

# Relief Work during the Greek War of Independence

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THE Greek War of Independence, 1821-9, the life and death struggle of a people who had suffered many years under the tyranny of Ottoman rule, aroused widespread sympathy in Europe and America. Appeals for assistance made by Greeks themselves and by philhellenes were answered for many reasons and by widely divergent types of people—by adventurers, traders, classical scholars, humanitarians, and many persons influenced by religious considerations. In Great Britain the response was not as immediate as on the continent, but it was the Society of Friends that raised one of the first subscriptions in this country and established the most systematic organization for the relief of distress.

This subscription was undertaken chiefly as the result of the initiative of a Friend well known for his philanthropic, religious, and educational activities—William Allen. Allen had been deeply interested in the Greek people ever since a trip made through the Levant in 1818-19 with Stephen Grellet; he was much concerned over the fate of the victims of the Greek war and believed in the potentialities of that nation.<sup>1</sup> Although after the war broke out Allen sincerely sympathized with the sufferers, his conscientious scruple against supporting war prevented him from participating in a proposed philhellenic committee and he felt compelled to refuse the request of Joseph Hume, a Liberal Member of Parliament, to lend his name for the calling of a public meeting at the end of 1821. However, Allen then expressed a hope that the Friends would raise a separate fund to relieve refugees from Turkish oppression.<sup>2</sup>

The necessity for action became very clear to Allen in the early autumn of 1822 when he was in Vienna. Some Greeks, who had escaped from the island of Scio when it was sacked the preceding April by the Turks, arrived in the city. Through Allen an appeal was addressed to the Society of Friends in England<sup>3</sup> and he himself gave of his own means

to help those in want : 10 napoleons for general distribution, money to individual cases of distress, and support for destitute professors and students. Two Greek students in Paris, stranded on account of the destruction of their college in Greece, received £50 from him, with the promise of more to come. This was done after he had taken the precaution to ascertain that they were being trained in the principles of Greek Christianity and not as *philosophes* of the French school.<sup>4</sup> At the same time Allen was able to secure permission of Prince Esterhazy and Count Sedlinsky, the Minister of Police in Vienna, for the Greek community there to make a public appeal for funds, which they had not dared to do on account of the antagonism of the Austrian Government, and he secured passports for the refugees to go to Leghorn.<sup>5</sup>

The following 3rd January, after Allen's return to London, at the close of the Meeting for Sufferings a committee met and a subscription was undertaken, to be used for relief purposes only. Allen, as treasurer, was directed to write to western Europeans at Corfu and in the Ionian Islands, to draw £100, and to state in his letters that further assistance would be sent to Trieste and Ancona, £200 having already been forwarded to these places.<sup>6</sup> A notice was later published in *The Times*,<sup>7</sup> and the fact that such action had been taken was used by other philhellenes outside the Society of Friends in their efforts to arouse the general public.

The committee at once set to work to carry out the relief in a systematic manner, with especial attention for the victims from the island of Scio. As early as March, 1823, the effectiveness of their organization was attested by Edward Blaquiere, a philhellene prominent on the general Greek committee established in London in the spring of that year. He commented that before he left for the Morea at that time the Society of Friends had been dispensing the means of existence to hundreds of both sexes at Trieste, Venice, Marseilles, Malta, Amsterdam, Vienna, and had special correspondents at work at Constantinople, Smyrna, the Ionian Islands, Stuttgart, and Paris.<sup>8</sup> Funds were liberally subscribed, among the first donations being £25 from William Allen, the same from Luke Howard and from Joseph Foster, and £10 from William Wilberforce.<sup>9</sup> The

treasurer's report, submitted by William Allen in January, 1824, showed that to date £9,435 3s. 10d. had been collected and dispensed ; six months later an additional £545 3s. 4d., exclusive of an exchequer bill for £1,000, had been added.<sup>10</sup> This account, printed in the committee's *First Report*, was accompanied by a list of the subscribers, reasons for the undertaking, extracts from letters appealing to the philanthropy of the Society, and a full account of the use to which the money had been put. According to the tenets of the Society and to the promise made at the opening of the subscription, this use was solely the relief of misery, and not in any sense the prosecution of the war.

