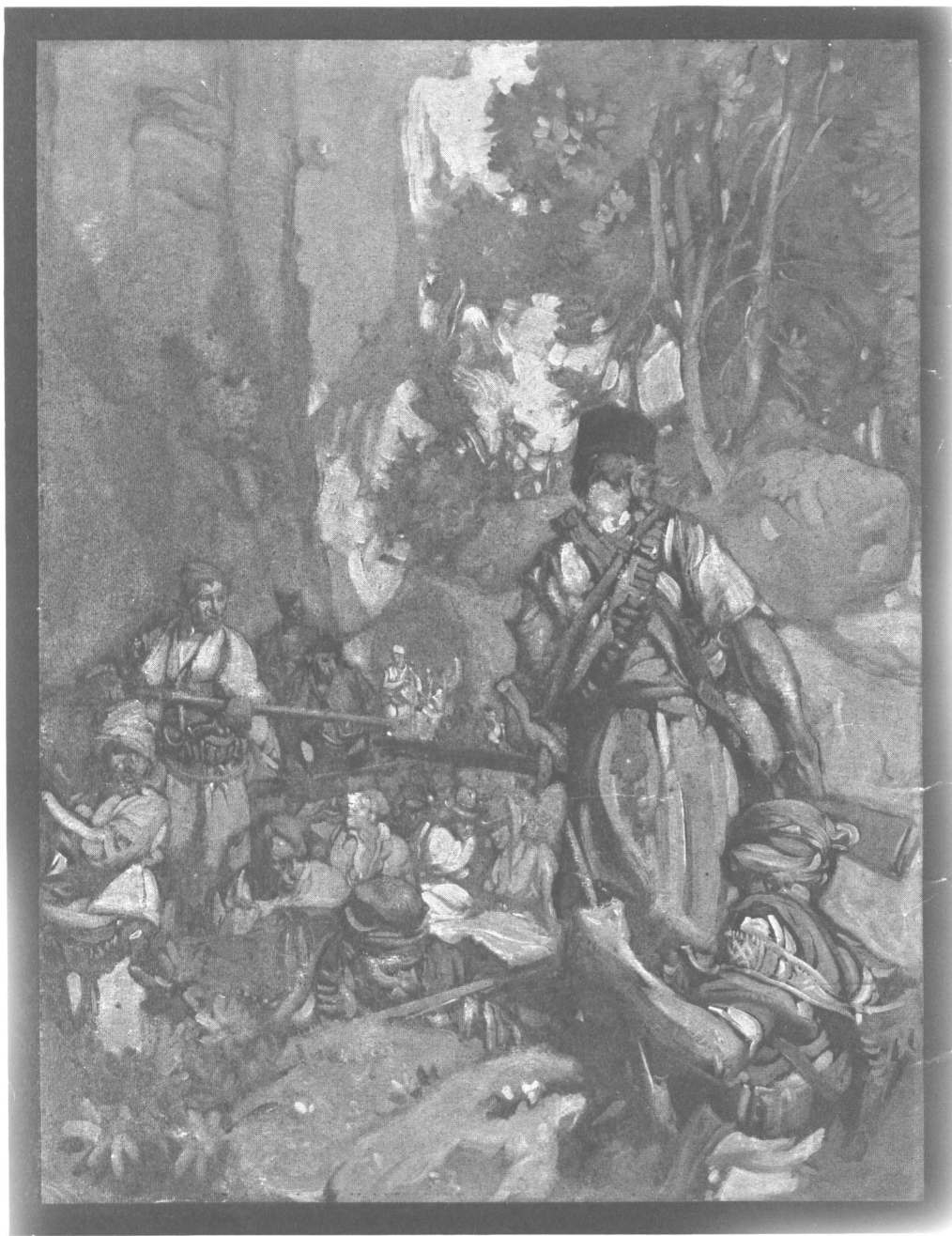




A typical Bansko street



Drawn by Frank Brangwyn

The Capture

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SIX MONTHS AMONG BRIGANDS

BY ELLEN M. STONE

I

The Capture of Miss Stone and Mrs. Tsilka on Turkish Soil—Murder of a Chance Witness—Flight into the Mountains—Sufferings and Dread of the Night Rides through the Forest—The Plot disclosed by the Brigands—\$125,000 Ransom Demanded—First Letter to the World

DURING the frequent missionary tours which I have made in Macedonia during the last twenty years and more, I have often been conscious of danger from the brigands who have long infested that country. Thrice before my capture I had come into personal contact with them. Once I spent the night in the common room of a khan or inn with a brigand sleeping on the other side of the fire; once two horses were stolen from the party with which I was traveling; and the third time two bandits stopped us on the road, but hesitated as to what manner of people we were, and so let us pass.

On our journey in September, however, we had no thought of fear. Only three weeks before, I had come to Bansko by way of Strumitza and Djumia with two Bulgarian ladies, teachers in our village schools, accompanied only by a muleteer and a young native boy. We had ridden through a wild and rugged country, spending four days on the road, sleeping one night in a native house, and two in khans, all without molestation. I had, indeed, traversed the road on which we were finally captured many times before, and, knowing the people and their ways, I was conscious of all the safety of long familiarity. The purpose of the journey to Bansko

from my home in Salonica was to conduct a summer training class for the native Bulgarian teachers in our primary schools and the Bible women who are working under the auspices of our mission station at Salonica. The class numbered eight women, gathered from various parts of the province, only one, a young teacher from Servia, being absent. Mrs. Katerina Stephanova Tsilka, who was in Bansko visiting her parents after an absence of nine years, kindly assisted me, relating some of her personal recollections of Dwight L. Moody, and giving the class a number of practical talks on nursing and what to do in emergencies. She was admirably fitted for such a service, having studied at Northfield Seminary, later graduating from the Training School for Nurses at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York. Two years before she had married Mr. Gregory Tsilka, an Albanian by birth, who was then completing his course at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, and in the following summer they had returned to Macedonia to devote themselves to Christian work in their native land. Both had studied in the mission schools of the American Board, at Monastir and Samakov, before going to America, and both are thoroughly conversant with the Bulgarian and English languages. Mr. Tsilka is also



