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John Gardner Wilkinson

Excerpt

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DALMATIA AND MONTENEGRO.

CHAP. VII.

Journey to the Narenta. — Inscriptions at Vido, the ancient Narona. — Visit to Mostar, in Herzegóvina. — Correspondence with the Vladika and the Vizir, respecting the Discontinuance of the Custom of decapitating Prisoners, and the Dead. — The Paterenes. — Blagai. — Vizir's Villa at Boona. — Return to Metcovich.

ON the 24th of October I again left Spalato for Ragusa, with the intention of visiting the Narenta, and penetrating into Herzegóvina. The governor of Dalmatia, General Turzsky, being on board the steamer, I obtained from him an order, that my passport should be made out for Mostar; to which, for some imaginary reason, great difficulties are made by the Austrian authorities; and as soon as my passport had been signed at Ragusa, and the steamer came back to that place from Cattaro, I returned to Cúrzola.

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The morning was most unpropitious, for our departure from Ragusa ; and as the steamer lay in the bay of Gravosa, the passengers had to walk the whole way in a pouring rain, with the certainty of being well drenched, and little hope of finding any thing dry in their baggage, exposed as it was to the storm, on the backs of porters.* One miserable being after another arrived on board the steamer, looking as if they had all walked through the sea ; and it was not till great drying and changing had been resorted to, that the general ill-humour of the party subsided.

The proceedings of one of them were strange enough, and would have appeared to me much more singular, if I had not already seen another person (a Croatian) do the same before ; and though I do not suppose that the habit is common, or that it is to be considered one of the *customs* of this part of Europe, it is too curious to be omitted.

A young Austrian officer, who was certainly a man of very gentlemanly manners, and who proved to be a person of rank, took up a conspicuous place in the public cabin, to make his toilette ; and probably preferring warm to cold water, poured out a tumbler-full, which he took into his mouth, and after keeping it there for a short time, put it out again into his two hands, and washed his face. Nobody seemed at all surprised ; but I

* See above, Vol. I. p. 271.

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CHAP. VII.] PENINSULA OF SABIONCELLO. 3

must say that, in the many countries I have visited, I never met with so extraordinary a performance.

After a stay of three days at Cúrzola, I crossed over to Orebich, on the opposite shore, in the peninsula of Sabioncello; a row of half an hour in a four-oared boat.

Orebich, called also Sabioncello, is the principal village, or town, in this part of the peninsula; and is ruled, as I afterwards learnt, by a Pretore, Signor Rossi, of whose existence I had not dreamt, while passing through the place. But an Austrian official is not to be passed by unheeded, and I was soon fully informed of his importance.

At Orebich are numerous gardens, and the land is carefully tilled. I observed that the olives were very productive, as they are throughout this peninsula; there are also many vines, figs, pomegranates, apples, pears, almonds, mulberries, *Caruba*, and other fruit trees. Oleanders, ilex, bay, rosemary, and junipers, abound there; and the beauty of the landscape is greatly indebted to the dark foliage, and graceful forms, of the cypresses* which grow in great numbers on the *plateaux* and sloping hills, particularly below the Church of Sta. Maria dell'Assunta, to the north of Orebich; above which towers the rugged summit of the Monte Vipero. The houses of the town are well built, and the inhabitants are wealthy; but they have the reputation of

* Both varieties, the upright and spreading. In the Illyric dialect of Slavonic the cypress is called Cempris.

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being a little too fond of money, and are not so hospitable as some of their neighbours.

The road from Orebich to Trapano crosses the mountains, that form the sharp central ridge, or back-bone, of the peninsula ; to the summit of which is a walk of about one hour. It passes, at first, through plantations of olives, and on the ascent of the mountain are many tamarisk bushes, lentiscus*, juniper, arbutus, heath, the small holly-leaved oak (which is so common in Greece), ash, and pines. On reaching the top of the pass, the road descends immediately on the other side, and overlooks some pretty vallies, with the blue sea beyond. We soon afterwards passed through a grove of pines, mostly small trees, the largest not exceeding five feet in girth ; and continued descending, till we reached Trapano, which is three hours' journey from Orebich.

