Elizabeth Bevan Tonjoroff (1847-1907)

IN 1893 (6 mo.) Westminster and Longford Meeting considered a joint application for membership from 48 citizens of Philippopolis.

Among the mementoes found in the house of Catharine Braithwaite at Banbury after her death was a plain but elegant wooden spoon inscribed: "First spoon made by the prisoners in the prison of Philippopolis, 1884."

But why this Quakerly stir during the last century, in a city of southern Bulgaria whose name probably rouses in the English reader nothing but faint memories of George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*? The reference is not inappropriate, for Shaw's play with its atmosphere of barbaric splendours crossed with tawdry Western innovations and Byronic cynicism was written in 1894 and set in 1885, and authentically belongs to our period: and no Shavian heroine, not even Lady Cicely Waynflete,[1] was so complete a "New Woman" as Elizabeth Bevan, riding through the snows of the Rhodope Mountains, decorated by Gladstone's "Great Assassin" Abdul Hamid II, and able to cow a whole courtyard full of Bashi-bazouks, burning for the virgins under her protection. Yet when she died on 14th May, 1907 in Saffron Walden, no obituary article in *The Friend*, no Testimony from her Monthly Meeting to the grace of God in her life, marked her passage. This article is a belated attempt to commemorate her remarkable career.

Of her early years hardly anything is known. Her father was a partner in the banking house of Barclay and Bevan; but in spite of the Quakerly names, she had no birthright in our Society. Some wealthy Bulgarian merchants on a visit to England, clients one supposes of her father's, invited her to go as governess to their children, and so in 1872, when she was about 25, she went out to Philippopolis (renamed now—alas!—Plovdiv).

[1] *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, Act II: "This castle is very romantic, Captain; but it hasn't had a spring cleaning since the Prophet lived in it. There's only one room I can put the wounded man into. Its the only one that has a bed in it . . ."

Only those who were born before 1914, or are gifted with historical imagination, will realize what that meant. The "turbulent Balkans"—the most unreliable place on earth. Outside Europe, the British Navy could cope—any hint of trouble, and a gun-boat or two would be on the scene; the sight of a solar topee would quell a riotous crowd like magic. But what could one do with the Balkans? There they lay between the suspicious and aggressive Russian, the unspeakable Turk—"the sick man of Europe", and the dubious chaotic Austro-Hungarian; a welter of little, backward countries, pushed and pulled by their powerful neighbours; mountainous, half Mohammedan, more than half feudal; in Europe, yet not of it; unresponsive to the frown of Lord Palmerston, and indifferent even to the rolling periods of Mr. Gladstone himself. Elizabeth Bevan found that they lived up to their reputation; "severe difficulties and trials" were her lot, "hindered at every turn by the extreme worldliness and superstition around her, and the persecution entailed on the children whenever the truths she inculcated appeared to influence their conduct." When one of the girls of whom she had charge got typhus, "the parents in their dread of contagion, withdrew from all communication with the sick chamber, leaving their child to the care of the English governess, and even urging her, when delirium set in with terrible violence, to consult her own safety by withdrawing from her charge. But she could not forsake the beautiful girl who had been the object of so many hopes and prayers. She watched her to the last."[1]

When the child was dead, the English governess went out feeble, lonely, and despondent into the streets of Philippopolis, and came by chance on "a few men gathered together in a small upper room to study the word of God, having no preacher or leader among them." They were part of that unorganized religious movement, so like the "seekers" of the seventeenth century, which spread through the Balkans at that time, subject to fierce persecution from the Orthodox Church and the Turkish authorities; a movement best known to Friends in England through the Serbian "Nazarenes". Elizabeth Bevan, who had so far acquired only a smattering

[1] Jane E. Newman, article in *The Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, vol. 29 (1895) pp. 249-63, using, apparently, an autobiographical account which cannot now be traced.

of Bulgarian, now set herself to acquire the language thoroughly, and began to identify herself with the dissenters, visiting their houses, where she found much ignorance, superstition and misery, tending them in sickness, supplying them with books and teaching them to read. "The people were astonished to see one so young fearlessly entering houses infected with . . . smallpox, typhus, fever, etc., to help the sufferers both temporally and spiritually." Her help was available to all, and in 1874 she was decorated for her services by the Sultan of Turkey.

