ARMENIAN GIRL BRINGS TALE OF "THE FORTY MARTYRS"

Two Score Christian Students of Anatolia College at Marsovan, in Asia Minor, Sold Into Slavery, Deported Into Arabian Deserts or Brutally Massacred by the Turks

By Charles W. Duke

ONE of the "Forty Martyrs," a thin wraith of an Armenian woman, has arrived in the United States from the inferno of Asia Minor, bringing a wretched tale of the terrible conditions that maintain there now under Moslem rule, backed up by the purveyors of Hun zrightruiness, now recognized as every whit as dark and hideous as the barbarities practiced these many years by the unspeakable Turk against the helpless Armenians. It was my privilege to hear her story.

The "Forty Martyrs" were two score talented young Armenian girls who at the beginning of the world war were students at Anatolia College in the Armenian city of Marsovan, and who vowed among themselves in a secret pact, sworn to with all the passionate ardor of their race, that they would each and every one submit to the most harrowing tortures or die by their own hand rather than embrace Mohammedanism.

So far as known, this young girl, Armenuhe Damerjian, is the only one of the "Forty Martyrs" who has escaped to America, although every once in a while the Armenian colonies in the various large American metropolitan centers welcome to their midst with tears of joy some emaciated tortured exile from the harems or prisons of the Moslem. Since the United States entered the war against Germany few exiles from Asia Minor have found their way into this country. At the present time more than half a million Armenian exiles are wasting away in the Arabian deserts. American relief still reaches more than 500,000 refugees in the Russian Caucasus and smaller colonies in Jerusalem and Alexandria, in Egypt, but this has been jeopardized by recent military operations.

Girls Disfigured Themselves

While the military operations in Palestine, Asia Minor and for that matter virtually all of eastern Europe have been veiled lately behind a curtain of ominous silence, it is known from meager cable reports that the outrages in Armenia have been resumed by the Turks with all the horror and brutality that marked the massacres of 1895 and the equally violent outrages of 1915-16. Since the conclusion of the peace at Brest-Litovsk between Germany and the Bolshevik Government of Russia it is known that the territory taken by the Russians earlier in the war, extending from Trebisond through Erzerum to Lake Van, has been abandoned to the Moslems, and Turkish fiendishness again holds diabolical high carnival at the expense of the Armenians.

The story of the "Forty Martyrs," although not heretofore revealed to the American public, is widely known among Armenians in America, who have watched from afar the unspeakable cruelties heaped upon their compatriots, and while waiting almost hopelessly for some word of the famous "Forty Martyrs" have labored incessantly to raise relief funds for their own war chest, funds that have been going forward by millions of dollars since the carnage began.

Armenian exiles arriving during the last year or two had brought the information that the most beautiful among these forty girls disfigured themselves, or helped to disfigure each other, when the Turks first drove them from their school, in order that they would not appear alluring victims for Turkish debauchery. It was known also that American missionaries had succeeded in rallying all the girls at Constantinople before the United States went into the war. But after April of last year the curtain dropped on the "Forty Martyrs."

In the meantime, there were only the wildest surmises here as to the fate of the girls. It was taken for granted that the most likely among them had been established in Turkish harems, the plain types probably deported along with the vast army of Armenian womanhood into the hot barren sands of the Mesopotamian deserts to wither and die. It was supposed, too, that some of the forty had died miserable deaths on the point of the bloody Turkish knife, or before machine guns turned upon scores of Armenian victims knotted together indiscriminately and mowed down like so many cattle—just as it has happened scores of times in darkest Armenia.

All of which, alas! has been proved only too true by the pitiful story of Armenuhe Damerjian, who escaped to the United States by way of Constantinople, and thence to Switzerland and France, through the good offices of American missionaries. In New York she was met by her sweetheart of childhood days, who had come to America before the war, and after a brief sojourn in the Armenian colonies there and in Philadelphia married and was off to her new home in Baltimore, in which city her husband is employed.

