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William John Hamilton

Excerpt

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RESEARCHES

IN

ASIA MINOR,

&c.

&c.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Smyrna—Plague—Hussein Bey—His rapacity—Leave Smyrna—Cruise down the Coast of Ionia—Fouges, anc. Phocæa—Ritri, anc. Erythræ—Ruins—Acropolis—Walls—Sail for Sighajik—Ruins of Teos.

NOVEMBER 1, 1836.—On my return to Smyrna I found the inhabitants in great alarm in consequence of the plague at Constantinople: this continued during the months of November and December. The mortality for nearly six weeks was estimated at 6000, 7000, and even 8000 per week, besides women, children, and slaves: the whole amount of deaths in Constantinople and the suburbs during this autumn being roughly estimated at above 100,000. No quarantine being then permitted by the predestinarian creed of the Turks, the Franks of Smyrna naturally dreaded its arrival amongst them, and their fears were but too well founded. It is, however, a remarkable fact, not yet satisfactorily explained, that the plague is never very destructive at Smyrna, when brought thither *direct* from Constantinople, whereas that of Egypt spreads immediately, and is of the worst character. An instance of the non-contagion of the Constantinople plague had just occurred in the case of

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two Greeks, who came to Smyrna as passengers in one of the steamers. The disease did not appear until after they had landed, when one of them died; and though they were in constant communication with their friends, it was not communicated to any one else.

Having resumed my former quarters at Marracini's, I passed some days in working up my notes and journals, and in partaking of the hospitable conviviality of the inhabitants. The merchants complained excessively of the monopoly of figs which Yacoub Pacha of Aïdin had just established, the supply having also been extremely short this year. His practice closely resembled that of Mehemet Ali in Egypt, and, by compelling the peasants to sell their crops to him at a price arbitrarily fixed by himself, viz. 90 piastres the quintal, he was enabled to control, and obtain the highest prices in the Smyrna bazaar: these varied from 250 to 300 piastres the quintal.

About this time an atrocious murder was committed in the streets of Smyrna, which marks the vindictive character of the Greeks. Exactly a year ago, a Greek of the name of Spiro, having stabbed a man in a drunken quarrel, rushed into the house of a Frank merchant, where my informant was residing at the time, and demanded an asylum. Pitying the unfortunate man, the merchant allowed him to remain, and refused admittance to the Turkish guard, the Franks acknowledging none but consular jurisdiction in their quarters. The authorities, believing that the house was the property of an Englishman, applied to the British consul, who gave his sanction for the apprehension of the culprit; but as the house belonged to a Dutchman, and the Dutch consul withheld his consent, the murderer escaped to one of the islands. The affair blew over in the course of time; the relations of the murdered man forgave the criminal; and about six months afterwards he returned to Smyrna. One relative, however, was not so easily satisfied, and he swore that he would have the murderer's blood within a year of his cousin's death: this he effected by stabbing the unhappy Spiro at

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the same hour, and the same night twelvemonth, on which the murder had been committed.

Many anecdotes were current at Smyrna respecting Hussein Bey, the governor, who had the character of being the most notorious and rapacious money-maker in the empire. Some of his expedients are worth recording as instances of Turkish manners. He possesses a large house and garden, near Bournoubat, which produces excellent fruit, and in which two years ago he had a most abundant crop of cherries. Anxious to sell them to advantage, he sent for the principal fruiterers to value them, who were all equally desirous of propitiating the governor by praising his fruit. They vied with each other in estimating the quantity as well as the quality, and ended by congratulating Hussein Bey on his good fortune and success: but they did not know whom they had to deal with; for no sooner had he got them to declare unanimously that his cherries were worth some highly preposterous sum, than he nailed them to their bargain, and declared they should not leave his house until they had bought his fruit at the price they had named. Remonstrance was useless; and they were compelled to pay the penalty of their flattery.

On another occasion he determined to make money by what he called "selling the sea," *i. e.* he put up to auction fifty feet of sea-shore along the Marina and wharfs, which the inhabitants of the houses abutting on the beach were compelled to buy in order to prevent others from building on the spot. But a condition was attached to the transaction, binding the purchaser to enclose and fill up his portion within a very short space of time; and if this was not done, the sea was again sold, and the unfortunate owners were compelled to repurchase it. In one instance the purchasers proceeded to enclose and partially fill up their shares. The sea-walls were built, and some muddy swamps were formed, which caused, according to the opinion of Dr. Clarke, the malignant fever which raged in the town a few years ago.

