

How Science Cleansed Her of the Cruel Turk's Brand of Shame

Tattooed by Her Heartless Master as a Living Symbol of Ownership and Religion Nargig Abakiam, One of the Few Survivors of the Armenian Massacres, Is Freed of Her Hideous Disfigurements by American Surgeons

A Photograph of Nargig as She Appeared Before the Tattoo Brands Were Removed by Science. The "Holy Arrows" Are Shown Between Her Eyes and Beneath Her Lower Lip. At Each Corner of Her Mouth Is the Brand of Her Master's Tribe. Between the Tribal Brands Are the Five Blotches of Purple Which Stand for Five Daily Prayers of Islam. The Dots Under Her Chin Are Symbols Which Only the Arabs of Her Tribe Can Translate.

FIFTY thousand Christian girls, held captive now in Moslem harems in Asiatic Turkey and in the desert tents of Arabs and Circassians in the Syrian desert, suddenly have been given hopes of freedom and happiness by the success of a remarkable scientific experiment just concluded in this country.

These young women, nearly all of them between the ages of fifteen and twenty years, were captured by the Turks, Arabs, Circassians and Kurds during the Armenian massacres. The majority of them are Armenian girls and were the most beautiful of their people. Kept by the tribal chiefs who captured them, because of their exceptional beauty, for their own harems, they were branded, according to Arab and Kurd custom, by the terrible practice of tattooing which these tribes have employed upon their Christian concubines for time immemorial.

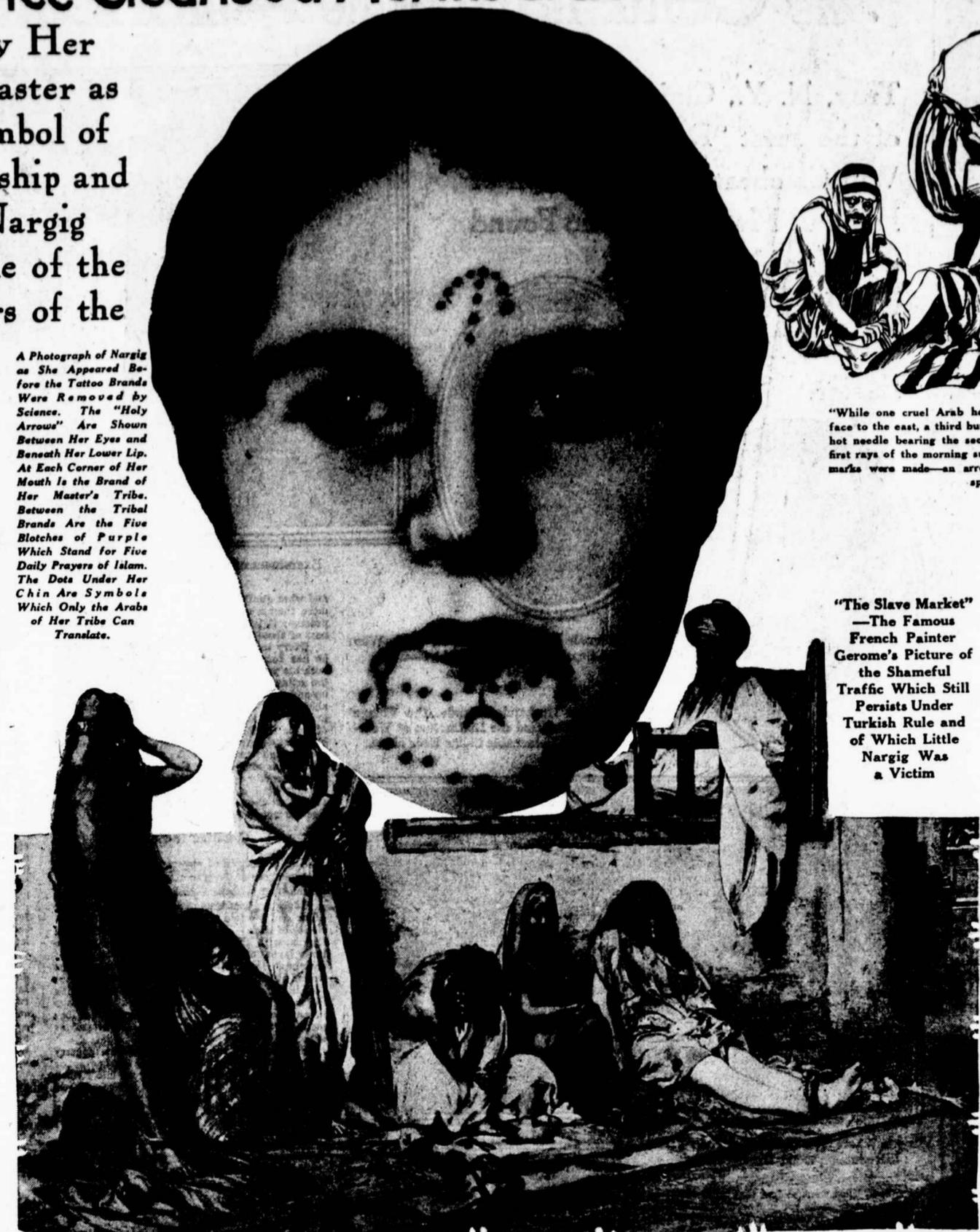
Imbedded in flesh and skin with secret inks made from Oriental herbs, these dread tatoos marks always have been indelible—none of the usual methods employed for the removal of modern tattooing have been successful in erasing these marks of shame. The young girl thus marked has been doomed to go through life branded as the property of her master, or her master's tribe, much the same as the horses on the western plains are branded with the marks of the ranch to which they belong.

