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SIX MONTHS AMONG BRIGANDS

BY ELLEN M. STONE

II

Life in the Mountain Huts—More Letters of Appeal—Increasing Severity of the Brigands—The "Bad Man" and the "Good Man"—Dressmaking—Talks with the Brigands—The First Letter from the World—The Approach of Winter—Flight into the Deepest Fastnesses of the Mountains—The Battle with another Band of Brigands

IT was a crowded, cluttered place for storage into which we were huddled when the brigands came to order me to write the second letter, announcing our capture and the sum demanded for our ransom. If they had been terrible to us before, how much more now, when they found themselves baffled in their expectation of securing, in a few days, the enormous ransom which they demanded for us. The same three again ranged themselves before us, fully armed as before, while their fierce words and fiercer manner struck terror to our hearts. We sat in our corners, their helpless captives, upon the cloaks which they had spread, our only place for sitting or lying. Their *voivoda*, as we took him to be, was again the spokesman. We had named him, to ourselves, "the Bad Man," and thus, for months, we designated him to each other, only abbreviating it to "the B. Man" sometimes, until, on a memorable day, after God had marvelously delivered us all—brigands and captives—from most imminent peril, we found that we had forgiven even "the Bad Man," and he seemed, as Mrs. Tsilka said that glad day, "like an angel."

Having announced to us the failure of our first attempt to establish connection with the world, and to set in operation measures which might induce action somewhere for our release, this cruel-faced and cruel-mouthed *voivoda* commanded me to make a second attempt

to open correspondence. He transferred the field chosen for negotiations from Macedonia to Bulgaria, from Bansko, on the slopes of the Perim Mountains, to Samokov, in the Switzerland of the Balkans, lying close by the pass between the Rhodope and the Rilo Mountains. He commanded me to choose one of our missionaries there to whom I should address the letter, acquainting him with the facts of our capture, the reason therefor—to extort the ransom of twenty-five thousand Turkish pounds—after mentioning the fact of our futile first attempt to open a correspondence, by which eleven days of the twenty set as the limit for the payment of the ransom had already been consumed. He also commanded me to request our busy missionary to go at once to Constantinople, bearing a second letter, inclosed, addressed to W. W. Peet, Treasurer of the Turkish Missions of the American Board, to whom I had previously written a letter which was lost. In this letter I was commanded to ask him to request the American Minister at the Porte to secure a cessation of the movements of the Turkish troops who were pursuing the brigands, on the ground that, in case of an encounter, *our* lives would be most endangered. They said that they were thinking to add fifteen days to the nine now remaining from the first time-limit. I pleaded for twenty; they compromised on eighteen. Twenty-seven days to live! Twenty-seven days for our ap-

peal to be taken to Samokov by foot messenger, thence to Constantinople—and the world! One hundred and ten thousand dollars! Not a para less! No Jewish bargaining here! Our captors made our hearts heavy because of their cupidity. The only material point of difference between the letters which I was now ordered to write and those previously written, was a reference to the changed manner of the brigands towards us. At first we had thought them terrible enough, but after they had announced their reason for our capture, we saw in them a constant effort to treat us humanely. “We took you for money,” they had said sententiously. “It is for our interest to keep you well, that we may get the ransom!” Hence their care at every point to guard us from falling, during our frequent nightly journeys, and from undue exposure to inclement weather; to provide for us food as abundant and as varied as the resources at their command would allow, and to give us occasionally a considerate word. Now, however, all was to be changed. Because of the failure of my first messenger to execute his commission, which had resulted in such loss of time, they would treat us with every severity, and were this second attempt to open negotiations to fail, they would no longer be trifled with. “There will be a bullet for you, and a bullet for her,” indicating my companion, Mrs. Tsilka. Feeling again all my nature rising within me in indignation at this conduct of men who had dared snatch us away from our God-given freedom, and made us their helpless victims—but recognizing the impotence of any remonstrance—I arose from our corner, and seated myself upon a projecting beam. They produced from one of the small satchels, which every man wore strapped across his back, some crumpled sheets of paper, a bottle of ink, and a pen. Again they remained and watched me, which was exceedingly irksome to me. I begged them to relieve us of their presence while I should complete the two letters. They said that was impossible. “Who knows what else you would write for your own purposes if we did not watch you?” I protested that I would write only what they had commanded, and that they should see every word; but they sneeringly disregarded my plea, and continued their watch. We concluded that they had never had captives before who comported themselves as honest, truthful people, and for themselves, their nefarious profession as brigands made them hold every man a liar.

