

No. 6.

Consul Biliotti to the Marquis of Salisbury.—
(Received October 1st.)

Canea, Crete, September 24, 1889.

MY LORD,

HER Majesty's Embassy having inquired with regard to his Excellency Shakir Pasha's alleged outrages, I have had the honour to wire to your Lordship my reply thereto, which runs thus:—

"All the outrages which have taken place have been duly reported. Shakir Pasha has hitherto acted with praiseworthy impartiality and goodwill, but there have nevertheless been repeated and increasing complaints during the last few days of the ill-treatment of Christians by the troops in the country, and there is a feeling that the Mussulmans have got the upper hand and are beginning to oppress the Christians.

Shakir Pasha, in reply to my representations on this subject, assured me that no such complaints had reached him, and I have no doubt that this is the case because the Christians are afraid of making complaints to the authorities. His Excellency appeared to think that I had been misinformed, but I fear that there is some foundation for the reports in question, although they may be exaggerated. It is also said that whereas many Christians have been recently apprehended for acts of arson committed a little while ago, hardly any Mussulmans have been arrested. But, although there may be some grounds for this statement, I have not yet been able to obtain any confirmation of it. The authorities should take great care to suppress anything which can give real cause for complaint, because there is a danger of matters assuming a much more serious aspect than has hitherto been the case."

In continuation of the above, I telegraphed to your Lordship last night as follows:—

"Seventeen Christians were brought into the town yesterday as prisoners from Apokorona. They were all fastened to the same rope and were dragged along by a gendarme; seven more came from Kisamos in the same manner and four from Cydonia. It is stated that in all those districts, as also in that of Selinos, the prisoners are cruelly flogged when they are first arrested, and that those who arrived last night were constantly struck with the butt end of rifles by the soldiers who formed the escort.

It is even declared that women are likewise ill-treated, and that some of the Christians cannot leave their beds owing to the brutal manner in which they have been beaten. Two cases were quoted to me as having occurred in the village of Armenous.

Rumours have quite recently been circulated to the effect that Christians are apprehended, whether guilty or not, on the simple statement of any Mussulman, and consequently the whole Christian population are in a state of terror. It is said that 300 armed men from Apokorona, and 200 from Selinos have removed from the plains to the mountain villages in the direction of Sphakia.

I have just heard from the Vice-Consul at Candia that there are many complaints of Christian prisoners being ill-treated and being deprived of their arms, whilst the Mussulmans who destroyed Christian villages are not being punished. He adds that some of the Christians are said to have refused to give up their arms, and have fled to the mountains.

It is remarkable that the complaints of the Christians against the severity of the measures adopted should have been especially numerous in both provinces during the last four or five

days, and that none of the Vali's subordinates should have brought them to his notice.

The Christians have hitherto given undoubted proofs of their sincere wish for peace and tranquillity. They are not likely to oppose the punishment of persons who are really guilty, but they will not submit to indiscriminate imprisonment and brutal treatment whilst the Mussulmans are allowed to escape with impunity.

I have considered it my duty to submit to your Lordship all the rumours that are afloat, and some of which may not be without exaggeration. At the same time, I consider it is perhaps better to go beyond, rather than to remain under, the mark, for in the present state of affairs timely precautions may be the means of preventing serious complications.

The situation is most difficult, and fraught with danger arising out of uncontrollable circumstances.

Animated as Shakir Pasha is with the best intentions, it is still impossible for him to personally attend to all the complaints of Christians, which may never come to his knowledge, there being no special channel for that purpose. Native Christians, generally, are so awed that even those enjoying the confidence of the Vali, who reckons on information on their part, do not dare to bring to his knowledge the current reports of ill-treatment to their co-religionists.

All these circumstances help each other in creating an unpleasant state of things, and in rendering impossible to distinguish truth from falsehood or exaggeration.

A certain Captain Mathios Milonoyiannakis, a former chief who exerted himself in preventing further disorders at Apokorona, even fought against Cacouri's band, and who can be believed, was telling me that denunciations on the part of Mussulmans, and ill-treatment at the hands of soldiers have become so common within the last few days, that he is not without apprehension for his person.

A Mussulman, on whose word reliance can be placed, related to my clerk that Apokorona Christians themselves acknowledge that those of their co-religionists who were arrested were either incendiaries or individuals who had recently gathered the olive crop of a Turkish farm, and that only those who resisted the public force were beaten.

However, this same Mussulman acknowledges that Christians in the district of Selinos have a right to complain of being ill-treated by the troops.

A Christian from Kisamos, whom I saw this morning, mentioned to me that, to his knowledge, there was only one case of ill-treatment.

I cannot give any details with regard to Christian prisoners being exposed to the sun for hours, as it is rumoured, or being made to carry a heavy stone on their shoulders on their march to the town.

But I have no difficulty in believing that they are struck with the butt end of rifles, and there is no doubt that they are conveyed to Canea fastened in a row to the same rope. An eyewitness stated that it was so tight that it had to be cut, and that the arms of the prisoners were shaking long after.

Exaggerated as all these rumours may be, it is difficult to admit that several hundred people should have deserted their homes and removed to mountain villages without some real motive.

These individuals are not insurgents; on the contrary, they are those who have given proof of their ardent wish for peace and tranquillity,