

for death is better than life. Christ have mercy!" And with the words on his lips he fell.

Men who never went to church now prayed and died praying. They who had scoffed at the piety of their neighbors now died rather than deny the religion of their forefathers. They who could lie unhesitatingly to gain a few paras scorned to tell the lie that would grant them life. So does danger make heroes of us all. So do the traditions of our forefathers, which we thought dead within us, rise up in our hearts and bid us die as they died.¹

Torkom took this all in at a glance and rushed inside his shop. A few others followed him and he beckoned them to a trap door which led into a cellar. There, in corners behind piles of rubbish, they lay hid, afraid to breathe, stifling with agonized energy the hysterical wish to scream.

"Some gjaours went in here."

"Nay, there is no one inside. Come, there's work for us out here."

"With my eyes I saw them go in, and by the beard of the prophet they shall not escape."

"This is the shop of one of those dogs. Search it, take all he has. The wealth of a Christian is fair prey for the faithful, so say our priests."

"Nay, do not all leave. Valla! we'll find the dogs. Allah curses those who think only of booty and leave their work undone."

Such were the cries the fated men heard, as a crowd burst in close upon their heels. In the shop everything was overturned and all the goods were taken. Not even a needle was left. But with unabated thirst they continued their search. The dull thud of a club as it fell or the sickening rip of a sword as it pierced a bag and was withdrawn gave terrible testimony to the hopeless perfection of the hunt. The trap door was found. And as if endowed with the scent of wild beasts the Turks rushed there knowing they had found their prey. Standing above the trap door they called aloud for those below to come forth.

"Ye dogs and breed of dogs! Thought ye to escape the hand of Allah? Slaves who would rob and slay your masters if you could. Come forth. We know you by name and will find means to fetch you out if you keep us waiting. How would you like to burn alive? It is better to die quickly than to die slowly. Allah is merciful. Come forth. Who is of the faithful?"

And some one below, his nerves unstrung by the long suspense, and feeling the inevitableness of his doom, cried out, "Have mercy! Oh God, have mercy!"

"Come then and we shall send thee to thy God. It is better to die soon than to die late. Allah is merciful. Come forth."

Then as if drawn by some hypnotic influence, as the bird is attracted to the snake, one poor man and then another came trembling to the ladder. And as he tried to mount the steps he fell back, a corpse, to make room

1. The Armenians live in the past, their glory lies there. Since the crusades, long before Columbus discovered America, they have been the victims of merciless oppression. They cherish a despairing hope for better days to come, but few dare express that hope, and none now alive expect to see that day.