MRS. KATERINA STEPANOVA TSILKA

A Confident Departure

Finally the day dawned for our departure from Bansko. I must go back to Salonica, the teachers to their work, and Mr. and Mrs. Tsilka to their home in Albania. We said good-bye to many hospitable friends, for here in Bansko we were all well acquainted, and felt much at home; here we have a church, a parsonage, and a largely attended school. Moreover, Bansko, set among the foot-hills of the beautiful snow-covered Perim mountains, had been a delightful spot in which to spend these summer weeks, and we had planned an early start for Djumia, choosing the day before the weekly market in order that there might be more company on the road. One of our friends, how-

familiar with Albanian, Turkish, Greek, and Wallachian. They had located at Kortcha, in Albania, Mr. Tsilka as preacher in the little Protestant congregation there, and teacher in the only existing girls' school which gives instruction in the native tongue. Mrs. Tsilka, in addition to her duties as wife and mother, devoted some time to the profession of physician and nurse, and gained a large influence in the city by her skill and sympathy.

During the sessions of the class, we visited several villages of the Raslug district, making journeys of an hour to three hours, sometimes on foot, once with an ox-cart, and once with horses, these tours being for the purpose of affording our teachers glimpses of Christian work in various parts of the field, and also to inspire the hearts of Christian friends in these villages. We little dreamed that we were everywhere watched, brigands skulking along our pathway, hiding behind trees and rocks, seeking what they deemed a fitting opportunity to take us. Yet so they themselves told us later.

ever, had died the previous evening, and we delayed our departure to show our respect for the dead and our sympathy with his sorrowing family. Accordingly, we were much later in starting than we had intended—the first of a series of untoward events.

It was a perfect September day, the third of the month, clear, warm, and sunshiny, so that our spirits rose as we entered into the merry confusion of loading and mounting our horses. Great numbers of our friends had gathered to bid us good-bye and to give us their loving wishes for a prosperous journey. The hallway of the house and the veranda were bright with the pretty Bulgarian dresses. All ages were there. Dear old Grandmother Mareeka, my first hostess in Bansko, more than twenty years ago, who had been ill during our class-sessions, had made her way feebly to Deacon Ivan's house to tell us that we were "mnoge milo" (very dear) to her, and to give us her parting blessing. Her aged brother, Deacon Peter, was there also, for were not his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Oosheva,

and her only son, Peter, to be of our party! It was in his home that the first missionaries who had visited Bansko, about thirty-five years ago, held the first preaching service. He came to add his fervent "God bless you!" Our friends covered us with exquisite carnations, pinks, and other flowers as a parting offering of their love.

As we finally rode out through the big gate into the narrow street I noticed with surprise, which, unfortunately, did not reach the point of suspicion, that my *kiridjee* (driver) led the way by the upper end of the village. When I asked him why he did so, instead of going out lower down, according to our usual custom, he answered that it was better so, and we let it pass, although I continued to feel a little uneasy at the unusual liberty he had taken. A few moments later we were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Tsilka with their weeping friends. The hearts of these young parents were doubly torn by the thought that they were leaving a little grave in the Protestant cemetery in Bansko, where they had laid their baby boy only three weeks before.

Unaware of Stealthy Watchers

Our party now being complete, we clattered merrily along the stony road, laughing and talking. There were just thirteen of us—unlucky number—three young men, students in our schools; three of our young lady teachers; Mrs. Oosheva, an older Bible woman; Mr. and Mrs. Tsilka, and myself, with three muleteers.

Lofty peaks of the Perim mountains loomed up in the south, and luxuriant forests cov-



*Faithfully yours,
Ellen M. Stone.*

ered all the foot-hills to the plain. How could a suspicion of danger overshadow the hearts of the happy party? They were rejoicing in the love of the friends from whom they had just parted, basking in the beauty of God's world about them, and full of hopes and high resolves to accomplish nobler things in the future for the Bulgarians in Macedonia through their schools and spiritual training. We had been provided with the usual *teskere*, or traveling passport, permitting us to make this journey. We were on the main road between Bansko and Djumia—though this road is only a rough mountain trail—and we had seven men with us, one of them armed. Never within my knowledge had so large a party been attacked. Three hours distant from Bansko we passed the guard-house, where Turkish soldiers looked out at us stolidly, and then we went on down into the beautiful valley, the trail following a mountain

brook full of little cascades and cool, dark pools. After a time we dismounted, that we might better enjoy the beauties of the way, and hold converse with the young students, all of whom were walking. I suppose that hidden eyes watched our every movement.

At length we came to a lonely bit of green-sward, under the shade of forest trees, by which purred and foamed the stream along its rocky bed. Some one suggested lunch, and immediately the stores were brought out, and we sat down in great content to refresh ourselves. How delicious were the meat balls, the fried cakes resembling crullers, and the native pastry (banitza), with fresh water from the stream! But one of us, Mrs. Oosheva, was suffering painfully from cramps induced by eating honey that morning, a fact that played an important part in our subsequent experiences. Mrs. Tsilka and I had eaten of the same honey, but with no ill results. When we were refreshed we set out again on our way, hoping to reach the khan where we intended to spend the night, before darkness should overtake us.



MISS STONE

Taken while she was on the Editorial Staff of "The Congregationalist"

The Ambush at the Balanced Rock

Mrs. Oosheva led the column, with her son walking by her side—a fine, chivalrous boy. We wound along the steep trail for some distance, the sure-footed mountain horses following one another in Indian file. Thus we approached a cliff known as the Balanced Rock, a bald crag of the mountain which here juts out into the valley, turning the stream to one side. At this point the pathway leads down into the water, so that travelers must ride into the swift current, pass around the rock, and strike the trail again on the farther side. Those in the lead of such a cavalcade as ours would necessarily

be hidden from those in the rear while passing the rock. An admirable spot for an ambush. But we had passed it safely so many times before that none of us thought of danger.