As a result of the Armenian massacres so many young women were marked with the tattooed brands of their owners that science throughout the Christian world found itself confronted with the humanitarian task of discovering some way these unknown Oriental inks, used for centuries by the desert tribesmen, might be removed from the tender faces disfigured by them. Otherwise there remained no hope that these young women, stolen from their families, might escape some day from their cruel bondage. For should they attempt escape, and even get beyond the clutches of their masters, their horrid markings would bar them from all happiness in the world at large.

Since long before the armistice scientists in America, spurred by the plight of these Christian girls, sought the hitherto unknown method of eradicating the tattooed brands. Harvard University was the leader among the great institutions which conducted experiments and investigations. At last success seemed to be promised the board of scientists employed by the university to solve the humanitarian problem, and a commission of these scientists was sent to Asia, seeking there a subject upon whom their new discoveries might be practiced.

Even this preliminary task was hard, however, as no young woman thus branded had succeeded in making her way across the desert or through the Moslem cities along the highways, after escaping from the harem where she had been imprisoned, without being caught, her ownership recognized by her brands, and sent back to be punished—scourged to death, perhaps. Strange as it may seem, the subject needed for a scientific demonstration of what the scientists believed would save these Christian girls from the scars of their unavailing shame, eventually was discovered, not in her native land, but in New York City.

This was little Nargig Avakian, eighteen years old, the beautiful daughter of a rich Armenian family of Sivas, who had been driven from her home when the Turks deported her people in 1915, and sent with her father and mother and brothers and



"While one cruel Arab held her feet and another held her body, her face to the east, a third buried deep in the tender flesh of her face a red hot needle bearing the secret branding inks of the Arabs. Just as the first rays of the morning sun fell upon her branded face the first cruel marks were made—an arrow supposed to lift her thoughts and all her speech to Mahommed!"

