

CHAPTER I.

A GENERAL VIEW OF THE ISLAND AND KINGDOM OF CYPRUS.

CYPRUS, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, and dependency of Turkey in Asia, lies in long. $52^{\circ} 45'$ and lat. $35^{\circ} 30'$, between the coast of Syria and that of Cilicia now called Caramania. It has had various names. Pliny, v. 31, calls it Acamantis, Cerastis, Aspelia, Amathusia, Macaria, Cryptos and Colinia. In other historians it bears the names of Chetinia, Aerosa, Paphos, Salamina; and in the poets Cythera, from the goddess Venus who, they say playfully, was there nursed and brought up, and to whom were erected there several temples, of which the most conspicuous were in the cities of Paphos, Cythera and Amathus. Cyprus once comprised nine kingdoms—"quondam novem regnorum sedem" says Pliny, afterwards the Kings of Egypt reigned there, and then the Romans. From the Empire of the West it passed to that of the Greek Emperors of Constantinople, from whom it was wrested by the Arabs in the days of Heraclius. The Emperors soon recovered their sovereignty, but Isaac, a prince of the family of the Comneni, who ruled the island with the title of Duke, usurped the supreme power, and through the weakness of the Empire remained in absolute and peaceful possession, until in 1191 Richard I, King of England, took his throne and his life, and sold the kingdom to the Knights Templars. These, owing to their harsh behaviour towards the natives who followed the Greek rite, saw that they could not

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 978-1-108-00432-9 - Travels in the Island of Cyprus
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long hold it in peace, and were obliged to restore it to Richard, who made over his rights to Guy Lusignan. Carlotta, the last scion of that family, was expelled in 1460 by her natural brother Jacques. She married Louis of Savoy, through whom those Dukes take the title of Kings of Cyprus. Jacques died, and his widow Carlotta Cornaro being childless gave the kingdom to the Venetians in 1489. They could not hold it against the Turks, who took it from them in 1570, and still hold it undisturbed. Ferdinand de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, attempted the conquest of the island, and might have succeeded, say the historians, had he been better served by the commander of his forces.

This most beautiful island has a circuit (including its bays) of 600 miles. It is 200 miles long, and 65 broad, and is crossed and divided by a range of mountains running from east to west: the highest of these are Olympus, S. Croce and Buffavento.

The greatest of her plains is that of Mesaria, of 78 miles in length, and 30 in breadth.

Her streams and torrents which flow even in winter are but few, so subject is the island to drought. It is said that in the days of Constantine the Great no rain was seen for full thirty years, and the land lost many of its inhabitants.

In ancient times there were many cities, but now the names only of a few remain attached to their old sites; of the rest the very locality is forgotten. The notable towns which still exist are Nicosia and Famagusta, which rank as walled cities. One might add Larnaca, where are the European mercantile houses. There are also seven large forts, in each of which is a *Disdar* or Commandant.

Cyprus surpasses every other Greek island in the number of natives illustrious for their birth, dignity, learning and saintliness. Strabo, *Geography*, XIV. 20, says of the island “κατ’ ἀρετὴν οὐδεμίας τῶν νήσων λείπεται—it yields to no other island in excellence.” Many ancient historians have thought

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that the air was bad and unwholesome, a prejudice which causes foreigners to stay here a short time so that they cannot fully test its climate. But it is the general opinion of all who have lived here some few years that the air is good. The tertian and quartan fevers which are seen to prevail so frequently and for so long a time not only in Cyprus but also throughout the Levant, spring from causes other and more avoidable than the air. I learnt from experience that I myself gave occasion to the relapses which made this malady hang about me for quite ten months. The great heat causes constant and copious perspirations, and with these upon one to expose oneself to the least draught produces a check, which is followed inevitably the next day by a fever. The use of strong drinks is another cause, and the free use of certain fruits, particularly cucumbers, pumpkins and water-melons, which are difficult to digest. The villagers everywhere suffer often from these fevers, especially in summer; they let blood and leave the cure to nature without a change of diet except that they abstain from fruit. But this treatment is not enough for Europeans, who have to be more careful lest the malady grow more severe. A relapse can be avoided by taking sparingly of any food, and if this is not effective, riding is a remedy of approved excellence: at least it keeps off the obstructions which frequently follow this kind of fever. Turks and Greeks use the same treatment; the latter, wearied sometimes of the tiresome persistence of the disease, after the fourth or fifth attack have recourse to a large potion of the excellent and generous wine of the island, which usually cures most of them, if taken just when the shiverings point to an early recurrence of the fever.

