

ON HORSEBACK THROUGH ASIA MINOR.



CHAPTER I.

My host—A Russian servant—The Crimean war—How the Russian soldiers were beaten—My father the Tzar—I would sooner be hanged!—The civilized way of eating a dinner—Knives and forks of Circassian manufacture—The Caimacan's opinion of knives and forks—My host's wife—His mother—Your Queen likes riding—An Armenian lady inquiring about balls—The barracks—The appearance of Arabkir—The prison—The inmates—The troops—A nation of soldiers—If Allah wills it—Capital required.

My host now called out in a loud voice, "Atech!" (fire!) "I want to show you my Russian servant," he remarked. The door opened. A man of about fifty years of age, with an unmistakable Calmuck cast of countenance, brought a piece of live charcoal, between a pair of iron tongs, and placed it in the bowl of my host's chibouk; then, retiring to the end of the

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room, and crossing his arms, he awaited a fresh order.

“So you are a Russian?” I said, addressing the man in his native tongue.

“Yes, your excellency.”

“And why did you not return to your own country after the Crimean war was over?”

The man looked down upon the floor; presently he remarked,—

“I was beaten.”

“Who beat you?”

“I was beaten all day and all night. My colonel beat me. The sergeant boxed my ears, and the corporals kicked me!”

“But did you get flogged more than the rest of your comrades?”

“No, your excellency; at that time we were all beaten. I am told that now the officers do not flog their men so much.”

“You are a deserter,” I remarked.

“No, your excellency, I did not desert. I liked my father the Tzar too much to run away when he required my services. I was taken prisoner; when the war was over, I would not return to Russia. That is all I have done.”

“Well, and if the Russians come here, as it is quite possible they may, what shall you do then?”

THE RUSSIAN SERVANT.

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For you would, in that case, have a very fair chance of being hanged.”

“It would be a dreadful thing, your excellency, but I must take the risk. I would sooner be hanged than go back.”

“But things have improved in Russia since your time.”

“A little,” replied the man. “Little by little we advance in Russia. It is a nice country for the rich, but it is a dreadful country for the poor!”

“Is Turkey better?”

“Yes, your excellency, no one is beaten here; when a man is hungry, no Turk will ever refuse him a mouthful of food—that is, if he has one for himself. I hope my brothers will not come here,” continued the man, pointing presumably in the direction of the Caucasus. “Allah has given our father the Tzar much land; why does he want more?” and, after putting some more red-hot charcoal in the bowls of our pipes, the Moujik left the room.

My host’s frequent journeys to Erzeroum, where he had occasionally met Europeans, had given him a taste for the civilized way of eating a dinner. He pointed with some pride to his knives and forks. They had been brought to Erzeroum from the Caucasus, and were a mixture of silver, lead, and

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gold—the three metals being blended together by the Circassian artificers, and then formed into the articles in question.

The Caimacan was also supplied with a knife and fork; however, this gentleman did not seem to understand the use of his plate, and ate out of the dish.

“Which do you like the best—to eat with a knife and fork, or with your fingers?” I inquired.

“With my fingers,” replied the Caimacan. “It is so much cleaner,” he continued. “I first wash my hands, and then put them into the dish; but I do not clean my own fork—that is the duty of the servant, who, perhaps, is an idle fellow. Besides this, who knows how many dirty mouths this fork has been stuck into before I put it in mine?”

Later in the evening, and when the governor had retired, my host said that his wife and mother would come and sit with us for a little while.

“I am not like the other Armenians in Anatolia,” continued the speaker; “I have determined to shut up my female relations no longer.”

“Do they not cover their faces?” I inquired.

“Yes, in the street they do, but not inside the house.”

The ladies now entered. They were dressed

in loose yellow silk dressing-gowns. Making a profound reverence to my host and self, they seated themselves on a divan in the farther corner of the room, tucking their legs underneath them, and assuming the same position as my companion.

“It is a great honour for them to see an Englishman,” he observed.

“Yes,” said the old lady, “and what a distance you have come! Our roads are bad, and travelling is very disagreeable for ladies,” she continued. “To have to go always on horseback, or in a box slung on a mule, is not comfortable. Do English ladies ride?”

“Yes.”

“And why should they ride?” observed my host’s wife. “Have they not carriages and railways in your country, so that when a man travels he can take a woman with him without any difficulty?”

“Yes, but they ride for pleasure. Our Queen is very fond of riding, and often does so when she is in Scotland.”

“Your Queen likes riding! That is a miracle!” said the old lady.