This girl's story is not materially different from any of the stories recounted in the report on the treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in documents presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, by Viscount Bryce—irrefutable evidence that will stand for all time as an indictment of the outrages committed under the auspices of the Young Turks, who, after deposing Abdul Hamid, of 1895 massacre fame, and promising to all the world the abandonment of further cruelties, disregarded their sworn word as just another "scrap of paper," as did Germany with Belgian neutrality.

Armenuhe Damerjian, speaking for her race, epitomizes all the religious persecution directed against her people through the years past; first, under

Just a pitiful Armenian exile writhing under the pain of the oppressor

the Persians, because they would not become fire-worshipers; second, under the Russians, because they would not embrace the faith of the Greek Orthodox church, and, lastly, under the Turks, because they would not acknowledge Mahomet. Coming down to the last ten years, and pointing the finger directly at Germany, she maintains Kaiserism has stood back of Turkish barbarities through all the years.

"Little Christian Armenia has stood all this time between the Kaiser and his dreams of a sweep eastward into Asia," she says. "Did not this very same Kaiser, after the massacre of 1895, when 350,000 of my people were killed off, go down to Constantinople and confer upon Abdul Hamid, 'the Bloody Turk,' the Iron Cross, or some other decoration for 'valor'? Haven't German missionaries all these years been pushing into Armenia, into sections of our country where missions and schools already were established in such numbers that there was no necessity for any more schools? Has it not all been a part of the Kaiser's plot against civilization? Every Armenian thinks so, and, by the blood of my slaughtered ones, has evidence enough."

Armenuhe Damerjian is an educated Armenian girl, and points proudly to the fact that at least 95 per cent of her people have a common education, obtained through the schools opened by Anglo-Saxon agencies, while fully 75 per cent of all the young people have obtained a college education, in whole or part. She knews the Hun for his full worth, and knows just how for years past, under the subterfuge of missionary work, the Kaiser's emissaries have been laying the groundwork for the present terrible drive eastward toward the desired Golden Empire.

"It is not unlike the method pursued in Belgium," she told me. "Men and women who came into Armenia ostensibly as missionaries were in reality German spies. This espionage under the guise of the Cross has been carried on for more than ten years. To any person with eyes wide open the operations of the Germans were only too patent. What, for instance, was the German plan in penetrating to sections of our country in which flourishing missions already were established? In many of these sections the schools had been in existence for some time and the educational facilities were entirely adequate.

German Acquiescence

"But was what the Germans did. They built their own schools. When the proper time came they razed their buildings—and there were the concrete emplacements for artillery just as the Germans built them in Belgium under the guise of commercial enterprises, etc. These German 'missionaries' knew every mountain, every river, every strategic point in the path toward Persia and the East, and when the war began the Turks, with their German officers, went forward as no Turkish army could have done alone. Does it not occur to you that through all these dark days since 1914, with our people slain and persecuted by the thousands, a word from Berlin to Constantinople in the name of humanity could have stopped these horrible massacres?

"Consider my people today, driven from their homes, rotting to death on the deserts, thousands over there now are perishing because the German commanders have permitted the Turkish commanders to herd them about like dumb cattle and slaughter them like so many beeves in a Chicago stockyard. The Turk is doing the wretched work, but back of him stands the German, maybe not nodding his head in approval, but, at any rate, turning his back upon the scene and with deaf ears refusing to intercede."

She took up the story of the "Forty Martyrs" as though an ordeal that she dreaded.

"My father was an Armenian minister," she began. "When the war began many of our young men were commandeered and forced into the Turkish army. Think what that means—brother fighting against brother! My father, with many other men, was deported. Can you imagine what that means? A gendarme at the front door during the night; a peremptory demand to be at the mobilization point in the morning; forced to go whether you want to or not. Oh, it has happened a thousand times just as it did in the case of my poor father. Where is he today? I do not know. Probably dead—at least, I hope so, rather than enduring savage cruelties, or dying from thirst and hunger, while being lashed for inability to perform hard manual labor.

