

LETTER No. XXIII.

JOURNEY FROM DIARBEEKIR TO HARPOOT—TAURUS MOUNTAINS—
SOURCE OF THE TIGRIS—HEROIC BAND OF MISSIONARIES AT
HARPOOT: STORY OF THEIR PRESERVATION DURING THE
MASSACRE AND IN THE PRESENCE OF DEATH.

HARPOOT, *July 22, 1896.*

DEAR FRIENDS,—We left Diarbekir for Harpoot early on the morning of July 13, accompanied for the first hour or so of our journey by our kind friend and host, Mr. Hallward. Towards evening we began our ascent of the Taurus mountains, and all the following day were in their midst, now climbing up, up, up; and then winding down again through some narrow pass or beside the edge of some steep precipice, while all around the wild and lonely mountain scenery every moment seemed to offer some fresh beauty or wonder to our view.

We kept very near the Tigris a good part of the way, and at one part it was extremely beautiful, rushing over a rocky bed with great volume and force. We believed we finally traced its source to a wonderful blue lake of “incredible crystal,” as Mr. Ruskin would say, which lies high up amid the mountains, lonely and without even a boat on its surface, reminding us very much of the Sea of Galilee (except that it is smaller), and our imaginations, looking forward to the good time coming when this country shall be open to civilisation, pictured it a lovely

summer resort for the dwellers on the neighbouring plains, all dotted over with white sails, and its shores with happy homes.

Our descent on the third day into the great plain on the northern side of the Taurus was very tedious and trying, especially as we accomplished it under a blazing sun—but our good horses never once made a false step—and before evening we had arrived at the Government village Mezreh, at the foot of the steep hill of 1000 feet high, on the summit of which Harpoot stands, and were met and kindly greeted by our Consul, Mr. Fontana, and also by Dr. Barnum and Mr. Ellis, two of the missionaries from Harpoot, who, after we had stayed a little while in conversation with the Consul (who lives at Mezreh), escorted us up the hill to their fortress-like town. In riding across the plain, we had come through much desolation and two ruined and burned villages, and on entering the town, we rode through the *entirely ruined* Christian quarter until we arrived at the American Mission, where four buildings only remained standing out of twelve, the rest being heaps of ruins.

The kindest welcome awaited us here as at every mission station previously visited, and we were soon at home with this heroic little band, every one of whom has faced immediate and terrible death without fear or flinching. This is no figure of speech, for their destruction was evidently intended by the authorities here, if not by those at Constantinople, and it was not by any Government protection (as with Miss Shattuck at Ourfa), but by direct Providential intervention that they were saved.

The soldiers were ranged on the hill-side below, and the cannon planted pointing at their buildings, which stood high above the Christian quarter, and the bullets fell *in showers* upon the premises, while one shell burst in Dr. Barnum's little study, and we saw the path it made and where it broke, with its own remains, which he keeps as a relic.

The officials put the blame for this disgraceful attack on those above them when not on the Armenians themselves, and justice and truth are things unknown.

And this continued reign of deceit and lies and oppression is never for a moment varied by the opposite. The poor villagers send constantly to the mission with one tale of sorrow or another. The Kurds are taking their harvest, for example; the missionaries tell this to the Vali, with name of village, date of robbery, &c., who professes to be as much interested as they in the good of the people; and then follows the *invariable* report, which sounds like an echo of the Sultan's letter to Queen Victoria last winter, "We have made all inquiries, and we find none of these complaints are true," and that is the end!

This neighbourhood has suffered more largely in pillage and destruction of property than any other in Armenia, and already about £30,000 has been spent here, and over 73,000 people kept alive, and still the needs are almost as great as ever. There is not a village rebuilt yet of the more than 150 which have been pulled down and burned.¹

The tale our missionary friends here (Dr. and Mrs. and

¹ A waggon-load of kerosene cans was supplied by the Government to the Kurds for the purpose, &c.