About the same time, she met her future husband. Ivan Alex. (John Alexander) Tonjoroff had been dedicated as a child to the service of the Greek Orthodox Church and brought up to the priesthood. Doubt and dissatisfaction with church doctrine and practice led him to study the New Testament, and then to renounce his orders and make common cause with a group of dissidents at Bansko in the district of Raslog[1] in the Macedonian highlands: a primitive remote place about one hundred miles south-west of Philippopolis. On a visit to the city he met Elizabeth Bevan, married her in 1875, and took her to live with him in Bansko. Her family were appalled, and except for a sister who supported her, cut her off completely. Nor were the highlanders, her new people, any more sympathetic and understanding at first. She helped her husband in a district which included thirteen towns and villages; the people shrank from the foreigner with fear and suspicion, and she often returned from meetings plastered with mud. But they were destitute of medical assistance, and she had discovered her power to heal.

> The sad condition of these people deeply touched my heart. Looking for strength and guidance from on high, I decided to consecrate myself to their welfare. Having an early inclination to serve the sick, and having a supply of drugs, I endeavoured to help them, not only by giving them medicines, but also by attending in different ways to their temporal wants. My simple efforts found grace in the sight of the Great Physician, and He blessed my work for their good.[2]

Cleanliness, fresh air, simple hygiene, hopeful words, soothing ministrations and the confidence she soon inspired

[1] Spelt in modern maps Raslag.

[2] Quoted in Jane E. Newman's article, *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, April 1895, p. 251.

made people consider her a messenger sent by God: "I saw her in my sweet dreams dressed in white like the Virgin Mary" said the wife of their leading Orthodox opponent in Bansko after she had been cured. In the villages the people crowded round her with tales of suffering, clinging to her horse's bridle and entreating her to stay.

But Elizabeth Bevan Tonjoroff was not merely a minister of healing, she was also the wife of a leading Protestant, and bound to become involved in politics. In the Spring of 1876 while on a visit to Samokov (thirty miles south of Sofia) she heard of a poor Protestant whose wife had left him at the instigation of the Orthodox Bishop, and who, sick and ailing, had been carried off to prison in Sofia; she went to the Pasha to plead for him, and succeeded in procuring his release. Her triumph was brief, for the Bishop knew (and sneeringly told them) that a warrant was out for her husband's arrest. Injudicious speeches had been magnified by the Church authorities into an accusation of treason laid before the Grand Vizier; and in Bansko (to which they felt it their duty to return) he was arrested by two Turkish zaptiehs,[1] and dragged off from one prison to another, and finally to Salonika, where he was held under the threat of being hanged.

For Elizabeth, public and private calamity coincided. 9th-16th May, 1876 marked the peak of the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria which so shocked the conscience of Europe, and led to the Berlin memorandum of May 13th in which Germany, Russia and Austria insisted on Turkish reforms. The dreaded Turkish mercenaries, the Bashi-bazouks ("those whose heads are turned" is the meaning of the name) ravaged the country; and one night Elizabeth, with her husband under threat of death stood in her courtyard between the maddened soldiers and the girls of Bansko who had been confided to her care, and sent them away silent and ashamed. Shortly afterwards her health broke down, and as soon as her husband had been released (through the good offices of Lord Salisbury, Sir Henry Drummond Woolf, the British Ambassador, and the American Ambassador in Constantinople) she returned with him to England, where the first of her five children, Catherine Mildmay Bevan Tonjoroff, was born on

[1] Policemen.

26th January, 1878.[1] The child was born lame, probably as a result of her mother's sufferings; but although the best surgeons of London and Vienna failed to remedy the condition, she grew up to a life of brave and undefeated activity and died at 72 on 17th January, 1951.

While the Tonjoroffs were in England, full scale war broke out in Bulgaria between Serbia and Turkey, and then between Russia and Turkey; wars short but terrible, which culminated in the capitulation of the Turks at Shipka Pass (January 1878,) and the Congress of Berlin (June-July, 1878) in which Russia, Austria and Rumania all gained Turkish provinces, and Rumania and Serbia became independent. Bulgaria, although in April 1879, it acquired its own prince (Alexander of Battenberg) remained under Turkish suzerainty, and when the Tonjoroffs returned in 1878 they found the streets full of starving, half-naked refugees; they joined immediately in the work of relief and rehabilitation, in which various voluntary committees were active.

