

Good Turks

By Rev. Arthur C. Ryan, Constantinople

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In these days when one hears little from Turkey but tales of cruelty and atrocity, it may be well to remember that there are good Turks as well as bad Turks. The following incidents were related to the writer by the young man who was the principal participant. I wonder if they may not have been duplicated in the present crisis in Turkey.

In 1895 Aram was a small Armenian boy whose home was in the city of Aintab. When the Armenian massacres [of 1896] began he was living with his mother on one side of the city, while two married sisters were living on the opposite side. For a considerable time it meant death for an Armenian to show himself in the streets of the city. When the troubles in the streets had subsided slightly and after many Armenians had been killed, Aram and his mother, thanks to a friendly Turkish bey, were still alive and safe in their home. This bey was a prominent Turk who lived at the end of the street on which stood Aram's house. He had always been friendly with his Armenian neighbors. When the mob, composed largely of wild Kurds and Arabs from regions outside of Aintab, came to massacre the Armenians in that street, this Turk was prepared to show his mettle. He with servants and some friends, at the point of revolvers and guns and with no small danger to themselves, drove the mob away and guarded the entrance to the street throughout the whole time of the massacre. In this manner about one hundred Armenians were saved.

When asked why he did such a thing at so great a risk to himself, he replied that these Armenians were good, faithful people who had done no harm to any one, and he would not stand by and see them butchered. For days, while his Armenian neighbors were shut in, this Turk saw to it that they had provisions and water. Here was one Turk, at least, whom I am ready to call good. He was not perfect, but who is?

Now while Aram with his mother and friends were safe, they were very anxious to learn what had happened to the daughters and sisters on the other side of the city. It was finally decided that Aram and another boy should attempt to reach their homes and try to bring back a report. When evening came, Aram and his friend, by cutting across lots and by climbing over walls, succeeded in reaching the home of one of the sisters, and with great joy found that they also had-been saved.

Early next morning Aram began his dangerous return trip. All went well until he reached an open space near the street on which his house stood, As he looked over

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the last wall all seemed clear, and he jumped down to make a dash for the street. Just when he touched ground a group of Kurds came into view.

They saw him, and shouting, "An Armenian! An Armenian!" started after him. Aram ran frantically for the street. On the corner stood a Turkish butcher shop from which he was accustomed to buy meat. Into the shop he ran and begging for protection threw himself into the arms of the Turkish butcher. In a moment the Kurds were upon him, but the butcher ordered them to stop. At the same time he raised his hand as a protection for the boy who was clinging to him. The Kurds were furious and demanded to know why the butcher, a Turk and a Moslem, was protecting a "gahour" Armenian. The butcher simply told them to be quiet and to move on. At this the Kurds began to rage and to threaten the Turk if he should not deliver the Armenian boy, The Turk was calm and firm, and in Oriental fashion began arguing with the Kurds, and finally persuaded them to pass on and the boy was saved.

Here again was a "good Turk."

For days few Armenians dared to leave their houses. A week or more after Aram's experience with the Kurds and the Turkish butcher, his mother was going to the home of her daughters. The good Turkish bey had sent a trusted servant to conduct her across the city. When about halfway to her daughter's house some Arabs saw her. Although she was disguised as a Turkish woman she was suspected, and the Arabs came after her, crying: "An Armenian woman! Capture her!" The Moslem guard was faithful and told the Arabs to stand back.

They protested and threatened, as did the Kurds to the butcher, but the guard was determined to shield the woman. In the argument that followed, the guard won out by persuading the men that they could have the woman only by killing him. He said that she was "*emminet*" to him • that is, a sacred trust to him from his master and he was bound to deliver the woman to her daughter at the risk of more than life; for to be faithless in such a position was to lose not only the favor of his master, but was a great crime against Allah.

Here is another Turk whom I think we may call good, not perfect, but who is?

Between 1895 and 1909 Aram had grown to be a fine young man. He had completed the course at Central Turkey College and a theological course At the Marash Theological Seminary, and was pastor of an evangelical church in Northern Syria. In April, 1909, he left Antioch by caravan to attend the annual meeting of the Central Turkey Mission and the Evangelical Churches of Cilicia. This meeting was to have been held at Adana. He was the only Christian in the caravan of several Moslems

One morning Aram noticed that his Moslem traveling companions were talking "on the side" in low but excited tones. After a time one of them informed him that "Armenian troubles had broken out in that region;" that "some Armenians had been killed in

Adana;” and that “there might be danger ahead.” Aram had visions of his Aintab experiences in 1895 but he was brave and went on.

As the party neared Alexandretta, the Turks told Aram that there had been trouble in that city and that he would doubtless be in danger, but if he would listen to them they would try to save him. What was he to do? What could he do but trust in God and his Turkish traveling companions? They told him to ride between, or rather among, them as they entered the city and to be very quiet. Aram was glad to obey.

On reaching the city they rode in a group, with Aram inconspicuously in the center. In this way they all went unmolested to a khan. Here the Turks told Aram to wait until they could go out into the marketplace to discover what the situation was. Aram waited, not knowing whether his Turkish companions of the road were trying to help him or to trap him, for one can never be perfectly sure of any one’s word in Turkey.

Soon the men, or, rather, two of them, returned and said that there had been a little disturbance in the city, and that many Armenians had been killed in Adana and in the villages of that region. They also said that the situation was critical in Alexandretta. They said there were three courses open to Aram and promised to help him, regardless of which one he might decide upon.

In the first place, there was the possibility of a return to Antioch. This would be very dangerous, as brigands, Kurds, Arabs, and bloodthirsty Turks were already on the roads and in the villages. In the second place, Aram might remain in Alexandretta and his friends would do what they could for him. This seemed more satisfactory than choice number one.

But the third alternative was to board a British steamer that was in the harbor and was to sail the following morning. If Aram could get on board this ship, he could go to Cyprus and be beyond the reach of savage Kurds, Arabs, and Turks. All agreed that this was the choice to make and arrangements were left to the Turks. Aram did not dare to be too hopeful, for fear that the prospect, which seemed too good to be true, might be a scheme to trap him. Still he trusted in God and prayed that the Turks might be loyal.

About five o'clock that afternoon the Turks came to the khan, telling Aram that all was ready and that he must put on a bold front and follow them. The baggage was sent by a *hämäl*. A little later Aram and his friends went to the wharf, where a small boat was waiting. All three men entered the boat and the boatman rowed them to the steamer, which Aram boarded with joy and the parting greeting, “*Saläämet-ileh!*” (Peace be with you) from his Turkish friends. Once more good Turks saved Aram.

When I asked him why these Turks saved him, he simply said, “I do not know.” Is it any wonder that Aram dedicated his life to bringing a knowledge of Jesus Christ to the Turks?