Miss Barnum, Mr. Ellis, and two single ladies) told us of the time of the tragedy here, was most thrilling. They were all together, with over 100 of their people, afterwards 400 gathered round them, and driven by the fire and the whistling of bullets from one place to another. They had also with them two aged and paralysed missionaries, who had to be carried—a Mr. Wheeler and Mrs. Allen—and they all found a temporary shelter on the top of the roof of the girls' school-room, since burned, which having a little parapet around, was some protection from the observation of the soldiers on the opposite hill. Here they expected and prepared to die together, but after a while, finding the entrance to the boys' school-room, which was on higher ground, accessible, they planned a united retreat thither. In doing so they were deliberately fired at by a Turk, who had found his way to the roof on which they were, as well as became again the targets for a brief space of the soldiers' bullets. The Turk *aimed too high*, else one or more *must have been killed*, his bullet was found in the gateway they passed through afterwards; and as for the rest, the Lord had evidently given His angels charge concerning His servants to protect them in all their ways, and these bullets also did not touch them.

I asked our friends what their feelings were under these terrible circumstances, and I will give you some of their replies as nearly verbatim as possible. One said: "I had always feared death till then, but at that moment all fear was taken from me and death seemed nothing." Another said: "I believe my husband was almost disappointed we did not go, it would have been so lovely to have been taken

out of all the confusion and trouble here, by a brief pang, and all together." She also told me she had unloosed her dress in front that a sword should meet with no hindrance in its thrust, and so she should go the quicker. A third said: "My thought was a query whether a bullet going through me, would have force to wound Mr. Wheeler or not" (the helpless friend whom he was assisting to carry); and Dr. Barnum said: "I assure Mrs. H. there was not a woman screamed on our whole ground, and our ladies were as calm and collected as they are now."

The evident Divine protection over these servants of the Lord extended to the scholars also. When the buildings were fired, sixty of the young girls made their escape to neighbouring houses, each of her own choice taking from her small stock of possessions neither jewellery nor clothes, but just her little Bible under her arm. All of these girls returned safely two days after, when the immediate danger was over, and then indeed there was excitement and many tears, and Mrs. Barnum said she was so hugged by the women and girls in their joy, it was hard for her to keep on her feet!

When one contrasts this safety with the dreadful occurrences outside the mission circle, it is the more remarkable. Only a very short distance from Harpoot, for example, thirty-two women, headed by a noble and very intelligent woman well known to the missionaries, had thrown themselves into the Euphrates and were drowned, to escape apparently otherwise unavoidable dishonour, and more than one father played the part of Virginius of old and killed his daughter outright.

The missionaries lost everything they had in the looting

that followed the massacre and fire, but have since bought back a good deal, so that they are living quite comfortably now; but the Government holds out no hope of any indemnity for rebuilding at present, and objects even to small walls being put up, for immediate convenience.¹

As the post is now going out I must conclude, and remain for us both, yours always affectionately,

HELEN B. H.

¹ A tiny statistical return will assist the imagination to grasp the extent of the desolation in the districts of Harpoot and Palu:—

Statistics for Palu and its Forty-three Villages.

Armenian houses	2,074	Kidnapped girls	43
Number of Armenians	14,878	„ women	152
Houses plundered	2,059	Girls married to Turks	29
„ burned	755	Women „ „	21
„ destroyed afterwards	259	Girls returned	16
Killed	900	Women „	92
Wounded	513	Churches destroyed	44
Families converted	474	Monasteries „	2
Individuals „	3,181	Schools „	37
„ circumcised	603	Ecclesiastics killed	16

This list does not include those who died from fear and exposure. The kidnapping represents but a small part of the violence done to women.

Statistics gathered at Gregorian Episcopate for Harpoot and its Seventy-three Villages.

Needy persons	26,990	Forced conversion of men and women	7,664
Houses plundered	6,029	Wounded	1,315
„ burned	1,861	Miscarriages	829
Churches badly injured and defiled	29	Killed in fields and highways	280
Churches burned	15	Persons burned	56
Protestant chapels destroyed	5	Died of hunger and cold	1,014
„ „ badly damaged	18	Suicides	23
Monasteries burned	2	Martyrs { Bishops	1
„ „ damaged	4	{ Priests	11
Forced marriages to Turks	166	Protestant ministers	3
Rape	2,300	Teachers	7
Forced conversion of priests	12	Men, women, and children	1,903
Loss of property		Total deaths	4,127
		1,651,956 liras Turkish.	

This does not include Malatia, Arabkir, Egin, Charsanjak, Gighi, Palu, Choonkoosh, and Diarbekir districts.

These statistics have been carefully prepared.

LETTER No. XXIV.

