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## SIX MONTHS AMONG BRIGANDS

BY ELLEN M. STONE

## IV

*Negotiations for the Payment of the Ransom—The Payment—Disheartening Continuance in Captivity—The Pursuit Closing in*

IT must always be kept in mind that this is the story of one of the captives who could know nothing of what the world knew of the stories circulated in the newspapers concerning them, and next to nothing concerning those who were conducting the negotiations, or of the measures taken by them.

On the sixth day after our capture the first attempt was made toward opening negotiations for the raising of the ransom. After eleven days we heard of the failure of that attempt. We felt then that death was inevitable, but they proceeded to command me to write a second time. This time they transferred the field of their negotiations to Bulgaria, having ordered me to write to one of our missionaries in Samokov, stating the fact of our capture and the intention of the brigands to exact a ransom or put us to death.

In each of these communications the brigands set a limit upon our lives, as well as in a third communication which they compelled me to write after they understood, as we guessed, that a movement was on foot in America for raising the ransom. In each instance they added a threat to murder us, which we were fully persuaded they would carry out if the money were not forthcoming

at the expiration of the time appointed. The scene in the sheepfold, one of the last Sabbaths in October, when after consultation they took out their revolvers to execute their threats, was proof enough of the inexorable determination of some of them, at least. Their desire for the money, however, caused another postponement. "Think how many liras!" was the remark of one of them, overheard by me during one of the first nights' journeys.

It was also plainly manifest that they were surprised and disappointed when they learned that the case had passed into the hands of the diplomats. It was of no use for them to set a limit of days to our lives after that. They clearly realized this when they said fiercely, but with unshaken determination: "We'll keep you if necessary five years, but we'll show the world we can keep you until we get our money."

Many and many of the waiting days were spent in such dark holes that we could do nothing but talk together, when not eating or sleeping, to while away the interminable hours, and frequently we could talk only in whispers. At one time we were hidden where the wooden shutters covering the windows were not nailed. In our anxiety to gain a little

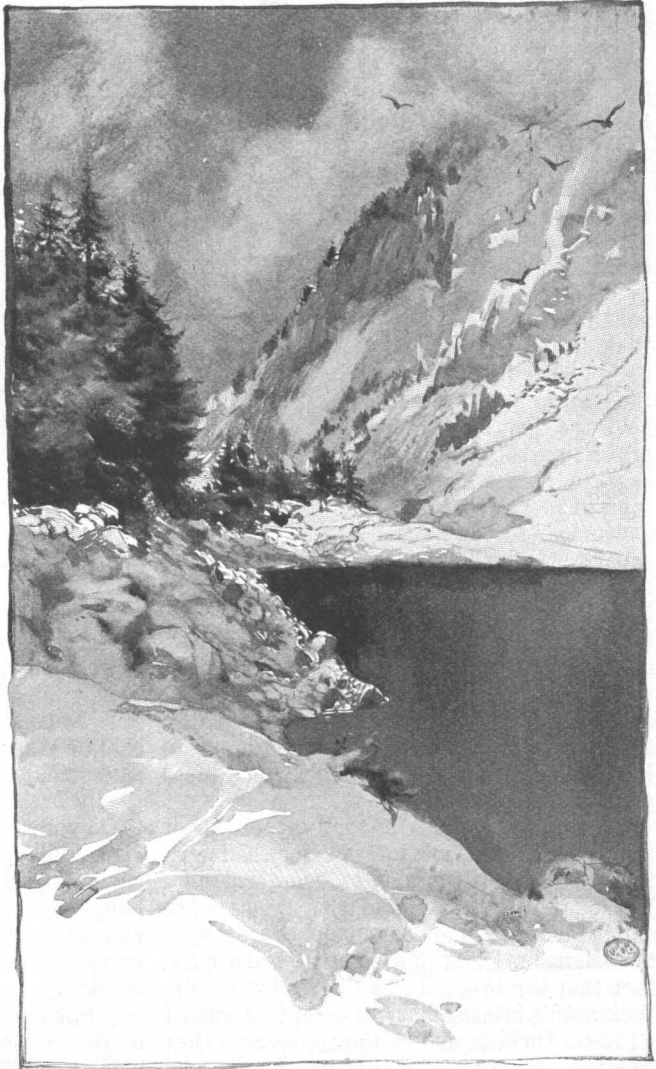
light, Mrs. Tsilka incautiously opened one shutter a little too far, and the white kerchief upon her head attracted the attention of a shepherd who was passing at a distance. When this came to the knowledge of the brigands, they visited their displeasure upon us in unmeasured terms, and one of them seated himself where we could by no means gain access to the light. Within we sat and sat until we both broke down, and wept bitterly. The confinement tortured Mrs. Tsilka beyond endurance. Finally, in desperation, we be-thought ourselves of a plan by which we might gain a little privacy. We took the one piece of stout cord which had been provided for the tying of our blanket during our nightly journeys, and stretched it across one corner of that black place. Over it we hung our homespun blanket, making a secluded corner in which we could hide ourselves to a degree, with our misery. At length we began to interest ourselves in watching the feet of the brigands as they passed in and out, and taught ourselves to distinguish the different guards by the way they wound the straps which held their foot-gear.