The weather during this month was variable and un-

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settled : we had a few days of soft, balmy weather, like an English summer, alternating with violent thunderstorms. But it was a source of great regret to me that my mountain barometers, which I had been expecting for the last twelve-month, had not yet arrived ; nor did I receive them before the spring.

While hesitating in what manner I should spend the winter, (for, although the season would not admit of travelling in the interior of Asia Minor, I was unwilling to throw it away entirely,) and undetermined whether I should visit Syria or Egypt, I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Mr. J. Brooke, who had visited Smyrna in his beautiful schooner the "Royalist," in which he has since explored parts of the China Seas, and the coasts of Borneo and Sumatra. He proposed to me to spend the two following months with him on a cruise down the coast of Ionia and Caria, as far as Rhodes ; to this I readily assented, and immediately proceeded to make preparations for the expedition.

Wednesday, November 30.—After waiting several days for a fair breeze, we got under weigh about nine A. M., with a light wind ; but after beating down as far as the castle, we were becalmed, and had to let go our anchor, not to drift back to Smyrna. Here we were boarded by a boat sent with a messenger from the governor, who was ignorant of the privileges of a British yacht, to inquire for our Teskeray, or passport. The night was warm and fine, and our position not uninteresting as we lay becalmed, and employed ourselves in watching the beautiful scenery of the coast, and the peaked and wooded hills behind the castle, or listening to the jackals howling in the mountains.

Thursday, December 1 —Delayed by contrary winds and calms, we could only get down to Long Island.

Friday, December 2.—Having passed Cape Kara Bournou with a fresh breeze, we soon came in sight of the Gulf of Scio, but it blew so strong from the S.W. that we went about and bore away for Fougas, where we cast anchor off

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its picturesque town in one of the harbours described by Livy.* Going on shore with our guns we found some red-legged partridges and a few hares on the neighbouring hills, which I have already described as being entirely volcanic and trachytic. The Turks we met were civil; and though we were unaccompanied by a tatar, they did not annoy us with their curiosity or interference, perhaps because we were well armed.

Saturday, December 3.—Being still detained by the violence of the gale, we again went on shore to shoot, accompanied by an old Turkish chasseur, who, with his long duck gun, pretended to be able to point out the best resorts for game. Our only adventure was the bursting of his gun into a thousand pieces, in consequence of his putting in a large charge of English powder, although we had already warned him on the subject. He was severely cut about the arm and face, but came on board the next day to beg for a little more powder.

Sunday, December 4.—The population of Fougés consisted of 600 Turkish and 400 Greek houses. We again strolled on shore in the afternoon, and visited a Greek chapel and burial-ground a short distance outside the town: on most of the graves were fragments of broken earthen jars, a remnant of the superstition of olden times. Many traces of ancient and modern quarries are visible in the hills above the town.

Monday, December 5.—We sailed early from Fougés, and stood across the entrance of the Gulf of Smyrna, but were unable to work through the passage between the mainland and the Spalmadores before night.

Tuesday, December 6.—The morning found us beating slowly to windward between the Spalmadores and the harbour of Eghri Liman, the ancient port Phœnicus. The mainland is rocky and barren, but the islands are well wooded. Scio appeared to the south, its bold and yellow mountains forming a striking outline against the blue

* Lib. xxxvii. c. 31. See also vol. i. p. 59.

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sky. At length we anchored in the capacious harbour of Erythræ, landlocked by promontories and islands, amidst which we were enabled to find our way by the help of an excellent chart, for which we were indebted to Captain Graves, commanding the "Beacon," then surveying the coast of Ionia and Caria. It was a quiet and sequestered spot; and the gentle breeze, the wild mountain scenery around us, the rich verdure without a trace of cultivation, and the few cattle grazing on the hills to mark the existence of man, inspired feelings not uncongenial to the place. After casting anchor in the narrow channel we landed on some of the islands, and found a variety of bulbous plants growing amidst the crevices and interstices of the rocks.* Soon after our return some Greeks came off in great alarm to see who and what we were, as we had omitted to show our colours as we entered. They stated that a short time before a vessel had come in, plundered the neighbouring villages, and carried off their property and cattle, and seemed anxious to find out whether we were likely to treat them in the same way.

