

Bad Days at Constantinople

Monday, Sept. 30, 1895

Saturday night I was told on good authority that on Sunday the Hunchagist [Hunchakian] party intended to make some kind of a demonstration of their dissatisfaction at the palace of Yildiz. Sunday passed off quietly, but I could not help feeling anxious. The Hunchagists have had the impression that they can force the powers to act by causing bloodshed in the city. They are absolutely crazy on the subject of bringing about some great change in their way, and tell the people that the English Ambassador wishes a disturbance. Nothing that anyone can say to the people will convince them that this is a lie and impossible.

This morning as soon as I went on the steamer to go to town, I was told that the demonstration is to take place today, and is to be of the nature of a petition to the Grand Vezir. The Armenians have sent him a letter telling him that they are coming and that they will not disturb the peace if they are not hindered by the police but are allowed to present their petition in the way that such things are commonly done in Turkey. This makes the prospect a little less dark unless the police try to hinder the party. Undoubtedly the revolutionists hope that there will be resistance so that a riot may be caused. With good sense on the part of the authorities, everything can pass off quietly, and the demonstration will be a very tame affair.

I went over to Pera about 11, and in coming back could see that something was astir of an unusual nature. The police swarmed in the streets and on the bridge and eyed me in a very embarrassing manner. Just then a fire broke out in Beshik-tach, and it was impossible to tell whether the excitement of the people was on account of the fire or not. While I was on the bridge the Grand Vezir, Said Pasha, came along on his way to the Porte. He had evidently waited at his house until the demonstration should have time to be broken up. Aside from the multitude of police and the unusual crowd at the head of the bridge, I could not see that any great thing was taking place. After I reached the Bible House, I was told that the demonstration had occurred, and had been attacked at Nouri Osmaniye by the troops, when about twenty Armenians had been sabred by the cavalry. Shortly after, a man came in who said that he had seen two fights between Armenians and the police at the Sublime Porte. The first was at the upper door, where the ministers enter. He saw one man carried off as if dead. Later the second fight occurred at the lower door of the Porte, and there he saw two or three fall. He thought it dangerous to linger in that region and left. After the Grand Vezir reached the Porte the police began to make arrests of Armenians. They seemed to search for arms and to seize those who had anything that could be called a weapon, if only a large pocket-knife. I went out from the Bible House rather late, to go to the steamer, and saw nothing but a rather anxious look on the faces of the people. The police were everywhere but I saw no arrests made although I went the longest way to the bridge in order to observe the signs of the atmosphere. The Turks were whispering together and the Armenians were conspicuous by their absence. Many stories were afloat about the result of the fights. The Armenians are said to have killed a Turkish major who fired upon them.

Tuesday, Oct. 1. The Turks at the steamer landing at Hissar were very much occupied with secret whispering, and I thought eyed me askance as I went to the steamer. There was nothing in the paper about the affair of yesterday except a bland sort of declaration that the Armenian hamals and firemen had gathered together at two or three places in the city and had been dispersed by the police, and that under the shadow of the sultan quiet was perfect in the city. There were no Armenians on the steamer and the Armenian shops in the city were mostly shut. A general hush ruled the streets. Everyone spoke in low tones and the coffee houses were deserted. The impression was of a sultry day absolutely still before a thunderstorm. I encountered a number of Softas on the streets who looked very savage and who I observed had revolvers under their long gowns. Altogether the impression of my morning jaunt in the city was not reassuring. It was evident that the Turks are angered by the affair of yesterday and are on the lookout for more trouble, or to make it. The police are patrolling the streets but only by twos, except once in a long while a mounted patrol passes of more men.

On arriving at the Bible House I was at once told that one of the men was at Sirkedji Lakelessi (near the railway station) that morning to take something to the Nicomedia steamer and saw two Armenians killed in the street by a mob. They were in the hands of the police, for what no one knows, and the mob, mostly of hamals, rushed in and beat them to death with clubs. Another man added to the horrible detail that the officer in command of the police called out to the crowd, "don't strike them, don't kill them," and at the same time that he was saying this with his lips, he was nodding approval with his head and motioning with his hand to strike. The worst of these stories is that one cannot tell how much is true, and how much imagination, of the details. Then another came in and said that he had seen two men beaten to death in Galata in the same way. Soon others arrived in great terror saying that in every case where an Armenian is arrested the Softas and the crowd of Turks generally rush in and beat him over the head trying to kill him, and that the police do not resist these attacks on their prisoners. It seems to be [a] regularly understood thing that the Softas are to be allowed to do this. A number of our Bible House people came to me, thinking that I could do something, to beg that I would get protection for them. They were in utter terror of their lives. They say that the Softas are going to make a general massacre, and that at the same time that the police are arresting every Armenian who has anything like a weapon they are allowing the Turkish mob to buy revolvers unmolested. I found from other sources that this was true as to the purchase of revolvers. Then came word that two of the Bible House men, one a printer and the other a hamal, had been arrested and very badly beaten. Help was wanted to secure their release, for it is rumored that they are killing the prisoners in cold blood at the Ministry of Police. A few minutes later word came that Garabed Senakirinian, one of the leading Protestants of Gedik Pasha, was arrested last night and no one knows whether he is alive or dead. He was at the new Gedik Pasha chapel when some Softas came in and ordered the people to stop working in the chapel. "We are not going to allow you to have a chapel here," they said. Garabed Eeffendi went out and spoke to the women of the congregation who have been doing watchman's duty there while the men were at work, telling them to go inside because the Softas looked so fierce. The Softas at once went and complained to the police that he had told the women to stone them, which was false, and the police arrested him. Happily, a Turk standing by had seen the whole performance and told the police that the Softas had lied and got him released. Shortly afterward on some threat from the Softas, the

