

IN THE HANDS OF THE TURKS.

AN AMERICAN WOMAN'S EXPERIENCES.

FATE OF BRITISH CIVILIANS.

The writer of the following article is an American lady who has recently returned from Beirut, Syria, by way of Turkey, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary, and Germany. In a previous article, which was published on September 15, she described the wholesale arrests of members of the best Syrian families, a disastrous plague of locusts, and the starvation of the Levant.

At the end of the first year of the war we happened to be buying clothes in a native store for a poor student. There was not much choice, but the storekeeper said that in a few days he was expecting a great quantity. "From where?" we asked, knowing that nothing had come into the city for a long time. "From Aleppo," was the answer—which means anything from the North, arriving in the Aleppo train. Two of our companions had just arrived "from Aleppo," in other words, from Armenia. If you had travelled as they did, along roads where the naked dead bodies made the fields on both sides white—if you had seen soldiers strip dying men before killing them—would you doubt where these clothes came from?

Here are a few facts about the Armenian massacres which we know to be correct. From one of the mission schools 157 boys between six and 16 were taken away by a body of 30 soldiers "for deportation to a village at some days' distance." Only three of them arrived at that village. Near Kharput is a beautiful deep mountain lake, where foreigners used to spend their summer holidays. Ten thousand Armenians were taken there by Turkish soldiers. Not one of them returned. In one of the villages on the Upper Euphrates a large bale was thrown on the bank one morning. It was found to contain the dead bodies of 35 babies. In Beirut, Armenian girls and women were sold in the streets for any price between 1s. and 5s. In three different places which we visited were camps of women and children, where mothers had to take off their clothes to protect their babies from the burning sun, and where any Moslem man could go in and select a child or woman and take them with him, dragging them along by the hair.

"THEY ARE AFTER THE ENGLISH."

None of us will ever forget that December evening when suddenly the news came to our home in Beirut, "They are after the English!" Those were the exact words of the message brought to us, and their dread sound still lingers in our ears. No one doubted who "they" were, and we all knew of what "they" were capable.

We also knew that everywhere in Europe civilian belligerents had been interned, but there is a great difference between being sent to any kind of prison or concentration camp in either England or Germany and being given over to the mercies of the Turkish authorities. We Americans all felt that we must do our very utmost to prevent our friends from being taken to the interior. We knew that, once away from the coast, all contact with them would soon be made impossible. Torture and massacre stood out clearly in our imagination.

REFUGE IN THE AMERICAN COLLEGE.

We were out of the house in a minute. All over the city we took the message to our English friends:—"Come over at once to the Campus of the American College; we shall put you up in the buildings there, and we shall stand by you to the end." Two hours later they were all gathered in our walled compound—a pathetic crowd. Most of them had come over just as they were, without even bringing night clothes with them. We tried to provide them with what they needed. We tried to comfort and encourage nervous women and cheer gloomy-looking men. But we were nervous ourselves, and dreaded the coming day.

The order had been (so our informant had told us) to take them all during the night and send them off inland by the morning train. What would the Turkish authorities do when they found their prey gone? Would they mob the compound or attack it with soldiers? Would they starve us out until we gave our friends up? Should we have to share their fate?

Early next morning reports began to come in. The Chief of Police had been furious when he found out that we had been ahead of him, and had sworn all sorts of oaths that he would get the better of us. Instructions came from the Consulate-General. The college President, Dr. H. Bliss, a man of great personal influence and a born diplomatist, had spent the greater part of the night between the Consulate and the Seraya, the Turkish Government building, and came home much discouraged. But things turned out differently from what we had expected. The Government sent word that those of the belligerents who were not back in their homes that day before noon would be looked upon as fugitives and dealt with very severely. Those who returned would enjoy all the consideration to which civilians had a right in time of war. The United States Consul-General, though humanly in full sympathy with our action, warned us against the unlawfulness of refusing to give up belligerents and resisting the authorities if they should wish to enter our premises. The fact that we did not trust the Turkish Government in no way altered its rights.

