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Fred Burnaby

Excerpt

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ON HORSEBACK THROUGH ASIA MINOR.

CHAPTER I.

The start—Cartridges and medicine bottles—The obese Englishman and the Yankee's cook—The refreshment-room at Dijon—"Ne vous pressez pas, messieurs"—Fellow-passengers—The silk-merchant—The pretty Greek girl who was a friend of Madame Ignatieff—The doctor—The respective merits of medicine and Christianity—The bay of Smyrna—The Greek ladies are not shy—Come along and smoke a Nargileh—A café in Smyrna—The Italian prima donna—The Christians and Turks in Smyrna—Newspapers believed to be in Russian pay—The Pacha's seraglio—A comely dame—Five hundred recruits—A doleful melody—To die for the sake of Islam—People so silly as to think that Gortschakoff wishes for peace—The fat woman—The eunuch in difficulties.

"BE quick, sir; you have no time to lose!" cried an officious porter in the Charing Cross Station, as he hustled me into a first-class carriage; and I found myself in the same compartment with a Queen's messenger bound for St. Petersburg. Time fled rapidly by, and I had hardly realized to

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myself that London was left behind, ere I was walking down those very uncomfortable steps which lead to the Calais boat. A rough passage with a number of Gauls, who all talked loud at starting, but whose conversation gradually died away in mournful strains, and we steamed into Calais harbour; five hours later I was having my luggage examined in the waiting-room in Paris.

“Sir, they ain’t found the cartridges, for I took good care to mix them up with the medicine bottles,” whispered my servant Radford, as he mounted the box of our fiacre, and I drove away to a hotel, somewhat relieved in my mind, as I was not quite sure whether carrying loaded cartridges is permitted on the Chemin de Fer du Nord. I did not remain long in Paris. The 2000 miles ride which lay before me across Asia Minor would take up every day of my leave. There was no time to lose, and in a very few hours I was in a railway station taking tickets for Marseilles. The night mail was just about to start. There were none but first-class carriages. The result was that servants and masters had to travel together.

“You will sit in that carriage,” said an obese and rubicund Englishman to his groom, point-

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THE ENGLISHMAN AND THE YANKEE'S COOK. 3

ing to my compartment; "I cannot go with servants;"—and he entered another carriage. Farther on I saw the portly personage in the refreshment-room at Dijon. He was talking to a little Frenchman, and apparently on the best of terms with him. The sound of their voices was mingled with the jingling of glasses and the clinking of knives and forks. Every one was eating as fast as he could. The waiters were serving the different travellers with lightning rapidity, and the proprietor of the buffet was calling out from time to time in a deep bass voice,—

"Ne vous pressez pas, messieurs. Il y a encore 10 minutes avant le départ du train."

"Who is the little man?" I inquired of a talkative Yankee who was sitting by my side during the *table d'hôte*.

"He, sir? He is my cook, and I am taking him with me to Nice."

The obese Englishman heard the remark, and became more rubicund than before.

"I reckon I have collapsed him," muttered the American. "If I have to travel with his darned servant, I don't see why he should not travel with mine."

The train rattled on. Each man in our crowded compartment tried to compose himself to sleep;

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the red light from the American's cigar gradually died away, and the individual himself, coolly lolling his head on his neighbour's shoulder, sank into semi-unconsciousness.

The morn broke bright and glorious. Winter was left behind ; we were in the land of orange-trees and olives.

The steamer for Constantinople started at four o'clock that afternoon, so we drove straight from the station in Marseilles to the harbour. Here I found a splendid vessel belonging to Les Messageries Maritimes, and which was already getting up steam. The captain was bustling about, giving orders. The crew were hauling in the ponderous anchors.

There were not many passengers on board ; only a silk merchant from Lyons, a rabid republican, and a pretty Greek girl,—a friend of Madame Ignatieff, the wife of the Russian ambassador at Constantinople,—who, after paying a visit to some friends in Paris, was again on her way to Constantinople. Our vessel was soon steaming ahead. She ploughed her way splendidly through the waters, and hardly a motion could be perceived inside the spacious saloon which formed the dining-room of the passengers. We were but a small party. The captain, a cheery tar who had

been in every part of the world, and knew more stories about the unguardedness of the fair sex than perhaps any other mortal living. The doctor, a somewhat bilious and elderly gentleman, who became easily excited on all religious questions, and gave short dissertations between the courses on the respective merits of medicine and Christianity. The silk-merchant, who cursed the empire, and then informed us that trade had never been so flourishing as under Napoleon's rule. Presently he told me in a whisper that some Frenchmen wished for another Emperor, and he concluded, with an oath, that if there were, he would head a revolution and sacrifice his own life—yes, his own life!—sooner than that the Prince Imperial should sit upon the throne of France.

We steam into the bay of Smyrna; the picturesque and undulating coast is shaded in a framework of azure clouds; the sea, blue as lapis lazuli, is dotted with numerous vessels; flags of almost every nation in the world float in the balmy air; the clean white houses, with their many-coloured wooden shutters, brighten up the glorious landscape; and boatmen, dressed in garbs of many hues and fashions, throng the sides of our vessel.