As early as September, 1876 the Quakers had been active, setting up a Bulgarian War Victims' Relief Committee, which continued the tradition established in the Franco-Prussian war, under William Jones (a leading spirit in Bulgaria as in France) and James Long, that inspired and indefatigable non-Friend commissioner, who now led a team of his veteran Alsatian foreman-carpenters and French engineers to construct new villages at Tatar Bazardjik, between Philippopolis and the Balkan Mountains (about 30 miles west of the city).[2] There the full tide of the Russo-Turkish war rolled over them, but they stood their ground and survived. Perhaps it was admiration for this, one of the most notable episodes in Quaker relief service, which first led Elizabeth Tonjoroff to thoughts of membership; but there may have been earlier contacts, for already in 1872, Friends were circulating in

[1] Date as given in Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting minutes, 1877, is incorrect. Her daughter, E. Mary Hooper, states that it should be 1878, which tallies with her age as given at the time of her application for membership and at her death. Catherine was the first surviving, but probably not the first-born child, as E. B. Tonjoroff in a letter of 13.viii. 1901 (Bulgaria papers, Friends House Library) refers to "our four dear children" whom we were obliged to bury "in our own garden where their little bodies remained for years". Her other recorded children were Braithwaite Charles (born 30.xii.1883), Alexander Braithwaite Bevan (born v.1887) and Albert E. Bevan (born viii.1889).

[2] E. B. Tonjoroff's brother-in-law Nicola later lived and preached there.

Bulgarian their *Plea for the Freedom of Conscience*. Other relief agencies besides Quakers were, however, active. On the Bosnian frontier were two noble women, A. P. Kirby and P. H. Johnstone. On a larger scale was the European Commission, represented in Philippopolis by Sir Henry Drummond Woolf, who had been instrumental in getting Tonjoroff released from prison in Salonika. Working under him, and with funds supplied by him, the Tonjoroffs fed 3,000-5,000 refugees every day during the winter of 1878-9, and set up an orphanage and a home of refuge for the helpless.

Many of the refugees came from the Raslog district, the Tonjoroffs' former home, where the excesses of the Bashi-bazouks had been most severe; and like all refugees, their chief longing was to return home. But the prospects were bleak; John Alexander Tonjoroff and Mr. Walpole of the European Commission returned from reconnaissance to report conditions still disturbed and food and provender non-existent. Nevertheless, pressure grew, and at last Elizabeth took the risk of advising the people to return, promising to go and stay with them. In June 1879, she rode on ahead, three hard days on horseback, leading a baggage train of food, clothing, medicine and money; the British Embassy at Constantinople asked the Pasha of Salonika for help and protection for her. Hard on her heels, the refugees followed.

Feeling between Turks and Bulgarians was still running high. Back home at Bansko, the Tonjoroffs heard rumours of a Turkish plot to kill thirty-seven leading Bulgarians; and while they were at Meeting, a man came with news that the thirty seven had been rounded up and were under guard in a stable. Dashing to the spot, Elizabeth asked the reason for their arrest and remonstrated with the Turkish officer, who said: "They do not pay their taxes." "But how can they?" asked Elizabeth, "They have lost everything." Unable to make any impression on the officer who refused to release them, she rode off to plead their case with the Governor. The Governor, she was told, was asleep. She telegraphed to the Pasha at Salonika. British prestige did count for something, even in the Balkans, it appeared; and besides, only the previous year Elizabeth had (for the second time) been decorated by the Turkish government for her help to Turkish soldiers. The Pasha ordered the release of the prisoners. The Governor at Raslog, now wide awake, was furious; he sum-

moned Elizabeth to court at Mahoomia and demanded the names of her informants. She refused to tell.

Nevertheless, she was determined not to appear anti-Turkish. There had been a lot of looting among the Turkish garrison at Bansko, who were poorly clad and badly fed. Elizabeth went to see the military Pasha, and offered to get supplies of cloth and comforts and make clothing for the soldiers. Incensed by his "loss of face" at the hands of the charitable young Englishwoman, the Commandant threatened to put a bullet through her head; but the Pasha was shamed into making better provision for the soldiers, and eventually withdrew the garrison altogether.