There are various religions current in the land for, although it is ruled by Muslims, Islam is not the prevailing faith, most of the inhabitants being schismatic Greeks. There are many Armenians, then come the Maronites who observe their own rites in the matter of feasts and fasts, but

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having no churches of their own they officiate, and fulfil the duties of Catholic Christians, in the Latin churches. The number of Latin Catholics is much smaller than that of the sects named above, for they are only the Europeans settled in the island, among whom are the fathers of St Francis (Minori Observanti) called *Padri di Terra Santa*, the name I shall give them in my book, for they are known by it throughout the Levant.

The Turks have a *Molla*, who ranks as the head of their Law; the Greeks an archbishop and three bishops; the Maronites an archpriest, and the Latins two curates, one for the French, another for the Italian colony, everyone being free to follow his own religion.

The English have neither church nor house of prayer, but when they are in sufficient numbers they would assemble in the house of their consul, and then they would be obliged to maintain a minister of their religion; but such is now wanting.

Greek and Turkish are the common languages, with the result that both one and the other are corrupted. Greek has here perhaps adhered with greater purity to the ancient vocabulary, but the pronunciation is entirely spoiled: an effect, they say, of the Venetian domination. The Greek commercial class frequently use Italian, French very little indeed. It is very remarkable that all orientals learn our Italian tongue with more ease than the other languages of Europe.

The Cypriots are generally well formed, tall and good looking, sober and temperate. The women have mostly good eyes, but ugly features, and few are seen of any special beauty: they are tall, spirited, little industrious, and luxurious: they are long lived, and often re-marry when they are already great-grandmothers. All Greeks like amusement, but the Cypriots to excess; and though they be never so much oppressed by the government they never lose their liveliness.

The men dress *alla Turca*, like those of Constantinople,

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and so too the women of any position, except as to the adornment of the head, which is high and striking, a fashion of very ancient date, which they say has been preserved here more faithfully than in the other Greek islands. Their general costume, *alla Cipriotta*, is more scanty than the other *alla Turca*; it consists of a kind of tight vest, and a skirt of red cotton cloth, the outer garment, which they call *benisce* (Turkish, *binish*) is of cloth, velvet or other silk stuff. This is a long mantle, which starts from the shoulders, and passing over the arms, almost reaches the ground. It is not closed in front, but leaves the body exposed down to the feet. The under garments are of silk, made in the country, and like white veils. They have drawers reaching to the feet, and their boots, called *mesti* (Turkish, *mest*), are a kind of low boots of yellow leather, which reach to the instep, under which they wear slippers. They wear no stays, but a little corset of dimity, which stops below the bosom, the rest being covered only by that plain, fine chemise, and another small piece of stuff which they wear for greater modesty. They adorn their necks and arms with pearls, jewels and gold chains. Their head dress, of which I have spoken above, consists of a collection of various handkerchiefs of muslin, prettily shaped, so that they form a kind of casque of a palm's height, with a pendant behind to the end of which they attach another handkerchief folded in a triangle, and allowed to hang on their shoulders. When they go out of doors modesty requires that they should take a corner and pull it in front to cover the chin, mouth and nose. The greater part of the hair remains under the ornaments mentioned above, except on the forehead where it is divided into two locks, which are led along the temples to the ears, and the ends are allowed to hang loose behind over the shoulders. Those who have abundance of hair make as many as eight or ten plaits. Cypriot women like sweet odours about their heads, and to this end adorn them grotesquely with flowers. The Christian ladies when

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they go abroad make a great parade of their costumes, while the Turks are covered from head to foot with a white cotton sheet.