Suddenly we were startled by a shout: a command in Turkish, "Halt!" I saw Mrs. Oosheva, who was then in the middle of the stream, start backward and attempt to turn her horse aside. An armed man had sprung toward her with uplifted musket-butt, as if

to strike her from her saddle. She turned a horror-stricken face upon me, and then swayed as if to faint. Before any of us could say a word, armed men were swarming about us on all sides, seeming to have sprung from the hillside. They crowded upon us, and fiercely demanded that we dismount. They even made as if to pull us off our pack-saddles.

"Give us time," I said in Bulgarian, "and we will dismount. We are women, not men, and cannot get down alone."

I saw the boy Peter assisting his fainting mother, taking her down from the horse in his young, strong arms. At the same moment the placid, phlegmatic face of my driver appeared by my

side. His was the only calm face in our party—strangely calm, as I remembered afterward—but I then ascribed it to his natural temperament. Somehow we dismounted in quick time from our saddles, with the brigands shouting, "Hurry, hurry," and waving their guns over our heads. They drove us like cattle into the stream. Peter carried his all but unconscious mother on his back. One of the young teachers, who showed rare presence of mind through the whole experience, crossed on a log, but the rest of us plunged into the water, save Mrs. Tsilka, who had not been given time in the hurry to dismount. Dripping with water, our captors urged us mercilessly from behind, driving us up the sharp mountain

side beyond the stream, where we had to use both hands and feet to prevent falling. Mrs. Tsilka was dragged from her horse, her husband cutting the cords that bound her trunk and other luggage to the saddle, letting them fall where they would. Thus we all scrambled up the hill, a tangle of horses, drivers, men, and women, with the brigands yelling behind. Our captors themselves, we now know, were very nervous, fearing lest some one should come upon us and give the alarm, for we were not such a great distance from the Turkish guard-house. One poor traveler, indeed, who had the misfortune to happen upon us as we were being driven up the hill, was now in the hands of the brigands, wounded and bloody, as we were to know a little later to our horror.

The Round-up on the Mountain Side

Though we were exhausted by the climb, they gave us no rest until we reached a small level spot among the trees, where we sank down exhausted, to regain our breath. We spread a rug and pillow for poor suffering Mrs. Oosh-eva, whose boy was trying to comfort her, repeating constantly in the tenderest tones:

"Don't be afraid, mother. Don't be afraid. If we must die, we shall at least die together."

To their great credit it should be said that those young Bulgarian teachers were quiet and self-possessed to a wonderful degree. Only one of them began to give way to hysterical crying; but a word of reminder to her of the "everlasting arms" and the un-failing strength of the Master whom we

serve, helped her to control herself. She tried to force into my hands a paper containing money which I knew was being forwarded to a suffering family in the city where she teaches. I put away her hand, feeling instinctively that it might be most unsafe with me. Mr. Tsilka, however, had given his wife his watch and money; the latter she secreted in her mouth, and tucked the watch under her belt, as she supposed,

but it slipped below and showed. One of the brigands called her attention to it, sarcastically remarking that she had better put it away more securely. He could not have alarmed her more; if the brigands did not want our money and watches, what could be their purpose! All through the terrible climb up the hill, Mrs. Tsilka had led the way as though fearing nothing. All her anxiety was centered on her husband, lest the brigands should take him.

The band now gathered swiftly about us, with guns pointed. One of them ordered us to sit and wait — we knew



MISS STONE'S MOTHER

From a recent photograph

not for what. I had hitherto given hardly more than a glance at them. Now I saw them plainly. They were of various ages, some bearded, fierce of face, and wild of dress; some younger, but all athletic and heavily armed. Some wore suits of brown homespun, some Turkish uniforms with red or white fezes, while others were in strange and nondescript attire: one had his face so bound up in a red handkerchief as to be unrecognizable, others with faces horribly blackened and disguised with what looked like rags bobbing over their foreheads—the knotted corners of their handkerchiefs, as we afterwards learned.

Their rifles and accoutrements seemed fresh and new, and they also carried revolvers and daggers in their belts, with a plentiful and evident supply of cartridges. They had undoubtedly intended to fill us with terror at the sight of them—and truly horrible they looked.

The Fate of the Turkish Traveler

I was especially anxious to learn whether these were of the Black Shirts, as highway-men are commonly called in Macedonia, because of their filthy condition in general. Feeling somewhat reassured on that point, I turned again to our teachers, and thus failed to see the first act in the approaching tragedy. Suddenly I heard rapidly approaching footsteps above us, then a cruel blow. The Turk whom the brigands had captured was driven past us, his arms pinioned behind him with a scarlet girdle. As he walked, the brigand struck him violently with the butt of his gun. Blood was streaming from a wound in his temple. Once he turned and looked back piteously at his pursuer. With tense nerves and a terrible fear in our hearts we saw him driven across the little opening where we sat, and into the thicket beyond. Here my eyes refused to follow. Alas that my ears could not also have been closed, that I might not have heard the horrible dagger thrusts and the death cry that followed.

