

STORY OF AN ARMENIAN REFUGEE

ALMOST the sole survivor of his city in Armenia, the teller of this tale has reached America after two years. He is seventeen, and his portrait appeared last week in the department of Religion and Social Service. Simply and earnestly he pleads for the survivors of a nation which, as he points out, has made a greater sacrifice in human life than any other in the war. His name is suppressed because he has still living a mother and sister somewhere in the East who might feel the vengeance of our merciless enemies. This story is issued by the Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. The boy addresses the nation as a whole as "Dear kind Americans," and says:

I have been asked to tell you my sad story. I do not know English well and it is hard for me to express myself, but again I will try my best.

Some nations are famous for their art, some because of their literature, some for their commerce, some for their cruelties, and some for their sufferings. Armenia has become famous for her sufferings. It seems to me not good to be only known for sufferings, but I am from that nation Armenia.

But Armenians were not always suffering. Neither was I and my family always suffering. I lived with my father, mother, two sisters, and brother, and we were happy. We had colleges, schools, churches, comfortable homes, theaters, and automobiles. But that was before 1915. In March, 1915, suddenly our town was surrounded by Turkish soldiers and all of the prominent Armenian merchants, doctors, dentists, professors, and business men were imprisoned and they began to torture them. I do not like to tell you sad things, and to tell of torturings in the land of freedom seems to me not good, but again I must tell you of the suffering of my people.

They tortured the professor of history in our college—the American Missionary College. First they beat him with a stick, then they burned his hair, then they burned his fingers, and finally they crucified him, and all the time he was murmuring:

"God, all this for your sake."

They did not take my father at first, but later they took him to the prison also, and there they kept him in a room where they tortured prominent Armenians. After he saw these torturings they told him: "These things will happen to you if you do not bring your guns." But my father was a peaceful man; he had no guns. He was a professor and he had no arms with which to defend himself. He was a kind man and he could not bear to see such torturings. He became sick and they took him to Dr. Atkinson's hospital. After two months of these torturings the Turkish Government ordered all Armenians to be deported to the Syrian and Arabian deserts, and on July 3, 1915, three thousand Armenians, the most prominent men in our city, doctors, lawyers, merchants, professors with their wives and families began to move toward the deserts. Our family was in this group.

Dear Americans, in America if some one is pretty they want to be prettier, if some one is beautiful they want to be more beautiful, but it was not so in our country during the deportations. At the time of

deportations they tried to spoil the beauty God gave. I saw mothers cut the long hair of their daughters. I saw my mother cut the long blond hair of my sister, but they could not take out their beautiful eyes. I heard mothers saying: "Daughter, I wish you were blind." But it is hard to spoil the beauty which God gives.

After a few days one of the Turkish officers saw my sister. We were traveling toward the deserts, surrounded by Turkish soldiers and officers, and these soldiers selected were the most cruel ones. After a few days the Turkish officer asked for my sister from my father, but my father would not do that. Neither would any Armenian do that. Never will I forget my father's words. We were standing on the bank of the River Euphrates. He said to the Turkish officer:

"You are a Turk and I am Armenian; you are Moslem and I am Christian. I can not give you my daughter. If it were not written in our Bible that suicide is a sin, I would throw myself with my daughter into the river."

After a few days we reached Malatia. This beautiful little city was my father's birthplace. Here we were suddenly surrounded by another corps of Turkish soldiers, and the men were separated from the women. I do not know English well, and it is hard for me to describe what a heartbreaking scene this was for men to be separated from women. Even if I tried to tell it to you in Armenian I could not describe the scene. Husbands could not say good-by to their wives for the last time; fathers were torn from the arms of their wives and children. I could not kiss my sister for the last time.

I was surrounded by two Turkish soldiers and they pulled me away, and 550 men, Armenians, were thrown into a great dungeon. Dear Americans, the men in the Orient do not weep very much. I have seen fathers bury their daughters and they did not weep, but in this dungeon every Armenian man was weeping. I wept, too, and I went into a dark corner, for if my father saw me weeping it would make him more sad. All the men began to pray. They did not pray for their own lives because it was better for them to die than to go out into the desert and to starve, but they prayed for those women and children who had no one to protect them or help them.