Finally, the letters and the copies of them were completed, leaving me with strained

nerves, flushed face, and aching head. Our inexorable captors had, however, one more demand to make of me. “Now write an authorization to the bearer of this to receive the entire sum demanded for your ransom, writing out the amount in words and then putting it in figures, and signing your name.”

“Is it not possible to indicate this sum, or some portion of it?” I asked, seeking to leave a loophole for hope. “No; it must be the whole sum. And there is to be no Jewish bargaining here!” was the brutal answer. Indignation overmastered prudence in me as I felt my impotence to resist his demand, which was signing not only my own death-warrant, but also that of my hapless companion. I burst out with, “I only hope that some of your sisters, if you have any, or all of them, may be put into just such an awful strait as you are putting me in now!” The brigand’s eyes flashed ominously. “You want a brother to destroy his sister! That’s it, is it?” “No,” I answered, “but only to know in your own experience how my four brothers feel, who love their only sister quite as well as you can love yours!” He fumed, while my indignation was quenched in the tears called forth by the recollection of my brave brothers and our precious mother, grieving, in ignorance of my fate. But not yet did I forgive our tormentor wholly. Forgetting that I was not in position to command, I told him he might be seated now. “*Saidnate!*” I said. “*Saidnate!*” he repeated in scorn. “*Saidnate!* Indeed!” while I realized, with trepidation of heart, what a storm I had roused, and trembled for its possible consequence. Fortunately, this fiery man was not alone. I did not see him restrained by his companions, for my eyes were bent upon the task imposed by them, but quietness reigned until I had signed the fateful receipt which was the price of my life—of our lives—and then they filed out.

We had before this learned the answer to Mrs. Tsilka’s agonized question, which she put after the brigands informed us that they had taken me for a ransom—“But why was I taken?” They told us that they had learned our plans for our journey, just who were to be in our party, the route chosen, etc., and had laid their plans accordingly to intercept us. “We intended to take your oldest Bible-woman, Mrs. Oosheva,” said they, “but she was so ill when we captured you—half dead in fact—that that was out of the question; then we took you to be company for Miss Stone.” When alone by ourselves we puzzled over the problem. How could the brigands have learned that Mrs. Tsilka was the only

other married lady in our company beside the sick mother? The more we puzzled over it, the more clearly we became convinced that it had been God's plan that *she* should be taken. We had all eaten of the same honey on that fateful third of September; but one had been made ill—the mother whom the brigands had planned to make prisoner. Mrs. Tsilka had told me her sacred secret, of her coming motherhood, which she had hardly breathed as yet to mother or husband. Although it seemed almost like the desecration of what was most holy, and most peculiarly her own, with her consent I had acquainted the brigands with the fact of her delicate situation, on one of the first days of our captivity. Then I based upon it a strong plea that they should free us, while there was yet time, and not lay themselves liable to the curse which highwaymen hold in special horror—the curse which they believe to be entailed if they cause any injury to a woman with child, or to her little one either before or after its birth. The men looked grave as they listened to me. Perhaps they thought it was a ruse on our part to escape. At any rate they answered, "It is too late. The dance which we have begun we must dance through to the end!" Would they have come to that decision could they have foreseen that the dance with varying movements was to continue within a few days of six months, or could we have looked consciously at such a fate, and have retained either our reason or our life? As time passed on, both of us became convinced that there was no mistaking God's plan that Mrs. Tsilka should be captured with me. Her helplessness appealed most strongly to the brigands. One of the steadiest among them made her his special care. He it was whose arm was always ready for her, and who patiently steadied her steps, who mounted her and dismounted her, who spread the brigands' cloaks for our bed, and often tucked us in. I shudder to think how much harder it would have been for me had not their tenderer natures thus been appealed to by my companion's approaching motherhood.

Although we were debarred the possession of paper and pencil, I managed surreptitiously to use my remaining Waterman pen to underline passages in the Scriptures, which proved to be specially comforting to my heart. When its ink was exhausted I lamented more than ever the loss of its companion pen during our first night's journey. I had referred to the loss when I discovered it, that first day, under our leafy booth; but the brigand to whom I addressed my remark answered brutally, "*Namah*

chorbadjee-luk tukah" (There is no masterful ordering here!), and I ceased my inquiries.

As the days wore by we were painfully conscious of the lack of the commonest necessities of life. With food we were supplied in those first days *ad nauseam*. When our hearts were sick with longing for the blessings of freedom, how exasperating to be asked what we would have for dinner or for supper, as though our captors might have had command of the finest market of the province! We often quoted to ourselves, in bitterness of spirit, the couplet from "Mother Goose for Old Folks," remembered from school days:

"Victuals and drink were the chief of her diet,
And yet this poor woman scarce ever was quiet."

However, we philosophized, we must eat to live, in case we should be ransomed some time.