The brigands were never to be caught off their guard, to reveal the progress of negotiations, nor to acquaint us with any knowledge which they might have had of what was going on in the great world. Our captors would never tell us the reason why they moved us night after night, sometimes in rain, sometimes in snow, sometimes fording many streams whose rocky beds were so filled with boulders that the captives on their horses with great difficulty held to their pack-saddles, amid the rushing waters. We could only infer from the frequency of these marches, that the pursuit by the troops was constant and unrelenting. During one night of pitchy darkness, when the way led through a region where they would not permit the slightest sound, they came to a place where the ascent was so steep that they dismounted us and led us by the hand. As we crawled along, one after the other, the brig-

ands stepping exactly in our tracks, so that their shapeless moccasin-tread might obliterate every trace of women's feet, the path through the slippery mud leading along the side of a precipice, the foot of the man who was supporting Mrs. Tsilka slipped, and he began to slide down the steep declivity, dragging her after him. Another brigand, with eyes like a cat's, seized her with a grip of iron, and bore her to the summit. Here, in the blackness, they commanded us to mount our horses. After many difficulties, Mrs. Tsilka found herself in her saddle, but when she reached to steady herself by grasping her horse's mane, she found his tail! But there was no laugh-

## RILO LAKE

*Near where Miss Stone was at one time detained. The region hereabouts is infested with brigands*



ing then; the strain of the hour was too tense.

But at length there came the happy day when one of them ordered me to write another authorization for the money, and this time he said: "We have determined to take whatever sum of money has been raised." With a glad heart I wrote the following, which was the receipt finally given by our captors to the ransoming party:

We give the present authorization to its bearer, a member of the band in whose hands we are held captive, on the basis of the one previously given him by us, with the right to receive the ransom demanded for us, but with the added powers to treat the question of our ransom to its final conclusion, in virtue whereof we sign with our own hands.

ELLEN M. STONE.

KATERINA STEPHANOVA  
TSILKA.

Macedonia, December 17-24,  
1901.

Events were now moving on. We heard from our captors hints of representations being made by other bands of brigands to Consul-General Dickinson, at Sophia, to the effect that they were the highwaymen who held the captives, and professing their willingness to accept smaller sums of money than that demanded by our real captors. Difficulties were thickening about them, and they finally were persuaded to come to an agreement with the intermediary left by Mr. Dickinson after his return to his post at Constantinople. On the 12th of January their agent once more returned from Sophia, and—joy of joys! was again the bearer of a letter to me! This time it was addressed to Mrs. Tsilka also, and was from a dearly loved pupil of former days.