One of the brigands now emerged from the thicket and signalled to me without saying a word. With indescribable horror tugging at my heart, but with a calm exterior, I rose and obeyed him. What was coming? Would they do with me as with the Turk? "Hope thou in God" whispered itself in my heart, and I was strengthened to await what-

ever might happen. But I was not compelled to enter the thicket. Following the motions of the brigand, I went to a spot higher up the hill some distance from the party, where I sat down alone, experiencing an intense revulsion of feeling as I noticed those hideously blackened faces with their rags and knots bobbing about their heads as though the brigands were gay carnivalers just before the Lenten fast. I became conscious that I was very thirsty; that my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I must have expressed this want aloud in some way, for



MRS. TSILKA, HER BABY BORN IN CAPTIVITY, AND MISS STONE

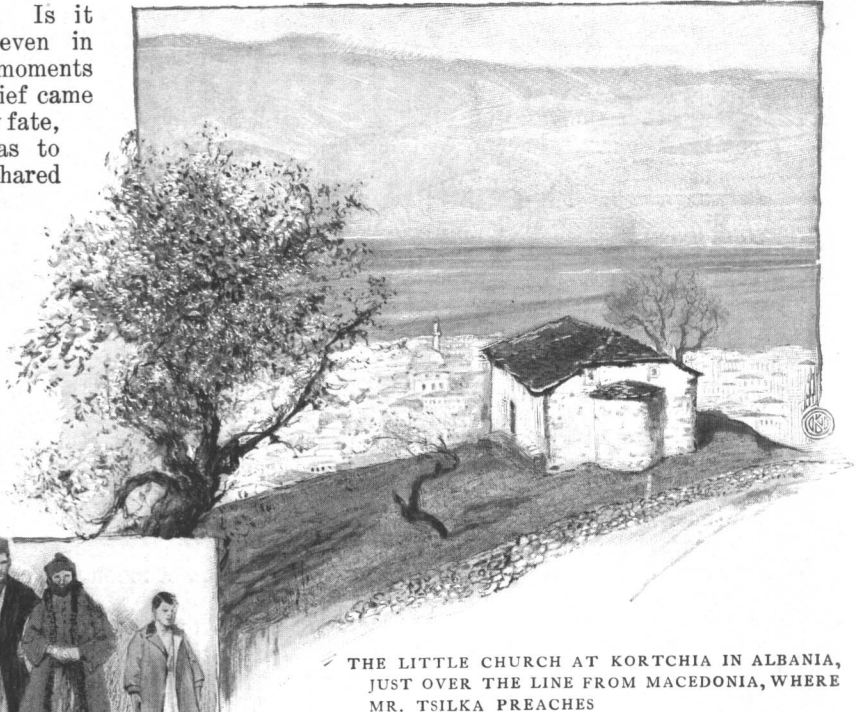
From a photograph taken specially for "McClure's"

the brigand who was guarding me, the same who had summoned me, said I could find some water at a spring which he indicated by a motion of his hand. It was the direction also which the Turk had taken, and from which he was never to return. Was this a grim refinement of cruelty? It was almost too much for me to go thither, but I finally started, with veiled eyes, fearing to see what must have lain there. After slaking my thirst with water from my hand, I was returning to my place, when it occurred to me—humorously enough, as it now seems—that I must not leave my umbrella, and so I went back and found it, no objection being made by my guard. Then I took my last look into the eyes of the dear young teachers, my co-workers, for whose safe return to their parents or to their places of service I had made myself responsible. Alas, that I was now cruelly prevented from fulfilling my pledge. I remember noticing, even then, the calmness which was given to Mr. Tsilka as he sat holding the halter of his bare-backed horse with one hand, while he leaned his face on the other in deep dejection. I did not then know that his wife, too, had been called by our captors, and was even then separated from him. Had I known that I should have

been even more impressed with the marvelous power of his faith in restraining himself. But had he fired one shot to save her, terrible consequences must have followed. Peter was still trying to comfort his mother, who now lay more quietly on my rug. The students were sitting, pale-faced and silent. But I could not tarry; so saying to them, "Pray for me as you never prayed before!" and hearing Mareeka's soft promise, "Yes'm," I went back, feeling that it would probably be to my death.

What was my surprise to find that I was no longer alone. There sat Mrs. Tsilka, with her back to the guard and her face turned towards our fellow-travelers. Is it strange that even in those dreadful moments a feeling of relief came over me that my fate, whatever it was to be, would be shared by another? Both of us were calm, at least outwardly. Our captors observed our quiet demeanor, and weeks later they told us that we had

with us next, we had time to observe that the brigands were hurriedly examining our baggage. To our surprise, they seemed to be taking only food, of which we had a good supply, being provisioned for three days. Some of them ate ravenously, as they emptied the baskets and bags. Later they said they had eaten no bread for two days. I also observed one brigand talking to the driver who had led us from Bansko; I thought now I knew what they were talking about. The brigands were still rummaging among our belongings, though little seemed to be taken. One of them found a Bible, held it out to a companion to see, and, to my great



THE LITTLE CHURCH AT KORTCHIA IN ALBANIA,
JUST OVER THE LINE FROM MACEDONIA, WHERE
MR. TSILKA PREACHES



TYPES OF MR. TSILKA'S CONGREGATION

Drawn by Corwin Knapp Linson from a photograph taken specially for "McClure's"

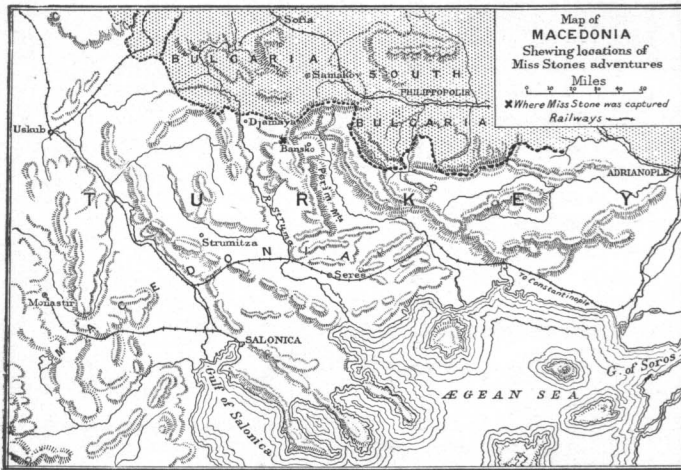
been very brave when taken. They little knew the reason of that quiet. We were leaning hard upon God's promise: "Fear not, I am with thee. Fear not, I will help thee," and God was telling us, "Be not afraid."