We remained here a whole week, most agreeably spent in exploring the neighbourhood and ruins of the ancient Erythræ, still called Ritri by the Greeks and Turks. It is situated in a small alluvial plain at the mouth of the river Aleus, some of the sources of which are in the town itself. The city faces the west, and the whole extent of the Hellenic walls may be distinctly traced, from their commencement near the harbour at the southern extremity of the town, to the northern point, where they terminate on a lofty rock of trachyte. The plain on which the city stood is skirted by two spurs from the limestone mountains on the east. The wall, carried irregularly along these hills, is connected by a stronger portion which stretches across the plain about a mile from the shore, and is defended by a greater number of towers than the rest. Everywhere, however, the walls are well built in the isodo-

* The geology of this part of the coast, as well as of those places on the coast of Caria which we visited, and of the Island of Rhodes, have been described in a Memoir on the Geology of Asia Minor, published in the "Transactions of the Geological Society," vol. vi. p. 1.

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mous style, except a small part of that which traverses the plain, and they consist either of blue marble or red trachyte, the former being diversified in one place, where it is upwards of twenty feet high, by two courses of trachyte, producing a singular effect. The remains of several gateways, some of which are of unusual construction, are still visible, and outside those to the north and east we discovered many remains of ancient tombs of various styles and forms.

The springs which mainly, and in dry weather solely, feed the Aleus, rise near the eastern gate within the walls. They appear to have been looked upon with peculiar veneration, for near them were many remains of aqueducts, walls, terraces, and foundations of buildings with temples. Amongst them we found the fragments of an inscription,* broken marble columns and architraves, and three large Ionic capitals of red trachyte lying in the water-course, and which had evidently belonged to some ancient building. But one of the most remarkable of these remains was a wall supporting a terrace, thirty-eight feet in length, the lower part of which consisted of a beautiful specimen of Cyclopiian architecture, the angles of the different blocks being cut very sharp, while upon it was raised a superstructure in the isodomous style, built with great regularity. It is represented in the accompanying woodcut: the site may have been that of the temple of Hercules mentioned by Pausanias,† and the Ionic capitals in the bed of the stream may have belonged to it.

After crossing the plain, another range of hills, and a second valley, the city wall ascends the ridge which forms the northern limit of the town. Here it is built upon the solid rock, gigantic steps being cut to receive securely the lower course of the foundations; another gateway near the summit of the hill led into the deep valley beyond. Many tombs and sarcophagi, all of which had been long since opened and rifled, stand outside this northern gate, upon

* See Appendix, No. 212.

† Ach. 5.

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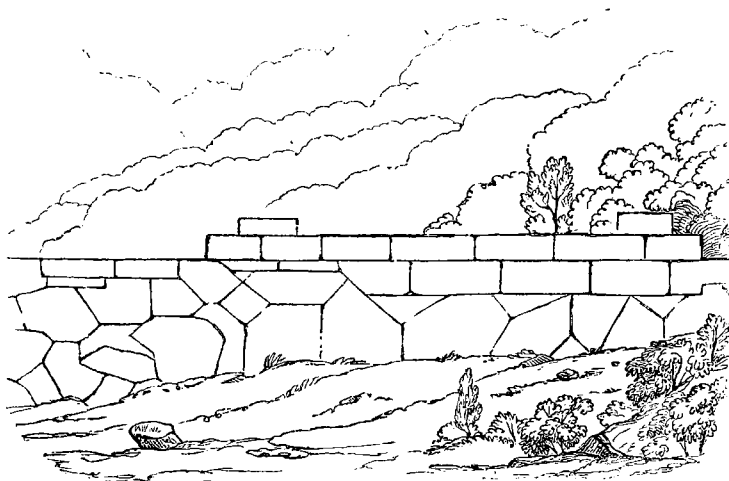
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THE THEATRE.

[CHAP. XXXI.]

No. 16.



[Walls at Erythræ.]

terraces and platforms, commanding a magnificent view of the surrounding country.