One day one of the brigands shamefacedly alluded to the fact that we had no change of undergarments. "No, we've nothing but what we wore when you captured us," I assured him, for, being so much Mrs. Tsilka's senior, she wished me to be chief speaker, although she was my chaperon! "I've lost all my handkerchiefs," she admitted. "And her blouse sleeves are in ribbons," I added. "Then make a list of the most indispensable things," said our guard, "and we will do what we can about getting them." Later we missed the "Good Man," and wondered whether he had not gone on a search for them. Our surmise proved correct, when, after a few days, he returned with some undergarments and socks—men's, of course—some cotton for our handkerchiefs, needles, thimbles (which fitted us, too), spools, and cloth for two blouses. Here, then, was work for us to do. With what avidity we set about it! We cut our white cotton cloth with our new shears, giving ourselves each four handkerchiefs, and then we hemstitched them, to make our work last as long as possible. What a blessing that work was to us! We had always our morning reading and prayer, and then we wanted something to do. Now we had it. We cut out our two brown blouses also, and made them, for Mrs. Tsilka was in great need of hers. Mine I fondly believed I should never wear, but should send it by her to some Albanian girl in the mission school of their home city, Kortcha, for which they were *en route* when we were captured. Our supply of light was limited, as it came through broken places in the withe-plaited wall, through which also we caught glimpses of green hills and trees beyond. At night we were quite willing to walk out a little distance with our guards and lie down upon their great

cloaks, unfailingly spread for us—to breathe in the fresh air of heaven, to fill our lungs and quiet our nerves. Sometimes the guards would bring us grapes to eat, or pears, or apples, and then we sat up and feasted. Once, when I unwisely presumed to wander too far by myself, an unwary step sent me headlong over the edge of a bank. I struck on the side of my face, and, continuing to fall after striking, scratched ugly ridges into my face from the edge of my hair to below the cheekbone. Here, again, was an instance showing how gladly we would have welcomed death from a natural cause, to free us from the horrors of our condition as captives. I am sure I made no outcry, and had only a feeling of disappointment, when I was helped to my feet, to find that beyond scratched hands and face, and the general shock from the fall, nothing had befallen me which would not in time be healed. The “Good Man” here appeared in a new rôle, for he produced from somewhere some antiseptic cotton, with which my wounds were washed and bound up. Enough gravel remained ingrained in my face to have caused lasting scars, under any ordinary circumstances, but now, thirty weeks after the fall, almost nothing remains to remind me of that accident. When my face and head were bandaged, my appearance must have been ludicrous enough, for Mrs. Tsilka still laughs at the remembrance of it. However, neither of us had any desire to look at all attractive in that company. She, being young, often pulled her white head-kerchief far down over her eyes, almost hiding her face.

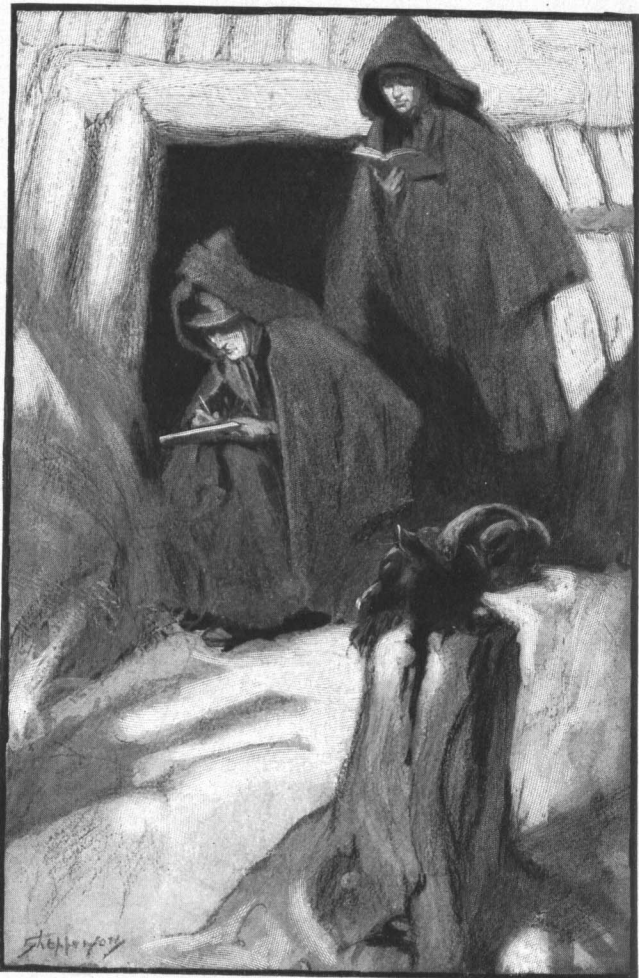
It was during these days that we found several opportunities to talk with some of our guards concerning some of the truths in God’s Word which gave us such comfort, and kept us steady and generally even cheerful in our strange and gruesome surroundings. One day two of the younger brigands were our guards. Time hung heavy on their hands. They were quite willing to talk. We looked into God’s record of some of those who made their human lives sublime and their names immortal because they accepted God’s plan for them, and hated wrong, while they gave themselves to be possessed by the right. We talked of Joseph, exalted from his prison to honor second only to King Pharaoh; of Joshua, mighty as was Moses, because God was with him; of Daniel, delivered from his den of lions, because no sin was found in him, and his God, in whom he trusted, sent and shut the lions’ mouths. We talked of the abstinence of Daniel and his three friends, and made it the text for a little temperance sermon. The brigands

