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Refugee Procession Is Scene of Horror

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

SOFIA, Bulgaria.—In a comfortable train with the horror of the Thracian evacuation behind me, it is already beginning to seem unreal. That is the boon of our memories.

I have described that evacuation in a cable to the *Star* from Adrianople. It does no good to go over it again. The evacuation still keeps up. No matter how long it takes this letter to get to Toronto, as you read this in the *Star* you may be sure that the same ghastly, shambling procession of people being driven from their homes is filing in unbroken line along the muddy road to Macedonia. A quarter of a million people take a long time to move.

Adrianople itself is not a pleasant place. Dropping off the train at 11 o'clock at night, I found the station a mud hole crowded with soldiers, bundles, bedsprings, bedding, sewing machines, babies, broken carts, all in the mud and the drizzling rain. Kerosene flares lit up the scene. The stationmaster told me he had shipped fifty-seven cars of retreating troops to Western Thrace that day. The telegraph wires were all out. There were more troops piling up and no means to evacuate them.

Madame Marie's, the stationmaster said, was the only place in town where a man could sleep. A soldier guided me to Madame Marie's down the dark side streets. We walked through mud puddles and waded around sloughs that were too deep to go through. Madame Marie's was dark.

I banged on the door and a Frenchman in bare feet and trousers opened it. He had no room but I could sleep on the floor if I had my own blankets. It looked bad.

Then a car rolled up outside, and two moving picture operators, with their chauffeur, came in. They had three cots and asked me to spread my blankets on one. The chauffeur slept in the car. We all turned in on the cots and the taller of the movie men, who was called "Shorty," told me they had had an awful trip coming up from Rodosto on the Sea of Marmora.

"Got some swell shots of a burning village today." Shorty pulled off the other boot. "Shoot it from two or three directions and it looks like a regular town on fire. Gee I'm tired. This

refugee business is hell all right. Man sure sees awful things in this country." In two minutes he was snoring.

I woke up about one o'clock with a bad chill, part of my Constantinople-acquired malaria, killed mosquitoes who had supped too heavily to fly away from my face, waited out the chill, took a big dose of aspirin and quinine and went back to sleep. Repeated the process along toward morning. Then Shorty woke me.

"Say, boy, look at the film box." I looked at it. It was crawling with lice. "Sure are hungry. Going after my film. Sure are hungry little fellows."

The cots were alive with them. I have been lousy during the war, but I have never seen anything like Thrace. If you looked at any article of furniture, or any spade on the wall steadily for a moment you saw it crawl, not literally crawl, but move in greasy, minute specks.

"They wouldn't hurt a man," Shorty said. "They're just little fellows."

"These fellows are nothing. You ought to see the real grown-up variety at Lule Burgas."

Madame Marie, a big, slovenly Croatian woman, gave us some coffee and sour black bread in the bare room that served as dining room, salon, hotel office and parlor.

"Our room was lousy, Madame," I said cheerfully to make table talk.

She spread out her hands. "It is better than sleeping in the road? Eh, Monsieur? It is better than that?"

I agreed that it was, and we went out with Madame standing looking after us.

Outside it was drizzling. At the end of the muddy side street we were on I could see the eternal procession of humanity moving slowly along the great stone road that runs from Adrianople across the Maritza valley to Karagatch and then divides into other roads that cross the rolling country into Western Thrace and Macedonia.

Shorty and Company were going a stretch along the stone road in their motorcar en route back to Rodosto and Constantinople and gave me a lift along the stone road past the procession of refugees into Adrianople. All the stream of slow

big-wheeled bullock and buffalo carts, bobbing camel trains and sodden, fleeing peasantry were moving west on the road, but there was a thin counterstream of empty carts driven by Turks in ragged, rain-soaked clothes and dirty fezzes which was working back against the main current. Each Turk cart had a Greek soldier in it, sitting behind the driver with his rifle between his knees and his cape up around his neck to keep the rain out. These carts had been commandeered by the Greeks to go back country in Thrace, load up with the goods of refugees and help the evacuation. The Turks looked sullen and very frightened. They had reason to be.

At the fork of the stone road in Adrianople all the traffic was being routed to the left by a lone Greek cavalryman who sat on his horse with his carbine slung over his back and accomplished the routing by slashing dispassionately across the face with his quirt any horse or bullock that turned toward the right. He motioned one of the empty carts driven by a Turk to turn off to the right. The Turk turned his cart and prodded his bullocks into a shamble. This awoke the Greek soldier guard riding with him, and seeing the Turk turning off the main road, he stood up and smashed him in the small of the back with his rifle butt.

The Turk, he was a ragged, hungry-looking Turk farmer, fell out of the cart on to his face, picked himself up in terror and ran down the road like a rabbit. A Greek cavalryman saw him running, kicked spurs into his horse and rode the Turk down. Two Greek soldiers and the cavalryman picked him up, smashed him in the face a couple of times, he shouting at the top of his voice all the time, and he was led, bloody-faced and wild-eyed, back to his cart and told to drive on. Nobody in the line of march paid any attention to the incident.

I walked five miles with the refugee procession along the road, dodging camels, that swayed and grunted along, past flat-wheeled ox carts piled high with bedding, mirrors, furniture, pigs tied flat, mothers huddled under blankets with their babies, old men and women leaning on the back of the buffalo carts and just keeping their feet moving, their eyes on the road and their heads sunken, ammunition mules, mules loaded with stacks of rifles, tied together like wheat sheaves, and an occasional Ford car with Greek staff officers, red eyes grubby

from lack of sleep, and always the slow, rain-soaked, shambling, trudging Thracian peasantry, plodding along in the rain, leaving their homes behind.

When I had crossed the bridge over the Maritza, running a brick-red quarter-mile-wide flood, where yesterday had been a dry riverbed covered with refugee carts, I turned off to the right and cut up side roads to Madame Marie's to write a cable to the *Star*. All the wires were cut and I finally got an Italian colonel, who was returning to Constantinople with an Allied commission, to promise to file it for me at the telegraph office there the next day.

The fever was going strong and Madame Marie brought me a bottle of sickly sweet Thracian wine to take my quinine with.

"I won't care when the Turks come," Madame Marie said, sitting her great bulk down at the table and scratching her chin.

"Why not?"

"They're all the same. The Greeks and Turks and the Bulgars. They're all the same." She accepted a glass of the wine. "I've seen them all. They've all had Karagatch."

"Who are the best?" I asked.

"Nobody. They're all the same. The Greek officers sleep here and then will come the Turk officers. Someday the Greeks will come back again. They all pay me." I filled up her glass.

"But the poor people who are out there in the road." I couldn't get the horror of that twenty-mile-long procession out of my mind, and I had seen some dreadful things that day.

"Oh well." Madame Marie shrugged. "It is always that way with the people. *Toujours la même chose*. The Turk has a proverb, you know. He has many good proverbs. 'It is not only the fault of the axe but of the tree as well.' That is his proverb."

That is his proverb all right.

"I'm sorry about the lice, Monsieur." Madame Marie had forgiven me under the influence of the bottle. "But what do you expect? This is not Paris." She stood up, big and slovenly, and wise as people get wisdom in the Balkans. "Good-bye, Monsieur. Yes, I know 100 drachmas is too much for the bill. But I have the only hotel here. It is better than the street? Eh?"

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