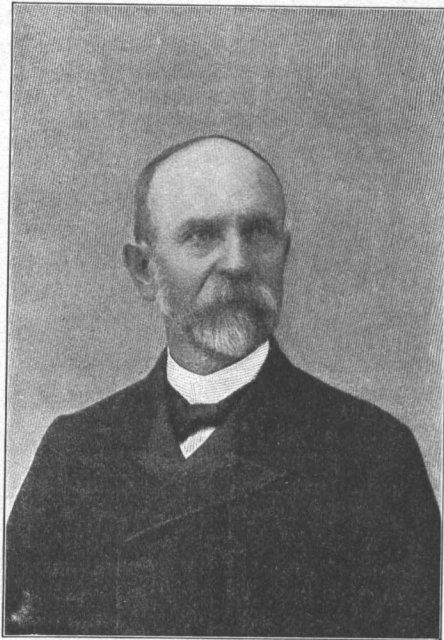
He brought me also a copy of the letter which Mr. Dickinson's intermediary had written to Dr. House of Salonica, from which we learned that the writer had been appointed to act on the ransoming committee, to treat with the brigands. From this letter we learned the fact that the brigands had agreed with Mr. Dickinson's intermediary to accept the sum of £14,500 Turkish, and to this agreement they adhered. We supposed that the reason why

a copy of this letter was sent to Mrs. Tsilka and to me was in order that Dr. House might have incontrovertible proof that we were still living, and that we were the captives for whose ransom the money had been provided, inasmuch as we were directed to write upon the reverse side information upon certain points which could not have been known to others.

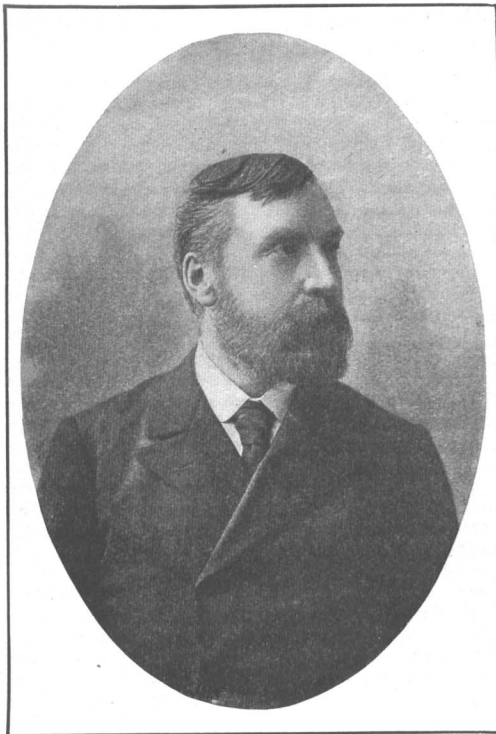
When one of the men who had had a large share in guarding us remarked during the day that his comrade was to start upon his return that same night, and that he also was to go, we were filled with apprehensions. Rightly or wrongly, we had come to feel that to this man we owed, perhaps more than to any other, the saving of our lives on that Sabbath, weeks before, when we had seen the revolvers taken out for our death. Now he was to go, and we were terribly afraid of most of those with whom we were to be left. We urged him, since he must go, to do all in his power to persuade our ransoming committee to pay the money before we were released, saying: "We will take the risks."

We had long been fully persuaded that there was no other way by which we should ever be freed. The men relentlessly held to their purpose. The money they would have before the captives were ever freed. Often we had wished that by some means we might communicate with those who held this money, and tell them our conviction. Here now had come our opportunity, for when I said, "We will take the risks," that brigand said quickly: "Will you write that?" "Most gladly I will," was my unhesitating answer. "Do you not agree to that?" I inquired of Mrs. Tsilka. Receiving her acquiescence, I seated myself by the light of the fire and the lamp—which in that black place burned day and night,—and wrote the appeal which we hoped would move our friends to act, and act quickly.

On this same Sabbath day the brigands handed to me a copy of a letter from the intermediary of Consul Dickinson, in Sophia. Mrs.