were greatly addicted to smoking, and one of these young ones was rarely to be seen without a cigarette in his mouth, while his companion, we were thankful to note, was as rarely to be seen with one. This seemed to me too good an opportunity to be lost, and I told them of the experience of some of our American “first young men” who were rejected by the army medical examiners when they applied with their regiments of militia to be accepted by the general government for service in Cuba. Some of them wept and implored to be allowed to go. Others offered money for the privilege. The examiners were inexorable. “You have a weak heart, a tobacco-heart, which cannot be trusted to bear the shocks of war.” So they stayed in America because they had loved their cigars too well. Not long after, I was delighted to find Meeter trying to live without his smoking.

While we were talking upon the necessity of being right with God and right with men, Meeter said: “Then we brigands must go to the bottom of ‘the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone!’” We said to him, “God never made that place of punishment for you or me or any human being. He prepared it for the devil and his angels.” No soul will ever get there unless he chooses the companionship of these evil ones, and rejects God and all His sweet constraints toward truth and holiness.” The young man listened, and several times afterward borrowed our Bible for reading. Some of the older men did the same. God knows whether it was to scoff at it, or to find some comfort from its sacred pages. With some of the older brigands we also had a few talks on religious topics. One evening, under the starry skies, two of us stood and talked of the mighty power and love of our God, who stretched the majesty and the beauty of the heavens, into which we nightly gazed. It was easy then to talk with that brigand, for something stilled his tongue. Was it the solemnity of the night? Was it a realization that God was there? Certain it was that he seemed to listen without caviling, though from his lips sometimes fell words indescribably shocking to us with their blasphemous unbelief. “Who knows whether God made man, or man God!” he questioned once, and several times, when too copious drafts of intoxicants made him careless of speech, he said: “God is an old man. He cannot do His work without us to help Him!” Thus said others of our guards, until we almost expected some instant visitation from heaven upon them for their infidel blasphemy. Yet He came to us by His signal deliverances, when even the hardest-hearted

must have admitted to himself: "God alone has saved us!"

During the autumn nights we were taken out from the hiding-places in which we were so closely concealed all day. When we did not travel, we lay on our couch of the men's cloaks, or on leaves or straw, as the brigands might find for us. My young companion slept the deep sleep of youth, while I kept watch, not being able to abandon care. One evening, weeks after our capture, when we had thus been taken out of doors under the trees, one of our guard suddenly inquired if I had heard that President McKinley had been shot. He might have refrained from asking, since we had no way of learning anything unless they chose to tell us. Inexpressibly shocked, and almost unbelieving that any one could be found wicked enough to lift a hand against our noble, loving, and beloved President, I questioned to learn all the man would communicate. When he ceased, I took a liberty never presumed upon before, and paced up and down, keeping well under the shadow of trees. For a time no one objected; then there was an alarm. Some one was approaching, who might be merely a stranger, or might be a foe. "Gather yourself together and sit down!" was the imperative



"They had permitted me to write an appeal to secure the balance of the sum."

order to me in an undertone. I quickly obeyed. The men stealthily crouched behind stone walls and trees, took aim with their guns, and waited. The intruder proved to be inoffensive, and the alarm passed. Nothing, however, could lift the burden of sorrow from my heart. Our noble President cut down, weeks before, and there was no one to tell me whether he still lived wounded, or had died. What was his beloved wife doing? What was our nation doing? Some time after, in answer to my repeated inquiries, the man said that President McKinley had died. I felt lonely and desolate, a foreigner in a strange land, indeed, when none of them evinced any sorrow whatever at that tragic taking off of one of the most uplifted and spotless of characters. So little did they care or appreciate my sorrowful feelings, that they would frequently indulge in dances, singing softly to themselves the ac-

companiment. One Albanian dance was especially weird and grotesque. After the cold weather obliged the brigands to put on their white woolen leggings, they seemed elfish, not human, with their legs suspended spider-like, in the movements of this dance. Sometimes they would take merrier measures of Greek, Bulgarian, or Turkish dances. When chilled by cold, they danced to warm their feet. The doctor, when without his cloak, because either Mrs. Tsilka or I was wearing it, often slipped under Chaoosh's, and the two had a merry dance and song, provoking merriment in us all.

