

**JAMES BRYCE'S LETTERS TO  
ARSHAK SAFRASTYAN (1915–1916)**

GINOSYAN N.

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Arshak Safrastian was born on September 13, 1886 in Van. In 1904 at the age of 17, he joined the service in Baksh (Bitlis), as a translator in British Consulate and from 1907 to 1911 was appointed to the post of Vice-Ambassador. He bypassed the provinces of Bitlis, Van, Diarbekir and collected information about the unbearable conditions of Armenians and the Armenian pogroms and massacres. The armenophile movement began its activity in Britain in 1878. At that time James Bryce, the forerunner of the movement, founded the first armenophile organization, “The Anglo-Armenian Association”. The president of the organization was Lord Carnarvon and the secretary was James Bryce.

It should be mentioned that James Bryce was born in May, 1838 in the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland, and in 1846 his family moved to Glasgow where he attended the local university. After graduation, he continued to study at Trinity College of Oxford where he completed the history and law courses. At the end of 1912 during the first Balkan war vivacity started in the armenophile movement anew. At the beginning of 1913 the British-Armenian Committee – the most influential organization was established and continued its dynamic activity until 1924.

In his letters to Mr. Safrastyan, some of which are presented below, J. Bryce asked him to provide some information about the events of Western Armenia and the adopted declaration on the part of the Turks concerning the deportation of Armenians. In one of the letters entitled as “confidential”, James

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Bryce wrote that Mr. Arnold J. Toynbee collected documents concerning the recent events in Armenia for publication on Lord Bryce's behalf. The letters of James Bryce are kept in the national archive of Armenia in printed and scripted versions (f. 412, l. 1, work 989).

In 1915–1916 Mr. Safrastyan published the magazine "Ararat" and in cooperation with Arnold Toynbee and Lord Bryce undertook the publication of such works as "Blue Book" and "Armenians in the Ottoman Empire", which were devoted to the Armenian massacres.

The collection of the evidence of the deportations and massacres of Armenians is due to Lord Bryce; its examination, arrangement, and editing was entrusted to Mr. Arnold Toynbee. A preface by Lord Bryce deals with the credibility of the evidence, and letters on the same subject are appended from Mr. Gilbert Murray (Professor of the Greek language at Oxford University), Mr. Herbert Fisher (Vice-rector at Sheffield University), and a distinguished American lawyer, Mr. Moorfield Storey. There follows a memorandum by Mr. Toynbee on the origin and nature of the documents. The documents themselves are extremely voluminous, filling nearly 600 pages. The documents have been well-edited, the editor singled out four clearly marked groups: (1) Evidence which appeared in German newspapers and was suppressed by the German censor, (2) Documents written by Germans or by neutrals in German employ in the Ottoman Empire, (3) Documents written by neutral eye-witnesses, (4) Evidence by the Armenian and Nestorian natives. In most cases, it has been considered necessary to withhold the names of the witnesses, because their publication would certainly expose persons, now living within the Turks' jurisdiction, to persecution and revenge.

The Blue Book, in fact, presents conclusive evidence of massacres and cruelties perpetrated by the Turks, which can vie with the greatest crimes of human savagery, the pages of history have made us familiar with. It contains a useful summary of the Armenian history up to 1915. It is important to mention that in 1948 Arshak Safrastyan also published the book "Kurds and Kurdistan" in London and in 1957 started the publication of his monumental work "History of Armenia" in two volumes.

**Ginosyan N.**

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Nº 1.

3, Buckingham Gate,  
S.W.

10th August, 1915

You are very welcome to translate my pamphlet into Armenian and publish it in Tiflis. I enclose a few lines such as you desire which may possibly serve by way of introduction.

Meantime the news from Armenia is terrible. The Turks, apparently, are trying to exterminate the whole Armenian people and it would seem as though they were backed up and possibly encouraged by the Germans. I hope your people in Armenia are publishing the facts there and are endeavouring to induce the American Government to address strong remonstrances to the Turkish Government. If you have, as I suppose you have correspondents in America you might write to them upon this subject and supply them with all the information you have obtained regarding the massacres that have happened and the expulsion of innocent inhabitants from their homes to be drive .....<sup>1</sup> Asia Minor and western and northern Arabia and Mesopotamia. I recieved the other day from Boghos Nubar Pasha in Paris a letter containing the short account of what the Turks have been doing and doubtless this and other information is at the disposal of the Armenians in Paris, perhaps of the Armenians here and possibly also of the Armenians in the United States. It should be published there and steps taken to rouse the conscience and feelings of the American people.

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.....<sup>2</sup>

Nº 2

3, Buckingham Gate,  
S.W.

James Bryce

There is no instance in history more striking of the value of national sentiment in preserving the life of a race, stimulating its activities and enabling it

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<sup>1</sup> Unreadable.

<sup>2</sup> Unreadable.

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to render service to the world, than the instance furnished by the history of the Armenian people since the early centuries of the Christian era. Having embraced Christianity about the same time as Christianity triumphed in the Roman Empire and became the dominant faith there from the days of the Emperor Constantine onwards, the Armenian people were thenceforth constantly loyal both to Christianity and to their national idea. They resisted the attacks of the Sassanid kings of Persia and maintained themselves as a sort of outlying bulwark of the Roman Empire until the invading flood of the Turks swept over them in the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ever since they have continued to hold to their religion and to their national sentiment, and to endure oppression and cruelties which have gone beyond those ever continuously inflicted upon any other people, .....<sup>3</sup> the horrible massacres of 1895 and 1896, still fresh in our memory, did not break their spirit, disappointed though they were in the failure of the Christian Powers to come to their assistance. Within the last four months they have had even more terrible sufferings to undergo. At this moment the Turkish Government seems to be engaged in an effort to exterminate the whole people, driving such of them as it does not kill from their homes into distant regions in some of which at least they seem destined to perish by want.

