

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her  
Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

TRAVELS  
OF  
LADY HESTER STANHOPE.

---

## CHAPTER I.

Preparations for a journey to Bálbec—Precautions against the plague—Departure from Meshmúshy—Heavy attire—The author loses his road—Cheerless night—Drúze hospitality—Barúk—Bur Elias—Village of Malaka—Cottages in the Bkâ—Hard dumplings—Grumbling servants—Misery of villages in the territory of Bálbec—Mode of encampment—Arrival at Bálbec.

A journey to Bálbec had been projected for this autumn; but obstacles of one kind or another had caused it to be delayed until the season was very far advanced. At length, however, every preparation being made, we set out on the 18th of October. During the whole of the year, the plague had not entirely ceased at Damascus, and in several villages of the Bkâ, a plain which we should have to traverse from one extremity to the other. Lady Hester was strongly impressed with the dread of exposure to its

VOL. III.

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

contagion<sup>1</sup> from the carelessness of some of the people ; to prevent which the strictest precautions were taken, and the observance of these considerably diminished the pleasure which such a tour would otherwise have afforded. We travelled with tents to prevent the necessity of sleeping in villages ; and no fire was ever to be lighted unless where the country supplied fuel without having recourse to the inhabitants for it, which was equivalent to a total interdict ; as, with the exception of a few orchards, there was not a tree through the whole plain. To supersede the necessity of cooking or buying provisions, a kind of minced meat dumplings was made, enough for the consumption of a week. These, and bread-cakes baked for the same purpose, were to be eaten indifferently by all. We carried with us kitchen utensils, tents, beds, coffee, rice, *búrgol* or malted wheat, soap, candles, oil, wine, vinegar, vermicelli, macaroni, cheese, tea and sugar, syrups for sherbet, and fuel for Lady Hester, whose sex and delicate health necessarily prevented her from submitting to the privations to which men could willingly subject themselves. It was necessary likewise to be provided with cords, nails, hammers, axes, hoes, and some other things of this sort ; so that we had wherewithal to colonize as well as to travel. For if, as it was reported, the plague still raged at Bálbec, the impossibility of obtaining anything from the town would expose us, if not thus fur-

<sup>1</sup> A few years afterwards she became more of a fatalist. See "Memoirs of Lady Hester Stanhope."

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## LADY HESTER STANHOPE.

3

nished, to great inconveniences. All this baggage loaded fifteen mules. The party consisted of Lady Hester, the dragoman, myself, eight men-servants, four women and a black female slave, making altogether fifteen ; and we all rode on asses.

The extraordinary resolution of performing a long and difficult journey on asses was not a mere fancy in Lady Hester : it arose from a deep feeling of indignation at the neglected state in which she found herself left by her friends and her relations, more especially by the then Marquis of B\*\*\*\*\* ; and she thought, by assuming the mode of travelling common only to the poorest pilgrims who traverse Syria on their way to Jerusalem, to direct the attention of the consuls and merchants of the towns through which she passed to her deserted condition, imagining, no doubt, that a report of it would reach England, and call down animadversions on those from whom she had a right to claim support and attention to her comforts.

Lady Hester descended the mountain, and I was preparing to accompany her, when I was detained by a dispute among the muleteers, who declared that the fifteen mules could not carry the baggage. Intending to compel them to it, I desired my servant to lead my ass down the mountain, saying I would follow ; but, after some time, I found that another mule was indeed required, and that there was not one to be had. Impatient of the delay, I mounted a horse belonging to the owner of the house, and rode to the monastery to