We had begun to hear rumors of movements on our behalf. The brigands said that Dr. Haskell had promptly complied with my request, and had gone to Constantinople to confer with Mr. Peet and the representatives of our government there. They seemed much



Donka Ilieva

Mareeka Stamenova

Mrs. Tsilka

Miss Stone

Athena Dimeva

Mrs. Kerefinka Oosheva

MISS STONE'S BIBLE CLASS IN BANSKO, MACEDONIA

Five of whom were with her when she was abducted

pleased with his prompt, decisive action. After a little they seemed less pleased; began to give vague intimation that there was a widespread movement on our account; that the United States Government had called upon Britain and Russia to aid her in finding us, and in bringing our abductors to justice. They also said that our pictures were in papers, that souvenir postal-cards representing us with the brigands had been gotten out, etc., to all of which we listened as in a dream.

It was evident that affairs had taken such a turn that it was of no use for the brigands to enforce their threats of taking our lives after the expiration of a certain number of days, if they hoped to secure the ransom. But would they keep us indefinitely? There had been a fearful afternoon some time before, when they had gathered again, and commanded me to write a third letter, extending the limit of our lives by *ten days* more of grace! Again the black cloud of hopelessness settled down over my soul, as they commanded me to write that, if the ransom were not forthcoming at the expiration of the ten days, they should "proceed to the operation" of taking our lives. The "Bad Man" was not of the number this time. It was the "Good Man" and his associate in

guarding us, who conducted this interview, and showed us how terrible even they could be. "If the full amount of ransom cannot be raised in this short time," I found courage at last to say, "you cannot proceed to murder us, women who have done you no harm. It would be a shame and a reproach to Turkey!" At this the "Good Man" (heaven help the title!) burst out in uncontrollable fury: "Why shame and reproach to take the life of two women, when unnumbered women and children in Turkey suffer nameless outrages, and are put to death daily!" His fierceness showed me the uselessness of any appeal for mercy to these men. I turned with a bursting heart and overflowing eyes to write the awful alternative which they set before me. Just then—was it a miracle which God wrought to give new courage to my sorely tried heart?—looking up at the sky, the rain came suddenly dashing in oblique lines from a black cloud; then burst out the sunshine, showing one of the most brilliant rainbows just before our eyes, which I have ever seen. Scarcely had it faded when it was repeated at a little greater remove, but hardly less brilliantly than at first. We laid to heart the sweet assurance that our God had not and would not desert us, however helpless

we might seem to be in the hands of our captors. "If thou canst break My covenant of the day and of the night, so that there shall be no day or night," sang its sweet assurance of steadfast abiding in the faithfulness of God, and our hearts were strengthened.

Some time later we were told that Consul-General Dickinson had gone from Constanti-nople to Sophia to undertake our case in person. We were not told whether Dr. Haskell had requested him to take this responsibility, or whether he had himself wished to do it, or whether our government at Washington had asked this service of him. We only knew that he was now the one to treat with the brigands. The intelligence was very welcome to me personally, as I had met the Consul and his family, socially, the previous year, and knew him to be a sagacious man and an earnest Christian. I told all this to the brigands, and implored them to allow me to write to him a letter undictated by them. Strange to say, they complied with my request, gave me pen, ink, and paper, and left me free to write.

A great and marvelous thing had happened that morning, which had lifted Mrs. Tsilka and myself to the seventh heaven of joy and hope. It was now October 29th. During the night the brigand who had been in Sophia negotiating had arrived at the sheepfold on the mountain-side in which we were then kept. No sign was given to us of his arrival until we had made our limited preparations for the day. Then he came, with others of his companions, and stood before us. Right gladly we greeted him, for we were always hoping for tidings about the payment of the ransom when he came. With a pleasant smile he held out a letter toward me. I could scarcely trust my eyes. A letter—for me! At last a message from somebody in God's great world. Then we were not forgotten. "Do you recognize the handwriting?" he asked, as I studied the superscription. "Indeed I do," I answered unhesitatingly. "It is the handwriting of one of my own dear pupils, a graduate of our mission school in Samokov, one of whom we are always proud as the present Court Stationer to Prince Ferdinand at Sophia." "Read it then." With joy radiating from every tone of voice and feature of face, Mrs. Tsilka keeping close by my side, I read the blessed words in my own language:

MY DEAR KAKA* STONE:—

You must think by this time that your friends have forgotten you, but remember that you will find when once you are with us again that your true friends have tried to

* *Kahkah*, as this word is pronounced, is the term used for an older sister, and is the dear name by which this friend and her husband had for years called me.

do all that they can for you, and more than that, *God has put it into the hearts of others who have never known you, to work, perhaps, the hardest of all, for you to be saved. We are working and praying day and night for you. Your friend and mine in Philippopolis gets letters from Mrs. Atwood. Your brothers and mother are well, but very anxious for you. My mother and my three boys are well, praying for and constantly talking of you. God be with you! Please write on this same letter with your own hand what you have to say, and, if possible, of your condition, and send it back by the same man who brought it to you.*

Hoping to see you soon, I am with love,

YOUR LITTLE SISTER.

The men stood around watching us, and eagerly listening while I translated the letter into Bulgarian—this was the only language which we had in common, as I was not sufficiently familiar with Turkish, Greek, or Albanian, in which languages we heard them speaking. As they heard the expressions, "We work and pray for you," and again, "My children and my mother pray for you," the "Bad Man" said with a sneer, "Yes, they pray and they pray, but where's the money?" But nothing could trouble us now. We were too happy with this first written assurance that some one was remembering and loving us, and praying and working for us, to mind the insults of the "Bad Man" or any of his companions. We hastened to ask for pen and ink, to comply with the request of my friend to write the answer on the same sheet of paper. It was with great reluctance that I realized that I must give up this letter which seemed so like a message from heaven, until the man who brought it suggested that I might copy it. Pen and ink were brought. I copied the precious words, and we kept them, with our Bible, for frequent reading, to encourage our hearts with this proof of the anxiety and loving activity of some of our Bulgarian friends on our behalf.

Having written the letter upon the remaining pages of the same sheet, I begged the brigands to permit me to write a letter to Consul-General Dickinson, who was in Sophia. Permission was granted me to do this, and I wrote a full account of our situation; told him how exposed we were to the weather, which had become inclement; and that as we had only the thin summer garments in which we were captured, we suffered from the cold. I then begged him to do all in his power to free us at the earliest possible date from our sufferings, and assured him of the satisfaction which I felt that he had undertaken the case, for I saw in him not only the representative of our great and powerful nation, but a personal friend, who would bring every influence to bear to secure our release from the brigands.



Facsimile of one of the souvenir postal cards

After finishing this letter, I begged permission to write another letter to my mother and family. The men looked grave over this request, but finally gave a reluctant consent.

What a delightful day we spent over that writing! It was not easy to sit curled up *à la Turque*, writing all one day on one's knees, but the delight of being allowed to write and to have a letter to answer far more than compensated for the discomfort. Late in the afternoon the letters and their translations were ready and delivered to the brigand who was to take them, whither we did not know, but who, we had faith to believe, would send them as designated. Then began another waiting time, but how different our feelings now! We had received the assurance that loving hearts were aroused in our behalf, and were putting forth strenuous endeavors for our release. One of the brigands later, in commenting upon that day, remarked, "We saw then the power of a few written words to change lives."

Now that the burden of our captivity was in a measure lightened, inasmuch as the hope which the brigands also had that they should receive the ransom for which they had captured and were so resolutely holding us, had changed their demeanor toward us to one of consideration, we could observe the details of their life about us. We noticed them occasionally playing games, rolling stones in the open square of the deserted sheepfold on the mountain-side in which we were then confined. Once in a while two of the merrier-hearted among them would stand up for a dance, to the accompaniment of the air hummed by the music lover. But the cold was

upon us, and the threatening weather compelled the men to remove us from that location.

That night came the snow as we traveled. I had cherished a fond hope that we should either be released, or should receive word that we were to be released before Thanksgiving Day. Consul-General Dickinson, who had been so long in Sophia, negotiating on behalf of our government, as an American, I reasoned, would naturally return

to his family in Constantinople to keep this great feast day; but we waited and watched in vain for the return of the brigand who had been sent to treat with him.

