

## THE BOY CAPTIVE.

A STORY OF BRIGAND LIFE IN EUROPEAN TURKEY.

By Miss I. M. Lyburn.

There might have been seen in a cavern, near the summit of one of those high mountains in Southern European Turkey, just after midnight, a band of a dozen or more Greek brigands. They were reclining or sitting cross-legged on their capotes, or large furry overcoats, drinking rachi. Their white fustanellas and scarlet jackets and gaiters formed a picturesque tableau in the brightly-lighted cavernous room; for each brigand kept his lamp burning before the picture of the Virgin, or of some specially revered saint, and however bloodthirsty or cruel the deeds of the day may have been, their devotion before the sacred pictures were duly performed at night. In another apartment the younger, raw recruits, who acted as valets for the rest, were busy preparing supper.

"Demetre," said the captain of the band, a tall, stalwart Greek, whose intelligent face and fine commanding appearance indicated that he could, under different circumstances and training, have commanded an army instead of a band of robbers, "go outside and tell those boys to roast four lamb; we are famishing and may have nothing more to eat in twenty-four hours. And tell them to make no fire near the opening of the cave, for one spark could be seen by those Turks, whose camp-fires are now burning on Mt. Pelion; and if they discover this retreat, there is not another for a hundred miles around so well suited to our needs, and so inaccessible to them; though I scarcely believe the cowardly dogs would attack us, should our retreat be discovered."

"Truly," growled one of the band, and muttered a terrible anathema on the head of the Sultan and all his followers.

"However," replied the captain, "the English might force them to ferret us out; then turning to the group around him, he said, "Well, my boys, we must make another capture; our funds are getting low, and our wives and our children are starving. What shall we do?"

"Capture the child from the English Consulate," replied the old Greek, with another oath, accompanied this time with the solemn bowing and reverent crossing of himself before the picture of the Virgin, adding, "May the most holy mother help us."

"Old Petros advises us to capture little Ernest Kamanski; shall we?" asked the captain.

"No, never," replied Nicholas, a kind-hearted old Greek who sat near.

"Who is this child?" asked young Themistocles a handsome youth who had joined the band the day before.

"Who is he?" replied the captain. "Why, the only son of an English lady who lives at the port some twenty miles distant and whose residence is the English Consulate," though her husband is a German and not the consul. But he is an English subject, and besides, a captive from the Consulate would secure for us a much larger booty than any other capture we could make. Why do you so warmly oppose it, Nicholas, my boy?"

"Why, captain," said the old man, "because the child was the playmate of my little Yannie, over whose grave there burns no oil for his soul because those fiendish wretches the Turks have left us nothing in our home. But little Ernest came every day to see my boy when he lay sick, and brought him part of his own food. He wept, too, as if his little heart would break, over little Yannie's grave, when the priest threw the spade full of earth into his face. No, I'll never see him taken from his mother's arms as my child was taken from mine. Besides, the Greeks have not a better friend in the country than Mrs. Kamanski."

"What," shrewdly inquired the captain, "took your child from your arms? Did he not perish from want of food, and do you choose that all of our children perish in the same way?" Then pausing for a moment he added with great warmth, "No; oppression begets revenge, and cruelty is but the natural child of cruelty; and just so long as fiends are allowed to rule over us, our actions must partake of fiendishness. No power on earth can so long retain or so soon remove this Turkish rule as England, therefore let the weight of these calamities come upon England's children as well as our own."

"Then why not capture the English consul

at once," said old Nicholas, partly convinced, still wanting to spare the child.

"Why, for more reasons than one," replied the captain; "he travels with a mounted guard, and it would take an armed force, more than we could muster, to capture him. Then, too, he is brave and daring. I do not believe we would ever take him alive, and his dead body would only bring revenge upon us and our children. We tried it once and failed."

"Then take the child," said one whose sorrow of countenance was mingled with hatred and revenge. "If revenge is sweet, let me drink deeply of it, for where are my wife and three little ones? Dead on Mt. Pelion! I went out on that bright spring morning and fought bravely until the sun set, and when I went back to my village at night what was left me? A barren, naked, desolate house, my wife and three little ones murdered by the Turks. The springtime has come and gone again, but no brightness or sunshine has ever come to me since. There is nothing for me to live for now but revenge."

"And I," said old Petros, not less vindictively, "have suffered more. My wife and daughters were brutally treated and cruelly beaten, and my boy, my only son, who would have perpetuated my name and family, was bound like a beast, and his head was cut off with the dull knives of Turkish soldiers, while I was tied hand and foot in sight and hearing of the deed."

"Who has eaten more bitterness than I?" growled still another of the band, "for only a few weeks ago my old father, mother, and brother-in-law were all cruelly murdered, and my beautiful sister was spared only that the fiends might revel in her anguish when she was taken in to see the dead bodies which they had placed in mocking attitudes before the open door. She, poor child, was found a few hours later and taken to the English consul a raving maniac."