B 2

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her  
Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

get one. The monks refused to lend or hire out their mules ; and, seeing no alternative, I desired the luggage thus left should be taken care of, and hastened on foot to overtake the party ; but more than an hour had elapsed, and they were far before me. Descending into the plain on the north-east side, I continued along the banks of the Ewely, passing the granite columns, of which mention has already been made, over the bridge called Geser Behannýn. The road continued for a small distance farther in the ravine, through which the river runs north and south, when it turned to the right up an almost precipitous mountain, which overhangs the river, and the indentations and strata of which correspond exactly with those on the opposite side. I here became much fatigued with walking and with the exertions I had made during the morning, and I sat down to rest myself ; for I had on me a riding dress, with which, in Turkey, it is scarcely possible to walk ; as the breeches are very large. I had likewise a brace of pistols in my girdle, the weight of which was annoying. Whilst sitting by the road-side, some Drúzes, coming in an opposite direction, passed me, and I questioned them whether the English lady had been seen by them, and they pointed out the road by which she had gone. I then offered them an unusual price if they would let me have one of their mules to convey me to where she was ; but they averred it to be impossible, on account of their business, which took them another way.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Renewing my journey, and ascending in a zigzag direction, I reached the head of a deep ravine, into which fell a cascade from the mountain above: I then resumed a northerly course, and made as much haste as my heavy attire would allow me. On the left, but low down and out of hearing, was the river Ewely, and on my right very high mountains, whilst my path was, although stony and rugged, along level ground. In this way I walked till the sun was declining behind the mountains, when I saw the lights of a village, but at some distance before me, which I guessed to be Makhtarah, the residence of the Shaykh Beshýr, as I knew I had been tending towards it. The path soon became somewhat intricate, in consequence of olive, fig, and mulberry-tree plantations, which were numerous hereabout. It now grew dark, and I overtook a man driving an ass, who, as far as I could discern, seemed somewhat afraid of me and my pistols, whilst I felt equally so of him; I therefore turned out of the path, apprehensive, if I asked the way, that he might guess my situation, and find means to rob me; for, in the hurry of the moment, I had not loaded my pistols, and my cartridges were with my servant.

The lights were still before me. I knew that the place of our encampment would be marked by blazing *meshals* (formed by fixing an iron-hooped cylinder on a pole, and supplying it continually with tarred canvas), and I thought that, at some distance on the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her  
Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

left and beyond the village, I observed this very blaze : I therefore left Makhtarah on my right, and inclined towards them. After I had walked about half an hour, the blaze suddenly disappeared ; by degrees, the path, which, from the darkness of the night was now no longer perceptible, became so uncertain, that I was almost fearful to advance, when, on a sudden, I found myself on a descent and within hearing of the sound of a torrent. Stepping with caution and difficulty, I came to a bridge over a rushing water, which I judged to be the river Ewely. I crossed it, but was no sooner over than I lost all traces of the path, and found my farther advance opposed by a precipice.

Here my courage and my strength failed me. I judged it to be three hours after sunset, and the darkness was not relieved in the abyss into which I had descended by even the glimmering of a star. The jackalls howled around me ; and whoever has heard their night-cry, so like what we may suppose would be the screams of a child whom robbers are in the act of murdering, will not wonder if I disliked the necessity of sleeping in this wild place. I was not sure that there were not leopards near the spot where I was ; and the jackalls alone, although they seldom or never attack a man who is awake and moving, might yet fall on me when asleep, and do me great injury before I could rise and defend myself. However, all these reflections were of no avail against extreme weariness. I lay down on the ground, fell asleep, and in the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

morning, soon after daylight and not before, awoke refreshed and unhurt.

I looked round me, and perceived that I was in a deep ravine; and, as I observed the path by which I had descended to the river, I blessed Providence that had guided my steps; for it was dangerous even in open day. About two hundred yards up the stream was a water-mill. I went to it, and, knocking at the door, found an old Drûze who invited me in; but my apprehensions of the plague caused me to refuse; and I asked him where I was, told him how I had passed the night, and inquired if he had seen a large caravan go by on the preceding day. The bridge, I learned, was called Geser Gedayda.

