This also should be insisted upon by the Government unless it is willing to take the report of Dr. Jewett as sufficient basis for peremptory demand for indemnity. Mr. Thompson has worked unceasingly for us in this crisis and is trying to do all in his power to secure justice. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has promised to remove Khosref, but has not promised to have him tried. It is evident that the hands of Mr. Thompson must be largely tied, until the Government at Washington has time to take the case into serious consideration. I think that you will see the necessity of action to secure this consideration and that promptly. (Signed) H.O. Dwight