

BRANDED CHRISTIAN GIRLS IN TURK HAREMS BEAR TORTURE FOR FAITH LIKE EARLY MARTYRS

Cross Burned Upon Their Bodies Fails to Make Them Turn to Moslem Religion

HOT IRON AND WHIP FOR OBSTINATE ONES

Thousands of Captives Still Held at Mercy of Brutal Masters

NO LESS brave than the martyrs who were stoned and burned to death ages ago; no less stoical than the early Christians forced into the arena to await death by lions' or tigers' claws; even more tragic than they are the Christian girls taken away to the Turkish harems, who suffer daily tortures rather than renounce their faith and become Moslems.

Treated with less consideration than the dogs which belong to a Turkish household, and bearing the symbol of their faith which has been burned into their skins by the torture of the branding iron, these girls wait day after day behind the closely latticed windows of the harem.

Day by day and week by week of monotonous, idle existence broken only by the sharp pain of beatings and ill treatment and the faint rays of a hope that they may be rescued.

But while thousands of these girls have been taken from the harems and placed in rescue stations, thousands more are still in captivity.

"Anything they wanted would be given to them if they would renounce Christianity," said Mrs. Pearl Larson, who, after spending two years in Asia Minor doing medical work in rescue stations, is now in Philadelphia.

"We rescued thousands of girls, and though we have seven rescue stations established now, there are literally thousands of other Christian girls who have been carried by the Turks into their harems and whom we have not been able to rescue," she said, "and many more stations are needed."

The Turkish women know nothing else but the life of the harem, Mrs. Larson said, but even to them it is a dreary, miserable existence. Unhappy

they would tell her that she would not be injured any more if she would become a Moslem, but she refused, and to mock and scorn her they put the sign of the cross upon her, and upon her forehead the seal of the owner of the harem to denote possession.

"There was another girl—so beautiful, so charming, with such shy dignity that she reminded you of a little Priscilla. Pilotsoo was captured when she was at the Euphrates School at Harpoot and taken into the mountains, where she was compelled to live for two and a half years.

"Here is one of the many remarkable



Mrs. Helen Airgood, Camden school teacher, who directed the rescue work among Christian girls in Turkish harems

Above—Christian girl stolen by the Turks. Below—Armenian girl, rescued from Turkish harem, back in native costume



Mrs. Pearl Larson, medical worker in the orphanage at Harpoot, who tells story of atrocities by the Turks in branding Christian women who refuse to accept the Moslem faith

because of the jealousy which exists among the different wives of the lord and master of the harem, they spend much of their time quarreling and wrangling; their hands and minds always idle; smoking innumerable cigarettes and closely confined to the rooms of the harem and the court. Their weekly visit to the bath is their only diversion.

Average Harem Unlike Those Seen in Movies

The harem itself is far from being a place of beauty.

"The waving plumes, rich brocades, sparkling fountains, and glistening silks are seen only in the movies," said Mrs. Larson. "I don't think there is a harem even in the Sultan's palace which would approach a movie harem in beauty. The ones I saw were bare and uncomfortable looking—the only ornaments of any color and beauty being the rugs on the wall and the cushions scattered around.

"The Christian girls are forced to wear the Turkish garment—the chert—and the veil or headpiece broke—these are of dark colors—unbeautiful and not even rich in texture.

"One of the girls we rescued told us that for seven days she was forced to suffer the tortures of being branded a little each day until the design of the cross was completed. Each day

and almost unbelievable escapes," said Mrs. Larson.

Girls Made a Human Ladder for Her Escape

"The girls formed a human ladder, and Pilotsoo climbed to the top and got over the wall. But there she was in the mountains. It was cold. She had no shelter, no food, and little clothing. For weeks she roamed the mountains, living almost like a little animal, burrowing into the brush, and hiding among the rocks. She did not dare to travel in daytime lest she be recaptured, so she hid when it was light and waited till darkness came before she fled further away down the mountains.

"At last she found her way to the rescue station at Harpoot and we took her in there. She was only fifteen when we rescued her—she had been captured when she was just about twelve.

"Her family, with the exception of her sister, who was as lovely looking as she, had all been killed in the massacre, and she was left alone. A missionary and his wife adopted her sister just before Pilotsoo was captured, and brought her to America, where she is now attending one of the large colleges.

"Pilotsoo's one ambition was to have more education. She would have given up her sister's lot, which came in the



Native Armenians, captured by Turks two days after this picture was taken

rescue station for her, and when she read of her pretty clothes, and the interesting things she was doing and seeing, Pilotsoo would shake her head and say, 'I am happy now that I am free. I am happy now that I am free. I do not care for those.'

"My interpreter was a little Armenian girl who was born in America. Her father had made money in this country and returned with his family just before the war when Shirnough was just fourteen. She was captured by a Turk near her home at Harpoot and she was the youngest and the most beautiful of the women who

an orphan and after many months she escaped. I found her on the streets of Malatia, exhausted, almost starving, half fainting, and I took her to the rescue station, and from that time on she became my guide and interpreter. She was as clever as she could be, and spoke several languages.

Speechless at Thought That Rescue Was Near

"Another girl," continued Mrs. Larson, "came to know that she was in a harem and that she

was in Caesarea. She was captured by a Turk and held for three years. It was the merest luck that we managed to rescue her. A party of relief workers was going to Yozgad, investigating conditions on the way. This girl—she was hardly more than a child—heard the noise of the automobile—a sound so curious, so new and strange, as she told us afterward, that she thought something must be about to happen. She had never seen an automobile, so she had no idea of what the noise of the motor was.