police rearrested him and sent him to prison. All these things come to me, and everyone looks to me to right all wrongs, as if I were their father or their advocate with the powers that be. They were very bitterly disappointed when I told them that I should not go to the British Embassy to present their case because it is already known, and that I did not believe that the British fleet would necessarily be summoned at once to restore order. The feeling that the appeals of these people produces is one of terrible anxiety, for the stories are heart-rending and the possibility that I might with a clearer inspiration find some way to help them is very wearing upon the nerves. It is very much as if we were in the midst of a military campaign and oppressed with the weight that belongs to the period just before the battle begins, when no one knows just what he will have to do in the next minute. It is a little curious that I have not been disturbed by a sense of fear for ourselves. In the afternoon a man was killed by the mob between the Bible House and the Egyptian bazaar. There is no reason for any of these murders. Someone sees an Armenian going along the street and calls out, "There goes an Armenian," and the whole crowd take up the cry, rush at him and kill him. No one cares to ask who he is or why they have killed him. It is the dreadful Turkish feeling that the Giaour is like a dog and may be killed without compunction by the "people of God." The very curious thing is that the most of those killed are of the poorest class. Our own men in general have not been touched in going to and from the house. It looks as if they kill those whom they think to be without friends, so that they may not be called to account. At evening when I went home the people seemed to be more sullen than ever, and several of the police eyed me so sharply that I expected to be stopped. But none of them ventured to question me. I have taken the precaution to cease carrying my hand bag with papers in it in these days. If the police see such a thing they are filled with curiosity to see what is inside. On opening it they would be sure that my writings and newspapers are arrant treason, and I might have serious trouble by the mere fact of having the bag in my hand. Tuesday is my regular day for working at home. I came down today to the Bible House wholly because of the troublous times, for it is of the greatest importance to know what is going on as early as possible and to watch the course of events in order to take any measures that may be necessary. I was relieved and glad to get safely home and to find all quiet and comfortable.

Wednesday, Oct. 2. The appearance of the people on the steamers and in the city was about the same as yesterday. The papers publish a proclamation ordering all classes of the population to attend to their own affairs and assuring them that the government will see that all malefactors are punished and the fact published. Last evening a man came to the Bible House in great terror, from Donjian's shop, to say that the police had just made a raid upon the shop as a place where arms are being sold to the Armenians. Donjian is a jeweler and curio merchant, a leading member of the Y.M.C.A. and son in law to Pastor Avedis Constantian. All the antique weapons were gathered up by the police as evidence of treason and carried off with Donjian himself to the Ministry of Police. What to do for this poor fellow was the problem and we could do nothing. We concluded that at the Ministry of Police there would be someone wise enough to see that swords from the time of the Crusades and flint-lock pistols of two or three centuries ago are not arms in the sense of the law. This morning I found that he had been released and went around to his shop on my way to the Bible House to congratulate him on his escape. He was badly frightened and nervous but thankful to get off with the loss of his goods, which had been kept by the police, to the value of £20. At the Bible House I found that we have been underestimating the lengths to which Turkish brutality can go, and that Donjian's deliverance is a far greater event than I had supposed. Garabed Senakirian has been released as he was known at the Ministry. He says that of 58 prisoners in the room where he was, he was the only one who had