The realm of Cyprus was governed for many years by a Pasha, sent by the Ottoman Porte, but the island began to decline from its ancient splendour, and the necessary cost of the maintenance of a Pasha and his court being found to weigh heavily on the people, they petitioned that the practice might be abolished, and that henceforth they might have instead a *Muhassil* or simple governor, which was at once granted to them. But they soon found the government of a *Muhassil* to be burdensome, and some years ago begged that they might have a Pasha again. This was refused, and they still find themselves under a yoke which at one time they thought less oppressive.

The revenues of the country are left to the Vezir A'zam, grand Vezir or Lieutenant of the Ottoman Empire. But as he cannot come here to rule it himself, he grants the island to the highest bidder, and sends him to govern it with a *Khatti Sherif* or august writing, a special order of the Grand Signor, bearing his autograph.

As it is not merit but interest which gives access to this dignity, it is by interest that the governors regulate their actions. They ill-use and harass the people, and impose on them unjust taxes, not only to recoup what they pay to the Grand Vezir but also enough to allow them to leave the country after a year, having made their own fortunes and those of all their train. As the Grand Vezir finds every year in Constantinople men who offer more to get the reins of this kingdom, Cyprus is reduced to a miserable condition for want of money, and of a large yield of its usual rich products—results which follow the abandonment of their country by thousands of its inhabitants, one of the greatest disgraces of a state. In all the Turkish dominions there is probably no place where the dues paid by their subjects are heavier;

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amounting, as they sometimes do, to 200 piastres, which make 100 Florentine scudi yearly per head, without distinction of larger or smaller means. The mere *Kharaj* or poll tax, imposed by the Grand Signor on his subjects, is only five piastres, while here it was increased to 40 piastres a head. And the people had to consider it a special favour that after many representations and petitions they were able to obtain a favourable rescript that they should not be bound or compelled to pay more than 21 piastres a head. In the year 1764 the tyranny of Chil Osman Agha, the Governor, had reached its height, and the people, the lower class of Turks especially, having grown insolent, committed the detestable excess of killing him, a deed which was soon followed by lamentable consequences, as I shall show in the proper place. I shall give a particular account of these events, at which I was present, and I had besides occasion to be mixed up with the leaders in the negotiations which were conducted by the Tuscan consul.

The suite of the *Muhassil* is composed of the *Khasnadar* or treasurer, the *Kiaya* or secretary, and other subaltern charges entrusted to the *Chawushes* who are his personal guards, and the *Choqadars*, men about the court, who have different duties. Their number is not fixed, but there are generally from 100 to 150, and they have their own chiefs called *Bash-Chawush* and *Bash-Choqadar*. There are besides the *Sarafs*, through whose hands pass all the monies which enter or leave the Treasury, their duty being to test its goodness and value, and to keep the accounts. This office is held by a Greek, and the *Terjuman* of the *Serai*, or interpreter of the Palace, is also a Greek, who holds his post by a firman or order of the Porte.

When the Governor wishes to impose some tax on the Greek *ri'aya*, or subjects, he does not address himself to the people directly, but to the interpreter, and he to the archbishop, who sends notice to the several dioceses to make the

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most convenient arrangements to avoid annoyances or to lessen the demand. The poor subjects might very often be saved from oppression if their archbishop were not from policy, and sometimes from personal interest, ready to lend himself to the exactions of the *Muhassil*, so that they are often abandoned by the very person who ought to take their part. When the Governor wishes to collect money out of season, or of his mere caprice, the mode of imposing duties and taxes is curious enough. He may even tax with a certain sum anyone who bears a name which he may select; as, for instance, anyone called George has, without appeal, to pay a certain sum. Such an exaction falls on members of the Greek community only, who are treated more as slaves than subjects.

