

ARMENIAN GIRLS TELL OF MASSACRES

Escaped Victims of Turkish and Circassian Cruelty Recount Their Experience.

HELD NAKED AND STARVING

Hundreds Slaughtered with Clubs as Parties Up to 5,000 Were Taken to Syrian Desert.

Personal narratives told by Christian women and girls of Armenia, who were deported from their homes to virtual captivity or slavery in the camps of the Turks, Circassians and Arabs, or were held captives in Turkish harems in Asia Minor, have been received by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. A statement issued by the Committee says that the women whose stories are now made public, were released by their masters or rescued by allied troops.

"After the signing of the armistice," says the Committee's statement, "many of the Turks, believing that by so doing they could escape punishment, turned the women—many of them with babies—into the streets. Cable dispatches to the Committee have reported that numbers of these women were wandering about the country, crazed by starvation and exposure. As fast as possible they are being gathered up by the Committee's relief workers and placed in homes established for their care. A late telegram said that fifteen such homes have been established in Asia Minor."

Stories of these Armenian victims of Turkish atrocity were obtained by Dr. Loyal L. Wirt, member of an expedition sent to Turkey by the Committee. They were taken down as related by Dr. W. A. Kennedy, Field Director of the Lord Mayor's Relief Fund of London. Dr. Kennedy assured Dr. Wirt that he personally reread the affidavits to the narrators and they signed them in his presence.

The Committee says that, taken together, these tales constitute one of the tragic chapters of the war. They were not isolated cases, but in some instances the experiences of as many as 5,000 refugees, who had been driven from their homes and forced on journeys of hundreds of miles from fertile Armenia into the borders of the Syrian desert. On the way, hundreds at a time were often separated and massacred.

Hundreds of girls were torn from the other members of their families and taken, none knows where, by the Turks, Kurds or Circassians. Scores were compelled to live in captivity naked for months and suffering from sunblisters and beatings.

Armenian girls who escaped death, the Committee declares, were hartered like cattle, after their fathers or relatives had vainly paid ransom for them. Some saw their fathers or friends murdered. In the tents of the Arabs in the Syrian desert, many were bound and forcibly tattooed on the forehead, lips and chin, to mark them as Moslem women.

Escaped Girls Tell of Massacres.

Generally, the stories indicate that the captives were moved sometimes in large groups from Armenia southward toward the desert of Syria. The stories told by at least three Armenian Christian girls deal with the movement of one of these great groups, consisting of 2,000 families or 5,000 persons.

One story of this journey into the desert was told by Takouhi Guezekuchukian, a girl of 18 years, who, with her father, mother, four sisters and a brother was deported from Hadjin, in Adana province, in May, 1915. They were moved southward to Aleppo, and thence further on toward the Syrian desert, until the party numbered about 2,000 families. At Sivaria, she said, they were told that on payment of 5,000 Turkish liras they would be allowed to return.

"The refugees said they could not give this amount," the Armenian girl told Dr. Kennedy. "Then the Circassians of the tribe of Chechens, who had control of them separated out 1,100 of the poorer families and took them away. The same evening some of these people returned and said they had escaped, and that four hours after they left, the Chechens had begun to kill members of their party with iron-studded clubs. The remaining families raised £1,500 and sent a deputation of fifty-two men with it to buy their security. The amount was refused and the men were beaten and sent back.

"They raised an additional 550 liras and took 2,000 Turkish pounds in gold to the Circassian Beys, who took the money and tried to force them to sign a paper saying the Armenians had paid no money to them. The deputation refused to do this and the fifty-two men were bound and taken away."

A few days later, according to the girl's story, the remaining families were deported from Sivaria and after eight days arrived at Shedadieh, on the River Habour, east of Deir-Es Zor.

"On the way," the girl's story went on, "150 men were separated and taken away and soon after the Circassians returned and divided among themselves some of the clothing which she recognized as belonging to some of the men which they had taken away. The next day 300 more men were taken away and killed."

As the refugees resumed their journey on the following morning she saw the bodies of some of the men she knew. They had been clubbed to death.

"A few days after this," reads the narrative, "they were told that for safety each family of women and children was to go to the house of an Arab. The Arabs robbed them and stripped them of their clothing and sent them back to the Circassians, who commenced at once to kill them with knives, attacking women and children, about 150 in all. Twenty-two boys and eleven girls were saved and taken to the tents of the Circassians, and she was taken with her sister to the village of Gebelleh, where she was beaten because she did not give them gold that they believed she had."

After having been kept awhile by a Circassian, she and her sister were sent to another Chechen and then to the house of another Circassian in Shegrush. She is now in the orphanage at Aleppo and her sister is in an Armenian house in Nusebin.

Victim from American Girls' School.

Other incidents evidently dealing with this terrible journey of the Armenians to Shedadieh were related to Dr. Kennedy by Araxa Barutjian, a girl of 17 years, who was a pupil in the American girls' school at Ada Bazaar, in the western portion of Asia Minor, near Constantinople. She spoke English.

"At Shedadieh," the narrative says, "she saw a party of 300 men, women, and children, all naked. It was in July and their backs had been blistered by the sun, and many of them had bruises all over their limbs and bodies, and sores caused by the beatings they had received. During the heat of the day they would lie covered in the water, as the pain in the sun was unbearable.

"Before she arrived at Shedadieh, two of her brothers died at Bab, and her father at another place. As the Arabs were taking only unmarried girls from among the refugees, her mother told them she was married. At Shedadieh her mother was sold to one Arab and she to another, and the girl lived in his house for a year.

"She ran away and an Arab girl took her into a tent, where she stayed for eighteen months, when she again ran away and finally reached Nusebin."

This journey from Ada Bazaar across Asia Minor to Deir-Es-Zor occupied a year and a half, according to the story told by another girl of 17 years, Arpeneh Der Harutunian, daughter of a teacher in a high school at Bardizag, a bright, intelligent girl, whose family was known to Dr. Kennedy. Reporting her story of the journey, Dr. Kennedy wrote:

"Her grandfather was killed before her eyes and she saw between 200 and 300 men shot and cut down by the sword. These men were bound in groups of ten, arm to arm. She saw at the same place women and children killed with iron-studded clubs or knives. The bodies were afterward soaked with paraffine and set on fire. This was done

by Chechen Circassians on the side of a hill near Shedadieh.

"About 100 young Armenian men who dressed as girls were discovered and put to death by the Chechens. One of these was flayed alive and thrown into the River Habour.

"After this the Circassians would not allow them to get food, and two weeks later they were sent to Sivaria. Mariam Gumushjian bribed the Chechens not to send them further into the desert. Arpeneh was taken to the tent of an Arab and kept for eight months, when she escaped with the assistance of her younger brother. During her stay, Arpeneh moved from place to place as the Arabs changed the tents for better pasturage for their camels. She was firmly bound and held to the ground by Turkish soldiers while her face was being tattooed. The family was united afterward, with the exception of the father, who disappeared at Deir-Es-Zor."