A remarkable feature in these ruins is the Acropolis, a mass of red trachyte, which has been erupted in the centre of the plain, and is within two hundred yards of the sea-shore. Although perfectly detached, it is a portion of the same formation as that on which the northern extremity of the wall terminates. The remains of a capacious theatre are still visible on its north side, excavated in the solid rock, while the summit is crowned with the remains of a castle, apparently Byzantine, the principal materials of which have been derived from the adjacent theatre. Most of the seats of the cavea are gone, except in the lines of the radii, seven in number, where they are nearly perfect, and show the deep-cut staircases between the cunei, which led to the upper rows. The outer wall of the scena is still standing, forming part of, or connected with that which served as an inner fortification round the Acropolis, and can be traced both to the east and west. On the summit of the hill, and in the wall of the castle, were many frag-

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ments of inscriptions, some of which appeared to have formed portions of public documents, wantonly destroyed and appropriated by the barbarians who had erected the castle. The character in which most of these inscriptions were written was extremely small.* One was remarkable for having lines drawn under each row of letters. This is a decree, recording the rewards and honours bestowed upon certain citizens who had successfully conducted a war, and who were to be publicly crowned with a golden crown.† Another, which we dug out of the wall on a chance, judging from the appearance and character of the stone that it might contain an inscription, proved to be the architrave of a door, on which was a dedication to Minerva or the sibyl Athenais, by a person whose name appears to be Artaxerxes.‡

One day, while we were otherwise engaged, some of the sailors visited the ruins of the theatre, and, in turning over various blocks of marble, they discovered an inscription, § which, although ignorant of the Greek letters, they copied so well, that when they brought it off in the evening for my inspection, I was able to make out every word correctly, as was proved by a subsequent examination. Other inscriptions, || also dedicatory, were found near the seashore, where the modern village of Ritri is situated at the N.W. foot of the Acropolis. The intervening space was covered with fragments of tiles and pottery, and large blocks of coarse red stone. In the village I obtained a few coins, chiefly of Erythræ, with a few of Clazomenæ, and one of Miletropolis of Ionia, and a few terra-cotta lamps; one of my companions procured a terra-cotta tablet, with a Greek inscription. ¶ The inhabitants were all Greeks; and at one of their farms near the ruins we obtained some excellent wine.

Another small stream falls into the sea to the north of the town, below the terraces. On the banks of this stream

* See Appendix, Nos. 217-230.

† See Appendix, No. 226.

‡ See Appendix, No. 231.

§ See Appendix, No. 232.

|| See Appendix, Nos. 233 and 234.

¶ See Appendix, No. 213.

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we found a handsome marble pedestal, with the inscription, No. 233, dedicated by the whole community of the Ionians in honour of an individual who had gained a victory in the Actian or Isthmian games. Near the mouth of the Aleus, where are still some remains of the ancient port, are traces of an aqueduct coming from the S.E., and incrustated in places with a calcareous sediment. It is built of loose rubble, and appears to have been cased with marble blocks.

About half a mile to the west of our anchorage was a small wooded island, consisting of limestone rock, on which were many partridges: we were told that on the adjacent island, further to the west, we should find still more, besides wild boars: this island was about three miles in length, and from one to one and a half in width, and we determined before leaving the bay to have a chasse. Landing, therefore, the greater part of the crew, armed with muskets, pistols, and tomahawks, we formed a line across the island as well as its rocky nature would admit, and proceeded to beat it from one extremity to the other. We had nearly reached the further end, and had seen nothing but a few partridges, when we came upon some rocky ground intersected by deep ravines, where a couple of musket-shots, accompanied by several loud shouts, announced that the game was afoot. The whole party hastened towards a deep glen, which was soon surrounded; and while some stationed upon the brink of the precipice poured volley after volley upon the grunting enemy, another party took possession of the mouth of the glen so as to intercept their retreat. In a few minutes the firing ceased, pig after pig in endeavouring to escape had rolled down the banks, perforated by our shot. We hastened to collect our prizes, which consisted of two full-grown boars, one sow, and four young grunters; our triumph being considerably diminished by the suspicious white and yellow bristles of our victims. However, we carried them off to the ship, but were visited in the evening by their owners, who had witnessed our proceedings from the opposite shore, and now came to demand compensation