"The Slave Market"—The Famous French Painter Gerome's Picture of the Shameful Traffic Which Still Persists Under Turkish Rule and of Which Little Nargig Was a Victim



Here Are the Four Processes of the Removal of the Tattoo (1) The Flesh Was Kneaded with Skilled Hands so That the Skin Was Separated from the Muscles Beneath; Then (2) the Face Bathed with a Medicated Solution, and (3) Compresses Which Draw the Inks to the Surface and Cause the Surface Flesh and Skin to Dissolve in a Process of Suppuration Were Kept Tightly Bandaged Around the Face for Weeks. (4) New Flesh and Skin Grew Where the Old Was Dissolved Leaving Only Pale Pink Tints Which Resembled Excessive Sunburns and Which Disappeared Completely in from Two to Four Weeks, Leaving Nargig as Comely as Ever.

sisters into the desert. Nargig had been the belle of all Sivas. She had been educated in Constantinople, and was known throughout the city for her proficiency in music, needlework, and for her deftness and captivating charm. Many times the Turkish governors had cast covetous eyes upon her, but her father was very rich and powerful among the Armenians and she was safe then from Turkish persecution.

When the massacres were ordered, however, her's was one of the first homes descended upon. All her father's property was confiscated and he was turned out, with his family, penniless, and sent upon the long walk into exile.

After many days of wanderings, during which her mother died from exposure and her father was killed by a Turkish Zaptieh, Nargig was stolen one night by a band of Kurds. They now were in the Arabian desert, and after a time the beautiful girl was sold, for three horses, to an Arab chieftain, the Sheikh Tashin Melaz, whose tribe had come from the south to harass the deported Armenians.

The Sheikh Tashin took Nargig, with others of his prettiest captives, to the city of Urfa, at the edge of the desert. Here he put her up for sale in the slave markets of that Moslem city. She was bought by a wealthy Arab, Abou Seraldz, who lived with a band of followers just outside the city. Abou took her to his harem and compelled her to submit to concubinage.

It was by the orders of her master, Abou, that she was tattooed. Abou declared his liking for her and gave orders that she be branded with the distinguishing marks of

his tribe, so that if she should run away she would be recognized any place on the Arabian or Syrian deserts, where the Arabs and Kurds roam, as belonging to his particular tribe. It is one of the unwritten laws of the Kurds and Arabs to return to each other runaway slave girls.

Accordingly, one morning, before the sun rose, Nargig was dragged from her couch in the harem and taken outside. Three of her master's tribesmen held her face to the East, where the first glints of the sun might fall upon her, according to the ancient Arabian custom when branding slaves.

One of her captors had within a little earthen bucket, in which had been mixed the strange inks made from herbs and grasses, the secret of which the civilized world never has learned. Another captor held in his hand a long, cruel needle of hammered steel. The third bound her feet that she might be easily held and prevented from squirming too much in her agonies.

Just as the first ray of the sun fell upon the party the Arab who brandished the cruel needle sank it into the poor girl's skin between her eyebrows. She screamed and struggled and begged for mercy, but with the precision of a clock's ticking the needle rose and fell, penetrated with each downward stroke far beneath the skin, into the flesh, and leaving behind it the indelible purple stain which, so far as science had known since the beginning of Arabian history, could never be removed.

Between the girl's eyebrows the needle made a crude arrow of little dots. The arrow pointed upward—"to guide the girl's future thoughts to Mohammed." Below her lower lip a similar arrow, also pointed upward, was formed, that "her spoken words might be wafted above with reverence to the Prophet." Around the edge of her lower lip five purple blotches were placed to represent the five daily prayers of Islam. The hieroglyphic representing the special prayer of her master's tribe was pricked into each temple, and the

slave girl brand of the tribe was drawn, with the needle heated to a red heat so the dots would form a seared line, in the flesh at each corner of her mouth. Other dots in symbolic design were pricked into other parts of her face and across her body, reaching from her throat to below her waist, the needle fixing a series of symbols, each signifying a verse from the Koran.