Gradually things quietened down. In 1883, Elizabeth returned to England for the birth of another child, Braithwaite Charles, born on 30th December, 1883. He was named in honour of J. Bevan Braithwaite; and it was from Bevan Braithwaite's home at 312 Camden Road (he was no relation, in spite of the name they shared) that Elizabeth Bevan Tonjoroff addressed her application for membership of Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting, on behalf of herself and her children. It sounds like a last-minute decision, for the application was written the day before Monthly Meeting held on 16.x.1884. She was visited by Richard Dell, Sophia H. Brown and Sarah M. Lecky, and in November she was admitted to membership. The children were not, no doubt because they were domiciled abroad and with a father not in membership. Nine years later (15.viii.1893) Catherine Tonjoroff "not yet 16" was to renew her application from Penketh School on her own behalf, and to be admitted on the recommendation of Albert Pollard, the Superintendent, as "Sufficiently mature and a Christian girl". She had written to Martha Braithwaite:

> Dear Mrs. Braithwaite:
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> I greatly wish to become a member of the Westminster Monthly Meeting, I know it is my dear Parents earnest desire that I should become one, and I myself should very much like to join it . . . if possible before my parents go back . . .[1]

Eventually all the children were accepted into membership.[2] John Alexander, however, did not join; although he

[1] Minutes of Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting, 17.viii.1893 (p. 235).

[2] Two younger boys, Alex B. B. and Albert E. Bevan, were admitted "by convincement" while at Saffron Walden School, 1901.

held and preached Quaker doctrines his heart was in his own land, and he was never more than a visitor in England. The exceptional position he held, however, is shown by his attendance several times at London Yearly Meeting.

The grimmest of the personal sufferings of the Tonjoroffs were now over. John Alexander was becoming an important person, and sat in the Senate of the Bulgarian Sobranje (Parliament) as representative of the Protestant Church. He and his wife transferred their residence to Philippopolis on her return from England with the new baby, and they were received by the young Prince Ferdinand on a visit to the city in 1885. The prince, who was to succeed to the throne in 1887 following the abdication of Alexander, held Tonjoroff in high esteem, and at one time offered him ministerial office, which he refused in order to continue with his evangelical and philanthropic work. Ferdinand and his first wife, Princess Marie, frequently entertained the Tonjoroffs, and a ruby pendant presented by the Prince is still a family heirloom. But if this patronage gave them a more assured position, their troubles were by no means at an end, and the terrible sufferings of the Bulgarian people continued. Very soon after Elizabeth's return from England, Serbia and Bulgaria were again at war; once more she helped the sick and wounded; once more she was decorated by the government. The war, which ended with the stalemate Treaty of Bucharest (3rd May, 1886) was followed by a revolution in which Alexander lost his throne, and Tonjoroff his seat in the senate.

While they continued their mission activities on tours of the villages, sometimes meeting in the fields with priests and people, (as Elizabeth reported to her new friends in England through the columns of the *British Friend* and *The Friend*), the Tonjoroffs had acquired two new major interests: in prisons and hospitals.

John Alexander's concern for prisoners went back to his own incarceration, in insanitary conditions, without facilities for reading or any employment. While his wife was in England in 1883-4, he began a long fluctuating struggle to improve prison conditions, to get the prisoners' chains struck off, to provide occupations and literature "in pure Bulgarian". He had raised the matter in the Sobranje, and "obtained some amelioration in the regulation of the prisons". In 1886 he was able to take Martha Braithwaite's brother,

Charles Gillett, on a tour of inspection, and show him the men working at their crafts, the bookshelves and the books which he had provided, and to give Charles as a souvenir to take home "the first spoon made by the prisoners in the prison of Philippopolis, 1884". The success, however, was temporary; the suspicions of the Orthodox Church were roused by the presence of Bibles in the cells, reactionary authority raised the usual objections to "pampering" prisoners, and the new government, following the revolution of 1886, threw out the books and bookcases. It was not until July, 1890 that Elizabeth was able to report to Charles Gillett, who had become her standing correspondent, and chief supporter and fund-raiser among English Friends, that her husband was preaching to 150 prisoners in the prison, that the government had withdrawn their opposition, and ordered the return of the books and bookcases,

> so the Bible is again in every prison cell in Philippopolis. The Government say we are free to go when we like and give them all the useful work we please, and my husband can preach Christ with the Bible in the prisoners' hands.[1]

