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Translated by Albert Henry Wratislaw

Excerpt

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ADVENTURES OF BARON WENCESLAS WRATISLAW.

BOOK I.

*Wherein is contained the Journey of the Imperial Embassy
from Vienna to Constantinople.*

WENCESLAS* WRATISLAW of *Mitrowitz* was entrusted by my relatives to the care of *Frederic Kregwitz*, who was sent to Constantinople with rich presents, in the year 1591, by his Majesty the Roman Emperor *Rudolph II*, as Ambassador Extraordinary to the Turkish Emperor, Sultan *Amurath III*. The object of my relatives was, that I should gain experience and see eastern countries. We spent several months of that year at Vienna, waiting till the jewellery, watches, and other special presents, which our ambassa-

* *Wacleslaw* or *Waclaw* is the Bohemian; *Wenceslaw* is the Polish name; and *Wenceslas* or *Wenceslaus* is the Latinized form best known in England.

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dor was to offer, not only to the Turkish emperor, but also to his pashas and grandees, were brought from Augsburg; and in the meantime the ambassador provided himself with the barges on which we were to sail to Comorn, and with other necessaries appertaining to the journey.

When everything was in readiness, and had been brought to Vienna, *Herr von Kregwitz*, with all who were to travel to Constantinople, had a final audience of his Imperial Majesty and the Archduke Ernest. After kissing his Majesty's hand, on Sept. 2, 1591, we took leave of our friends, embarked in our boats, and sailed down the Danube to an Austrian town called Wissamund, four German miles from Vienna. There an Austrian gentleman named *Unverzagt* (Dauntless) awaited us. We went to his chateau, where he received and entertained us with great hospitality. In this town we stayed two days, as some letters and collateral presents, which we were to distribute in the Turkish court, were still unprepared, and had not been sent to us.

When all was ready we left Wissamund for Comorn, on Sept. 4. Thence a message was sent in the morning to Mahomed Beg at Gran, and notice given of the arrival of the ambassador, in order that he might send as soon as possible boats and an escort to meet us for our better security. Meanwhile we were entertained by Herr Erasmus Braun, the mayor of Comorn. After dinner we walked about the town and inspected the fortress. Here we stayed for seven days, at the end of which intelligence came that the Turks were waiting to receive us, at the usual place, in a beautiful plain; we

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therefore set out from Comorn, our *cortège* on land consisting of about 300 foot-soldiers, under a captain, without firearms, and only with sidearms, and about fifty hussars on horseback; on the Danube we had fifteen boats, each carrying three guns and twenty-five Hungarian soldiers with long muskets, javelins, and their pennons. Thus we voyaged some hours down the Danube, till we espied the Turkish boats, which were ten in number.

The Turkish boats were exactly similar to ours in all respects, except in carrying only one gun each. On land about one hundred very fine-looking and well-appointed Turkish horsemen rode towards us, and, on perceiving us, set spurs to their horses and galloped to the very brink of the Danube. Herr von Kregwitz then ordered the boats to cast anchor. We disembarked on the bank and welcomed and were welcomed by our Turkish friends, and ere long partook of dinner together in the boats. It was certainly matter of wonder, to a person who had never beheld anything of the kind before, to see the beautiful horses, the lances with streaming pennons, the sabres inlaid with silver, gold, and precious stones, the magnificent cloths of blue and red, the gilded saddles and caparisons of the Turks; and I think they must have equipped themselves in this manner on purpose. While the principal Turks were dining with the ambassador the hussars of both parties walked on the plain and conversed together in a friendly manner, their horses and lances being held by *jermeks* or grooms. Here a quarrel arose between a Turkish hussar and one of ours. They wanted to break a lance on the spot, which, however, was strictly forbidden by their officers,

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and they deferred the matter till such time as they should meet in battle. They were both very eager to try each other's strength, but, though we should have liked to see the fight, we did not allow them to proceed to such extremities.

After dinner we took leave of our Christian friends, and placed ourselves under the protection of the Turks. Lashing their boats to ours, they towed us down the Danube as far as Gran. Here Mahomet the *sangiak* (so called from a banner on the top of which is a gilt horsetail, the ensign of knighthood) sent us three janissaries, as a guard for our protection.