I was furnished with a letter to one of the principal merchants there, who entertained me very hospitably during my stay. I had arrived in the evening, intending to cross the Gulf next morning, to the Narenta ; but I was no sooner up, than I received the strange intelligence that Signor Rossi, the Pretore of Orebich, had sent a peremptory order, for my *immediate* return to his august presence.

The message arrived at midnight ; but my host having pleaded the bad state of the weather, and

* Called Skinos, like the Greek *σχοινος*, both which are pronounced in the same manner, *Skeenos*.

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CHAP. VII.] AUTHORITY OF THE PRETORE. 5

other excuses, for not rousing me at that unseasonable hour, the satellite consented to leave me undisturbed, on condition that the summons should be given me early next morning. My host, accordingly, explained to me the “disagreeable intelligence, he had to impart,” the moment I had concluded the complimentary wishes of the day; and on my inquiring, whether he thought the man in sober earnest, he expressed his decided opinion there was no course left, but to obey. My opinion was different: though I consented to send my passport, which the police at Trapano allowed to be “in order,” for the inspection of the great man of the small Orebich, and agreed to put off my journey, till the return of the messenger.

It was not to be supposed, that a stranger could know of the existence of the Pretore, or of its being necessary to present himself to every policeman, as he passed through a small town, not to be distinguished from a village*; and I pleaded ignorance of the wise regulation which, they assured me, required every one to do so. For such is the vexatious system, towards persons travelling in the interior, that the police are not satisfied to demand a passport, but condemn every one to sacrifice his time, as well as all other considerations, and appear, in person, at the police-office of every

* The whole commune contains only 423 houses: the town about half the number.

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town, as if he were guilty of some heinous crime. If his greatest interests are at stake, he cannot proceed, until his passport is signed; and if the Pretore is in bed, or at dinner, or taking his *siesta*, or out of the way, the most urgent business must be deferred, perhaps twelve or fourteen hours; on account of these stolid, and inquisitorial, regulations.

By the kind intervention of some man of the law, who happened to be at Trapano, a letter was written, enclosing my passport to the Pretore; with strong representations of the state of the weather, the ignorance of the stranger about their passport regulations, and the good order of the passport itself; in consideration of which, Signor Rossi returned it, with permission for my departure to the Narenta, and a dignified lecture on the necessity, for the future, of presenting myself to every Pretore, "the neglect of which duty could not be excused, under any circumstances."

Trapano* consists of about 100 houses, and contains 600 inhabitants†, who pay 800 florins a year in taxes to the government, in custom dues, and tithes on land; and though so small a place, it has a more extensive commerce than any other in the Peninsula of Sabioncello. The quantity of fish caught for salting is very great, and the village purchases annually 35,000 florins worth of salt for this trade; which is carried on with Venice, and

* Or Trappano.

† The whole commune 206 houses and 1218 inhabitants.

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other places in the Adriatic; and which would be greatly increased, were it not for the heavy duties on that article. Salt, indeed, has always been subject to a rigid monopoly in Dalmatia; it often led to serious disputes with other neighbouring states; and the exclusive privilege of selling it, which was first established by Louis, King of Hungary, about 1376 *, has been scrupulously maintained by the Austrians, to the present day. †

The principal fishery at Trapano is of Sardelle, which they catch in this manner. From the star-board bow, of their large open boats, a cradle of iron projects, in which they burn a quantity of wood; and as soon as the fish have collected under the light of this fire, they row the boat gently towards the shore, accompanied by the fish, which are then surrounded, and taken with nets.

The valley of Trapano produces abundance of olives, which are a source of great profit. I never saw trees so laden with fruit; and though of a large size, it is by no means of a coarse quality; and it yields an unusual quantity of oil. The greatest care is bestowed, by these people, on the cultivation of the olive; the earth is walled up with stone, wherever there is room for a single

* See the History in Chapter IX.