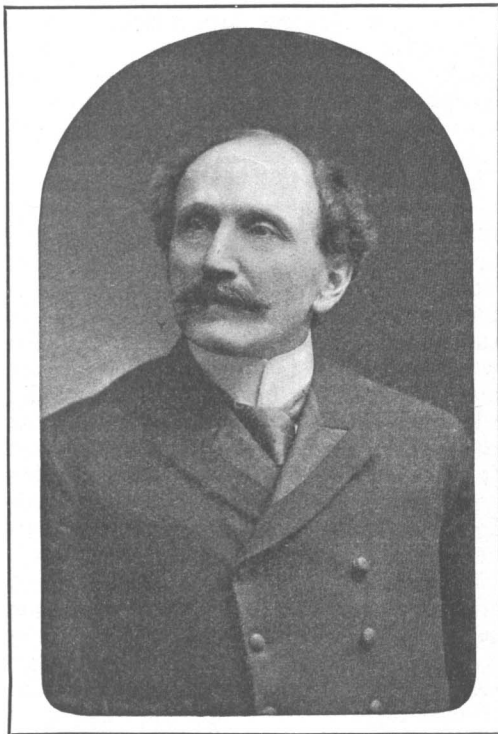


DR. J. H. HOUSE  
*Of the American Mission at Salonica, and a member of  
the ransoming committee*



REV. W. W. PEET

*Treasurer of Missions to Turkey, and a member of the ransoming committee*



CHARLES M. DICKINSON, CONSUL-GENERAL AT CONSTANTINOPLE

Tsilka and I bent over this letter, and considered what we should say in response to its injunction that we write with our own hands on the reverse side of the sheet. The following is the letter:

*December 18-31, 1901.*

MR. J. H. HOUSE:

As the authorized agent of Mr. Charles Dickinson to treat with the brigands for the ransoming and freeing of Miss Stone and Mrs. Tsilka, with this present I certify to the following:

1. The agent on the part of the brigands, with an authorization signed by Miss Stone and Mrs. Tsilka and I, the agent of Mr. Dickinson, have agreed that the captives shall be freed on the payment of a sum collected for this purpose, namely, £14,500 T.

2. As to exact place and manner of delivering the sum and freeing the captives you will agree with the person who will bring this letter from me. He has this right.

3. In order that you may be assured that the captives are alive and well, this, my letter, shall be put before Miss Stone and Mrs. Tsilka, that they may write with their own hands on the other side of this paper; after which it may be given to you.

4. A copy of this letter I am sending you by post.

5. The money may be paid in Napoleons.

Mr. House, receive my best wishes with my signature.

On the reverse occurs the following:

MISS E. STONE:

Write out a few lines concerning things, incidents, or names which you and Mr. House know.

I made the following notes:

DR. HOUSE:

*Respected brother and fellow-laborer in the evangelical work in Macedonia:*

Last night in my dreams I was talking with Mrs. House, and I asked her whether she remembered that less a few days, *eight months* have passed from the time I gave your family a send-off to France. On this holy Sabbath, this letter has been given me by one of our captors, just arrived from Sophia. Have Mr. Holway and wife arrived? So also our beloved ones who went to America last year. My heart is often with my fellow-laborers in Salonica and other places in the province. We are very sad over the sufferings of Raina Gheorghieva, concerning which we have heard only the fact. May God bless his work, especially during this week of prayer!

With heartfelt salutations, your fellow-laborer,

ELLEN M. STONE.

Saturday evening, January 4, 1902, December 22, 1901 (O. S.), Elena G. Tsilka was born. Everything was and is well with the child and the mother, through God's wonderful mercy.

E. M. STONE.

Mrs. Tsilka's question was:

TO MRS. TSILKA:

Answer who your friend was in East Orange, New Jersey, and who was the directress of the hospital in which you were.

The answer was in Mrs. Tsilka's handwriting:

Miss Belle Judd. The directress of the hospital is Miss Anna Maxwell. KATERINA STEPHANOVA TSILKA.

During the waiting days which followed, the care of the baby and her mother gave me plenty of occupation. It was hard enough to complete the most indispensable duties in that dismal, draughty place, and with the pitifully few conveniences to be obtained there. The only way we had of knowing day from night was by the glimmering of light through the cracks around the door, which was nailed up. Once we were amazed by a pale ray of sunshine falling near us, and tracing it back found that it shone through a hole in the earth floor, from some object in the cellar which reflected it! Mrs. Tsilka here devised a unique cloak for her little one, a wadded bag made of stout white cotton cloth, from the scanty supplies which the brigands had furnished. Into this bag, fastened around her neck outside of her swaddling blankets, little Elenchie was put on every subsequent journey.

