

U. S. Breakable Turk

A Tale of the Greco-Turkish War.
By George Horner, Author of "The Greek and the Turk," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

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John Curtis, a young American, who came to the island of Crete, in the Greco-Turkish War, joins a filibustering expedition to Crete. The little vessel is wrecked, but Curtis, accompanied by Lieutenant Lindbohm, a soldier of fortune, and a native Cretan, reach the island safely. They arrive at a village, and are cared for by the inhabitants. Curtis has injured his foot on a sea urchin. He is nursed by Panayota, the priest's daughter. In a few days word comes of the advance of the Turks under Kostakes toward the town.

CHAPTER VII.

The peaceful village was transformed as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, into a scene of tumult. An invisible thunder cloud seemed hovering in the clear sky. The frightened little children and the timid women running about the streets, reminded Curtis of the sudden motherward flurry of chickens, at the shadow of the swooping hawk. He was left alone in the deserted inn. He dragged a bench to the open door and sat down. Those rapid preparations for defense were going on which suggest themselves instinctively to people bred and reared in a land of strife. Despite the sinking of the Holy Mary and her precious cargo, guns and ammunition existed. A group of sturdy mountaineers soon collected on the square, wearing well-filled cartridge belts and carrying gras rifles. The throng grew, and every new arrival was greeted affectionately by his first name. "Bravo, Kur Yanne," or "Bravo, Kur George." The demarch formed the nucleus of the group, the red marks under his eyes blushing like new cut slashes.

A rapid jangling of bells, as of animals running, was heard, and a figure appeared on the edge of a distant rock. He cast an agitated glance back over his shoulders and slid down, his four hooves together, his hunched back into a semi-circle, his hands thrust outward. Others appeared and slid over, as though borne on the crest of a torrent. Then two tall shepherds were sketched for an instant on a background of mountains and sky, swinging their crooked staves. But they, too, were caught by the imaginary torrent and swept into the town. Boys were dispatched into the surrounding hills, and within an hour the streets were filled with bleating flocks. The group of armed men grew to 50. Lindbohm and Michael had both been provided with guns. The Swede had been induced to discard his crooked staff, and a conspicuous mark, and to bind a dark handkerchief about his head. Curtis felt himself one of them, and yet knew that he was not.

"If I had a gun, I might get up there among the rocks and do something," he muttered. "I can shoot just as well as I am lame, if I could only get into position. Pahaw! What's the matter with this lame man's sight. I'm a non-combatant, I am."

The priest came down, leading Panayota by the hand and carrying a cross. The girl was white, even to her face, but there was a proud gleam in her eyes and her eyes were shining. She wore a short Cretan knife in her belt. Papis-Malekko held aloft the cross and solemnly blessed the waiting warriors, but which he presented the sacred symbol to the lips of each in turn. Lindbohm strode over to Panayota, and, pulling the handkerchief from his head, bowed low, with his hand upon his heart.

"Before they get you," he said, "they must just take us all."

Curtis shouted "That's right!" and was not aware of the little army turning and looking at him inquiringly.

"I'll make a fool of myself here yet," he said, sinking back onto the beach. Michael translated Lindbohm's speech and a great shout of "Bravo, bravo!" went up.

Lindbohm was in his element.

"There was," he understood, no other way for the army to get in from the land side except through the pass. They might approach with difficulty from the seashore, but there was only one place where they could land. Men were waiting that, and a smoke by way of a fire by night would warn the villagers. Very good. Fifty men might defend this pass against 50, but they must lose no men and must make every shot count. How much ammunition had they?

"Not much. Only their belts full, and possibly as much again, curses on the English!"

"Very well. We must use it the more carefully. We must not get excited. Kostakes' efforts cannot possibly reach the ravine before nightfall—he can get through without a guide!"

"No," replied the demarch. "Impossible."

Panayota spoke. She said only two words, and she said them quietly, though distinctly, but they fell like a thunderclap.

"Peter Ampster."