"You know what the Turks do with our middle-aged and older men. Chain them together in squads of fifteen, twenty or thirty. March them for miles out into the open country. Stop along some desolate roadway. Turn their guns upon them and shoot them down like so many defenseless sheep. I have seen the roads in Asia Minor piled with the dead bodies of Armenians so that it was impossible to pass until the barricade of flesh had been removed. I have seen whole families massacred in this way—the bodies of mother, father and innocent children stretched out upon the highway.

"My mother was torn away from us in just this fashion. It was terrible to see father go and to think of what probably would happen to him. It was terrible to think that mother——

"God in heaven, I have prayed over and over; will it ever end? Will poor, downtrodden Armenia ever be saved from the horrors of her desolation and her crucifixion. Surely, if the world is to be made safe for democracy, little Armenia will be saved from her destroyers and made safe for her own brave people."

Martyrs for Christianity

Flashes of "Quo Vadis" recurred through my mind at the fearful story, and with it the thought that the first Christians who were thrown to the lions in the amphitheatre of Rome, there to die for their religious faith, or made flaming pillars to adorn the pathway of the Roman emperors, were persecuted no more atrociously than are the Christians of Armenia in these modern times of the Terrible Turk.

"The Forty Martyrs," this girl resumed, "were all young Armenian women just like myself, college students seeking to elevate themselves through the educational facilities provided us by Christian America and Christian Europe. A leader of the gendarmes came to our school and made it known that we, too, must follow in the footsteps of the cavalcade moving eastward to the deserts. It was either a case of suicide or go along. And well we knew what was in store.

"You know how the Turks managed these deportations. All the vile and morally unfit were turned out of prisons and put into the army. Many of the deportations were under the auspices of this class. A caravan would proceed from a given city, and then, at many points along the line, girls and women would be captured and carried off to the harems or mistreated and left dying along the roadway.

Slaughtered by the Thousands

"It was always the same procedure. At a short distance from the villages, the men were separated from the women and tied together; the guards then shot at the human target just as long as there was any sign of life. In many instances the victims were stoned to death, or hacked to pieces with knives and hatchets. It was particularly effective to chop down the heads of families in this way in the presence of their mothers, their wives and their children, and watch them go mad with horror and grief.

"We ten-nine men were too numerous to dispatch in this spectacular way, they were simply bound together in batches and hurled from some high cliff to be dashed to death on the rocks below. There was only one flaw to be found in these ingenious methods of destroying Armenian defense. Unburied corpses were piling up in such numbers as to become a serious menace to the health of the executioners themselves, so a still better system was worked out.

"I stood beside a trench which was the grave of 2000 men," one of our missionaries reported. 'They had all surrendered their arms upon implicit promises that they would be spared. The moment they became defenseless they were compelled at the point of bayonets to dig the trench into which they were forced, and then hacked to pieces.'

"Not all the men were destroyed so speedily. Many were thrown into prisons and subjected to horrible tortures, while large sums were extorted from their families to buy their release. When the unhappy relatives had no more money to give, the victims were loaded into sailing boats and taken out some distance on the Black Sea, where they were thrown overboard to drown; those who attempted to swim were shot as they struggled in the water. Over 5000 men perished in this way.

"In the prison such inhuman tortures were inflicted that even the Turkish populace protested that their slumbers were disturbed by the frightful moans of the victims and asked that the nuisance be expedited. A common means of torturing Christians was to tear out their eyebrows, their beards and their nails. The medieval practice of bastinadoing was also resorted to, in several cases as many as 800 strokes were administered, not until the feet burst open from the blows did they cease. If a man lost consciousness during the process, he was promptly revived by means of cold water. Each day the bastinadoing was repeated until the feet of the victim began to burn and had to be amputated. A foreign resident of an Anatolian town states that he saw thirty Christian prisoners with their feet in this condition. He also tells of one man who was beaten to death in the space of five minutes.