Having satisfied myself on these points, he directed me up the mountain to a village, where, on my arrival, I met another Drûze, who was just driving his oxen to plough. I asked him for something to eat, and he immediately turned back, and led me to his own door. His wife was yet in bed. He roused her, and said he had brought a foreigner for a visitor, desiring her to set out the table. But, on expressing my apprehensions of the plague, and on refusing to cross the threshold, she put out her homely fare on a straw tray.<sup>1</sup> It consisted of cheese soaked in oil, a bunch of hung grapes, and some bad bread-cakes. I had now fasted for twenty-two hours, and was not disposed to quarrel about

<sup>1</sup> These trays are made in continuous circles, like the top of a beehive, and are very common in Syria.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her  
Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

trifles ; so she placed it on a stone, and on her retiring I advanced, and ate with my fingers. My looks, dress, &c., were all examined by the woman and a neighbour ; but they both scrupulously kept their faces covered.

Having satisfied my hunger, the man desired his son and daughter, children of six or seven years old, to show me on my way ; but when I produced all the money I happened to have about me, which was seven paras (about two-pence), and offered it in payment for my breakfast, his civility relaxed, and he suffered me to set off alone. In the village of Gedaydy, for so this was called, the inhabitants are Drûzes.

As soon as I was out of the village, I came on a country barren and stony ; hardly was there a tree to be seen. An hour's walk brought me to a Drûze village, called Ayn-wy-Zayn. Here, as there was no plague, I hired an ass and guide to carry me onward. Soon after we entered among very extensive vineyards, which continued as far as Barûk, where it will be recollected we halted for a night two years before.

Lady Hester had pitched the tents on the very same spot where she had encamped at that time. She had been, during the night, apprehensive that some accident had happened to detain me, and my absence had been productive likewise of still worse consequences. For as, in the necessity there was that our provisions should last us until we reached Bâlbec, the keys could not be entrusted to the servants, I had them in my



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

pocket. Upon the arrival, therefore, of the party to the resting-place, which they did not reach until eleven at night, no provisions could be had ; and after so long a day's journey (the dragoman, who had turned off the road to go to Makhtarah to bear Lady Hester's compliments to the Shaykh Beshyr, not being present), the mule-drivers and servants broke open the provision hampers, and unnecessary waste ensued, and caused us to be afterwards reduced to great straits.

My pedestrian exertion brought on an intolerable erysipelatous heat and itching in both my feet, which nothing could appease but sitting with my naked feet in the stream, just where it issued quite cold from the rock,—a dangerous mode of cure, only to be justified by the necessity I was under of pursuing our journey on the morrow. We passed the whole of the 19th at this spot, while Pierre went back to recover the luggage which had been left at Meshmûshy.

On the 20th, we ascended the last ridge of Lebanon, and, when at the summit, enjoyed that fine prospect which has been described in a former place. We descended into the Bkâ, and passed the hamlet of Aânev, a few miserable cottages, whither the husbandmen of Barûk go in the summer to plough and sow, and, having finished these operations, quit them for their homes until harvest time.

One mile farther we planted our tents. Here we remained two nights, waiting for the return of M. Beaudin ; but, not being come back on the 22d of Octo-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-04230-7 - Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her  
Memoirs: Volume 3

Charles Meryon

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ber, in the morning, the tents were struck. We took a northerly direction, along the plain close to the foot of Mount Lebanon, and passed some small villages part on our left in the mountain, and part on our right in the plain.

After a march of about three leagues we came to Bur Elias, a small village with a castle of modern construction overhanging it. It was watered by a rivulet, which ran with a smart stream through it. This stream was made to irrigate several well cultivated gardens and orchards, which so much embellished the spot, that, until our arrival at Bâlbec, we saw no place to compare with it. There were also the remains of an old mosque, with other evidences that the village was once more populous than at present. In a rock on the south-west side are several ancient caverns, which served as tombs, with sarcophagi hewn in the stone; and, at one part, on the face of a small precipice, chiselled smooth for the purpose, was a square portion of ten or fifteen feet, cut deep enough to admit of a layer of stucco or marble with which it seemed to have been coated, having in its centre, towards the bottom, three recesses, which had probably been filled up with votive tablets, or basso-relievos, there not being depth enough for statues.

Leaving Bur Elias, we came next to Malaka, a large village of two hundred houses, where terminates what is called the district of Bkâ,<sup>1</sup> and begins the Bâlbec

<sup>1</sup> There are said to be about forty-four villages in the Bkâ.