Elizabeth herself, however, was mainly concerned with the sick. With an energy like that of Florence Nightingale, and equally disconcerting to the authorities, she threw herself into the improvement of the shocking conditions of the few government hospitals. In spite of partial success in Philippopolis, "influencing doctors and nurses to a kinder treatment of the sufferers, till the whole aspect of the hospital was softened and brightened by her means"[2] she was not satisfied. What was to happen, for example, to the incurables? Soon she took a small house, where she received a young man with a leg amputated as a result of a railway accident, a woman with internal cancer, another dying of consumption. Still she was not satisfied. With £400 raised in England among Friends by Charles Gillett, and drawing on her own patrimony and what other money she could muster, she opened a cottage hospital on 27th July, 1888. It had sixteen beds in four wards, a library, a dispensary, a kitchen and a soup-kitchen. The library was open to the public three times a week, and there was a room where meetings could be held, including a public meeting for worship on first-day. It opened with friendly

[1] E. B. T. to Charles Gillett, *The Friend*, 1.vii.1890.
[2] Jane E. Newman, *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, April 1895, p. 258.

support from the press, and the Armenian Bishop of the city; and M. Dimitroff, Governor of Southern Bulgaria, although absent from the city at the time of the opening, later declared himself "quite charmed with everything".

But this apparently modest, innocent and admirable scheme proved the beginning of Elizabeth Bevan Tonjoroff's undoing. The use of a room for religious meetings roused her Orthodox enemies, who were further incensed by the proposal to buy land and erect a Mission Hall. Having been prevented from acquiring the site she wanted, Elizabeth had to choose another, owned by Turks. But meanwhile another attack was developing on the opposite flank. Hitherto there had been no other missionary activity on the part of foreign Protestants in Bulgaria. By the Constantinople agreement between the British and American Bible societies, the European field had been divided between them, and Bulgaria fell into the American sector. In the wake of American Bibles came two missionaries from the American Board. John Alexander was soon on bad terms with them and the church which they organized, the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance; complaints and recriminations flowed in which, as usual, neither side appears blameless.

But the worst problem of all was money. Elizabeth's ambitions grew. From the south was heard the age-old cry: "Come over into Macedonia and help us". It was five days' journey on horseback, through mountains infested with brigands, but Elizabeth dreamed of spending her summers there, "The poor Friends there are begging me to come over." The winter of 1888-89 was a bitter one of fearful distress, and in Philippopolis the hospital coped with cases from all over the country. At the end of its first year there was a deficit of £75; a cloud no bigger than a man's hand which was to grow and grow.

At this point, when the Tonjoroffs stood in great need of sympathetic and wise advice, they did not get it. In October 1891 there arrived on a visit one of the most distinguished Quaker visitors, greatest of all the "travelling Friends" of the late nineteenth century, Isaac Sharp. Already 85 years old, and travelling with a physician, Dr. Henry Appleton, but far from finished, and in fact en route for the Far East, Isaac Sharp was a person of immense zest and enthusiasm. These qualities, among the most precious though they are, were not

at all what the present situation required. "The good they have effected is simply marvellous" wrote Appleton to the *British Friend* "everything has been so evidently prospered by the Lord of the harvest that we must give him the praise." They admired the "large medical mission" and contrasted the "jeers, scoffs, mud, stones, filth" with which the Tonjoroffs had been met at first with the present success of the cottage hospital, which had forced the government to make improvements in its own to compete. With John Alexander they visited the prisons, where he had won the confidence of the authorities and the love of the poor prisoners; and approved the newspaper which he edited, through which he enlightened and educated the Bulgarians. "Go on" said Isaac Sharp "the gold and silver is the Lord's"; and with this encouragement on 2nd October, 1891, "today" as Appleton dramatically wrote, the Tonjoroffs paid down £310 for the land to build a meeting house. The next distinguished Quaker visitor, the scholar J. Rendel Harris, laid the foundation stone of white marble found on the site, and the building was completed in time for the first Bulgarian Exhibition, held in Philippopolis in the autumn of 1892. An article in *The Friend* of 23rd December in that year[1] shows the hall, looking like a Friends' Institute in a midland town dumped inappropriately in its Balkan setting. Its main room held 500 people (about 70-80 attended the morning services); it had a Sunday school, a temperance society, a women's afternoon meeting—the full programme of a contemporary English nonconformist chapel; and an itinerating Bible woman (Bena Mumford) completed the organization. The article was accompanied by an appeal from Martha Braithwaite for £471 needed to complete the building. The gold and silver was the Lord's, as Isaac Sharp had said, but Friends did not know it well enough, apparently . . . this cynical comment is not that of the present author, but of Jane Newman in 1895.