no beating. While he was being taken into the prison he saw three Armenians beaten to death in the court of the Ministry of Police by the soldiers assembled there. One of these men was still pounded on the head after his skull had been broken in. A prisoner cried out to the soldiers that it is an outrage even for a Turk's conscience to beat a dead body. "If you must beat someone," said he, "beat me for I am alive." The men instantly turned on him and beat him over the head and dragged him bleeding into an underground dungeon. A prisoner told Garabed that he was taken before the examining officer the evening before. The officer took down his name, his address, and his crime, which was that of having been among the crowd with the petitioners. After this the officer left the room, saying to the guards, "Do not hurt any one of these people," and then adding, "Now finish." As soon as the officer left the room, the two guards clubbed the prisoner over the head and threw him into an adjoining room upon a pile of dead bodies. While he was lying there three more men were clubbed to death in the police station and thrown in upon the pile. Later the man contrived to profit by a confusion in the station owing to the admission of a large batch of prisoners, who were sent off to be locked up in the place provided for the less guilty men. He cautiously rose from the floor and joined this party unobserved and so escaped sure death for it seems clear that the police intended to kill every man taken at the time of the demonstration. He saw prisoners brought from the street bound and bayoneted by the troops instantly on their arrival without inquiry and entirely unknown to any there. On Tuesday morning the police were overheard to say that orders had come not to kill anymore. One of our friends was arrested as he was going home from his shop Monday night. No one had any charge against him save that he is an Armenian. He was not beaten in the street as so many had been, but the instant he entered the court of the Ministry of Police the officers standing there showered blows from clubs upon his head and shoulders. He ran for the door of the receiving room and by the time he reached it his skull had been laid bare and he was deluged with his own blood. Then the officials said, "This is a wounded man he must go to the hospital." Thus he became a hospital patient in a dangerous condition within ten minutes after he entered the Ministry of Police in perfect health. The city missionary at Kassisa Pasha came to us with a horrible story. The previous night a party of Kurds attacked a lodging place where thirty five Armenians were staying and which was right opposite to his own house. The Kurds killed all of them with clubs and knives, the police standing by and not interfering. After midnight scavenger carts were brought by the officers, the bodies stripped of their clothing were piled in the carts and were sent away; at early dawn the police brought men to try to hide or remove the pools of blood that stood in the streets in front of where the butchery occurred. The poor preacher was in an awful condition of nervous terror, as may be imagined after such an experience. A bakery near the landing at Scutari was attacked at about the same time and all the people, seven Armenians, were killed by the mob. At Chukur Chishme Han in Stamboul forty or fifty Armenians were killed in the same way. All of these people were common working men whose only crime was that they were Armenians.

I had been rather anxious yesterday for the effect of the nervous strain upon the ladies at Gedik Pasha but did not understand yesterday the magnitude of the crimes that were being committed and so did not go over to see them. These stories showed that I must go over there to comfort and devise any needful measures of relief for them. But first I went to see the minister, Mr. Terrell, so as to be sure that he knows the awful condition of affairs. I also asked him to send his secretary ostentatiously to call at the Gedik Pasha house in order to impress the people with the

fact that the people there are Americans and under the protection of the Legation. He kindly offered to go himself and did so. The call had a very good effect not only on the police but on the whole population; the Armenians beleaguered in their houses were very much cheered by seeing the American minister riding through the streets. Mr. Terrell saw enough to convince him of the tremendous peril of the situation and went at once to the Ministry of Police to demand official protection for all Americans. Later in the day I went over to Gedik Pasha, ostensibly to call on Mrs. Newell on the occasion of her arrival from America, but really to get a clear idea of the general situation and of theirs in particular. Just before I left the Bible House, there was a rather sharp shock of an earthquake. As soon as Mrs. Newell saw me she said, "It takes an earthquake to bring you here." I then remembered that since the earthquakes of July 1894, when I went over to see how the ladies had passed the danger, I had been only once in their house. The three ladies were in good spirits and full of pluck. They had not seen any disposition to attack their house and felt that there would be no such attack. They had seen the Softas roaming in parties of ten or more through their street, armed with revolvers, daggers, and clubs of a uniform pattern. They had heard the horrid sound of the blows of the clubs striking on the heads of the victims in the street, which they said sounded like pistol shots, and they had comforted and helped the poor women left alone in their houses by the arrest of their men. But no harm had come near them and they were not inclined to wish any help. It is a remarkable fact that the women have not been molested in any case. Even in cases where the mob broke into and robbed houses, they did no harm to the women, unless in one instance which has been reported to me, but which I have not been able to verify.

In the streets going and coming there was less of disagreeable hate in the faces of the Turks. The Softas were almost entirely absent and they had not their clubs, although I could detect the revolver under the long robe. All the Armenian shops are closed, and not an Armenian is seen on the street. The Armenian dwelling houses are closely shut and silent. In fact, the Armenian part of the city appears uninhabited.

This afternoon a marked improvement took place in all parts of the city. The police have been reinforced by soldiers and patrols go about in constant circuit. It seems that the worst danger is over. But all wish that some of the foreign ships of war would come up so as to control the mob if the Armenians should commit any more follies. The Turks are threatening a general massacre if the ships come, but that is nonsense. Numbers of Armenians have asked us when the fleet will be here, and I have been obliged to tell them that I am inclined to think that the rising of the Hunchagists has made its coming now impossible unless the government ceases to show the purpose to protect the people generally from the mob. The appeals of these people for advice, the terrible nature of their position, and the utter uselessness of their hoping help from me, make a combination of influences that crush me under the sense of responsibility and impotence. I feel like crying aloud, "Oh, Lord, my burden is greater than I can bear."

Thursday, Oct. 3. No new disturbances have occurred and no more murders are reported. Ninety two bodies have been taken by the authorities to the hospital at Yedi Conde for burial. They are for the most part horribly mangled about the head. This is probably something more

than half of the whole number killed. The bodies are gathered up at night and taken in lighters around the Seven Towers so as to avoid attracting attention. There are three women in the hospital badly wounded by the mob, one of them killed in the fiendish way characteristic of the Sassoun affair.

Oct. 5. Quiet has been preserved for two days now, and we hope the worst is over. In our house all are well and not nervous as might be expected. Isabel [Dwight, his daughter] is brave and cool. The Sultan has sent money presents to the Softas.

(signed) H. O. Dwight