"But were they not brigands like ourselves?" asked the young Themistocles.

"Like ourselves?" replied the captain. "Never; they were sheep-stealers—a lower grade of brigands who have no code of honor—and besides they were Turks. We capture only for booty, they to gratify their bloodthirsty passions."

"Yet we often shed blood, and innocent blood," answered the youth.

"We never do," said the captain, "unless forced to it by our necessities and those of our suffering wives and little ones."

"But, as in the case of Ernest Kamanski, may we not be forced to kill him, or at least mutilate his body?" asked Themistocles.

"What?" said old Nicholas, thoroughly aroused, "then we will never capture him. I'll go to his mother to-night and warn her of the threatened danger, unless, captain, you give me your word of honor, here in the presence of your land, that the child's body will be returned alive and whole to his mother."

"The fool will betray us, or I should not bind myself," said the captain aside; then to Nicholas, "My word of honor is given, and as leader of this band I do solemnly promise that the child shall be returned alive and whole to his parents. But to ease your conscience we will ask 'Papa Demetre' if this capture is right."

A lazy-looking priest with unkempt beard and long hair sat drinking a cup of strong coffee as an antidote for the rachi he had drunk so freely. "Well," said he "our religion does not teach that revenge is right, yet from pecuniary considerations this capture becomes a necessity. Why, my five daughters will never marry if I have no money to give them, and my portion of this child's ransom must go towards that."

"Upon the same plea he charged for his time for making a list of the suffering poor in his own parish, that they might receive aid from a benevolent society in England," said the young Themistocles aside to a comrade. "Sure they are pretty girls, and I should not object to marrying one of them myself if she brought a fair dower."

"Well, then," said the captain, "it is decided we are to get the boy. Themistocles, you are to be trusted. Go down to old Dionysius at the foot of the mountain, tell him that twenty Napoleons in French gold will be paid him precisely at twelve o'clock to-morrow night if the child, alive and unharmed, is ours. Hasten, my boy; you will eat upon your return." Then, turning to the band, he said, "Leave it to old Diony-

The lower order of Greek priests marry.

sius, my brothers, we have no more faithful ally than he, and well he may be, for we have paid him nigh a thousand francs for information given and received from the country below."

The young Themistocles hastily adjusted a more sombre attire and went rapidly down the mountain-side, knowing only to obey the cruel command, yet having within him enough of those higher characteristics of the Greek to give him an uneasy, strange desire to do and be something better than the life of a highway robber permitted. A certain sense of honor was strongly inculcated into this brigand life. To betray his band, or even to shrink back from an undertaking entered into, would not for a moment be thought of by him; but he resolved that night to take no booty from Ernest Kamanski's capture, and to leave the band honorably as soon as this was over.

At ten o'clock the next night Ernest Kamanski reached the home of old Dionysius at the foot of the mountain, where he was carefully concealed by the old man from his wife and daughters. He had been deceived and gagged by the old Dionysius, thrown into a coarse bag, and put upon a mule, and thus brought out of the town without any suspicion on the part of anyone except the few accomplices employed by the old man. As soon as it was dark old Dionysius had taken the child up into his arms and the gag from his mouth. Poor little Ernest then cried and pleaded most piteously with this strange man, but all in vain. Now in the sheep-cot, tired and hungry and exhausted, carefully wrapped in the capote of old Dionysius, he soon slept soundly; nor did he wake as he was carried on the back of the strong young Themistocles up the mountain-side and tenderly laid on a bed of straw prepared for him in the cave by his old friend Nicholas.

"Waking early next morning, he cried out, "O mamma, I have had such a dreadful dream, and I am so hungry." Then opening his eyes wide he gazed around him in amazement for a moment, then burst into a piteous wail as the truth flashed upon him, for Ernest was too familiar with the habits of these mountain robbers not to recognize at once his surroundings. He had but a few months before listened with intense interest to the account of a merchant of the town who had been captured and spent several weeks with this band. The ransom being refused, the brigands had cut off his two thumbs and an ear and sent them to his friends, threatening at the same time to skin them alive if they did not immediately send what was demanded. And, knowing this would be done, his friends, had borrowed the money and paid the ransom.

Little Ernest's piteous cries brought forth the sympathy of all around him, for most of them had children of their own, and the Greeks love their children very tenderly. But none could comfort and soothe him until old Nicholas took him into a little room in the cave all alone, and let him weep his very soul out. Then, hugging up in his arms, he talked to him first of little Yannie, then of his mother, then told him how the captain had promised that no one should hurt him, and that before long he would be taken home to his mother.

"They want put me in the ground and throw earth in my face, will they?" sobbed the child.

"Oh, no," said Nicholas, now finding it his time to weep.

Finally the little fellow put an end to all weeping, by remembering that he was "so hungry." Old Nicholas was only too glad to find something to do for the child. He soon brought in some brown bread and warm milk from a goat, which the old man had brought up the mountain the night before especially for the comfort of the child. After eating heartily and really enjoying it, Ernest looked up so pleadingly into his friend's face, and said,

"Now take me home to see my mother."