For the moment, however, hope lay in a closer association with Friends. In 1893 came the dramatic letter, dated 3.vi. mo., from 48 members of the mission asking for visits, recalling those of Charles Gillett, Isaac Sharp and Dr. Appleton, and J. Rendel Harris, describing the work of the mission and its need of funds, and asking for membership of Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting. The letter

[1] *The Friend*, N.S. vol. xxxii, (1892) p. 849.

was followed by the arrival of the Tonjoroffs, who came "unexpectedly" to England and gave further interesting particulars. The Monthly Meeting set up a committee (George Gillett, John Dixon, Alfred Wright, Joseph Bevan and Rachel B. Braithwaite and Sarah J. Smith) to go into the matter. The circumstances were unusual, the financial liabilities dangerous . . . it was clear that a deputation should go and interview the applicants, but for the moment no one was available; a temporizing message was prepared for the Tonjoroffs to take home:

> To the little company [*little* deleted] assembling at the Medical Mission [*altered to:*] professing with Friends at Philippopolis, S. Bulgaria.
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> . . . We look upon your admission into actual membership with our religious Society as an important step, only to be taken after careful consideration of each individual case, upon satisfactory evidence of genuine conversion and conviction of the truth of our religious principles. But we think that you have been well advised as a preliminary step to organize yourselves as a little missionary band . . .[1]

The committee was kept standing for two years, until a deputation arranged by Meeting for Sufferings had visited Bulgaria and presented its report; Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting then (13.vi.1895) handed the future of the concern to the Continental Committee. But while this was going on, it was clear that some more urgent help for the mission was required. On 5th April, 1894, the faithful Charles Gillett convened a meeting "of a few Friends interested in Philippopolis" at Devonshire House, and they decided to "form themselves into a Committee to help forward the Mission work and communicate with E.B. Tonjoroff. Also to communicate with the Constantinople Committee as to whether they could act as a Sub-Committee for Bulgaria."[2] The new Committee had some difficulty in finding officers, the first minutes being signed by Charles Gillett, and the second by John T. Dorland, each acting "pro temp."; but finally William Baker agreed to serve, and Edmund Wright Brooks became treasurer. They decided that they must take a strong line at the outset. Matters had in fact become desperate. It was necessary to close the cottage hospital after

[1] From draft in Westminster and Longford M.M. minutes.

[2] Opening minute of Minutes of the Bulgarian Medical Mission Committee, 5.iv.1894.

only six years. On 6th September, 1894, the second minute recorded:

> Careful consideration has been given to the responsibility of the Committee with regard to the financial expenditure upon the Mission Work at Philippopolis. It is decided that no liability can be undertaken by the Committee in respect of debts at present remaining unpaid in connection with the Mission there. It is also decided that the sanction of this Committee must in every case be obtained before any step is decided upon by Friends at Philippopolis which involves the expenditure of money upon special objects.

In October, the Committee was glad to hear that Elizabeth Bevan Tonjoroff had closed the cottage hospital, and hoped that the staff of the mission would be reduced; they asked her also to fix the salary of workers "as low as circumstances would permit". The hospital building was let, and in 1896 steps were taken to sell it. The Tonjoroffs' home was also let, and part of the mission hall adapted for their residence, "including a necessary water supply, not at first contemplated"; the money for this conversion was raised by a special fund in England, and the building vested in trustees.

By this time the projected deputation from Meeting for Sufferings had paid its long-expected visit. It consisted of Dr. John Dixon (one of the members of the original Westminster and Longford Committee), Walter and Louisa Morice, who had had long experience of Friends' works in Scandinavia and in consequence of what they had encountered there were inclined to be rather rigid and strait-laced, and Hannah F. White from Ireland, whose ministry and loving spirit often acted "like oil on troubled waters." They arrived to find the annual meeting of the Bulgarian Evangelical Church (the rival organization to which allusion has been made above, founded by some American congregational ministers) in session in Philippopolis. Their first efforts, therefore, were to effect a reconciliation between the rival bodies:

> . . . the cause of much of the friction that has existed between them and our friends the Tonjoroffs was explained, and best endeavours were used to put an end to this unhappy condition of affairs.
>
> After much and continued prayer for guidance, we again saw the persons chiefly concerned, and after many painful hours of conference during several consecutive days, by our Heavenly Father's blessing we were enabled to bring about a reconciliation

> between the most active opponents—who gave the hand of fellowship to J.A.T. and one also the kiss of peace . . . We had to press upon *all* the absolute necessity of setting a strict watch not merely upon their hearts but equally upon their lips.
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> It was touching to hear the testimonies to the good that our dear friend J.A.T. had been the means of doing in former years; and no word is now spoken against his present consistent life and character, but it was with regret we found that a feeling of soreness existed, that a second Protestant Church had of late years arisen in the city and very near to the older community.[1]

The next stage was to discuss the question of membership with the Friends' group, and this was done in family visits and social gatherings, as well as in formal session in which an adaptation of the Discipline was prepared for them. The visitors were impressed with "the intelligence and neat order of their houses"; they were mostly humble people "all but three teetotalers", and outstanding among them was an ex-major of the army who acted as secretary of the group.

> They appeared to be largely led in the direction of Friends, to have fully come out from dependance upon man, to realize the headship of Christ in his Church, and the necessity in all work for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[2]
>
> We think it will be impracticable to admit the applicants as members of an English Monthly Meeting, but we approve of their present Monthly Meeting being further developed after the manner of that in Constantinople.[3]

On financial questions the reports are discreetly silent, but whatever good resolutions were made, they were soon under pressure. During the winter of 1895-96 there was serious flooding, and Elizabeth was again stretching her slender resources in relief. Her children were growing up, and needed education in England. Her own patrimony was spent, and she had drawn on her sister's charity. But an even more serious threat to her peace of mind was developing: in 1894 the first organised massacres of Armenians in the Turkish Empire had begun, and in 1896 refugees came flooding into Bulgaria.

In the summer of that year, the Tonjoroffs were called to England for discussion, "for a period of rest and change, as well as the opportunity of attending Yearly Meeting and of seeing mission work in this country." A seed of resentment had been left by the Deputation's visit; "allusion has been

[1] Report of the Deputation to Meeting for Sufferings, 7.vi.1895.

[2] Report of Walter Morice to Yearly Meeting, in *British Friend*, N.S. vol. 4 (1895), p. 183.

[3] Report of the Deputation, to Meeting for Sufferings, 7.vi.1895.

made to our friends' recent visit to Philippopolis in a way which the Committee much regret, and which has evidently been the result of a misunderstanding." In May, 1896 there was a full financial discussion not only with Elizabeth and John Alexander, but with their daughter Catherine, who shortly afterwards was asked to undertake the clerical and book-keeping side of the work and to report quarterly. The committee agreed to try and increase its contributions, and to provide £200 a year for the maintenance of the Tonjoroffs and their two youngest children. While in England Elizabeth and John were sent on deputation work to Quaker centres to solicit support. The indefatigable Charles Gillett had just died, and new names were proposed to widen the committee. The cottage hospital was to be sold as soon as possible.

But back home in Philippopolis, what use were resolutions of economy in face of the Armenian refugees? On 9th December, 1896, Elizabeth wrote:

> Ours is quite a public house; all the poor and needy come to me; and now, with the poor Armenian refugees who are coming from morning till night, I am very busy. In visiting the different districts what awful scenes we have to see! There are in Philippopolis 800 poor in great need, and 1000 who are better off . . . Our own refuge has forty-five persons in it, and I have not the means to provide for them all; and there are several needing better care than they are getting. I do hope someone will send me help soon . . . One woman, whose husband was in a good position, came to me just now; she had sold her dress, which was a good one, off her back, and came to me in her petticoat; she has three children, and is begging for help to keep them alive until her husband, whom she expected to follow her, could join her. What is the cause of his delay she does not know.[1]

Alexander Bevan Tonjoroff, then a child of nine, still vividly recalls those nightmare days of more than sixty years ago,

> when their home and garden were literally packed with poor mutilated men and women, with arms and legs cut off, breasts cut off, heads gashed open; they all received treatment and care.[2]

Help did indeed come from England, but only a portion of it reached the Tonjoroffs. The greater part went in sporadic relief given at the Black Sea ports in Varna and Bourgas, through Mary Anne Marriage Allen (the first to arrive with a Monthly Meeting minute) John and Elizabeth Bellows and James Adams, who set up workshops in the Varna district,

[1] Letter of Dec. 9th, 1896 to *Our Missions*, 1897, pp. 3-4.
[2] As reported by E. Mary Hooper in a letter to the present writer.

and a Miss Fraser at Varna who administered non-Quaker funds but also large sums provided by Friends.