We, in Great Britain, who have long sympathised deeply with the sufferings of the Armenians and have admired their constancy, both to the Christian faith and to their national traditions, earnestly hope that as a better day, and we wish to bid them retain hope, even in this hour of gloom. Surely a people who has suffered so much and yet maintained its ancient life and given constant proof of its intellectual power, will not be allowed by Providence to perish from the earth. Surely some place of usefulness and honour and, let us hope, of peace and prosperity who is reserved for it .....<sup>4</sup>

№ 3.

Confidential

Mr. Arnold J. Toynbee, of Wellington House, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W., who is collecting documents concerning the recent events in Armenia, for

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<sup>3</sup> Unreadable.

<sup>4</sup> Unreadable.

publication on Lord Bryce's behalf, would be glad of assistance in the following points:

- (i). Angora: He possesses no first hand evidence of events there, and needs a narrative from some resident or other witness - an American missionary or an Armenian victim.
- (ii). Zeitoun: item (e.g. a more detailed account from the Pastor Dikran Andressian than the few lines at the beginning of his narrative of Tibal Mousa).
- (iii). Ourfa: item
- (iv). Kaisaria: item
- (v). Adana: item
- (vi). Diyarbakir: item
- (vii). Erzeroum: He possesses a report from the American Consul at Trebizond of a visit to Erzeroum after the deportation, but no account of the deportation itself.
- (viii). "Gotchnag" (American journal published in New York). He has translations of following documents extracted from this journal:-
  - 28<sup>th</sup> Aug. Letter dated Constantinople, 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1915.
  - " " Survey of the situation in Thrace.
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. " " " " " Constantinople.
  - " " Letter relating principally to Sivas.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct. Survey of the situation in Constantinople and the neighborhood.but would be glad to be furnished with any other extracts of importance (including full particulars of authorship, date, etc), either from "Gotchnag" or any other local Armenian Journal especially from more recent issues: e.g.
  - "Arev" (Alexandria).
  - "Houssaper" (? Alexandris).
  - "Armenia" (Marseilles)
  - "Horizon" (Tiflis)
  - "Mshak" (?)
- (ix). Sonnensufgang. (The German missionary journal)

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He needs especially the issues of Oct.1<sup>st</sup>, 1915, and one of the unknown date, containing Fräulein Rohner's description of Der-el-Zor.

H.B. He is particularly anxious to have a complete copy of the letter in original German.

Also, any other documents, published in other issues of the "Sonnenaufgang", which may be of value.

- (x). He has no copy of the narrative of events at Van, published in the Boston "Evening Transcript" of 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1915.
- (xi). He has no copy of the "Turkish White Book", of which a resume was recently cabled by the correspondent of the New York "American" from Berlin.
- (xii). He would be glad of information as to authenticity of the deportation-proclamation, of which a copy is here enclosed.

Alleged text of the Ottoman Government's Proclamation ordering the deportation of the Armenians; extracted from an article by Miss Eleanor Franklin Egan, in the Philadelphia "Saturday Evening Post" of February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1916.

"Our fellow countrymen, the Armenians, who form one of the racist elements of the Ottoman Empire, having taken up, as a result of foreign instigation for many years past, with a lot of false ideas of a nature to disturb the public order, and because of the fact that they have brought about bloody happenings and have attempted to destroy the peace and security of the Ottoman state, the safety and interests of their fellow countrymen, as well as themselves; and, moreover, as they have now dared to join in with the enemy of their "existence" – Russia – "and to the enemies now at war with our state – our government is compelled to adopt extraordinary measures and sacrifices, both for the preservation of the order and security of the country and for the welfare and continuation of the existence of the Armenian society. Therefore, as a measure to be applied until the conclusion of the war, the Armenians have to be sent away to places which have been prepared in the interior vilayets; and a literal obedience to the following orders, in a categorical manner, is accordingly enjoined on all Ottomans:

"First – All Armenians, with the exception of the sick, are obliged to leave within five days from the date of this proclamation, by villages or quarters, and under the escort of the gendarmerie.

“Second – Though they are free to carry with them on their journey the articles of their movable property which they desire they.

They are forbidden to sell their lands and their extra effects, or to leave the latter here and there with other people, because their exile is only temporary and their landed property and the effects they will be unable to take with them will be taken care of under the supervision of the government, and stored in closed and protected buildings. Anyone who sells or attempts to take care of movable effects or landed property in a manner contrary to this order shall be sent before the Court Martial. They are free to sell only the articles to the government, which may meet the demands of the army.

“Third – Contains a promise of safe conduct.

“Fourth – A threat against anyone attempting to molest them on the way.

“Fifth – Since the Armenians are obliged to submit to this decision of the government, if some of them attempt to use arms against the soldiers or gendarmes, arms shall be employed against them and they shall be taken dead or alive. In this manner those who, in opposition to the government’s decision, refrain from leaving or seek to hide themselves, if they are sheltered or given food or assistance, the persons who thus shelter or aid them shall be sent before the Court Martial for execution”.

*NAA, f. 412, l. 1, work 989, p. 1–3, 23–26:*