Many days passed. The nights were now very cold. High winds prevailed, and there was snow on the ground. Nevertheless, not many days elapsed before the brigands again began to move on with us. The stern, set expression of their faces convinced me that they must have weighty reasons for so fearfully exposing those who still needed shelter and care. Morning after morning we questioned in vain whether any one had come. We had no idea where the work was being carried on, nor where we were being hidden. Finally one night there was an arrival. We were awakened from sleep, and a note was handed me; it was from Dr. House. It acknowledged the receipt of my letter, and said further that he would try to persuade the rest of the ransoming committee to think as he did, that the money must be paid before the release of the captives.

What did it mean? Consternation filled our hearts. Consul Dickinson's intermediary had made mention of Dr. House only. Who were these others who remained to be persuaded? We were terribly perplexed, and the brigands were angry beyond all bounds. They crowded about us, huddled trembling in our corner, their fierce faces revealed to us by the fire-light. They gave me once more a piece of paper and a pen and ink, with which to write the "last letter," for they said: "If they cannot conclude the business now, they need not expect to hear again from you. We will put the ransom which we demand back to £25,000 T., and we will never abate it!" What was to become of us? The little child lay all unconscious of the agony in the heart of its mother and in mine. A brigand held the miser-

able little tin kerosene lamp, and I wrote this second letter to Dr. House:

*Dear Dr. House:*—I thank you for your letter of the 17th, which I have just received. I am glad to hear the good news from home and from your family, but, on the other hand, I am very sad, and even in terror, over your words: "I will endeavor to persuade the men who hold the money to come to the proposals of the brigands." Have you not received the letter of Consul Dickinson's representative at Sophia, and the letter which I sent with it, signed by Mrs. Tsilka and myself? The intermediary said that you were empowered to pay the sum agreed upon, £14,500 T. Why, then, this delay? We waited every night for the return of the men sent to you, that we might hear the joyful news that at last we were to be set free; but in place of this, we must still wait longer in great suffering and danger. Now our captors have bidden me to write this "last letter," to say to you that if their propositions are not accepted, and that without delay, they will refuse to receive the reduced sum, and will insist upon the original sum of £25,000 T. They finally agreed to accept the less sum out of pity for Mrs. Tsilka and me, because we are women, and thus suffer in a special degree from this captivity; but our friends have prolonged our sufferings to five months, and are continuing to prolong them. For the love of God I pray you to believe all that I wrote you in my previous letter as to the confidence we have in those who come to you on the part of our captors, that they will try to fulfil any pledges they may make to you. We assure you that there is no other way to save our lives. Act, then, as you would if your sister or daughter were in our place. Have mercy on the unfortunate child, which during the first seventeen days of its life has been compelled to journey three times, in extreme danger to itself and its mother. Have mercy also, if possible, on me. Nobody can play with the men who hold us. We wonder at their patience up to this point in this matter. We know that it is only through the pitying love of God for us that they have spared our lives to this time.

Here Mrs. Tsilka's feelings of indignation at the oft-repeated delays overcame her; seizing the pen, she wrote:

Who are these people who dare to be the cause of the lengthening out of our sufferings? They are either people without human sympathy with the helpless, or they haven't any Christian love in their hearts. I would like them to have only one month of our now almost five months of sufferings. Cannot they sympathize with my little daughter, who is in constant distress? Our eyes are swollen with smoke, which is constantly like a cloud in the room, and I can scarcely talk because of it. It is not a room, but a hole! Imagine my sufferings as I see my little one suffer. The people who hold the money will wait, it seems, till we are dead. Oh, Dr. House, I pray you to act quickly!

With a heart filled with sorrow,  
KATERINA STEPHANOVA TSILKA.

As she gave back the pen, I continued:

No one has a right to hold back the money that has been given so long ago by our beloved ones and others who sympathized with us. Our captors are exasperated with these repeated delays in the negotiations, and they enjoin upon us to write you not to expect another letter from us, if you do not now finish the work of obtaining our freedom.

With loving salutations to your family and all friends in Salonica and elsewhere.

Your friend and fellow-laborer,  
ELLEN M. STONE.