In 1897 the London committee despaired of persuading the Tonjoroffs to balance their books, and disclaimed responsibility, having issued just one printed Annual Report. A minority, however, continued to believe in the value of the work and to support it. Curbed by lack of money, John Alexander resumed the itinerant evangelism of his earlier days. In March, 1898, Elizabeth wrote to Ellen Barclay, secretary of the Missionary Helpers' Union which had given her much support, finding "the great pecuniary difficulties a trial of faith", but describing "my dear husband, baptized with power from on high", holding open-air meetings; "he has visited and talked to all the Bishops and to all the priests".[1]

There must have been much joy and satisfaction, one feels, in this way-side evangelism, which was to be interrupted once again by the horrors and atrocities of the Macedonian massacres of 1903. Certainly the Tonjoroffs' home appeared a haven of rest and peace to the last of their Quaker visitors from England, attempting once more to help and heal 15,000 victims of human inhumanity. This was Georgina King Lewis, who in 1904, with Catherine Tonjoroff as her interpreter, rode through the devastated mountain villages.

> We left Bourgas yesterday at 6 a.m. in deep snow, and though it was quite dark and very cold and still snowing, a great number of the poor refugees were standing all along the line to bid us good-bye . . .
>
> I reached Philippopolis at 9 p.m. and Mr. Tonjoroff kindly met us and here I am in a comfortable home with every possible kindness shown me. Oh, how I did sleep that night! No rats or mice. No fleas or bugs, no drunken men screaming out under my room, no dirt, no smells. It was a little heaven below.[2]

I am glad that this should be the note on which the story ends; for shortly afterwards Elizabeth Bevan Tonjoroff's health again broke down, and she returned to England for good, settling at Saffron Walden so that she could watch over the boys at the Friends' School there. John Alexander, however, could not relinquish his country or his calling, and so

[1] Autograph letter of March 25th, 1898 to Ellen Barclay in C. W. Pumphrey collection (Friends House library).

[2] Foreword to her autobiography, *Georgina King Lewis, an autobiographical sketch* (1925), pp. 11-12.

they were compelled to part. He made his last visit to Elizabeth three weeks before she died on 14th May, 1907. I have not been able to ascertain the date of his own death, but it seems that he may not have long survived her, for there is no mention of him in 1912, when Friends again set up a War Victims' Relief Committee for Bulgaria in what is ironically called the First Balkan War.

In Philippopolis the Tonjoroffs were long remembered, and in the nineteen thirties there were still "Friends of the Friends" there, with whom Headley and Elizabeth Horsnaill and Emma Cadbury renewed contacts. But in England they were soon forgotten; and only the members of their family retained stories, mostly stark and grim, of the young English governess and her labours for the country of her adoption. How can one end this story of such deep shadows without despair, but by recalling the words of God the Father in an old morality play from that other dark age of the Wars of the Roses:

The seven deeds of mercy shall make secure
Those good hearts who to the hungry have given meat,
Or drink to the thirsty, to the naked, vesture,
The poor or the pilgrim, in whom thou hast met
Thy neighbour that hath need.
Whoso doth mercy in my sight
To the sick, or him in prison pight,
He doth it to me, I shall him requite.
Heaven's bliss shall be his meed.[1]

Sources: For this account I have used the minutes of Meeting for Sufferings; the Continental Committee; Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting, 1883-95; the Bulgarian Medical Mission Committee (recently deposited in Friends House Library by Mary Allen Baker, daughter of its secretary William Baker); Letters to the *Friend*, the *British Friend*, and *Our Missions* by Elizabeth Bevan Tonjoroff, 1885 ff.; an article on her by Jane E. Newman (using autobiographical material) in *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, April 1895; the autobiography of Georgina King Lewis (1925); and family recollections kindly collected for me by E. Mary Hooper, daughter of Catherine Tonjoroff, from her sister Georgina Shrewsbury and her uncle Alexander Bevan Tonjoroff, to all of whom I am greatly indebted.

ORMEROD GREENWOOD

[1] Closing speech of God the Father in *The Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1425).