While waiting to see what would be done

comfort, brought it with him. It was neither of my Bibles—the English version, which had been the stay and comfort of my beloved missionary sister in Japan, nor yet my copy in Bulgarian; it was the property of one of our young teachers. Only He who searcheth all hearts can know what comfort and strength our souls derived from this Bible; it was our only book.

The Flight 'Cross Country

At length the brigands ended their search, and after a hurried consultation two of them approached and motioned us roughly to rise



and go with them. They indicated not the direction toward the thicket, which still held my thoughts fascinated, but up and back from the spot where we had been sitting. The rise was sharp, and presently across plowed land, where I stumbled and found great difficulty in walking on account of my wet skirts. One of the brigands seized me by my arm with a grip that left black and blue marks for weeks afterwards. Another took Mrs. Tsilka. I stole but one glance into the stern, bearded face of my keeper. He had thick curly hair of a light hue, surmounted by a black turban. Perspiration dripped from his face; he was evidently greatly excited.

After a time, when we were well-nigh exhausted, we came upon two of our own horses which had been taken by the brigands. Our captors compelled us to mount hurriedly, and we started at once through the now gathering twilight. The brigands fell into line before, behind, and on both sides of us. Poor Mrs. Tsilka glanced backward at our party below, where her husband still sat. Those we left were guarded all that night by some of the brigands, so that no alarm should be given until the band had escaped with their captives, as we learned afterwards. Shall I confess that my first sensation as we moved off was one of relief that we were not then and there to be searched for plunder, or put to a violent death. Both of us were dazed and numbed by what had befallen us. Strangely enough, it did not come clearly to my mind for some time that we were taken for ransom. To Mrs. Tsilka's question, when she realized that we were being carried away into the mountains by those strange, fierce men: "Why have you taken us?" the brig-

ands vouchsafed only the answer:

"You will know all bye-and-bye."

"What will you do with us?" she asked in agony.

"Nishto! Nishto! Ne boi sia" (Nothing, nothing; don't be afraid).

We had started on that night's journey wearing only the thin summer garments in which we were captured. One of the men overtook us later on with a shawl for Mrs. Tsilka, at the same time giving me one of their

heavy cloaks. The next day they brought me my waterproof; that and the shawl were invaluable to us day and night and so long as we were captives.

As the quiet of the night calmed our fevered nerves we observed the brigands marching noiselessly around us. Their moccasined feet made little sound. If they had occasion for conference no word was spoken aloud, nor could even their whisperings be heard. As if by magic, men were deployed upon one side or the other as scouts, the path often changing direction without apparent command. There was a weird fascination about the scene. The men, nearly a score in number, bore each his gun upon his back and their cloaks hung behind them, sometimes trailing on the ground, as they marched in file. The quiet moon looked down upon the scene.

"She sits up there like a spy," the brigands afterwards frequently said to us. "She says, 'Eto ghee! Tay sul!'" (Here they are. These are they).

Through the long hours of that night we traveled. Sometimes the barking of dogs would indicate the proximity of some shepherd with his flock, some threshing floor, or a lonely farmhouse on a hillside; but our line of march was kept by secluded ways, often under trees whose branches were so low as almost to sweep us from our saddles, notwithstanding the efforts of a man of gigantic strength, who went before, breaking down branches and pulling up young trees from our path. Once my horse stumbled and fell, carrying me with him. As I felt myself falling, a sweet content filled me as I thought that it might be the end of all my troubles; but it was not to be so. Instantly

men flocked around, raised me on my horse, inquired if I were hurt, and setting me again in the saddle, we moved on as if nothing had happened. Not knowing, then, the rule of brigands to allow no conversation, I remember talking with my guards, telling them of my aged mother, of my brothers, devoted to their only sister, and at one time I spoke of God's love and care for His children. One of the men, to my great surprise and relief, answered:

"Yes, we are all God's children."

I looked at him trudging sturdily along by my side, the moonlight falling on his head, from which he had removed his fez, and in my heart I named him "The Good Man," and so he was known to Mrs. Tsilka and myself as long as he was among our guards. They had tried to speak in Turkish to me, but as I answered them, "Bil mem" (I do not understand), they ceased by degrees, and used only Bulgarian. Repeatedly my guard tried to set me more at my ease by repeating, "Ne boi! Ne boi!" instead of "Ne boi sia!" but I caught his meaning only, "Be not afraid," and cared not for the incompleteness of the exclamation, disguised though it might be.

The long strain of riding hour after hour at length compelled us to beg for a halt and a little rest. After a time they granted it, helped us to alight from our horses, and spread a couple of their cloaks on the ground. Mrs. Tsilka and I sank down upon them, were covered with a brigand's coat, and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. All too soon they roused us, and we started forward again. Toward morning, I think it must have been, we came to a descent so precipitous that we were compelled to dismount and walk, at one point even being taken on the back of one athletic fellow and lifted down where we could neither walk nor jump. During the night there must have been some murmuring at the new order of things, horses and women hampering the proverbial swift movements of the brigands. I did not hear the remark, but the answer was, "Think how many liras." This gave me my first inkling of the fact that we had been taken for ransom. Still, I dared not believe that this was the case, for I was yet under the spell of the horrible fear that our captors would murder us as they had their first victim.

The Halt at Dawn

The dawn was almost breaking when at last we stopped again. We were in a most

desolate narrow valley between bare and towering crags. Half dead with exhaustion, we sat down upon a rock, only to be forced onward again. We could scarcely compel our feet to move, so the brigands helped us to climb up into a small ravine, gruesome and wild, but clothed with vegetation—a spot well fitted for such awful deeds as I thought might await us. Finally they seemed satisfied with a location, spread down a woolen rug which I then learned they had taken from one of our teachers, and told us to sit down.

One or two broke off great leafy branches from trees and arched them over us, making a booth to shelter us alike from the sun and from any intrusive eye. Most of the men disappeared, but only to take positions in our rear and above us, from which, unseen by us, they could command our movements. Of course we were faint with hunger and weariness, as we had eaten nothing save a few pears which were given us during the night, "instead of water," as the brigands said, since our happy lunch by the brookside. Once in the night, when we came to a stream, one of the brigands offered us water out of my own blue and white granite-ware cup, which I had left suspended from my pack-saddle.