The night before Thanksgiving, overborne with hope deferred and the sorrowful pictures conjured up by my mind of the many homes in America which, like us, had waited in vain for some joyful tidings, I was pacing up and down in a tiny space in one corner, when the guard on duty observed to Mrs. Tsilka the unhappiness of my mood and remarked upon it. "How can she be happy," said she, "when to-morrow is Thanksgiving Day in her country?" She then went on to tell him the meaning of the day, how it was observed, and what happy experiences she had had during the years she had spent in American homes. That young brigand laid her words to heart, and must have influenced his companions in the band, for the next morning, when we had made our scanty preparations for the day, he said nonchalantly, "A turkey has been killed. How would you like it cooked?" The touch of kindness, so unexpected, from a captor to his captive, dissipated in great measure the cloud of sadness which weighed down my spirits, and, thanking God for this mercy, we put on a more cheerful mien. In another way, they made the morning appear like Christmas morning, for another brigand came in and spread out upon our pallet of straw purchases which some one had made for us. There were warm woolen socks, a pair of thick woolen nether garments, over which we laughed and laughed, in place of the long leggings for which we had asked. During the cold winter nights of our subsequent travels we saw that



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ELLEN M. STONE
FROM HER LATEST PORTRAIT

the brigand's choice for us was much wiser than our own would have been. Thus the day passed more cheerfully than we would have believed was possible.

They kept from us the knowledge which they had all day of the failure of negotiations for the ransom in Sophia. Their messenger was with them Thanksgiving morning, but kept out of our sight all the day. The next morn-

ing, however, they told us the sad news, with stern determination adding:

"Now we'll take you so far away that not even a bird will know where you are, eight hours (about twenty-five miles) from everywhere. We'll keep you five years, if necessary, but we'll have the money!"

We said, "We must have warmer clothes to wear," and asked them if they could not pro-

cure for us some woolen homespun. They inquired if we could make the dresses, for they said, "Of course you can have no machine." We begged them to get the cloth, and trust us to be able to use it. Some days later there was a roll of thick brown homespun laid in our corner, and a smaller roll of still thicker white woolen cloth, like what they used for their foot wrappings under their moccasins. Then followed busy days, for they hurried us to be ready. Our fingers were stiff and lame from cutting and sewing this unwieldy material, but in two days our skirts and sacks were in wearable condition. Along with the homespun, wonderful to say, those brigands had remembered buttons and braid, the latter of so heavy a quality and abundant quantity as to allow us one row for trimming.

The next night they started with us for that threatened destination of our more distant exile. We traveled and traveled night after night, through piercing winds and bitter cold, ascending to a great altitude, until we reached a little opening where stood two huts which men sent before had just built. The freshly hewn trees, the ground covered with chips, branches strewn all about, showed how hastily the work had been done. They took us to the smaller of the two rude structures. An open fire blazed in one end opposite the door. Before it had been spread down the coverings of our bed. That was all there was room for in our hut. Theirs, at a little remove, was larger, but they made their fire outside before their door. Alas for our visions of a place which we might fit up with a woman's ingenuity with some small degree of comfort! There was no way to keep out the cold wind which swept through the chinks between the split logs of which our hut was composed. The men covered us with their cloaks, leaving themselves exposed to the rigors of the winter nights, but even then they saw they could not keep us well. Beside this, we had left an open trail behind us, which exposed the party to danger of discovery. In this lonely mountain retreat in the leafless forest, with towering peaks encircling us about at still greater heights, what was there to hinder some adventurous hunter for wild game, or spy with evil intent from seeing those two huts, with smoke issuing from them, or even the captive women, moving freely about outside their own door? For here we were allowed freedom to go out of doors, to look upon the blue sky, to thank God that once more we might see the light of day. The very first morning a sweet bird sang to us, disproving the prophecy of the men that they would hide us where even

a bird could not find us. A certain brigand boasted that he, better than any other, knew how to roast a sheep before the open fire. Toward evening, one day, a huge fire was kindled before the door of their hut, a sheep killed and spitted upon a long green branch, and the roasting process began. Tired of staying alone, and dreading the long evening without light, save from the fire in our hut, we walked down to their rendezvous. They did not seem displeased that we had taken this liberty, but indicated to us a seat upon a log, and later, put a sack filled with leaves behind our backs to break the force of the wind. Here we sat to watch the roasting, and to regale ourselves with the pleasing odor, for our appetites were keen upon that mountain-side. Our supper of black whole-wheat bread and roast mutton had a particular relish that night.

Finally our captors came to be of our opinion that the place was unsafe, and lost no time in moving us. Again there were nights of great exposure and of suffering from the cold. They made for us, at their captives' suggestion, boots of sheepskin, which we could wear outside our rubbers, and these materially mitigated our suffering from cold feet. Of course it would not do for us to be losing our rubbers, as we had done before, when removing our feet, numbed with cold, from our rope stirrups, that we might warm them by swinging them.