The janissaries are much regarded in all the Turkish dominions, as being the Turkish emperor's household troops. They are infantry, and attend on the Sultan's person, to the number of 12,000; the rest are dispersed through almost all his territories; whether placed in castles and fortresses as garrisons against enemies, or stationed for the protection of the Jews and Christians against the illegal violence of the mob. They wear long garments down to the instep, but of cloth, not of silk, which never comes upon them. Instead of hats they wear a kind of sleeves, into the wider end of which they put their heads; these are different at each end, and one end hangs down the neck as far as the back, whereas there is a tube of silver gilt, set with pearls and the more ordinary precious stones, in front over the forehead. In this in war time they place feathers.

These janissaries are for the most part kidnapped persons, or children of Christian peasants living under the Turkish sway. Some hundreds of these latter are assembled every third year, bringing with them their

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male children of eight, nine, or ten years old. Surgeons are on the spot, who judge of the mental capacity of each individual child from his personal appearance, and determine for what future occupation he is likely to be fit. The most promising are selected for the service of the Turkish emperor, the next class for that of the pashas and other Turkish officials; the remainder, who appear of less intellectual promise, are sold into Anatolia or Asia, to any one who chooses to purchase them, for a ducat each. There they are kept till the appointed time, *i. e.* till they are eighteen, or, at latest, twenty years old; are brought up in want, poverty, cold, and heat, and are altogether treated little better than dogs: only whoever takes such a boy is obliged to bring him back again to the Sultan's court at the expiration of the above period, should the kidnapped youth still be living; should he die, his master must report the fact to the *cadi* or judge of the district, who keeps a register of such boys, in order that he may be struck out of the list. When about twenty years old, all embrowned with sun and heat, and accustomed to all kinds of labour, they are brought to Constantinople from the different countries in which they have thus been dispersed. There the most active are enrolled as *acziam oglany*, or young janissaries, and assigned to veteran janissaries to learn, under their instruction, to shoot, to use the sabre, to fling darts, to leap over trenches, and to scale walls. They are bound to obey every order given by the elder janissaries, to prepare their food, cleave wood, and perform every necessary service as long as peace lasts. When they march with the elder soldiers to war, although enrolled in their number, they

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are still obliged to wait upon them, to pitch their tents, and to look after the camels and mules which carry their provisions and necessaries. On occasion of a battle or skirmish they march in the van, and endeavour to surpass each other in valour and steadiness; nor are any of these boys taken into the number of the veteran janissaries till they have borne themselves like heroes. The younger are then bound to serve and attend upon them, as they did previously upon others. From these it is that the bravest and fiercest warriors that the Turks possess arise, and it is on these that the Turkish emperor places the greatest reliance. I have written this account of the janissaries, in recording the first occasion on which I saw them, because I was afterwards an eye-witness at Constantinople of the manner in which, from youth upwards, they are obliged to accustom themselves, not to pleasure, but to work, and are formed into the formidable soldiers which they are. I saw them here for the first time, when they kissed my lord the ambassador's hands, and presented themselves for his service.

It was already late, so that we were unable to enter into any business on his Imperial Majesty's behalf with the sangiak. He, however, gave orders to provide us with a sufficient supply of meat, wine, sturgeon, fish, and fowls. Here, having no feather-beds or mattresses, we for the first time began to lie on carpets and rugs, with which each prepared himself a place of repose for the night as he best could.

Early in the morning of Sept. 8 the sangiak sent to the boats fifteen extremely handsome Turkish horses, with splendid housings and saddles, all studded with

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silver, gilt, and embroidered with precious stones and pearls. These were mounted and ridden in procession by those gentlemen of equestrian rank who were accompanying the ambassador to Constantinople. After them walked the servants, two and two, bearing presents for the sangiak. Next came four boys of equestrian rank, who carried weapons before my lord the ambassador. The first bore a sabre overlaid with silver and gilt, with its scabbard set with pearls and precious stones; the second, a *buzygan* or mace,* overlaid with silver and gilt, and set with precious stones; the third, a Hungarian battle-axe, with its handle also set with precious stones; and the fourth carried a Hungarian *morgenstern*,† splendidly ornamented with precious stones, and gilt all over. After these rode the ambassador on a very beautiful Turkish horse, white as snow,‡ followed by his steward or major-domo.

After riding for some time we came in sight of the sangiak's abode, which was a common unpretending house. On arriving the ambassador went immediately upstairs, and we followed him. There the sangiak gave audience to the ambassador, and bade him sit down on a chair opposite himself. Round the sangiak stood his principal councillors and warriors, and we posted ourselves behind the ambassador. When the ambassador delivered his Imperial Majesty's letter to the sangiak, the latter received it with due reverence and resumed his seat. The ambassador then delivered

* With a pear-shaped head, almost like a hammer, according to Jungman.