For voluntary homicide the law imposes on the slayer the capital penalty, and on the village where the homicide took place a tax which goes to the treasury of the Grand Signor, together with the sum levied as blood-money. The blood-money for a man killed, of 30 or 35 years of age, is reckoned at 500 piastres: for others a calculation is made of the time which, humanly speaking, the man might have lived, and of the gain which in that residue of his life might have accrued therefrom to the Grand Signor, the sum being often excessive. If the homicide resulted from some accident, or were indirectly planned, the slayer very often escapes all punishment but the payment of some few piastres. The *Mehkeme* are the courts before which are pleaded all causes, criminal and civil; in the capital the *Molla* presides, in the other cities and in the principal villages the *Qazi*, judges who acquit or condemn after a short hearing. The Turks have no written civil law, their guide is the Qur'an, their sacred book. Every good *Qazi* ought to have many texts from it, called *Fetawa*, written out in long lists, to which, according to the cases, are given various interpretations, very often opposed to the true sentiments of their lawgiver.

A man who is summoned to a court for debt has no choice

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but to pay to the *Qazi* the tenth part of the sum in dispute: this is disbursed by the debtor if he is proved to be such, or by the plaintiff, if his claim be fraudulent or unfounded. A similar fee of one-tenth falls to the *Qazi* from the property of every person deceased. But the valuation is not very strict.

There are in the island of Cyprus 16 *Qaziliqs*, which are so many courts, in each of which a *Qazi* presides, but all are subordinate to their chief the *Molla*. For although they may hold their posts under a special *firman*, or order of the Porte, they cannot give judgment except in a provisional form. In affairs of any consequence they must draw up their *i'lam*, or judgment, and send it to the Governor, who sends it to the *Molla*, without whose consent and approval the Governor cannot examine a matter affecting the life of a subject.

The military government of the island rests with the *Alay Bey*, who is the General of the *Sipahi* or mounted troops, and the *Yenicheri Agha*, who commands the infantry: their captain is called *Zabit* and *Qolaghasi*. There ought to be 3000 *Sipahi* in the island, and about 8000 *Yenicheri* (Janisaries), but now one would hardly find 100 of the first, and 2000 of the last, the several commandants having appropriated the pay and perquisites of the many men wanting.

When the Turks took the island there were reckoned 80,000 subjects chargeable with the *Kharaj* or poll-tax, not counting women, children and old men, who were exempt. This number was maintained as long as the kingdom continued to be prosperous, and the Grand Signor received as his just due, at five piastres a head, 400,000 piastres a year.

Wealth soon decreased and with it the population, but the Pashas continued to exact the same sum, and to this end increased the taxes on those who remained; and this course was followed even when the government was transferred to a *Muhassil*, for these officers raised the amount to 40 piastres a head. Now there are only 12,000 men liable to *Kharai*

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and this, as I have said above, is reduced to 21 piastres a head, yet the result is the by no means contemptible sum of 252,000 piastres. Add to this as much again extorted by the Governor, the Chief Justices, the officers of every grade, and you have a revenue of 504,000 piastres. So that we may conclude that the population has notably decreased, and the sums wrung from it increased.

The population thus reduced will scarcely amount now to 40,000 souls in all. But the number is extremely hard to fix accurately, not only in Cyprus but in every other province of the Levant, for Eastern peoples keep no registers of births or deaths, and count the inhabitants only by those who pay the poll-tax, who are less than a third of the whole. I ought to add that in Asia the number of women largely exceeds that of men, a fact which I have observed and proved in all the various tribes among whom I have lived in the Levant.

The products of the island were many and rich. In old days there were mines of gold, silver, copper, iron, marcasite (iron pyrites), vitriol and rock-alum: even emeralds have been found here. Of some of these there remains but a memory, and the name of the district where they were found. The existing Turkish government allows no search, and no enterprise for their recovery. It used to make a large quantity of oil and sugar. But cultivation of the sugar-cane had begun to fall off even in the Venetian epoch, as it was found more profitable to plant cotton. Saffron and rhubarb gave no inconsiderable return, but these plants have disappeared. Wild goats, deer, wild boars, wild asses and wild cattle have all been exterminated; as well as pheasants, which abounded in Cyprus even after its unhappy absorption in the Ottoman Empire.

The present products are silk, cotton, wool, madder (called *boia*, *rizari* and *robbia*), muscat and precious wines, cochineal, ladanum, wheat and barley, colocynth, pitch and tar, potash, salt, carobs, timber, and umber, brown and green; with these