To deny this request seemed too hard, so Nicholas did what most Greeks would have done under similar circumstances, told an untruth, and made the child believe that it was raining hard outside of the cave and that as soon as it cleared off he should go. This Ernest readily accepted, as the darkness of the cavern made him think it must be cloudy.

Themistocles just then came in, bringing with him a reel, out of which he proposed carving a shepherd's flute. Taking Ernest on his knee close to one of the lamps, they

were soon so engrossed in each other and in making the flute that the child forgot for the time all his sorrow.

Themistocles told him how the Turks had come over into the plains of Thessaly, where he lived, and had burned and destroyed all their houses, and how he and a half a dozen young men had gone up on a mountain and concealed themselves near the pathway where the Turkish soldiers would pass on their return to the port and had shot so many of them down in revenge. All these were horrible tales for so young a listener, but there was nothing brighter to relate in the lives of these poor people during those dark days when they were kept in waiting for their liberty.

"But what made you join the brigands?" asked Ernest. "They are such wicked men!"

"I know they are," said Themistocles, "and I wish already I never had. But, you see, I have an old mother almost seventy years old. She had one daughter and one son. My sister married when I was a little boy, and had six or seven children." Then the Turks came over the mountain they killed her husband in the fight and burned her house. My sister soon after took sick and died, and I was a prisoner for a long time down in the Turkish fort. My poor old mother has ever since lived in an old shed with my sister's children, with nothing but the few clothes they had on their backs, and eating grass and roots. Oh, it was too pitiful! When I came out of prison I tried to get work and could not, so I joined these robbers a few days ago, that my old mother and my sister's children might not die of want. They are starving even now, yet what can I do?"

"Why don't you ask the English consul to make you a soldier? He has a little army to keep the Turks and brigands from stealing everything from other people."

"True," said Themistocles thoughtfully, "he has an armed force in order to protect the ingathering crops, and I believe I will go right to him and ask permission to join it. The pay of a regular soldier would be better than this uncertainty."

"Then take me with you," begged the child, "because I know him, and he'll take me right to my mother."

"I cannot to-day," sadly replied Themistocles; "but I will not go until I can take you with me, I'll promise you that."

By this time the flute was finished, all beautifully carved, and Themistocles went into an adjoining apartment of the cavern and asked the captain's permission to blow it. This was readily granted, as they were entirely out of hearing of every one. Themistocles then played the Greek national air, whose wild, plaintive notes sounded peculiarly sweet within the cave. Thus entertained for the first day passed and at the end of it Themistocles and the child found themselves warm friends.

That night, at supper, the only meal which the brigands take, Ernest had a special seat of honor, down on the ground but just at the right of the captain, and he was given the best of everything their table supplied. A fat mutton, cut to pieces and cooked in large earthen vessels with rice, seasoned with tomatoes, formed a large part of their repast, while beets, boiled with the tops on, then cut up in vinegar and oil, make a salad much enjoyed by them all. Brown bread and coarse white cheese completed the whole. This was spread upon a rough straw matting, and the brigands sat cross-legged around on the ground. But near little Ernest there was a savory chop of the mutton broiled on the coals, two fresh boiled eggs, a cup of warm milk from the goat, and a large bunch of grapes. These had all been carefully prepared by old Nicholas, and he had walked some eight or ten miles that day to the country below to get the grapes and eggs.

Soon after eating, Ernest went soundly to sleep on his straw pallet, but not without kneeling in one corner of the cave and saying aloud his little prayer in Greek, which was as familiar to him as English. To his usual prayer which he said at his mother's knee every night, asking so earnestly to be forgiven his sins and made a good boy, he added to-night, "And please, God, make these brigands all good, and give their little children something to eat, but don't let them catch my mother and father and bring them here, for Jesus's sake. Amen."

To the wild mountain robbers, whose devotions consisted of hastily-read prayers in their churches, or of a few rapid crossings of themselves before some sacred picture, this

seemed never fel nor had trouble a "May G was offer of any r Ernest got from his lack.

Late til cil of w should be for the re particular to be arri course, w abouts, t is too di necessar ands, of r mous a r sibility o always d with the c an offer n ceive. T occupy s came to t

We can- our litt the time l gals, who him if it the same "do you. You can't often brin as he wa the inner that it wa was cont period a l to cross o this retrea might me them, they through i movement trying to l in the high fectly darl never kin was kept. the old m bread and an earthen specially fr always bee fellow had days seeme end of that and Ernest They agai on their sh but to the Nicholas c when it ca that it had carrying hi ments of connection those three all the r ransom a child had been done below had should be brought the money one of the brought by met others place, and brought th back and money was made, both there a of their boy and little E still pinione unskilled, th counting o mother stan some mista cause their l at last the n was laid on unloosed an arms.

Early the Mrs. Kam French stea They felt th too great in stocles came cognized by