HOW TO HELP THE DESOLATED VILLAGES?—CONDITION AROUND HARPOOT—DESPAIR OF THE VILLAGERS—PETITION FROM HOO-I-LOO FOR REBUILDING OF PROTESTANT CHURCH—VISIT TO THE VILLAGE IN RUINS—MEAL IN AN ORCHARD—ASSESSING THE TAXES OF THE DEAD UPON THE SURVIVORS—PLANS FOR FUTURE WORK—VAN, MALATIA, ETC.

HARPOOT, *July 25, 1896.*

DEAR FRIENDS,—One of the most difficult problems in connection with the relief of Armenian distress is that of the villages, and it is difficult in two ways. The first is that these villages are so numerous that to deal with them is much the same as trying to deal with single shops, houses, or persons in a city where there has been murder and pillage. One does not know where to begin, and even if one had a millionaire on the Relief Committee, one would hardly know where to stop. But the second reason which makes it hard to help is that a village *is* a village. It has no walls, nor gates; little or no active government (though that is not always a hardship, when, as in this country, the dogs persistently fraternise with the wolves): and consequently when an attack has once been made upon the Christians either by their neighbours or by outside tribes, the chances are that it will be repeated as often as there is anything worth plundering in the village. In the city, people can combine their strength

(even when disarmed by the Government as the first step in a massacre); they can hide a good deal of their property or carry it from place to place; but what can a poor villager do, who owns a very obvious yoke of oxen, and an almost as obvious store of grain? I know of several towns that have been able successfully to resist massacre, but I cannot at present recall a successful defence of a village.

And it is the sense of their helplessness in these villages that makes their and our hopelessness, whenever we give way to despair with them. Here at Harpoot, one looks to the south, from the cliffs where we are perched, across a great upland plain bounded on the south by the Taurus mountains, which we crossed on coming from Diarbekir. This plain is well watered by mountain streams and dotted all over with villages, mostly Christian villages, and almost all of them have been burned and destroyed. For days before the massacre and plunder at Harpoot, the missionaries watched the flames rising from one village after another, as the Kurds and Turks drew nearer and nearer to this doomed city. And what is true of this plain is true of every plain and hillside in this part of the country. It is the same to the north of Harpoot, across the Euphrates, where they have not only carried off the spoil of the people, in oxen, grain, implements, and other properties, but have come back again to plunder them of the oxen purchased for them by some of the relief workers (happily the Government has secured restitution of this last bit of plunder), and are even now threatening them with a renewal of the attacks of last

autumn. Is it any wonder that the people feared to till their fields, or that they fear to gather in their harvest, or that they huddle together like sheep, in villages that have not been burned, or where the desolation is less complete? It is a problem to aid them, a more difficult one to secure them from further danger: both parts of the question appear at first sight equally hopeless.

Some days ago we had an interesting visit from some villagers at the south side of the plain, coming from what was once the richest Christian village in the neighbourhood. The men came to the mission (two of them, if I remember, were the deputation) to ask for advice and help. They had been visited, I believe, some time since by one of the Red Cross agents, who had urged them to begin to rebuild their ruined houses, and had offered to start them by giving £5 a piece to the first ten or twenty houses—an excellent plan, and one that went right to the heart of the difficulty. The people, however, had refused the help, not because they were averse to help, but because they were in despair. What was the use of building what would be pulled down again, or of storing what would be plundered again? So the offer was declined, strange as it may seem. It will help you to understand the discouragement of the people.

Their recent visit was on a slightly different errand. There is (or was) in the village a fine Protestant church, which was built four years ago, and is now wholly destroyed, only the bare walls standing. Since the troubles, they have been holding their service in the Gregorian Armenian church, at the close of the Armenian service;

but without much sympathy from their hosts, who have now told them that they cannot any longer entertain them. So the deputation came to Harpoot to know if something could not be done to put their church in order; they did not want their houses built, but they wanted, so they said, a place to pray in, and they begged for help in rebuilding their house of worship. Dr. Barnum told them that there were no funds available for any such purpose, and sent them away, only promising that we would think over their case. I need hardly say that I was very interested in the people who put God first in this way; and while I do not believe in exterior sanctities, I felt the sanctity of spirits that had become prayerful by misfortune, and wished to know more about them. And so it came about that we planned an expedition to them, and yesterday five of us rode across the plain to examine into things for ourselves.