“I am going on shore,” said the silk-merchant,

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who was surrounded by a crowd of vociferous Greeks. "Our steamer will not start for several hours. Let us dine in a café, and see if the fair sex in this part of Turkey is as beautiful as some travellers would have us believe."

I accepted his proposal, and we walked through the streets of Smyrna. The town, clean as it looked from the harbour, proved to be a hideous deception. The streets were narrow and dirty, and the odour which everywhere met our olfactory nerves, was strongly suggestive of typhus. Women were seated in the *patios* or open courts of the houses, and the Greek ladies in Smyrna are evidently not shy. They boldly returned the inquisitive glances of my companion and myself, and appeared rather pleased than otherwise at our curiosity.

"Well, I can't say much for their beauty," observed my companion. "They have good eyes and hair, but all of them look as if they had not washed their faces for at least a fortnight. Come along and smoke a Nargileh. If there is one thing I love, it is a Nargileh, and when I am inhaling the tobacco I imagine myself to be a Pacha surrounded by my seraglio."

We turned into a café; it was surrounded by a large garden. Some Greek merchants were

playing at dominoes; an Italian prima donna, who might have been any age from seventy to a hundred, was singing a popular air; men with game and fish for sale walked up and down, regardless of interrupting the ancient vocalist, and offered their wares to the visitors. Presently my companion moved uneasily in his chair; some drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, and his face was becoming rapidly green under the influence of the Turkish Nargileh.

“I think I have had enough,” he remarked. “The room is very hot. *Au revoir.*” And he returned to our vessel.

In the meantime I proceeded to call upon a friend in the town. This gentleman informed me that the Christians and Turks in Smyrna were on the best of terms; however, he added that certain papers, believed to be in Russian pay, were constantly announcing that there would shortly be a massacre of the Christians; it was said that this was done to excite bad blood between the two sects.

The shrill sound of the steamer’s whistle announced that she was getting up steam. Hastily retracing my steps, I arrived on board just as the crew were weighing anchor. The original number of passengers had by this time received a considerable addition. Greeks, Armenians, and Turks

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were walking about or lying stretched along the deck. Women and children were huddled up in close proximity with the men. A Babel of different languages was going on around me, and an old Greek woman was having an animated squabble with one of the ship's officers, the subject of discussion being as to whether the ancient female had paid the proper fare. The French officer could speak but little Greek, and the shrill-voiced dame no French; in consequence of this it was difficult for them to arrive at any satisfactory solution of the matter.

A Pacha, his son, and the chief of the telegraphs, were the only first-class passengers. However, four ladies, the Pacha's seraglio, had been accommodated on the deck; they were reclining on some cushions in close juxtaposition with their attendant—a negro. The voice of this sable gentleman was pitched in a feminine key, and he was busily engaged in arranging some pillows beneath the stoutest of the ladies—a comely dame who would have turned the scale at probably sixteen stone. Two pointer dogs in a large hamper, which was directed to a Bey in Constantinople, added their barking to the general clamour, and some horses, bound to Stamboul, were fastened by head-collars to the bulwarks, no horse-boxes

being provided. Farther on, and towards the steerage end of the vessel, were 500 recruits, on their way to Servia, and in high spirits at the idea of shortly encountering the Russians.

It was a lovely evening, and I walked along the deck with the captain, gazing curiously at his motley passengers. The stars shone bright, as became an Eastern clime; a gradually freshening breeze for the moment had cleared the horizon.

“We shall have an easy passage,” I remarked.

“Yes, for good sailors,” was the reply; “but it will be a little rough for those poor women,”—pointing to the pacha’s harem—“and for the half-clad recruits yonder.”

The latter did not seem to anticipate the treat that was in store for them. They were scattered in groups about the deck, many of them squatting upon their haunches, and attired for the most part in rags and many-coloured patchwork.

Presently a doleful melody was heard; the dirge which reached our ears told us of the readiness of these embryo warriors to meet the foe and die for the sake of Islam.

“They will die quite soon enough,” remarked the captain drily, as the last verse died away. “Look down there,” he added, pointing to the ship’s hold; “our vessel is laden with 300 tons

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of lead, and once a week for several months past the steamers belonging to the Messageries Maritimes have been freighted with a similar cargo. This is all going to Odessa. It will be odd if some of the lead does not soon find its way back to the true believers, in the shape of bullets."

"The Russian Government is putting itself to great expense," he continued; "however, there are people so silly as to think that Gortschakoff wishes for peace; and in spite of all his preparations they actually believe in the Conference!"

The captain now left me, but I remained on deck. The freshening gale gradually imparted an oscillating movement to our steamer. The rain fell in large drops. Some of the sailors covered the ladies of the harem with an awning. The horses began to kick, and the dogs in the hamper to bark. A melancholy groan could be heard from that part of the vessel appropriated by the soldiers. The first to succumb was the fat woman; in despairing tones she called for assistance. The black attendant rushed to the rescue and convulsively grasped the lady's head. It was a funny spectacle--that enormous pumpkin-shaped face supported by two black hands. The now hazy moon cast a shadowy