On this return journey, one night, our guards made a stop in a place where it was against their inclinations to stop, but did so out of consideration for Mrs. Tsilka's sufferings from a longer journey. That night was enacted the tragedy of an attempt on the part of another band of highwaymen, who had arrived at the same place a little before us, to take us captives from the brigand band that held us, and secure the ransom for themselves. Our ever-watchful guards in some way became suspicious of the plot and were on the alert. As the darkness settled upon us, there was a sudden sound of musketry. Mrs. Tsilka was roused from deep sleep, horror-stricken by the sudden alarm. We captives were alone, in absolute darkness. It was my custom to watch while she slept, and I had observed whisperings and movements which assured me that something unusual was being prepared for. Our guards were outside, and successfully resisted the first attack. One or two came inside and moved us into an inner compartment—a closet. Here we crouched in a corner through all the hours of the night, a guard of our own captors remaining with us. Occasional shots kept us aware that the place was besieged all night. At about twelve o'clock (Turkish), as dawn was approaching,

they took us to the horses, which had been ready for our journey during the night, and we essayed our escape. A shot fired in our direction, just as Mrs. Tsilka was being mounted, drove us quickly back under shelter. The men maintained their guard. Later a villager approached, proposing terms of treaty. A shot from a guard stationed above us and suspicious of treachery struck in his heart, and with a loud cry he fell dead. We waited yet longer in suspense, not knowing whether a sudden rush would be made to overpower our captors and fire the place, or whether Turkish troops had been summoned to their aid by our attackers. During this moment Mrs. Tsilka and I decided the question that if worst came to worst we would take our death at the hands of the guard who stood over us rather than fall into the hands of those unknown highwaymen or of Turkish troops.

As the morning wore away, our men decided to make another attempt to escape. No shots had been heard for some time, and they gathered that the enemy might have withdrawn. Cautiously, and fearing every instant a shot from behind us, we climbed the steep ascent to gain the path. At length we had passed the brow of the hill and were hidden from sight. No shot had been fired, nor had we heard the voice of pursuers. We were exhausted with the climb, and a brigand ventured back and brought up two horses for us. We hastily mounted, caring nothing that no pillow or blanket softened the wooden ribs of our pack-saddles. We took the halters in our own hands, and with hearts overflowing with relief at our merciful preservation, we hurried on after the men who led the way, who constantly turned to us with injunctions to make speed.

What a wonderful day that was to us, when captors and captured alike rejoiced in their salvation from the horrible fate which threatened all through the night. We freely said to them, "God has saved us," and one of them admitted, "I prayed, too, I tell you; I prayed from the bottom of my heart." And we said, "We know you did, for only God could have saved us."

This was the most desperate of our encounters during our nearly six months of captivity, but there was not a night during which we traveled, nor a day during which we were hidden away from the knowledge of every one in the world save those who held us, helpless in their power, when we were not exposed to dire peril. Vigilant watch was always kept on every side. Our prayer to be allowed

to go out into the fresh air, or to lift dark curtains, or to remove board shutters, so that a little more light might come to us, was refused, lest some stranger might by some chance discover where they were hiding us. Many a day we were not allowed to speak above a whisper, lest some strange man should hear and betray us. Of course, we were never allowed to sing. One Sabbath night, early in our captivity, while we were concealed in a spot in which the cradle for hay indicated that its use was a stable, the remembrance of our happy Sabbath evenings at home came strongly upon me, and I said to Mrs. Tsilka, "I wonder if they would let me sing—of course, softly." We seemed to be on a hill-side, remote from any habitation. Our guard noted the query, and remarked to Mrs. Tsilka, "Let her understand that she is to do nothing without permission."

Sometimes it seemed to us that we should never know our own voices again; that we should need to learn to walk, so long did we sit curled up tailorwise in the corners allotted to our use. "I don't believe we can ever laugh again," said Mrs. Tsilka, "if we are ever freed." The sadness of hope deferred ate into our very souls. Thus passed the long weeks of waiting. Sometimes the brigands vouchsafed to us a few words of rumors from the outside world. More frequently they told us stories at which we wondered whether they could be true or not, but which we had no way of disproving, until after our release we learned that they had told them to us as fairy tales are told to children.

Meantime we were left to wonder and wonder why we were not ransomed, if it were true, as our captors said, that the money had been raised. Once, indeed, in their mood of desperation at receiving back to their midst one of their own number, with a command from our negotiating party in Sophia, which they chose to regard as a pretext merely to gain time, the men had said to me, "This note that you now write is the last letter you will ever write." The letter was an appeal to the American public to secure the balance of the sum, if all had not yet been raised, or, to demand that such pressure be brought upon the parties holding the ransom that the money should be paid.

The burden of confinement and of anxiety was becoming intolerable. The plea was written and dispatched, and again we waited, hearing nothing from it. This was early in December, and we waited, and waited, and New Year's found us still waiting.

(To be continued)