These were variations of the tattooing to which the other thousands of Christian girl captives throughout Syria and Arabia were subjected by their cruel harem masters. Each was marked with the brand of her tribe among the other symbols, and thus each lost hope of ever regaining her freedom.

Nargig, however, managed to escape into the city of Urfa, and to find there a true friend who kept her hidden for many weeks in a dark, dank cellar. At last opportunity came for her to be spirited away to Aleppo. From here she was taken in a caravan to Damascus, where there lived a rich uncle, who had ostensibly accepted the Moslem religion as a protection for his life and property. This uncle took her in and succeeded eventually in getting her to Constantinople.

Relatives who had come to America many years before learned of little Nargig's plight and brought her to this country. She arrived in New York three months ago.

Nargig was taken at once to experts in the art of removing tattoo marks, but each of these told her no method had been discovered to remove these secret inks imbedded so far into the flesh. Ordinary tattooing could be erased, but not this brand of the Arabs. Little Nargig thought she was doomed for life to wear a heavy veil whenever she appeared on the streets;

never able to show her face except to the most intimate of friends.

Whenever strangers did catch a glimpse of her face they looked with horror and disgust upon the grotesque markings, little knowing the tragedy they represented.

Friends of the young victim at last were sent to Dr. Edgar T. Strickland, a scientist attached to Sheffield University, in England, who had joined the Harvard commission in Asia, and who had studied firsthand the processes of tattooing employed by the Arabs, and who had examined the faces of many Armenian girls who had been beautiful, but who had been horribly disfigured by their captors. Dr. Strickland was visiting in America.

The scientist at once placed the girl in charge of a New York institute at No. 330 West Ninety-fifth street, where, under the personal direction of Professor Edith Hansen, lately of the Royal Copenhagen University, science set about its demonstration that the branded girl captives of the Turks and Arabs may eventually be restored to their unblemished beauty.

The method employed is one of absorption and suppuration. Professor Hansen, reporting the condition of the young girl's face when she entered into the care of the institute, said:

"The penetration of the electric needle used in modern tattooing is slight, sinking only into the outer skin. Removal of modern tattooing, in which the well-known Chinese colored inks are used, is comparatively an easy matter. In the case of Nargig, however, the Arabs had used a hand needle, which was very thick, and which was not even sharp. Evidently they were too cruel to even sharpen their needle or use a thin one. The penetration was uneven. In many spots it went clear through into the inner flesh. In branding the girl's nose they jabbed clear through the two skins and into the cartilage. The places chosen for marking were the most tender spots on the face—the temples, the nose, the brow and the region of the under lip.

"First it was necessary to pack the girl's face in compresses, medicated with a solution which softened the skin, enlarged the pores and increased blood circulation through the color pigment of the skin. After these compresses had been kept in place, changed at frequent intervals, the skin was carefully kneaded to break its hold on the flesh beneath.

"The compresses were then replaced for another stretch of days, removed periodically that the face might be bathed with medicaments calculated to further soften the skin and begin the necessary process of absorption.

"Suppuration now set in coincident with the absorption. Almost every hour, day and night, the flesh and skin was kneaded until it was indicated that the poisonous colors which were foreign to the under flesh had begun to spread and slowly to dissolve into the flesh. There was constant bathing, and soon the bathing cotton began to be discolored. This was the sign that the colors were seeping out through the pores.

"The flesh which had been poisoned by the unknown inks began to dissolve and suppurate. Tubes were applied through the compresses and the liquidized flesh drawn out. The skin which had been poisoned with the markings dissolved and came away also.

"At last there was no trace of foreign colors in the little girl's face. Then began the simple process of healing. When new skin had grown over the places where the tatoos marks had been the little girl presented the appearance of having been heavily sunburned. This 'sunburn' appearance will gradually disappear in from four to six weeks. Then Nargig will be beautiful as ever—more beautiful, perhaps for the little lines and wrinkles that gathered also as the natural marks of sufferings will have disappeared and a fresh bloom of youth will have been stored."