Harem girl protected from public gaze by traditional Turkish charf



Armenian girl branded by the Turks with the sign of the cross and with marks denoting Turkish ownership

spite of her hope, the almost unbearable agony of suspense, she was helpless. Even her voice left her. She could not cry out. One of the women in the party succeeded in bribing the gate-keeper to let her in, and there she found this girl, swaying as she stood in the courtyard, her arms outstretched, but her voice silent. She could not even cry. When the wonderful fact of her rescue was ascertained, the three years waiting and longing had almost made her incapable of believing.

"She had been told that her family had been killed, all the Armenians driven out of the country, and that there was no hope of her ever escaping from the harem.

"When we took her with us we found that she could speak English, and we asked her how it was that after all those years away from any English-speaking peoples or English influence, she still remembered the language she had learned in school. And she explained it to us. She said that after they would beat her and torture her, often for hours at a time, she would take a little Bible which she managed to conceal in the folds of her burka and whisper the English verses over and over to herself."

Mrs. Helen Airgood, 5549 Media street, who has been teaching French in the Camden High School since her return from Harpoot, where she was in charge of a rescue station, also told of the work being done to free the Christian girls from the harems.

American Flag Best Protection for Girls

"The Turks are afraid of America, and have the greatest respect for the American flag," she said. "One day a Turkish officer with fifteen soldiers came to the station and demanded the

Hundreds of Them, Daring Death, Manage to Flee From Bondage

FREEZE AND STARVE IN MOUNTAIN WILDS

American Flag Is Best Protection and Many Seek Its Shelter

return of a Christian girl who had escaped from his harem. I brought the girl, but before her I placed an American flag. 'Take her, if you dare, from this protection,' I said, and without a word the officer turned and gave the order for his soldiers to go away.

"It is a very difficult matter to escape from the harems," Mrs. Airgood said. "Walls seven to nine feet high surround them, and a guard is constantly on duty at the gate. In the wealthier homes there are two guards—one for the day and one for the night—but in the poorer homes there is only one, and he has a little shelter near the wall where he sleeps. Bits of glass, brush and an overhanging ledge make it almost impossible to get over the wall.

"But a Christian girl is always ready to help another escape and sometimes by forming human ladders or making ropes of bed clothing they manage to get away. It is always danger-

It is the duty of the Turkish wives to see that the Christian girls do not escape from the harems, and if they do the wrath of the Turk is poured forth on them.

"Divorce is such a simple process with them," she continued. "All a Turk has to do is to say, 'Leave my house,' or, without even speaking, bring the slippers of his wife and place them in front of her, and she is compelled to go back to her own home. If he repents of his 'divorce' he cannot bring the woman back until after she has been married to another man. Then it is all right for him to take another man's wife back to his harem, but not his own divorced wife.

"Even the poorer classes of Turks have taken the Christian girls into their harems. One camel entitles a man to two wives, according to their code. I have seen Christian girls being sold in the market places," she said. "We saved many of them, but there were many we were helpless to aid.

"The rescue stations are usually college buildings we have taken over," said Mrs. Larson. "We had about 300 girls at Harpoot. They lived there all the time, of course. Some of them taught in our orphanage. Others did the cooking and the housework. But they all had work of some kind to do—whatever they had been accustomed to doing. If it was weaving or handwork—many of them do exquisite handwork—they do that. That is the difference between the Armenian and Turkish women. The Armenian woman always works, and the Turkish woman never does if she can avoid it.

Weekly Bath Really Ceremony for Turks

"The Turkish woman's only form of recreation is her visit to the baths once a week. These baths are dirty and dark, not beautiful at all, as we are accustomed to picture them. The bath last virtually all day; the women pouring the water, which sprays continually, over their bodies, always pouring from the top of the head. They think we are very unclean because we bathe in water which is not running. They lie on the hot stones, and then they will bathe again.

"The richer Turks send their women in carriages; the poorer class are compelled to walk. It is really a ceremony—a sort of parade—this going to the baths. The Turks take great pride in decorating their women with all sorts of jewelry and ornaments—all of which are rented. There are stores for that purpose, and once the women are safely back in the harem the jewelry is stripped from them and returned to the renter. Bracelets, anklets, chains—the women are almost covered with them, but few of them are valuable—they are just bits of colored stones and chains of brass.

"We were always treated with the greatest courtesy when we visited in Turkish homes," said Mrs. Larson. "but the women were never permitted to appear. The head of the house acted as our gracious host, and the eldest son served us the meal. There were often twelve courses, and the greatest dignity and ceremony was observed. From the serving of the coffee and—"

she smiled—"the offering of cigarettes the minute we got in the house to the serving of the last course of fruit. The coffee was brought in cups of 'gingine' of thinnest china with silver and bronze holders. And they eat cucumbers just as we would a banana—only skin and all.

"The food was placed on a carved brass tray which rested on a low stool. A spoon was the only tableware we had—the handle being of carved ivory or gold. Every one ate out of this one bowl, which the eldest son brought in with such ceremony and dignity.

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Wives Eat After Husband Is Through

"The women were always kept in their separate quarters during our visit. One day I asked a Turk if his wives might not be permitted to share the meal with us.

"Oh! And is that your custom in America?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "The women always eat with the men in my country."

"So as a great concession he permitted his wives to come in and eat some fruit with us, but they remained standing and were not allowed to sit down.

"If a Turk takes his women to the fields, he sits in the shade under an umbrella while they work, and in case one of them is a Christian girl—tries to escape, she is brought back and chained to a stump and compelled to sing songs until the cart comes to take them back home.

"The Turkish women are just like children when they are amused. They laugh and clap their hands and skip around. I remember in one harem where we visited there was a woman who said that she would give her own life if only she could have a ride in an automobile.

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