

"My Two Years of Torture in Ravished, Ma

The Only Christian Armenian Girl to Escape at Last from the Murdering Turks and Kurds and the Wicked Harems of the Sultan's Bloodthirsty Officials Reveals, for the First Time, the Details of the Wholesale Massacres and Seizure of Thousands of Young Women, Which She Witnessed



Miss Mardiganian, Safe at Last in America, Weaving Memories of Her Massacred People into the Beautiful Laces That Every Armenian Girl Delights to Make.

By
Aurora
Mardiganian.

CHAPTER VIII.—In the House of Hadji-Ghafour.

(Continued from Last Sunday)

ONE prayer to Allah; one prayer to God. One with our lips, one with our hearts.

That was how we left Malatia, the Charnel City, where one hundred thousand Christian Armenian men and other thousands of Armenian women and children had been massacred, to begin the one hundred-mile walk to Diyarbekir.

Only women and girls ever left Malatia. Such men as were not massacred at their homes in the north or on the roads were killed in the "Charnel City." Boys and girls under ten or eleven years old were taken outside the city and drowned—except the healthiest girls, who were sold to rich Turks, who wanted them to raise for their harems, and the strong boys, who were sold to Turkish farmers.

Fifteen thousand women left Malatia that morning with me for Diyarbekir. As I told last Sunday I had been placed, as a special favor to the American lady, Miss McLaine, with a party of "turned" Armenians, all young women, who were promised by the Vali, or Governor, protection on the road to Diyarbekir. There were two hundred of us in this company, and all but me had agreed to be Mohammedans to save their lives or their relatives. So when the Muezzins on the mosque called the First Prayer just before we left the city, all of us in this party had to kneel toward Mecca and recite the sunrise devotion to Allah and his prophet.

But this prayer was on the lips only. They had said the rek'ah—the Mohammedan creed—and had thus renounced their Christianity, but I know that none of them had done so with sincerity. They were faithful in secret to their faith. So from their hearts, as from mine, they said their real prayer—that God would keep them, and save them, through the long days of the hundred-mile walk to Diyarbekir.

Our party was at the head of the column, with a small band of soldiers guarding us. Only Turkish police guarded the rest of the long line. Our guards said the Vali at Malatia could not spare many soldiers for such a long journey as that to Diyarbekir. They said the Kurds would take charge of the refugees beyond the city.

It was very hot those days—scores of aged women dropped to the ground within the first hour or two outside the city, prostrated by the heat and famished for water, of which there was only that which we could beg from Turkish farmers along the way. The mother of two girls in my party, who, with her daughters, already had walked a hundred miles into Malatia, was struck by a soldier because she fell behind. The blow knocked her down, and she could not get up. The soldiers would not let us take time to revive her. Her two daughters had to kiss her good-by and leave her moaning by the roadside.

One of the two girls was a bride—a widowed bride. She had seen her husband and father killed in the town of Kangai, on the Sivas road, and when the Kurds were about to kill her mother because she was old, she begged a Turkish officer who was near by to save her. The officer had asked her if she would renounce her religion to save her mother, and she agreed—she and her younger sister. So they had saved their mother thus far—only to leave her to die by the road.

The sisters walked on with their arms about each other. They dared not even look around to where their mother lay upon the ground. When we could hear the woman's moans no longer I walked over to them and asked them to let me stay near them. I knew how they must feel. I wondered if my own mother and my little brothers and sisters had lived. A soldier in Malatia had told me the exiles from Tchamesh-Gedzak, our city, had passed through that city weeks before and had gone, as we were going, toward Diyarbekir. Perhaps, he said, they might still be there when we arrived—if we ever did.

The Turkish officials in Diyarbekir allowed many refugees to camp outside the town, this soldier said, as long as they had money to pay him. My mother still had money, I knew. So I was hopeful—and pretty soon the two sisters began to sympathize with my hopes, and that softened their own sorrow.

If they had only known then what was coming! I saw one of them whipped to death a few days later and the other hung by her feet until she died from a window of the house of Hadji Ghafour in Geulik!