Now the men were concerned to bring us food, some milk in a kettle, with a couple of wooden spoons, and in one of her own towels they brought to Mrs. Tsilka the crumbled remains of some pastry which her mother had given her for the journey. That brought the tears. Dear mother, did she yet know that her daughter had been carried off, and perhaps killed? Would she ever know that we had actually eaten of her good things? They also brought a woolen homespun bag containing a stabrets of pork (cured in a pig's stomach), and a large piece of another one. This is a specialty in the Raglug district, and the Tsilkas and several of the teachers had provided themselves with a supply for the winter. They gave us pears, cornel-berries, red, tart, and astringent, and pressed them upon us in far greater quantities than we could eat. One brought a pretty tin box, empty, which Mrs. Tsilka knew was filled with honey for the journey; but some of the brigands, not being able to resist the temptation of such a tit-bit, had eaten it. We were thankful, however, for the box. What most surprised us was a gift from one of the brigands of a bunch of wild cyclamen, which touched us beyond anything else, and made hope spring up in our hearts, that men who

could thus care to supply us not only with the necessities of life, but even with flowers, could not be bent upon murdering us. This brigand had observed that some of the flowers which covered me like a breastplate the day before, when we rode out of Bansko, were still clinging to my dress (though our hearts were crushed and discouraged), and he had sent these blossoms of the woods "Because I saw you loved flowers." Here, then, was one heart, not wholly calloused, but susceptible to a noble impulse! One brigand had had his morning nap in my mackintosh before delivering it, but that did not matter compared with the comfort of gaining possession of it. We were already learning not to be too particular! At the last some one handed us the best of all, the Bible which they had taken from Mareeka's bundle. Mrs. Tsilka and I opened its blessed leaves with chastened hearts to find what message our Father in Heaven had for us, and were strengthened to feel that He was with us even in captivity.

We had no soap or towels, comb or brush, nor any of the indispensables of life, save the clothes we stood in. We learned the value of a tooth-brush and of a button-hook through our deprivation of them for nearly six months. We learned, too, with how few things one can manage to live when one must. That morning after our capture we procured water for our face and hands, and borrowed a comb from one of our guards. Mrs. Tsilka had let down her hair and covered her head with a white *shimeer* (head-handkerchief) on the road before we were captured, and thus she wore it during our entire captivity. I continued to do mine up as usual, though I adopted the handkerchief as a protection. My dress had been torn during the night, and we had no needles and thread, but one of the guards promptly supplied us. The needle, a large one of course, he took from the lining of his cap, and the coarse black thread from the knapsack which he carried upon his shoulders. Without a thimble I mended the rents in my garments, and sewed on the braid which had been ripped from my skirt in our hurried climb the night before. Our guards occupied themselves in similar ways, and in drying their wet feet. After a time they seemed, by common consent, to go to sleep. We were sure that some were watching us then, as always, but no one was in sight. It was a good time to put our money and a few valuables more securely away, for we yet expected to be plundered when it should suit the plans of the brigands.

Forward Again with the Twilight

Late in the afternoon some one brought us a chicken, only about half boiled, and explained that we were to have had one earlier, but that the shepherd who was to cook it had boiled it with ten hot red peppers and an *oke* (two and three-quarter pounds) of flour, making a dish which none of the brigands themselves could eat. Hence they had delayed until a second chicken could be boiled. Of course we thanked them, and when they commanded us to be ready to start on our journey, and brought us a pair of goat's-hair saddle-bags, we wrapped it up and put it with our other food, our Bible, tin box, and shawl strap into the bags.

Twilight was just beginning to fall when we emerged upon the height above us. Here we saw that a hard climb awaited us. The man who had gripped my arm so powerfully the night before stood ready to escort Gosposia, as Mrs. Tsilka was always called while among them. The one who was detailed to guard me delayed to give some directions about loading the horses, and directed two other men to lead them up after us.

"Ne sum konar" (I am not a hostler), answered one of them.

"Why are you here, then? Why didn't you stay at home?" impatiently demanded my guard, and started toward him to enforce his order.

Could those brigands have foreseen all the trials to their strength and patience which they were to endure during the next six months, with their captives, I wonder whether they would not have released us at once. On the first day they gave us no opportunity for more than a chance word with them. Finally the horses were started off, and we began our climb, Mrs. Tsilka and her guard having quite a start of us. We climbed steadily, but were soon puffing and perspiring because of the steepness of the way. "If only Mrs. Tsilka would stop, for I *must* sit and rest," I said, but she continued to climb and I was forced to follow. Afterward she said that she was ready to drop from fatigue, but as her guard did not suggest a stop she feared to ask him, and he almost carried her. Finally we reached the horses, mounted, and started on our second night's journey. Now I noticed more clearly than I could the night before that we never traveled by roads, but always by mountain trails or sheep or goat paths, or with no path at all.

If we saw a road anywhere, and hoped for

an easier journey on it, we were here to be disappointed, for the advance guard always crossed over and continued the journey through the underbrush, where their captives were often in imminent danger of Absalom's fate from the overhanging branches. The way that night was long also. We were permitted to dismount to rest once or twice,

and once we were refreshed from a jar of buttermilk. Whence it came or how it was brought was a mystery to us, but we drank and were refreshed. Finally, we were dismounted and told to wait. After a time spent in silence and deep darkness the men came and commanded us each to put on one of their heavy goat-hair coats, the deep hoods of which they pulled over our heads, so that we could see only the ground immediately before us. Thus they led us to a doorway and through some dark outer space, into a small inner room with one small barred window.

from the tiny barred window, but could see only trees on a grassy slope. Though we occasionally heard voices during the day besides those of the brigands, we could never see any one. We were cut off from all mankind save those who had so mercilessly captured us.