† See above, Vol. I. p. 234. The salt duty was only repealed in England in 1824–5, (though salt used in fisheries was free of duty before); but it still continues in India. Governments seem always to be, or to have been, tyrannical about salt and tobacco.

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tree; and such is the profit obtained from them, that olives are planted in all the small hollow spaces, between the rocks; where they thrive in this congenial soil.

The Trapanines export annually 15,000 barrels of oil. They not only use the produce of their own olives, but buy up the oil of other villages; which they either pay for in money, or take in exchange for cloth, and other manufactured goods imported by them; gaining thereby on both commodities. They even buy it from Gradatz, Zistrok, and other villages, on the opposite shore of the Narentine Gulf; and so profitably do they employ their money, that it repays them to borrow it, at 5 per cent., from the people of Orebich.

The only productions, of the gardens and fields of Trapano, are olives, vines, and vegetables; they have neither wheat, nor Indian corn; and all the grain, required for making bread, is imported from Venice and Trieste. The trade is carried on in *trabaccoli*, the large coasting craft of the Adriatic.

Manufactured goods are brought from the same ports; and while I was at Trapano, some large cargoes arrived from Trieste, among which were raw hides from Brazil. The unloading of the vessels was performed by men, but all the goods were carried from the port to Trapano, a distance of one-third of a mile, by women; who so frequently perform the duties of porters in Dalmatia; and

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CHAP. VII.] REGULATIONS RESPECTING TREES. 9

some women are *said* to bear, on their backs, burthens, weighing 250 *funti*.*

To Trepano belong many of the pine trees we passed, in crossing the hills, about half a mile before we reached the village. An annual tax is levied on them by the government; and I was told, that any one, who plants them in a barren piece of land, is obliged to pay it, after a certain number of years. The wisdom, or the justice, of such a measure may be doubted; which is very similar to that adopted, respecting trees, in Egypt, and amounts almost to a prohibition to plant them; but another regulation, that forbids any one to fell timber, on the hills, without an order from the government, who restrict the quantity cut during the year, is a wise and prudent precaution; which, if taken in earlier times, would have prevented the indiscriminate felling of trees on the mountains, and might have saved the soil, that then covered a great portion of their now bare rocky sides.

The port of Trapano is small; but might, at a small expense, be made commodious and secure; by connecting the rocks that lie in front of it. This could only be done by the government; but as the Austrians are not in the habit of spending money, on improvements in Dalmatia, the Tra-

* A funto is nearly 14 ounces, making about 218 pounds. 100 funti being equal to 56 French chilogrammes, the funto is $\frac{1}{2}\frac{1}{3}$ of a chilogramme.

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panines are likely to look, for a long time, upon the unconnected rocks.

“*Rusticus expectat dum defluat amnis;*” and the Trapanines will have to wait, probably with a similar chance of obtaining the wished-for benefit.

The water is from four, to five, fathoms deep.

There is no village on the shore ; the few buildings there being merely magazines, belonging to the people of Trapano ; but, on the hill above, are the remains of an old walled town, called *Gradina**, and *Citta Vecchia*, the ruined houses of which may, here and there, be traced ; and, on the side towards Trapano, is a dilapidated church, said to have belonged to it.

The costume of the Sabioncello peninsula is very singular, particularly on gala days, when the women appear in a straw hat, decked with ribands, roses, and feathers of all colours ; which last are brought even from England, to complete this most important part of their dress. Another peculiarity of the costume is a blue skirt, with a double red, and yellow, border.

On the return of my passport, I left Trapano, in a four-oared boat, for the valley of the Narenta. We first coasted along the peninsula ; and the weather being very stormy, we put into a small cove, below Tzerkvich ; where we covered ourselves, as well as we could, from the deluge of rain, that poured down

* Properly “the little town,” or “*paesetto*.”