The Turkish gendarmes left the party two hours out-

side the city. We halted, and there was great excitement. The city was no longer in sight, only the great empty plains and mountains and valleys. All feared they had been led into a trap of some kind—that something terrible was to happen. This feeling was increased when the soldiers guarding our apostasized party took us further down the road and made us rest there—away from the others.

It was almost sundown when a great cry went up. We looked to the east, where there was a wide pass through the hills, and saw a band of horsemen riding down upon us. They were Kurds we could tell from the way they rode. The villagers shouted—"It is Kerim Bey, the friend of Djebbar. It is well for us to scatter!" With this the villagers scrambled back into the hills, afraid, it seemed, the Kurd chieftain would not welcome their foraging among his charges.

To say that Kerim Bey was "a friend of Djebbar" explained his coming with his band, and what came after. Djebbar Effendi, as I have told before, was military commandant of the district, sent by the Sultan to oppress the Armenians during the deportations. His word was law, and always it was a cruel word. Kerim Bey was the most feared of the Kurd chieftains—he and Musa Bey, from whom I had escaped, as I have told. Both were of the Aghja Daghi Kurds. Kerim Bey and his band ruled the countryside, and frequently revolted against the Turks. To keep him as an ally Djebbar Effendi had given into his keeping many companies of exiled Armenians sent from Malatia to Diyarbekir and beyond. Kerim Bey was to be our keeper for a hundred miles!

There were hundreds of horsemen in Kerim's band. They had ridden far and were tired, too tired to take up the march in the moonlight, but not too tired to begin at once the nightly revels which kept us terrorized for so many days after. Scarcely had they hobbled their horses in little groups that stretched along the side of the column of refugees when they began to collect their toll. Screams and cries for mercy and the groans of mothers and sisters filled the night.

I saw terrible things that night which I cannot tell. When I see them in my dreams now I scream, so even now, safe in America, my nights are not happy. A group of Kurds were so torturing one young woman that the women who saw became crazed and rushed in a body at the wicked men to save the girl from more misery. For a moment the Kurds were trampled under the feet of the maddened women, and the girl was hurried away.

When they recovered themselves, the Kurds drew their long, sharp knives and set upon the women and killed them all. I think there must have been fifty of them. They piled their bodies together and set fire to their clothes. While some fanned the blaze, others searched for the girl who had been rescued, but they could not find her. So, baffled in this, they caught another girl and carried her to the flaming pile and threw her onto it. When she tried to escape they threw her back until she was burned to death.

When the Kurds approached my party, the apostates, the soldiers with us turned them away. "You may do as you wish with the others—these are protected," said the Turkish officer in charge of us. "It is the command of Djebbar Effendi." But this same officer was not content to be without his amusement while the Kurds were reveling.

Five soldiers came from his tent and sought a young woman they thought would be to their chief's liking. They tore aside the veils of the women whose forms suggested they might be young and pleasing until they came upon a girl from the town of Derenda, toward Sivas. She was very pretty, but one of the soldiers, when they were dragging her off, recognized her.

"Kah!" he ganted to his comrades. "This one will not do. She is not longer a maid!" They pushed her aside, with an oath, and sought further. But each girl they laid their hands on after that cried to them, "I, too, am not a virgin!" Each one was given a blow, but each was thrust aside when she claimed a shame.

Soon the soldiers saw they were being cheated of the choicest prey. They turned upon some older women and seized three. One of them they forced to her knees and two of the soldiers held her head back between their hands until her face was turned to the camp. Another

ON these pages seven weeks ago began the story of Aurora Mardiganian, the only Christian Armenian girl to escape the Turkish massacres of the Christians in Asia Minor, which began in her city, Tchamesh-Gedzak, near Harpout, three years ago on Easter Sunday.

Little Aurora's father and elder brother met their death at the hands of the Turks. Aurora, although only fourteen, was a well-developed and a very pretty girl. The Turkish governor had already marked her for his harem. He promised to spare her mother and brothers and sisters if she would join his harem slaves, but her devoted priest and her mother refused to let her make the sacrifice.

The Pacha summoned all the remaining Christian men and massacred them. The Turks carried off to their harems scores of the prettiest girls. Aurora and her sister managed to elude the Turkish soldiers only for a while.