“I do not like it at all—it makes me so sore,” said her companion; “but you Franks are wonder-

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ful people, and your women seem to do what they like!"

"Would not you like to do the same?" I inquired.

"A woman's place is to stay at home, and look after the children," said my host's mother gravely.

"Do not the husbands in England often become jealous of their wives?" inquired my host,—“and the wives of their husbands?” interrupted the old lady.

"Yes, sometimes."

"Well, there is a great deal to be said on both sides of the question," observed the Armenian. "It will be a long time before we follow you in all your customs."

"You have places in your country where the men and women meet and dance together in the same way as our gipsies dance—at least so I have been told," remarked my host's wife.

"Not exactly like your gipsies," I replied; "but we have what are called balls, where men and women meet and dance together."

"The husband with his own wife?"

"No, not always. In fact, more often with the daughter or wife of a friend."

"I should like to see a ball very much," observed my host.

THE PRISON IN ARABKIR.

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“We had better go,” said his mother, “it is getting late;” rising from the sofa, she made another very obsequious reverence, and left the room with her daughter-in-law.

The following day I rode to see the barracks. Arabkir is built in such a straggling fashion, that, although it only contains about 3000 houses, it extends for a distance of six miles. The houses are built on each side of a deep ravine. The streets, which are very precipitous, lead, in some instances, over the flat roofs of the dwellings. The latter were many of them built of stone, and an air of cleanliness prevailed throughout the town.

Large gardens, planted with all sorts of fruit-trees, surrounded the houses. Long avenues of mulberry-trees were to be met with in every direction.

I stopped for a few minutes at the prison, and, dismounting, walked into the building. There were only seven prisoners—six Turks and one Armenian—the latter for attempting to pass false money, the Mohammedans for robberies and debt.

The population in Arabkir is equally divided between the Turks and Armenians. It was very creditable to the latter that there should be only one Armenian in the gaol. By all accounts,

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there was very little crime in this district, and the prison of Arabkir would be often for weeks together without a single criminal within its walls.

We arrived at the barracks, a square building, with long dormitories for the troops, and which were fairly clean. It contained at the time of my visit 500 redif (reserve) soldiers. They were shortly to start for Erzeroum. There were quarters for three times that number of troops, and another battalion was expected very shortly.

The men had not received their uniform. It was to be given to them at Erzeroum; they were clad for the most part in rags and tatters, and had been armed with the needle rifle. I was informed that the Martini-Peabody weapon would be shortly served out to them. A squad of men was being instructed in the manual exercise in one of the passages. I spoke to the officer, and inquired if the battalion had ever been out for target practice.

“No,” replied the man, apparently surprised at the question, “we want all our ball-cartridges for the enemy.”

“But if your men do not practise at a target in the time of peace, they will not be able to hit their enemies in the time of war.”

“We are a nation of soldiers,” said the officer.

“Every Turk carries a fire-arm. You have doubtless observed this on your journey,” he continued.

“Yes; but the weapons are for the most part old flint guns, which, if fired, would be quite as dangerous to the owners as to the foe, and are of no use whatever as a means of enabling your soldiers to aim correctly.”

“If Allah wills it, our bullets will strike the Russians,” observed the Turk.

“If Allah wills it, there will be no war, and all this instruction which you are giving the men in the manual exercise will have been wasted. What is the good of teaching your soldiers anything?” I continued; “if Allah wills it so, they can defeat the enemy with chibouks and nargilehs (pipes) just as easily as with Martini rifles!”

“This is the effect of the doctrine of fatalism,” observed my Armenian host, who had accompanied me to the barracks; “it is the cause of half the apathy which characterizes the Turks. Why, they only commenced making roads after Sultan Abdul Aziz’s visit to Europe.”

“But you Armenians are equally to blame in that respect,” I observed. “Only look at your own town. There are no roads, the streets are not paved, and they are full of ruts. The inhabi-

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tants are half of them Armenians; then why do not you Christians set the Turks an example, and begin by making a road to Divriki?"

"We are quite as apathetic as the Mohammedans," replied the Armenian. "The same observation which you have just made has been repeated to us fifty times over; but there is no one who has energy enough in his disposition to commence taking the initiative."

"Why do not you set about the business yourself?"

"I have my own affairs to look after. We are not public-spirited, or like Englishmen," continued my companion; "each one of us thinks of his purse first, and afterwards of how to benefit his fellow-townsmen. What a good thing it would be for the country if you English were to come here!" he continued. "All we want is a little of your energy, with it and capital, Anatolia would soon become one of the richest countries in the world."