After a time a guard brought us bread, and perhaps a bit of cheese, and inquired about food for dinner. We gave him the under-cooked chicken, to be prepared in some way so that we could eat it, and later in the day it was returned to us, fried and fairly palatable.

During the day three men came filing into the room. As they seated themselves upon the ground they filled all the space outside of our corner. They were heavily armed. Cart-ridges were upon their breasts and in belts around their waists. Daggers and revolvers hung at their sides. They had left their rifles behind; but, as though their present ar-

ment was not sufficient to protect them against us, one soon went out and brought in the three guns, which he stacked in a corner. They were at no pains to remove their fezes from their heads. Ah! We were only poor captives!

With trembling hearts under an exterior which we prayed God to keep calm, we waited until they should tell us the purpose of their visit. Finally, one whom I took to be the *voivoda* (leader) spoke rapidly and roughly, telling us that they were highwaymen, that among them were many nationalities (my glance involuntarily wandered from his face



MRS. TSILKA AND MISS STONE IN TRAVELING COSTUME

Drawn from a photograph taken specially for "McClure's"

In the Hut—The Plot Revealed

A light was brought. After the brigands had spread down some cloaks for us we were left to ourselves. The horror of a great fear fell upon us. What could they not do to us in that dark, hidden spot? Why had they brought us thither? If we should be killed now no one in the wide world would know our fate. The darkness settled into our very souls. We lay down in our corner, which was far harder than the hillside had been the day before, but no sleep came to refresh us. After daylight we looked

to those of his companions; one, with dark, shaggy hair and beard, I thought might be of Spanish extraction, while he of the thick, light-hued curls might be a Jew, and the *voivoda* himself a Macedonian Parnak). He told us that they had taken us for money, and should hold us until the ransom was forthcoming.

"If it is not paid," he said menacingly, "there will be a bullet for you and a bullet for her"—indicating Mrs. Tsilka. We named him in our hearts "The Bad Man," and so called him for many weeks; but not to the end.

He warned us also that if we attempted to do anything for our own rescue, or anything that might endanger them, they would shoot us instantly. Filled with contempt at the manner in which they threatened us in our helplessness, I told them that they had taken the responsibility of stealing us from our God-given freedom, and must therefore find a way to restore us; we should not make it easier for them by any attempt to escape. I had by this time become convinced that our capture had been carefully planned by men who were desperately in earnest in carrying out their purpose, and I had no doubt of their readiness to visit sudden vengeance upon any one who should attempt to balk them in their plans, whether that one should be a captive or the friend of a captive. When I inquired the amount of the ransom, the spokesman took an envelope and wrote upon it, then passed it to the next man, who also wrote upon it and gave it to the third, who, after writing upon it, returned it to their spokesman.

"We have decided," he said, "to ask twenty-five thousand pounds for your ransom, and we are prepared to hold you until it is paid, or, in case of failure to pay it, there is, as I said before, a bullet for each of you, to let people know that we are not men to be trifled with."

We were utterly crushed with the helplessness of the position in which they had put us. To my inquiry as to when I should write the letter telling my friends of their demands, they answered:

"After a few days we will tell you, but not now."

Then they filed out of the tiny black room, leaving it filled with smoke from their tobacco, and the stench from clothes long unchanged, and also with something worse, for a cloud of despair settled into our very souls. Twenty-five thousand pounds! One hundred and ten thousand dollars! It could never be

raised. Why should they not kill us at once? So we talked with each other until our faith in God overcame the fearful forebodings and comforted us. "Our God reigns, and we are still in His hands. He can deliver us from even these toils. We will trust Him still."