Then with the 4,000 Christian women and children of her city, Aurora was taken into the desert, where, after long hours of suffering at the hands of

the cruel Zaptieths, she was stolen, with other pretty girls, by Musa Bey, the notorious Kurd chieftain. Musa Bey sold her to Kehmal Effendi, from whom she escaped by jumping into the Euphrates. She rejoined her party of refugees in the desert, and again took up the long tramp under the cruel scourging of the Zaptieths.

She has told of the fate of the young women of Keban-Maden, and of the "Butcher Shop" at Arabkero; how she was stolen the second time from her mother; of the "crucifixion" of sixteen beautiful Christian girls near Malatia; of the fate of the school girls of Kirk-Goz, and of the cruel massacres in the "Charnel City."

To-day she tells of the Christian slaves in the house of Hadji Ghafour, the forced apostasizing of the Christian girls at Geulik, and of her own reception in the harem.

With the permission of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief of New York City, the diary of her terrible experiences will be continued from Sunday to Sunday on these pages.

soldier pressed his thumbs upon her eyeballs. Then he spoke:

"If there be not a comely virgin here, then by Allah's will this wench's eyes come out!"

There was a cry of horror, then a shriek. A girl who must have been of my own age, almost fifteen then, and whom I had often noticed because her hair was almost brown, so much lighter than that of nearly all Armenian girls, threw herself, screaming, onto the ground at the soldiers' feet. Winding her hands about the legs of the soldier whose thumbs were pressing against the woman's eyes, she cried:

"My mother! my mother! Spare her—here I am—I am still a maid!"

The soldiers seized the girl, guffawing loudly at the success of their plan. As they lifted her between them she flung out her hands toward the woman, who had fallen in a heap when the soldiers released her. "Mother," the girl screamed, "kiss me—kiss me!"

The poor woman struggled to her feet and reached out her arms, but her eyes were hurt and she couldn't see. The girl begged the soldiers to carry her to her mother. "I will go—I will go, and be willing—but let me kiss my mother!" she cried. But the soldiers hurried away with her, still laughing and jesting with themselves.

The mother stood, leaning on those who crowded close to comfort her. Then, suddenly, she drooped and sank to the ground. When we bent over her she was dead. We sat by the body until the daughter came back—after the moon had crossed the sky, and it must have been midnight. The girl hid her face when she came near until she could bury it in her mother's shawl. She sat by the body until morning, when we took up our march again.

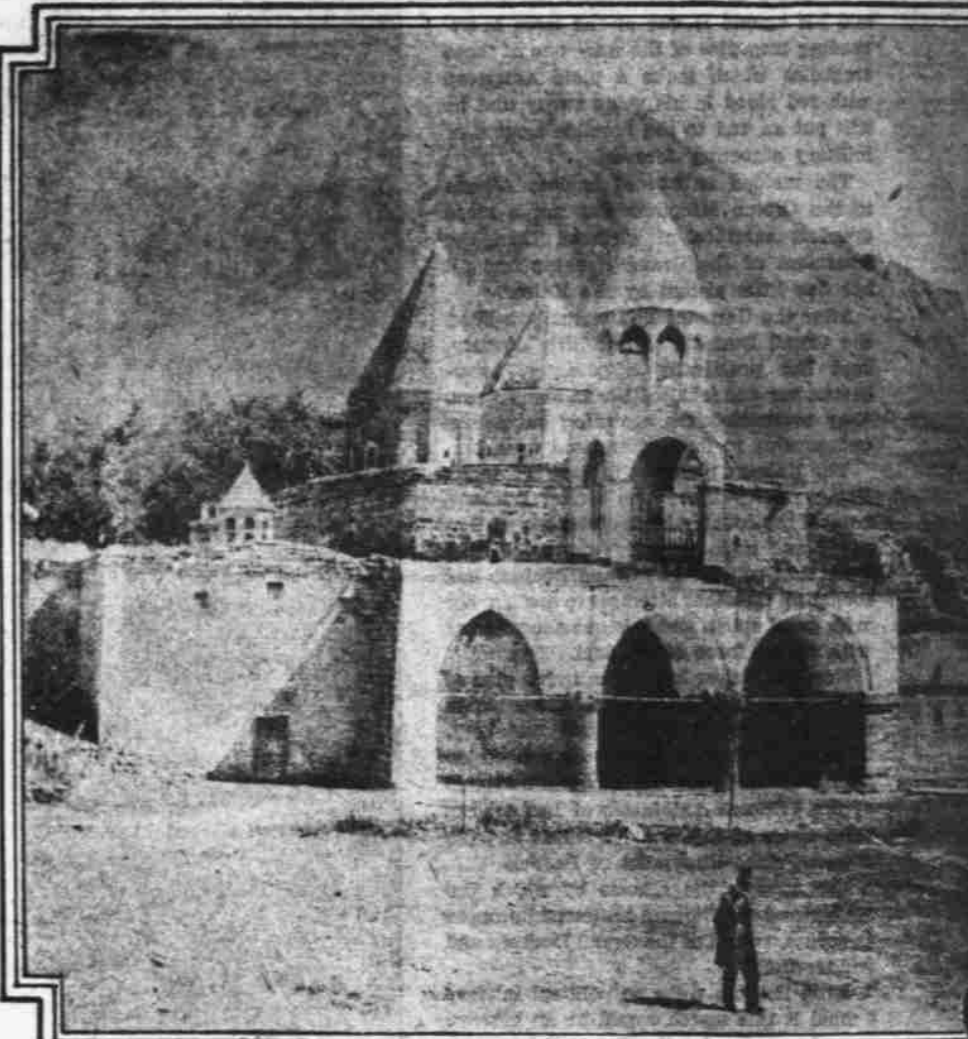
Every night such things happened.