† A kind of mace studded with sharp points at the end.

‡ Literally, "chalk."

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to him the presents from his Imperial Majesty, viz. 300 broad doubloons, a silver-gilt beaker, and a silver-gilt ewer and basin.

When this business was ended, permission was given us to go and see the Castle of Gran, in which the archbishop formerly lived. On entering the church, in which the Turks perform their devotions, we saw a handsome chapel, cased inside with marble, in which was a beautiful representation of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, made of variegated marble. Thence we ascended by a lofty staircase into a handsome private chapel, in which were pictures of saints. Next to this chapel was a tolerably spacious palace, and in it pictures of the former kings of Hungary. Immediately behind the palace is a beautiful gallery, adorned all round with marble pillars, from which there is an extensive view of the fields and plains, as well as of the city, which is close to the Danube. Under this gallery is an extraordinary well, hewn out of the solid rock, and so deep that, when a stone is thrown into it, the splash cannot be heard for a considerable time. The water is forced up from the Danube at a vast expense. The well is a very beautiful one, and must have cost the Hungarian archbishop, who formerly had his usual abode here, many thousand ducats. After seeing what there was in the fortress, we repaired to our boats and dined. After dinner we started again down the Danube with our escort, *i.e.* with the ten boats, to which ours were lashed. We sailed past the Castle Wyssehrad,* which is situated on a lofty eminence, and towards evening arrived at Waitzen, where also a bishop's see formerly

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existed. Although no bishop lives there, they informed us that his revenues were regularly paid him.

We started again early on Sept. 9, and in three hours were in sight of Buda. On our arriving within about half-a-mile of the place the pasha sent nineteen barges, or ships, in excellent condition, and ornamented with flags, to meet us. These, on coming up to us, fired all their guns, both great and small, and our boats answered them in like manner; this was repeated several times. It was a wondrous spectacle when these nine-and-twenty boats placed themselves cross-wise on the Danube, and that with so many pennons, flags, and pendants, like a field of poppies in flower. There were full 700 of these on the boats, and our eyes were greatly delighted at the sight. When we approached close to Buda all the boats fired again and drew to the shore, where the pasha of Buda had given orders for us to be well supplied with provisions and necessaries, and a guard of janissaries to be assigned us.

In the morning of Sept. 10 the pasha sent down to the boats sixteen beautiful horses, splendidly caparisoned with saddles, stirrups, and other furniture richly gilt. These were mounted by the ambassador and those of his attendants who enjoyed the rank of knights. They rode off in the same manner as they had done at Gran. All the way from the suburb to the pasha's abode stood soldiers in rows on both sides, and we rode through the midst of them. On arriving at the pasha's house we found 200 janissaries stationed between the entrance and the staircase, as a kind of body-guard. On entering the entrance-hall we saw the pasha sitting in the midst of valuable carpets upon a divan. Round him

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sat his principal chiaouses, councillors, and chief officers, the rest standing. Opposite the pasha was a red velvet chair, in which the ambassador took his seat after giving his hand to the pasha, and about fifteen of us, who were present, stood behind the ambassador. The whole of the audience hall, spacious as it was, had the floor covered with handsome carpets and the walls hung with tapestry.

When Herr von Kregwitz delivered the letter from his Imperial Majesty to the pasha, the latter rose up, kissed the letter, placed it on his head or turban, and afterwards held it in his hand. The ambassador then delivered him the present, viz. 300 broad dollars, two large crescent-shaped silver bottles, a silver-gilt ewer and basin, and a very handsome striking-clock. After presenting these gifts he conversed for a considerable time with the pasha, and made complaints of certain Turkish soldiers, who had done us injury by carrying off cattle, demanding that this should be put a stop to and prohibited for the future. The ambassador also delivered to him a letter from Ernest, archduke of Austria, which he received politely, though not so reverentially, as that from the Emperor. We remained full three hours, while this business was being transacted. The pasha presented the ambassador in return with a Turkish caftan, or overcoat, of gold brocade, which he immediately put on, in token of acknowledgment, and rode wearing it to the boat.

On returning to the boats we learnt that one of our company, an Italian named Nicholas de Bello, a native of the island of Crete or Candy, had turned Turk. This person had been brought by the ambassador from