May God forgive us for the injustice we did in our hearts to the faithful men who were doing everything in their power to save us! We knew nothing of all this. We only knew that the brigands had agreed to accept the smaller sum of money; that Dr. House had been named as the one to pay it over to them; and that some of their men had gone to take it. Why could they not come to an agreement, and free us?

We resigned ourselves to the inevitable as best we could, and continued our weary waiting. How often we promised ourselves that if we should live to be freed, we would compensate ourselves by lighting all the lamps in our homes, to rejoice our eyes after the dismal darkness of our confinement.

At length a night came when it was evident that news was expected. A portion of the band, who had their quarters elsewhere, came crowding in, and filled all the available space. They seemed happy, and we wondered whether we might venture to hope again. After a long time there was an arrival. Two brigands came. One handed to their head man his satchel of skin, and said a few words to him; then all retired to an inner apartment. Some minutes passed. Then the chief came out and handed me the following letter from the ransoming committee:

MISS ELLEN M. STONE.

*My dear Fellow-Worker:*—Our hearts are deeply touched by your words and those of Mrs. Tsilka in your last letter. We rejoice to tell you that we are already convinced by your previous letter, and by our interview with the bearer of it, so that we had resolved to accept the terms of the brigands. We regret exceedingly that when we were working with unexpected haste to finish the work, we were met with difficulties from the government, which we scarcely overcame after several days of endeavor. We succeeded in obtaining from the Sultan himself an order that the military and civil authorities should facilitate our work—also an order that they should give to us whatever we should need for the furtherance of the work, so that we hope that we may in the shortest possible time exchange the necessary papers that you may be finally freed. We cannot tell you how we shall rejoice to see the hour when we shall greet you. We have now given the money, £14,500 T., and we have taken your receipt for the same, and as we rely upon the “word

of honor” of the bearer of your letter, we expect to see you soon. We will go from here to Serres, and there will await you with great joy.

With sincere greetings and with ardent desire, we await the hour of your deliverance. May God preserve you, and have mercy upon you!

Faithfully yours,

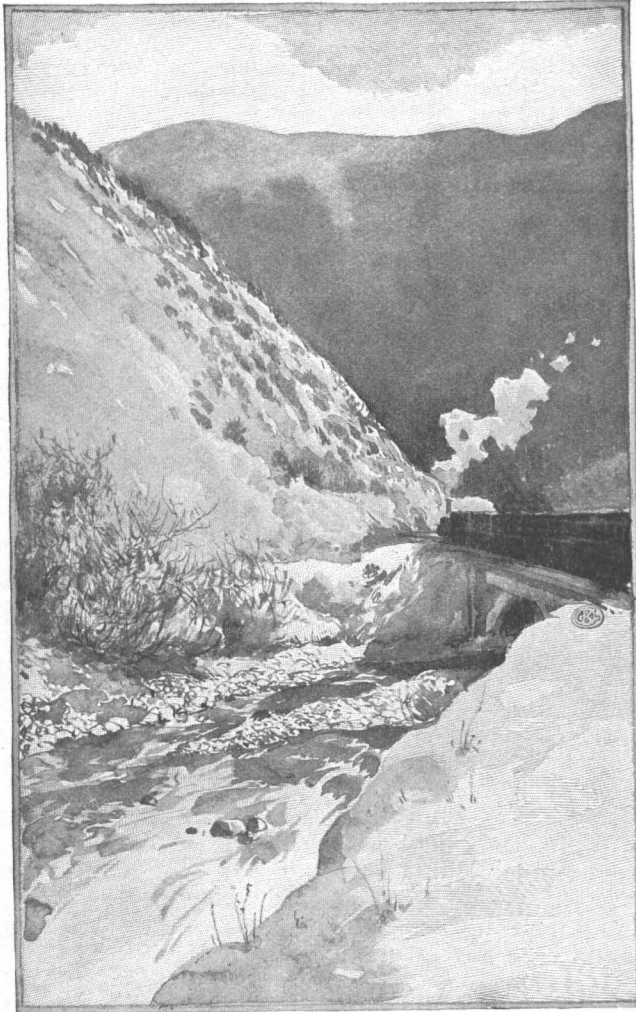
J. H. HOUSE,  
W. W. PEET,  
A. A. GARGIULO.