Other parties along that road had fared the same. Sometimes I counted the bodies of exiles who had preceded us until I could count no longer. They laid at the roadside, where their guards had left them, for miles. I wondered, sometimes, if God could make room for so many of His people in Heaven.

On the eleventh day we came to Geulik, the Turkish city where the caravans for Damascus and Beroit spend the night in great, busy khans and then turn southward. There are even more caravans now than there used to be, for now they travel only to the Damascus railway and then return. Geulik is the home of many rich Turks, who profit from the traders or who have retired from posts of power and profit at Constantinople.

We camped outside the city. Early the next morning scores of bashi-bazouks, with military officers, came out. Kerim Bey met them, and there was a short conference. Then the Kurds and bashi-bazouks began to gather the prettiest girls. They tore them from their relatives and half dragged, half carried them to where guards were placed to take charge of them.

All morning the bashi-bazouks carried young women away until more than two hundred had been accepted by the chief officer. Then the apostates, with whom I had been given refuge, were ordered to join these weeping



The Famous Ancient Armenian Monastery on the Diyarbekir Road from Which Other Christian Girls Who Had Taken Refuge There Were Stolen by Monks Were Tortured and Slain. Aurora Will Tell About It.

girls, and we were marched into the city.

The narrow streets were crowded with Turks and Arabs, curious to see us. They hooted at us, and made cruel jests as we passed. Among the apostates were many old women, whose daughters had sworn to be Mohammedans to save them. When the crowds saw these they laughed with ridicule. Once the citizens swooped down upon the party and, unhindered by our guards, seized four of the older women, stripped off their clothing and carried them away on their shoulders, shouting in glee. We never heard what became of these women. I think they were just tossed about by the crowd until they died.

We were taken to a house which we soon learned was the residence of Hadji Ghafour, which looked as though it must be one of the largest houses in the city. Only devout Moslems who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca may be called "Hadji." Hadji Ghafour was looked upon as one of the most religious of men. He was very wealthy and his house was a khan, or open resting place, for the owners of great caravans, who always became his guests during their stay in the city.

In the house of Hadji Ghafour we were crowded into large room, with bare stone walls, which, I learned later was where camels and dromedaries were often quartered over night when the caravans came. Of the apostate party only a hundred were left; of the girls who had been stolen from the others there were more than two hundred as I have said.

Into the great room soon came he whom I learned later was Hadji Ghafour himself. Soldiers accompanied him. We of the apostate party had been put into one corner with bashi-bazouks to watch us. Hadji Ghafour gave an order to his soldiers and they separated the most pleasing girls and the younger of the women who had been married from the others. Of these, with me among them, there were only thirty, and we were taken out of the room and into another, not so large, on another floor of the house.