This was the name of the cowardly shepherd whom Lindbohm had driven from the town.

"Is there any way to build fires so as to light up narrow places in the ravine?"

There were two or three such places where bonfires could be located that would make them as light as day. People standing behind the rocks in positions of comparative safety could feed the flames by tossing wood into them.

"Send out the boys and girls then to prepare these fires and to pile up brushwood enough behind the rocks to keep them burning all night," commanded the Swede. "Build one fire at the mouth of the pass," but here he was interrupted by a chorus of protest. "Let the Turks get into the pass and then we will kill them," cried his listeners.

"Very well, but see that they don't get through."

Papis-Malekko had a suggestion to make. The Spakotes often got the Turks into narrow defiles and rolled stones down upon their heads. There were half a dozen precipitous places in the gorge where this could be effectively done.

"Capital idea," assented Lindbohm. "Let some more women go to those places and pile up heaps of the biggest stones they can carry." Lindbohm suggested that the men, who now numbered 60, should take their places near the mouth of the defile. In a few brief words he also laid the foundation of an effective Commissariat. The Mayor's brother, too old a man to fight, was instructed to superintend the sending of food twice a day. In case the Turks should be protracted, and above all, water, which could not be found up among the rocks. Women and boys were to act as carriers.

A messenger was sent to Korakes, an insurgent chief, who with 300 men had

established his headquarters near the village of Aiklino.

"We might be able to hold out for a week," said Lindbohm to Curtis, "and Korakes will surely come to our aid. At any rate, we must just take our chances."

CHAPTER VIII.

Curtis was left alone in the priest's house. Papis-Malekko had gone up the ravine, and the Turkish soldiers were in the village of Aiklino.

"If one of my boys were wounded," he said, "and I were not there to comfort him, God might forgive me, but I should never forgive myself."

The day passed very peacefully. Curtis sat in the door of the parsonage, with his hand upon a stool. The children, usually so noisy in the streets, were quiet, and the gossips were either gone or were talking in whispers. A woman sat in a doorway opposite shouting her babe, that squealed and shouted with delight at the familiarity of a pet kid. The mother smiled sadly, and then clasped the child to her bosom, smoothing it with affection. The sudden purple twilight of the Orient fell, and a light breeze flew up from the sea, beating the blossoms from the cherry and pear trees and scattering their faint, delicious perfume. The purple changed to black and the nightingales began to sing. The flocks had gone to sleep. The antiphonal bleating and the jangle of the bells were swallowed up in the darkness. The silence, save where now and then a little lamb cried softly to its mother across the meadows of dreamland or a bell tinkled musically. There was a purring of many waters.

"By Jove, war's a queer thing," mused Curtis. "It's hate and lust and bigotry. It's a big selfish life, and all the time a thousand voices are preaching truth and love. Here am I sitting among the nightingales, the cherry blossoms and the dreaming sheep, and a mile from here all the men of the vicinity are trying to cut each other's throats. And I suppose I'd be with 'em if it wasn't for this blasted foot. These Cretans are plucky fellows. By George, I glory in their sand! Had they been a lot of cowardly fellows they wouldn't have got here while I could hold a gun! Why, she's a natural queen! She'd grace any man's friends, she would. What beautiful eyes she has! What a mouth! What a carriage, and what a smile! Talk about your ancient epics and your ancient heroes! Why, here's the Trojan War right over again, or the spirit of it. We aren't shy on men and women these days, we're shy on heroes and that girl, that Panayota, she's as pure as snow. She'd knife herself in a minute before she'd let herself fall into the hands of the Turks. By Jove! Whatever else the boys do, I hope they'll pink that Kostakes' effendi—the damned scoundrel! I'd like to pot him myself. I wonder if the boys can shoot any?"

The idea of a Turk casting his eyes on a woman like that!

As the time wore on, Curtis found himself leaning forward in the darkness, listening for the sound of distant shots. He wondered if the Turks would attack that night and if he could hear the shots if they did.