Finally a Turkish officer asked him if he would like to go to the prison of the women. It was his wish but he did not want to leave his father, who, seeing him hesitate, told him to go. The writer continues:

And it was good for me that I went, for in a few hours that same night, at midnight, the Turkish officers and soldiers took these 549 Armenians out to the nearby mountains and they killed them all, one by one, with axes and knives. One of the Turkish soldiers laughed and told me that they did not use guns because cartridges cost four cents each.

When I reached the prison of the women—only one boy, fifteen years of age, among 2,500 women and children and girls—it was a sad sight, I tell you dear Americans. Mothers were asking me about their sons and about their husbands; sisters wanted to know about their brothers, but I could only say that they will see you all again (tho, of course, not in this world).

That same night the officer who had

asked for my sister from my father came and took her away. She was weeping, but there was no one to help, only a boy fifteen years of age who could do nothing. She wept and cried with the officer for her family, so we were allowed to go back to our city, my mother, my little sister and brother, and I. But what happened to those 2,500 women and children and girls? I know you will ask. First they took their money, their carts, their goods, and then they took their clothes. Do you know what it means to have the women without clothes. Our Armenian ladies could not bear to be ungowned and they threw themselves into the rivers.

The prettiest girls they took to Turkish harems. Do you know what it means to be in a Turkish harem? Turkish harems are very bad for Turkish girls. Even in my native city I pitied Turkish girls who were in a Turkish harem, but Turkish harems for Armenian Christian girls are terrible.

We went back to our city, but we had no home. The Turkish Government had confiscated our home, our garden, our goods, and all that we had. My little brother was not strong enough to stand such sufferings and he died. He would wake up in the night and call:

"Brother, do you not see there in that corner they are killing my father—just there in that corner."

He was not strong to stand such suffering, so he died.

For months we lived under the protection of the American Consul and the kind American missionaries. But it was the intention of the Turkish Government to kill every Armenian student. Of the five hundred boy students in the American College where I studied, only five escaped, and it became impossible for me to live there any longer. We planned for me to escape over the mountains to the Russian Army. One night in September, 1916, with four other Armenian villagers, I bade good-by to my mother and little sister and we began our journey. It is hard to make an almost hopeless flight over mountains, sometimes covered with the snow. We slept on the hard ground, sometimes with a rock for a pillow. Many times we did not have bread to eat. Five times we were captured by Turkish soldiers, and they would have taken our lives but we gave them money and bought our freedom.

Finally we came to the Russian Army. I saw a Russian soldier standing on the hill-top, and we ran to him, and I was very glad. But I was not glad for long, for when I reached the Russian Army, there in that Christian land, I found Armenians, starving. Armenians who had escaped the sword of the Turk were starving day by day. Students like me, who had escaped over the mountains, were starving. Armenian girls who had escaped from Turkish harems were starving there in Russia, and there were little Armenian children who had escaped from being buried alive. They buried Armenian children alive in Turkey. I know a place where 10,000 Armenian children were buried alive, and those little children who had escaped were starving there in Russia. The Russians were kind to them, but they did not have food enough themselves.

I do not ask your help because these are Armenians and I am Armenian. The Turks do not need your help. If one day I saw the Turks in the same condition as I saw Armenians, the Armenian refugee

would stand on the platforms of America and say: "Help for the Turks, for they are starving. Rich, kind Americans, give aid to the Turks, for they are starving." But the Turks do not need your aid.

I plead with you for help for my people. One million Armenians have died. Show me if you can another nation that has given one million martyrs in eight months. And now many thousands of Armenians are starving. It is for them I ask your help.

When I was traveling in Japan one night I saw the beautiful stars in the sky, and never, it seemed to me, had I seen them shine so brightly. In a few days, in one of the harbors of Japan, I saw your flag, the Stars and Stripes, and it seemed to me that the stars on your flag shone as brightly as the stars in the sky, and I murmured: "Is there any difference?" It seems to me there is one difference: The stars in the sky shine on everybody; they shine on Armenians in Turkey; they shine in Siberia, in Korea, in Japan, and they shine in America. The stars on your flag shine on America, but they do not shine on everybody. The stars on your flag are the emblem of your liberty. You are free and for that they put the stars on your flag. You are rich and the stars on your flag are the symbol of your wealth and your power. Dear Americans, don't you want the stars on your flag to shine on everybody? Then help the Armenians.

If you will help them and save them they will go back to Armenia after the war, and in a hundred years they will become thirty million as once they were. And then they will cry from the far Orient:

"Long live America! Long live the flag of freedom, for the stars on your flag are like the stars in the sky—they shine on everybody!"