RETURN OF THE FUGITIVES.

It was a hard blow for American national pride. It seemed almost impossible to have to tell one's friends to leave one's own safe home and submit to the good pleasure of their tyrants. I know that at that moment several of us felt as if we would rather have gone ourselves than send off those who had put their trust in us.

But they went; and that day nothing more happened.

Next morning word was sent round by the Turkish Government that all male British subjects should keep themselves ready to leave the coast cities within two days. All through these two days the United States Consul-General, all influential Americans, and the institutions with which several of these British were connected, tried their utmost to get this decision changed or at least postponed. In vain.

Two days later the male British subjects all left, early in the morning. There were business men, teachers, engineers, ministers, doctors, a very mixed crowd, but all kept up their spirits splendidly. A few women had come to the train for a last farewell. To the surprise and almost indignation of the natives, they did not indulge in any lamentations to show their devotion and their despair at the departure of their men. Those who had come out kept up as bravely as the men themselves.

PRISONERS AT DAMASCUS.

The next few days were hard, but in less than a week word came from the prisoners themselves that they were in Damascus, and apparently would stay there. They were free to live wherever they liked—at their own expense. They had chosen hotels according to their means. They had to report daily to the police, but otherwise had the liberty of the city. Except that

life was monotonous and the absence of families trying, there were no complaints. Thereafter news came fairly regularly. Censors in letters would, of course, have been censored. But from time to time we got news by word of mouth. Sometimes it was by native friends coming from Damascus; once a prisoner was allowed a week's visit on parole for very urgent business; a few times, prisoners who were invalid or over 65 years of age were by some special protection let off for good. From them we learnt that, as a rule, their treatment was not bad, and the life except for its suspense and monotony, was bearable. But suddenly periods would come of danger and excitement, and they would all be thrown into prison and their lives threatened. Later they were sent from Damascus to Urfah, a city of the interior in one of the Armenian districts.

During their stay there a new scare came to the coast cities. All belligerent women and children had to go to the interior. This was in the summer of 1915. The order came in the same devilish way as the first one—in the dead of night, when everything looks a hundred times more dreadful than in daylight. We felt that there was an element of intentional cruelty in the choice of this night hour—an hour in which no decently-brought-up Moslem would think of knocking at a house where only women lived. I was staying then at one of the English homes with a frail, nervous woman of 61, who had seen her husband and two sons taken from her some months before and had been left alone with a young servant girl. We passed a dreadful night of suspense. In the meantime the United States Consul-General and other leading Americans were doing their best with the authorities. They secured that night a delay of a few days, and during those days exemption for reasons of health for almost all of the elderly ladies, including my friend. The others, however, had to go, and I do not think that any prospect of immediate death can be compared to the agony of those mothers who had to take delicate children, little babies, or, worst of all, grown-up girls, into the unknown, unprotected interior.

BEIRUT ARMENIANS MASSACRED.

All, however, so far as we know, reached Urfah safely. There they passed through the worst period that the men had had yet—the massacre of the Armenians in this city. The Armenians had paid to be exempt from deportation, and after the authorities had received the money cannon were placed outside the city, and the Armenian quarter was destroyed, with all its inhabitants. We have never had all particulars, but we have reason to know that our friends passed through frightful scenes.

A few weeks later a fortunate change released the women and children. A decision came from Constantinople by which they were allowed, or rather ordered, to leave the country immediately. They were not permitted to return first to their homes, and so that they had to leave behind everything except a few clothes. American cruisers were allowed to touch at the nearest port where the poor people could embark.

As for the men, news became scarcer and more irregular. We know that they were sent farther north than Urfah. We know that many of them had typhus, and some of them died. We know that when we left Turkey two months ago they were scattered in little groups of two and three over different villages and towns of Asia Minor, and that is about all.