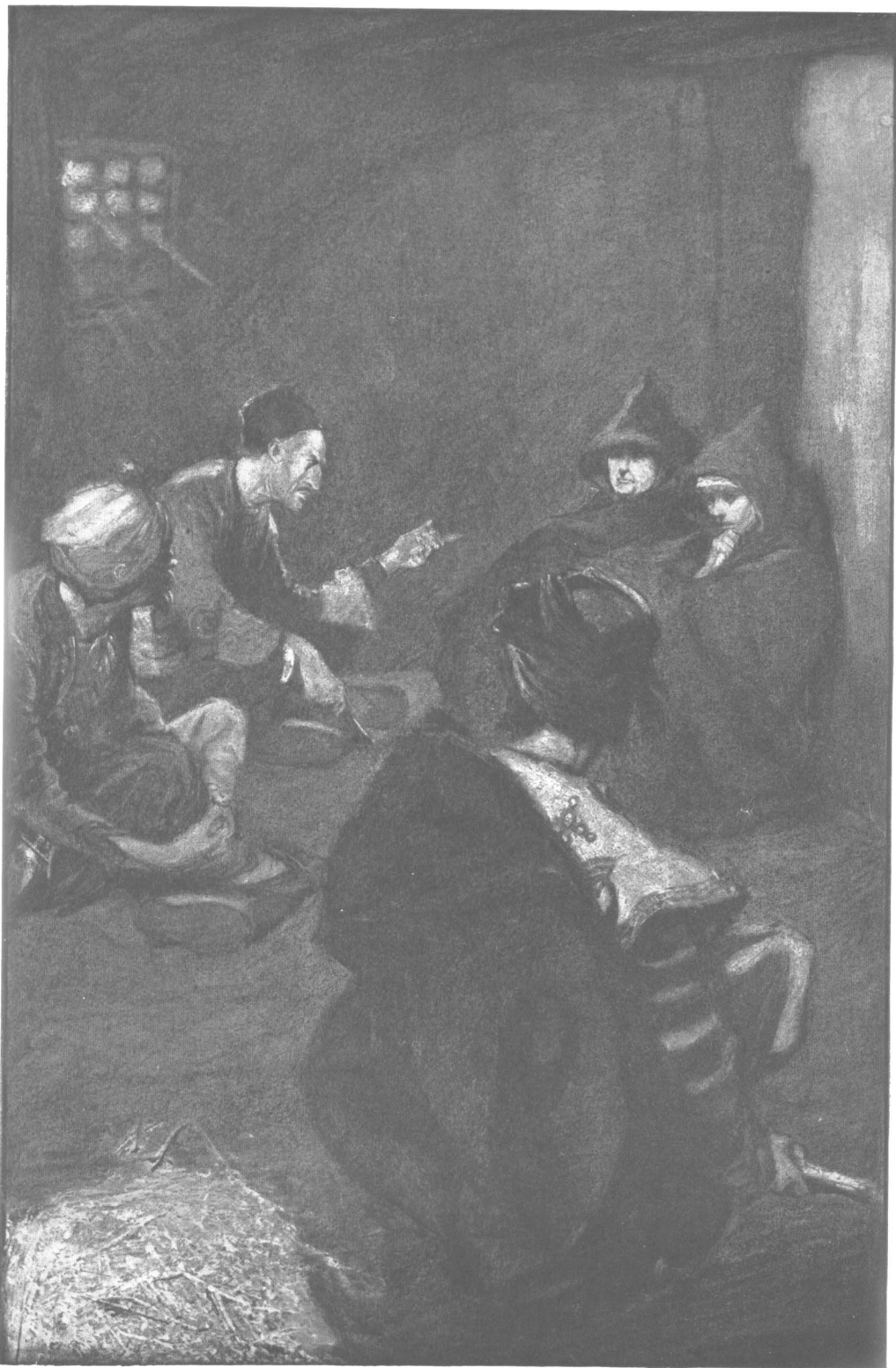
By Goat-path and Forest Trail

After dark we were summoned to start once more. That night Mrs. Tsilka had the misfortune to fall from her horse. As we were ascending a steep hill the saddle girth broke, throwing her violently backward down the stony mountain trail, the heavy pack-saddle falling on top of her. Seeing that she did not rise, nor cry out, I feared she had been killed. Giving no thought to the brigands, I attempted to dismount, but my guard refused to help me.

"Hold my horse, then," I commanded, "and I will get down myself."

They could do no less than permit me, and I hurried to help Mrs. Tsilka. She had not yet risen from the ground, and when we saw that she could not, all were much alarmed. The guards stood helplessly around, one of them inquiring if she would like medicine for fainting. After a little she was assisted to her feet, and her whole frame shook like an aspen leaf from the nervous shock, and she burst into almost hysterical weeping. The men left her to me to soothe, but urged the necessity of remounting as soon as possible. By-and-bye we reached a dense forest, and in one of the darkest glades they dismounted us in the gray of the dawn. Mrs. Tsilka was still trembling, and the dampness of that shaded place struck through to our very bones. After a time we were ordered to move on a little, without the horses, and we spent that bright, beautiful day under the trees.

In the afternoon we opened conversation with the brigand I thought to be a leader of the band. I told him that they had captured the wrong person if they expected to gain any such ransom for me; that only for a princess or the daughter of a millionaire could they hope to secure such an amount of money, while I was only an humble Christian worker and a daughter of the people. If they hoped to gain it because of my work as a missionary, again the case was hopeless, for the American Board had notified us several years before to take all possible precautions in our touring, since we must do it at our own risk; if captured at any time by



By Claude Shepperson

"IF IT IS NOT PAID. . . ."

brigands, they could not do anything toward ransoming us. He listened quietly, but incredulously, and was evidently unmoved by my representations. Then I told him of my mother, so enfeebled with her nearly ninety years that I feared that to hear by telegraph of the kidnapping of her only daughter might cause her death. Both Mrs. Tsilka and I broke down and cried bitterly for our dear ones, to whom we feared the news might even then have come with crushing weight. The brigand's eyes showed that we had made it hard for him too, for he could not wholly steel himself against our plea, as I went on to beg that, since their hopes for ransom could not be realized through me, they would free us and send us on our way. There was still time to rejoin our party and carry out our original plan for traveling and work. He listened quietly, but answered at last, resolutely:

"We can make no change. Whether you grieve or not, we shall carry out our plan to the end."

So we left off pleading with the man and tried to resign ourselves to the inevitable. More than once during the succeeding three or four days I intimated my willingness to write the letter announcing our capture and the reason for it, and to appeal for the raising of the ransom. Every day seemed to us too valuable to be lost.

The First Letter to the World

Finally, on the first Monday afternoon after our capture, the same three men who had talked with us before came to where we were sitting, almost as did Job of old, by a charcoal heap in that deserted place. They produced paper, ink, and a pen from a knapsack, found a board on which I could write, and then commanded me to choose some person in

Bansko in whom I had confidence to act as an intermediary. He was to go down to Salonica, so that negotiations could be opened with Constantinople, and a letter sent to Treasurer Peet of the Turkish Missions of the American Board. Finally I chose an old-time friend in the Bansko church, and wrote to him, and also to Mr. Peet what the brigands dictated. They set twenty days as the limit of time during which they would wait for the ransom and preserve our lives. No copies of these letters are at hand. What were my feelings when I wrote what seemed to me a sure death sentence for both Mrs. Tsilka and myself! These restless men stood over me and made sure I did not abuse my opportunity, and as soon as the two letters were finished they took back the unused paper and pen and ink, as was their invariable custom afterward.

Nine Days to Live

It seemed impossible that the money should be raised in those few days, yet we clung to the hope that by some miracle the attempt might prove successful. The days passed with infinite slowness while we waited for some news from the outside world, some evidence that our plea had been heard. Eleven days passed; then our dread visitors came to us again, and we perceived instantly from their ominous manner that we might expect the worst. Briefly and gruffly they told us that our attempt to reach the world had failed.

"Your man in Bansko has done nothing," they said.

It was a bitter, bitter disappointment. Eleven days of our twenty had been lost. Our hopes sank; we felt that we were condemned and forgotten. Only nine days of life left to us!

(To be continued)