In February, 1823, the London Greek committee was formed and on 25th April a resolution was passed that a deputation be appointed to wait on the Friends to see if the two Greek committees might co-operate.<sup>11</sup> This was brought about first when an appeal was sent to England for the rescue of some Greek refugees stranded in Germany, Switzerland, and France.<sup>12</sup> Later the Friends were able to assist agents of the London committee in the equipping of a dispensary in Greece. It was recorded that in 1824 medical stores from this source were on hand in Messalonghi.<sup>13</sup>

The two committees likewise worked for a common end when eight Greek boys were brought to England to be educated, also in 1824. The Friends offered to share the burden of expense and were so generous in the matter that Edward Blaquiére commented that their conduct was above praise and entitled to the warmest gratitude.<sup>14</sup> This commendation contrasted with the criticism of one of the London committee agents in Greece, Colonel Leicester Stanhope, who was disappointed that his educational efforts there had not been encouraged by the Friends. He had hoped they would send out some schoolmasters and thought that the money expended by them might better have been devoted to matters of permanent value to the country. For instance he wrote home that "Some of the unfortunate Greeks whom the Quakers with such laudable intentions sent home are now pining in want and contributing to create further distress."<sup>15</sup>

One additional item is of interest since it shows William Allen's continued activity on behalf of enslaved Greeks. He noted in his diary on the 7th of the 2nd month, 1824 :

“To Downing Street to wait upon George Canning by appointment: my business was the case of the Greek captives, and to know whether our government would try to negotiate with the Turkish government for their release. Canning listened very attentively to what I said, and desired me to write a letter to him upon this subject, which he promises to despatch to Constantinople, and inform me of the result. He agrees with me that no *public* subscription ought to be raised expressly for the captives, lest a knowledge of it by the Turks would enhance their demands.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This was revealed in a conversation of his with Emperor Alexander I of Russia in 1822. See J. Sherman: *Memoir of William Allen*, Phila. 1851, 348; and *Life of William Allen, with Selections from his Correspondence*, Phila., 1847, ii, 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of W.A.*, ii, 25, Allen to Joseph Hume, 1.1.1822.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of W.A.*, II, 60-61, 1.x.1822; and Library, Friends House, MSS. Port. 8. 165, 166.

<sup>4</sup> J. Sherman: *Memoir*, 354; *Life of W.A.*, II, 62, 3.x. and 5.x. 1822.

<sup>5</sup> J. Sherman: *Memoir*, 354.

<sup>6</sup> *Life of W.A.*, II, 103.

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, March 11, 1823, p. 3, col. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Life of W.A.*, II, 104; and Committee of the Society of Friends for Distressed Greeks: *First Report*, London, 1824, Library, Friends House. Tracts, 204, 28.

<sup>9</sup> *Case of the Distressed Greeks*, London, 1823, Library, Friends House, Tracts, E. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Friends' Committee: *First Report*, 70ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Archives of the London Greek Committee*, Athens, III, 1, Minutes of the meeting of April 25, 1823, in Library of the Greek Parliament, Athens.

<sup>12</sup> *Archives*, IV, E1, Stanhope to Bowering, Geneva, October 18, 1823; VII, C3, Stanhope to Bowering, Messalonghi, January 28, 1824; L. Stanhope: *Greece in 1823 and 1824*, London, 1824, 104.

<sup>13</sup> *Archives*, III, M, Minutes of the meeting of June 3, 1823; Peter Gamba: *Narrative of Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece*, London, 1825, 161, note of February 10, 1824; William Parry: *Last Days of Lord Byron*, London, 1825, I, 254.

<sup>14</sup> *Archives*, XI, G6, Blaquiere to Bowering, London, Dec. 18, 1824; E. Blaquiere: *Letters from Greece*, London, 1828, 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> L. Stanhope: *Greece*, 98, note of Jan. 28, 1824; *Archives*, VII, J3, Stanhope to Bowering, Messalonghi, Feb. 4, 1824.

<sup>16</sup> *Life of W.A.*, II, 142, 7.x.1824.