

THE COMPASSIONATE WARRIOR

scattering gold coins to distract his pursuers as he ran through the streets. Disguised as a North African, but beaten and bloody, he was finally brought to Abd el-Kader's house and reunited with his family. He recorded his experiences later in a lively history of the area, a book that he entitled *Murder, Mayhem, Pillage, and Plunder*.

RESCUING THE CHRISTIANS

Abd el-Kader had about a thousand of his own men, many of them former fighters, armed and ready. Now they gave top priority to rescuing the Christians.

Horrendous destruction had already swept through the Christian quarter. The Damascus mob—which had started as rabble mostly from the lowest classes—was soon joined by Muslims and Druze from outside the city, crazy with excitement and greedy for the spoils. The rioters first targeted the houses of rich Christians, seizing everything that could be carried away, down to the woodwork and tiles. Before long the whole Christian quarter was burning. Some women and children tried to escape the flames by running across the flat housetops, leaping over spaces between them. Churches, houses, and shops were all looted, and many people murdered.

In the midst of this chaos, Abd el-Kader himself went hurrying through the streets, calling to the Christians to follow him to safety. He described his actions in a letter written on July 18, 1860, which was eventually translated from the Arabic and published by the *New York Times*. "Seeing matters were so desperate," he wrote, "I lost no time in taking under my protection these unfortunate Christians. I sallied forth, taking my Algerians with me, and we were able to save the lives of men, women, and children, and bring them home with us."⁴ He also sent groups of his armed men to search through the Christian quarter, shouting, "We are Abd el-Kader's men, don't be afraid! We've come to

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save you.” People emerged from wherever they had tried to find shelter, many filthy from having hidden in drains and wells. A stream of refugees began to find their way to Abd el-Kader’s huge house.

It appears from the various accounts that, despite the mob “in a state of frenzy,” as Abd el-Kader described them, he and his men were not given any real trouble as they went about their rescue missions. The Algerians’ reputation for having fought *jihad* in their home country still carried weight with the Muslims.

A few incidents stand out in the often confused descriptions of those days of violence. On one of his missions Abd el-Kader went to a Franciscan monastery and urged the monks to come with him. Afraid of treachery, they refused—only to die a little later when their house was torched by the mob. Another rescue attempt had a much better outcome. At an orphanage, fortunately outside the Christian quarter, the Sisters of Charity nuns and Lazarist fathers quickly marshaled their students, many barefoot but in uniform. Abd el-Kader and his sons, with armed Algerians on each side, led a procession of a few hundred children, plus the nuns and monks, to safety in the Emir’s house.

What about the forces of law and order, while all this was going on? Abd el-Kader found no help from the religious leaders. When he hurried to the home of the mufti, early in the outbreak of violence, he was told firmly that the mufti was having his nap and could not be disturbed. Worse still, the Ottoman governor took no action. On that point, individuals who survived and described the riots were in total agreement. Some of the governor’s soldiers joined in the looting and even turned their guns and bayonets on people trying to escape the fires. As the governor had warned Abd el-Kader, these troops were hardly the cream of the Ottoman army; but clearly, neither were they under any instructions to restore order. One Turkish commander who did try to stop the rioters was charged with insubordination.