He went to the door and called to an old man who was sitting in a low tone, but excitedly, to the woman across the way. The babe had been put to bed. They both came running, and he asked them, framing his sentence with much care.

"Has the fighting begun? Can the guns be heard from here?"

They replied in concert, volubly and at great length. Then they held a consultation with each other and withdrew.

"That's the trouble with a foreign tongue," mused Curtis. "You can talk them all right, but they don't know what you can't understand what they say to you. Now, I said it perfectly right," and he repeated the sentence again.

After about half an hour the old man returned, bringing some bread, cheese, halva and a glass of dark wine. Curtis repeated the Greek word for "thank you" half a dozen times, and then fell upon the food voraciously. "The more I see of these people, the better I like them," he muttered. "Now, I call that thoughtful of the old man. Why, she and

ward a red eye of flame that glowed among the rocks, high up and far away."

THE PRIEST CAME DOWN, LEADING PANAYOTA BY THE HAND AND CARRYING A CROSS.

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CHAPTER IX.

That was one of Lindbohm's bonfires, sure enough. Perhaps a battle was going on at that moment.

"Mother of God, save my man!" cried the woman with the baby. "Save him, save him!"

"Mother of God, save my boy, b' cy-prus tree, my Petrol!" groaned the old man.

"Curse the Turks! May their fathers roast in hell!" shrieked the lad. "Give me a gun, tip old enough to shoot."

For three hours they stood watching the fire, as though they could actually see what was going on there. At times they stood silent for many minutes together, listening, listening for the sound of guns, but they could hear nothing. At last a shot was heard in the distance.

"Oo-hoo!"

"What is it. What is it?" the watchers asked, hoarsely at each other with pale faces.

Again "Oo-hoo! Oo-hoo!" nearer.

At last footfalls were heard, as of one running and stumbling among loose rocks, and at length little Spitz Kaphtakes staggered up to the group and stood panting before them. His trousers were torn, and blood was flowing from his legs. The women and the old man started at him open-mouthed for a long minute, and then, pointing upon him, began to shake him.

"What is it? What news?"

"Is any Petro safe?"

"How goes it with my Yanne?"

Others ran up out of dark alleys and from the doorways of distant houses, and

leg broken, was brought in on a donkey.

CHAPTER X.

They laid the wounded Cretan on the lounge in the parsonage. He was pale as death from loss of blood, and kept snapping at his under lip with his teeth, but he did not groan.

"We're a pair of storks now," he said, smiling at Curtis, and then he faintly asked the priest to get him some water.

A ball had struck the shin, low down.

"It's not badly splintered, old man," said the American, as Michael opened his eyes again. "I don't know anything about surgery, but I should think the proper thing would be to wash it, support it with some splints and bind it up tight."

"What you speak?" asked Michael.

"Some warm water, two or three straight sticks and a piece of cloth that I can tear up into strips."

Curtis obeyed the request for the necessary articles and they were soon brought. Curtis washed the blood away carefully. The end of a piece of bone pushed against the skin from beneath and made a short protrusion.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man, but I've got to hurt you—like the devil, I'm afraid."

"All right, my friend," replied Michael, "only a minute. Lie on your back. That's right. Now take hold of the sides of the lounge and hang on tight. That'll help you. I know it from having teeth pulled. Now let this old man take hold of your ankle so, with both hands and pull, slowly, carefully, till I say 'stop,' and not to commence pulling till I say 'now.' You'd better explain—your Greek is some better than mine."

Michael explained.

"Does he understand?"

"Perfectly."

Curtis put his hand above the broken shin in such a way that he could push the fragment of bone into place.

"This can't be wrong," he reflected. "At any rate, there's nothing else to do."

Looking at the old man, he nodded.

"Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" gurgled Michael, as though the words were being pulled from his throat with a hook. There was so much agony in them, they meant so much more than the screams of a weaker person would have meant, that the amateur surgeon felt sick at his stomach and it cost him a tremendous effort to suppress a sickening sense of blindness that settled like a cloud before his eyes. But the two ends of the bone came together and he resolutely pushed the splinter into place.

Still holding the leg tightly he looked at Michael. Great drops of sweat were standing on the Cretan's face and his underlip was bleeding but he smiled bravely.

"All over," said Curtis. "Now for the sticks and strips."

Fortunately for the success of the operation, the boy who had led the mule was outside, giving an account of the progress of the battle. He proved a greater attraction even than the broken leg. Curtis, finding himself alone with his patient, shut and locked the door.

"Does it hurt you very much, old man?" he asked. "I suppose the proper thing now would be to give you something to put you to sleep. Don't you think you could sleep a little while, anyway?"

"No, no, I cannot sleep. It hurts me some, but not much—not too much."

Curtis sat quietly for some time in the semi-darkness of the room, listening to the chatter of the boy outside, punctuated by the excited exclamations of his listeners. He glanced at the drawn face of Michael, which had a ghastly hue in the wan light. The wounded man's eyes were open, but he made no sound.

"He's a plucky beggar," thought Curtis. "I wonder if it would do him any harm to let me try a little of my own medicine. How is it going? What are they doing up there?"

"They tried to come through about 11 o'clock, but how can I tell you, since you do not see the ravine now? It begins with a bang, and then it's a deep, steady valley, with many pine trees, and patches of grass. Near the top of the mountain the ravine becomes narrow, between walls of rock, what you call it—perpendicular. If the Turk ever gets over the summit

her face and rubbed her hands, the boy talked rapidly, shrilly, flinging his arms about with loose-elbowed gestures. The woman opened her eyes and two of the men helped her to her feet. She tottered for a moment, disheveling her hair with despairing hands and whispering hoarsely: "Tanne! Tanne! What shall I do? O God! O God!"

But suddenly the brave woman asserted itself, and her frail body straightened, tense, defiant, ready for any effort. Clapping the babe to her breast she kissed it tenderly many times. Holding it for a moment at arm's length, she looked at it hungrily, and then turned her eyes away. A neighbor took the child.

"Come!" said the mother, and she ran lightly up the ravine, followed by the boy. The babe bleated "Mamma! Mamma!" like a frightened lamb, but the woman did not look back. Hopping two or three steps from the doorway, Curtis seized a woman by the arm.

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we are lost. Very well—that devil Ampster! Lindbohm should have killed him!"

"Why, what did he do?"

"Without him the Turk could never have found the best path. Well, we have men on all the paths with dogs—good dogs, hear half a mile, bark—O, like the devil. We stay high up, most of us, with our rifles in narrow gorges, and cut out too much. We hide behind the rocks on both sides the ravine, on the other side the mountain. We listen and listen. O, how we listen! Nothing. The wind in the pine trees. The cross, the cross. My ears get very wide awake. I think I hear the wind among the stars. Then, all at once, we sit up very straight, holding our guns ready. 'Boo! boo! woo!' It is old Spito's dog down below. We sit very still. Perhaps the dog makes a mistake. Perhaps he barks at the moon. But no, Bang goes old Spito's gun. Then or three steps from the doorway, Curtis seized a woman by the arm.

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but the girls all jumped off, laughing. All killed—Panaskeve, Elena, Maria." The speaker's voice was drowned in a pandemonium of shrieks and sobs.

But again the priest was heard, reverently, distinctly, firmly like the voice of Christ calming the waters.

"They are with Christ in paradise. Still I say unto you, courage. Since God is with us, who shall stand against us?"

"Panayota was with them, but her dress caught in a thorn bush, and before she could tear herself loose they had her."

"Every eye in the church was riveted upon the priest. The crowd rushed to the floor, and his arm dropped to his side. His lips were white and there was a terrible look in the large brown eyes."

"Panayota! Panayota!" he called hoarsely. His voice sounded far away now. Suddenly he tore off his