"Old people, too feeble to keep up with the march, were beaten with cudgels until they could rise no more; many were saturated with oil and burned to death.

"One refugee succeeded in effecting her escape because she fainted and was left for dead with the body of a child over her head. This woman tells of a little girl about three years of age who fell at the feet of an officer. She was picked up on the point of his bayonet and tossed into the air. Another officer caught the screaming child with his bayonet and in turn tossed her to another. In this way the baby was hurled from point to point until the mangled condition of their victim put an end to the ghastly game. This was done by a company of German officers, and they were not the only ones who openly participated in diabolical orgies of this kind, and were denounced by some of their own countrymen who were engaged as teachers in the German Technical School at Aleppo."

This recital of atrocities could run on ad infinitum to fill a huge book just as they filled the Bryce report. But in the case of the "Forty Martyrs," the witness declared:

"All of us agreed that we would suffer anything rather than bow to Mohammedanism. A number of them, the prettiest, were taken into the harems. It has been established that one of the forty escaped there after killing her keeper. Many of them had tried to avoid just such a fate as the harem by scarring their faces.

"The director of our school personally found several of the girls being auctioned off on the public block and bought them back. They were obtained for $5 each.

"I was gotten back through the intervention of one of our teachers. I will not go into all the details of my lot, except to say that first we were invited to accept Mohammedanism. Then when we refused we were asked to marry the Turks. Refusal of course meant that some of the girls were hurried off to the harems while others were deported, as I was, toward the east.

"It was either a case of go along or take your own life. And means of suicide were not always available. Yet many, many Armenian girls cast themselves into rivers or over cliffs to a death preferable to tortures or indecencies.

In Free America!

"In the town of Harpout the Turks took 200 Armenians into a church, did as they pleased with them, then killed every single one and finally burned the church to cover the awful crime.

"In one fireplace were found the skulls of forty children.

"Many, very many, including some of the Forty Martyrs, were scorched, and some of them thrown into vats of boiling oil. Many of the priests and preachers were crucified.

"I could go on and on. But it is all the same horrible story. I got back to Constantinople from Beirut and thence into Switzerland through the kind offices of our good missionary teachers, all of whom were driven out when the United States and Germany went to war. And now I have arrived in free America. And here I shall remain, hoping and longing and praying for the day when the oppressed of my poor Armenia will be oppressed no more."

An Armenian mother weeping by the bodies of her five dead sons in the woods of Etchmiadzin

Typical Armenian girls, saved from the harem by American missionaries, formed in a bread line

PITY ARMENIA!

Armenian population at beginning of war, 5,000,000.

Estimated fully 1,500,000 have perished in massacres, starvation, brutalities in deportations and slain in battle.

Refugees in Russian Caucasia, more than 200,000.

Refugees in Jerusalem, 5000.

Refugees in Alexandria, Egypt, 5000.

Exiles to Arabian deserts, 500,000.

Army of 180,000 Armenians still intact today in southern Russia, fighting for Allies against Turks.

American Army Lieutenant in Action

Gilmer, Tex., June 20.

NO ACCURATE mental composite picture of life and action upon the western front can be framed either by the man who is several thousand miles removed from the scene or by the soldier who is on the fighting line, according to the statement of Lieutenant William J. Tucker, who has been in service in France for several months. In a letter just received from him by his father, George Tucker, of Gilmer, Lieutenant Tucker says:

"What puzzled me most when I first went up to the trenches, quite a little while ago, was that at the very mouth of the boyaux, and within easy rifle shot of the boche trenches, there resided civilians—women and some little children. They went about their daily task with gas masks strapped across their shoulders. This was a feature of the war the American soldier did not well understand. These intrepid civilians refused to be driven from their ruins of homes. I had not thought of myself exactly as coming out of the trenches, with gas mask at the alert, and walking across the street to purchase souvenir postals.