Hoo-i-loo is the name of the place, as nearly as I can write it from sound (for you will not find it marked on any map), and it lies between three and four hours from here (all distances, as you know, are measured by hours with us, like the German *Stunde*, and an hour stands for the distance covered by a laden horse in an hour of time, say between three and four miles English). Our party consisted of Mr. Gates, Miss Bush, Miss Emma Barnum, our two selves, our servant, and a *zaptich*. There was a cool breeze blowing, and we had a delightful ride across the plain, passing on the way a little Armenian church into which were built two Latin inscriptions, dedicated by Nero to some officers of the third legion. It seemed

appropriate to find the name of Nero here! It ought to be inscribed over the whole country-side, and on a thousand broken walls and ruined homes.

When we came to the village, we found that it consisted of about three hundred houses, and that not more than six were standing. All the rest was brown, bare, broken wall of mud-brick, without a roof, and with hardly a door or a window-shutter left. The people began to come around us and welcome us; one of the first women that drew near had lost her hand; there was no more than a stump left by the sword of the destroyer.

We went to the ruins of the church; the roof, as I said, was gone, and every piece of timber in the walls was burnt out by fire. The débris had raised the floor by perhaps a foot. The people crowded round with eyes full of tears, the women telling of slain sons and other pitiful things; the pastor, too, came to talk to us—a fine young fellow, in whom we were much interested. We made the tour of the village, found a little Catholic church similarly destroyed; then I took a lesson in archæology, for I noticed the streets deep in dust from the disintegrating brick, and saw how these mounds or tells were formed that we have seen so many times on our journey. Moreover, it was clear that desolations of this kind had occurred from the earliest times in this country, for how else could we explain the frequency with which such tells or mounds are found? If the people at Hoo-i-loo do not rebuild, there will be a tell formed there within a couple of years.

One single thing I found which had escaped destruction. High on the wall of a ruined house, in the second storey,

a photograph was nailed. We sent for a pole and got it down. It was a group of Armenian workmen from a factory at Worcester, Mass., and had doubtless been sent home by some happy emigrant to his relations.

When we had finished our tour of the village, we were taken to an orchard, where they had prepared us a meal. "The robbers have not stolen our gardens," said the poor people. "No," I replied, "nor did they steal the sunshine," at which they brightened up. They set before us great dishes of apricots, apples, plums, and mulberries and cherries prettily arranged with hollyhock blossoms, and brought us milk, both fresh and curdled; and did everything in the way of hospitality that an Eastern people can do so much better than we. And we talked over all their plans, and encouraged them to believe for better days.

I must not forget to state that our study of the village showed that the houses were fired one by one; those that were spared belonged to Turks. They were fired by petroleum, the supply of which was brought in a waggon from Harpoot, by an official of the Government. The man who did it is well known; and I suppose he will be rewarded by-and-by with promotion, if one may judge from parallel cases.

And now what are we going to do for these poor people? We are encouraging them again to rebuild their houses, and shall try to help the foremost of them; and as to the church, who knows but what we may find some way presently to fulfil the desire of their hearts and give them and their pastor a "place to pray in?"

I must not close this letter without saying how delighted

we were to hear that Friends had sent us £1000 for our work here. Some of it may go to the village of Hoo-i-loo. We shall try to be very wise, very wary, and very economical in the distribution of it, so that all of it may go to the neediest people, and none of it may be turned into taxes. By the way, in regard to taxes, we have bad news from Ourfa; the Government is assessing the taxes of the dead upon the survivors! If this is true, it is one of the most heartless schemes that could be devised, and will throw the people back again just as they are rising. And I am almost certain, from the character and position of my informant, that it *is* true.—Your sincere friend,

J. R. H.

Extracts from Private Letters.

If all goes well, I hope to see thee and the rest of our friends in about six weeks' time. Meanwhile letters will still find me if addressed to the Bible House at Constantinople.

J. R. H.

Partly on account of Mr. Atkin's earnest request to us to continue our reports from this country, and partly because I am glad to remain in the country a while longer, I am letting R. return alone. But I shall continue to write you as before, because there is always so much to tell, and now that R. is going there is (perhaps) less need of reticence in using any information I may give, because the Turks despise women so much I don't think they will trouble themselves very much about my doings or say-