A TURKISH SOLDIER OF THE TYPE WHICH ESCORTED MISS STONE AFTER HER RELEASE

There was also a brief note from one of the brigands, who had left their camp that Sabbath night some weeks before, to go to meet the ransoming committee. He said briefly that they had received the ransom which they had demanded for us, and had given over to the committee the receipt from us. We were convinced that there could be no mistake—that the ransom had been paid.

We did not, however, for a moment deceive



RAILWAY BRIDGE IN THE WILD REGIONS OF MACEDONIA  
*The region is dangerous, and the inhabitants—Mohammedan Albanians—are  
 always to be seen fully armed*

ourselves that we were out of danger, or that it would be an easy task for our captors to deliver us up safely. Nevertheless, a wonderful relief had come to us, and our hearts were overflowing with gratitude to God for His marvelous mercy. The relief of the brigands was, if possible, even greater than ours. We had become an almost intolerable burden to them to provide for our imperative needs, which had been so much augmented since the birth of the baby.

A deep fog now prevailed for several days. It was so dense that it was impossible for us to journey. We were in a mountain cabin, perched high on the rocks, from which the descent was so steep that we must make it on foot. We were not troubled, however, at this enforced delay. God had sent the fog,

and we knew it must be all for the best. He might be shutting us in by it from some terrible danger, to which, all unconscious to ourselves, we were exposed. The men guarding us were evidently troubled because they could not travel, and more than once referred to the fact, saying, apologetically, "We have kept you alive so long, and without serious harm; we do not wish that now you should risk a broken limb, or even worse." We assured them that we were not troubled at the delay, because God had sent it. We were troubled with what man was responsible for; whatever God did was all right.

When at last we started, it was with deep gladness in our hearts. The journeys were just as hard as ever; the nights were just as cold; the snow fell, and the winds blew, and we were as frequently terrified as before lest baby should roll out of our arms, or we should fall with her. Yet we were joyful, and hope was strong within us. The danger from pursuit was, we judged, even greater than before, despite the fact that Dr. House's letter had told us of the command which the ransoming committee had obtained from the Sultan himself, that the military authorities should intermit their pursuit of the brigands until we had been delivered up. The brigands evidently moved with extreme

caution, and some nights refused to travel at all. This was what tried our endurance most severely. Nor would they give us any reason for these delays. Although they had received the ransom, they still maintained the strictest silence toward us concerning their movements.

Finally, however, the man who we then supposed had the charge of the band came one morning into the damp, unwholesome place where they were hiding us. He referred to the fact that we might be wondering at this delay, after we knew that the ransom money had been paid. I told him that we did wonder very much. He gave us to understand that they were doing their best to deliver us up, but that the pursuit was very close and persistent—on five or six occasions so close that



they had almost despaired of keeping us. I said to him: "Without doubt your men who met our ransoming committee must have given some pledge to them of an approximate time when they would deliver us up at some specified place. The days are passing and we are not moving. Now it is more than possible that a great danger may come upon you from my own people, who will think that when that limit of time has passed, and they hear nothing from us, that you have killed us, even after accepting the money. Now if you have any way of sending a messenger to our committee, you had better lose no time in acquainting them with the reason for our detention." He made me no answer, but went away. After we were released we learned that a messenger had been sent to them by the brigands, and that he had arrived just in time to avert a most serious danger. Had the representatives of the United States Government at

Constantinople made a demand upon the Turkish Government just at that time that all possible pressure should be brought to bear for the detection of the brigands, undoubtedly our lives would have been the forfeit.

I had understood during this interview with the chief that they had been obliged to change all their plans, not only as to the place where they would deliver us up, but also the time. The pursuit by the troops was too persistent, and their watchfulness too vigilant. Dr. House had said in his letter that they would await us in Serres, but when, after weeks of traveling, we were finally released, we found ourselves far from that region. Mrs. Tsilka and I oftentimes said to each other, "The money has been paid, and they are bound to free us if they can, yet they treat us just the same as before. We are just as much their captives as ever." It was of no use, however, to ex-

*(To be concluded)*