"And the uncanny accuracy of the artillery. That is something most of us had thought about. But we have come to find it is surprising how many shells the very best of artillery can drop very close by without hitting the right spot. And it is terribly annoying to think that with as many places there are to hit where you are not one of these shells might strike where you are.

"One of the best laughs I ever enjoyed was from looking over a shell area through my glasses and seeing the Hun drop two shells nearly every two minutes against one of 'our batteries,' which his avions had located. The way they were plowing up the ground in front of those 'guns' was delightful to behold. The great joke was the 'battery' was only some nicely shaped timbers, which protruded out of the 'emplacements' quite ominously.

"There was another time, not long ago, when I wandered over beautiful hills and splendid woods, which gave some evidence that the boche lighter nieces could reach me with ease, but from morning until night I did not hear a single shot fired. Here I was, just back of the trenches, but with nothing but the occasional patch of 'suffering trees' to remind me that I was doing duty in the first line trenches. There is where the imagination mistakes. The splendid things of comfort and earthly protection are usually on paper.

"The American soldiers beat back a raiding party last night,' or 'the Americans on the blank sector drive the enemy from his first line.' Those headlines give you an idea of what the American soldiers did, and the writer tries to tell you something of how magnificent the boys from home acted and how ignominiously the enemy was defeated. He has told you all he has been able to obtain from headquarters about the working of the machinery. It is often impossible to secure the information and to describe the human side.

"When the American soldiers beat back that raid perhaps the writer forgot to tell you about the sentry who remained at the dugout entrance while the others were safely beneath the protecting covering of earth, and who, while he lay at his post was hit by a rather heavy H. H. And he doesn't learn that days afterward in his kitbag somewhere they found a letter addressed to his mother and relatives. He told them he was glad to be over here and that if he ever had to go he hoped it would be while he was on the job at a little better than ordinary duty. The correspondents don't know about that letter and how the brave lad seemed to have some presentiment that he was approaching real danger, and whole ever so tenderly and wanted to be 'forgiven for the slightest trouble he had ever caused them.' But that is one of the true delights, as you might learn if you knew the parents of Corporal Hughes.

"You see through the lines of the printed article the Americans driving the enemy from his own line, but they can't make you see the hell of shell-fire that was falling about those men even before they were ready to leave their own trench. And they didn't tell you about the boche who had climbed up a tree with an automatic rifle and dealt out a little destruction until an American located him. They can't show you Max Hubbell as he calmly goes to the knoll and fires the lone shot that tumbles the Fritz out of that tree. And what sort of a view could you get of that giant Texas lieutenant, Currie, birch club in one hand and an automatic pistol in the other, worming down the trenches, more than half naked from forcing his men to 'come in!' Just as if all they had to do was to follow while he cleared the way.

"Do they show you Hart, bombing those fellows he caught in their dugout, holding the grenades a little after they had fused to be sure they would not be thrown back at him, like the first one he threw in? But we see them. We understand. And if you could gather the news from the homes many wide apart, and they could tell you how Freddie Turner went and how Al Bohmer fought to the last; of how Orville Hawkins got his Croix de Guerre, of why Lieutenant Van Hoff is still in the hospital because he persisted in leading his men on after he was severely wounded, and why Captain Ross was cited in orders, then you would get better than a composite of the things which we have seen. You would understand that those headlines are potent in their significance; that they are laden with glory for a large number, and that it means suffering for a few who are fighting the silent and sacrificing battle back home.

"It is hard to compass the human side. It is difficult to perceive how it works upon an individual. When I first visited within the range of the mobile guns the constant roar of our guns and enemy guns and falling shells kind of unnerved me and I did not sleep so well that first night. Not long ago I was with an old veteran of a trench fight-er. Things were ominously calm at the time. We decided to get a little sleep. 'How in the Sam Hill is a fellow going to sleep this kind of a night?' he asked me. 'I wish our guns would open up and the boche would drop over a few shells.' And he meant it, and I was in the humor to agree with him."

"Over There" Pens Impressive Picture of Fighting