

## TWO ROVING ENGLISHWOMEN IN GREECE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### ABOUT THE GREEK. FACTS AND THOUGHTS.

FOR his own comfort and interest, any one travelling in Greece without a dragoman should certainly have a slight acquaintance with modern Greek, not but that I believe a traveller with a good temper and a sense of the ridiculous could get through the Peloponnesus on three words—*krassi* (κρασί), wine, *psomi* (ψωμί), bread, *kalá* (καλά), good, beautiful, &c.

Wine and bread appeared to be the staple food of the people, meat we found had to be ordered, and the traveller does not generally stay long enough in a place to benefit by the execution of a lamb, whilst the word *kalá* is absolutely indispensable. This *kalá* seemed to stand for a number of words and expressions all in the pleasant tense; thus, when you were struggling over an intensely

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Excerpt

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nasty native dish, your hostess stood over you and asked you if it was not *kalá*? and then puzzled you very much the next morning by making *kalá* stand for farewell, a good journey. In fact, there would be no knowing how a Greek would use this word; in Thessaly we found it synonymous with "All right," whilst the Peloponnesian would make *málista* (μάλιστα), "certainly," do duty for that term. The slowly dragged out *málista* came much more suitably from the lips of the silent Greek of the Peloponnesus than the quick *kalá* of the gay Thessalian. And whilst on the subject of the language it might be as well to say that the difficulty the novice finds is in the daily use of so many synonyms for the same word; thus in our short experience when asking for hot water we came across three words for hot. Early in our travels it was said to us, "They will understand you, but you will not understand them, because though they may bring your question into their answer they will reply in other words." This we found was literally true. Our difficulty was not that they could not understand what we said, but that we knew so very little to say. In the same way the names of places are duplicated or even quadrupled, which at first causes the stranger some confusion of mind; for instance, there is Mt. Olympus in Thessaly and another in Eubœa. Orchomenós in Arcadia and the Orchomenós in

A BOOT AND SHOE STANDARD. 3

Bœotia, where Dr. Schliemann excavated the Treasury of Minyas; whilst in Argolis at one glance we could sweep in three hills with the name of Elias.

Besides bread and wine, eggs and coffee came in as a luxury; the latter, of course, was black, and it was not necessarily good. With regard to cleanliness, we were obliged to take a practical view of it, and for further convenience we brought all things into a shoe-standard or a boot-standard. Shoes and civilization seemed to go hand in hand. When you had to get into bed with your boots, and there take them off, you knew what you had to expect. Until we went to Thessaly I do not remember seeing a cow in Greece, but there were sheep and goats in abundance, and so milk and cheese could be had; butter was an extravagance that we only tasted at Patras, Athens, and Volo. Oxen were used for ploughing, and presented an extraordinary variety in shape and size. Ponies, donkeys, and mules were the beasts of burden; horses seemed to be principally kept for carriage use, and a miserable lot they were.

We were told that the national costume was fast dying out, and that probably we should hardly see it, but in this we were singularly fortunate throughout our tour. At Olympia men in fustanella were constantly coming to the Greek inn at which we put up, even sometimes sitting

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down to our table, and the blacksmith's shed outside—as in England—was the local club, more than half of whose members wore the national dress. When we went still farther into the depths of the country all the men appeared either in fustanella or loose white tunics and Turkish knickerbockers of various patterns; likewise at Athens, owing to the influx of countrymen for Easter, we constantly saw the national dress, irrespective of the Queen's guard. On the other hand, excepting when dressed up for Easter, we never saw a Greek woman in the typical costume of her country. Sometimes in the fields a woman would be seen with her head tied up in a gorgeous handkerchief, whilst an apron that once had been embroidered was twisted about her waist; and when seated on a bright striped rug on a mule she would make a patch of colour, but as a rule the women looked like walking bundles of dull-coloured rags. It seemed as if the occupation of the men was such as to permit them to wear their "swagger clothes," but that the work that fell to the lot of woman was of a nature that would allow of no display of dainty dress; even their hours of recreation apparently were spent in washing the clothes of the male portion of their houses. This can be no sinecure considering that the ordinary Greek, with the exception of his black cap and black embroidered jacket, is clothed

## THE NATIONAL DRESS.

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in white from head to foot—white shirt, white fustanella, white woollen hose, and, in many cases, white turned-up shoes. The marvel is how he manages to keep his clothes as clean as he does, for Greece is by no means a land guiltless of mud ; the dust is proverbial, and heavy rain often turns this into a sea of slime ; in Athens alone after rain some of the streets would be ankle deep in mud. To tall dark men the national dress is particularly becoming, and although artistically the fustanella that has the fewest pleats is the most elegant, this is not the Greek ideal, which appears to be to plait as many yards as you can cram into the waistband so as to make it stand out in a perfect frill all the way round ; over this in cold weather a black coat is worn, fitting in at the waist and with long flaps covering the white skirts. To our ideas there was something intensely feminine about the cut of these coats, and made their wearers look exactly like a troupe of ballet girls masquerading as brigands ; indeed, when they lounged in elegant attitudes about the picturesque shoeing-shed at Olympia it might have been a scene out of an opera ; moreover, they all walked with the same peculiar swagger that is noticeable in the *première danseuse* as she crosses the stage. Whatever the ancient Greek might have been, with the exception of his dress, there is nothing feminine in the physiognomy or physique of the modern Greek ;

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his face may be characteristic of distrust, but his figure is the embodiment of true art. If such were the models the old Greeks had ever before their eyes, it is no wonder that Greece produced such a succession of sculptors and painters. Whether the women retain any of the famous classic grace I cannot venture to say ; certainly they displayed none in the home life as we saw it, neither did we see one really pretty girl among the people. In the higher grades it is different ; there are ladies famous for their beauty, and the few Greek ladies we came across were all good-looking. Afterwards at Constantinople, and especially at Broussa, we saw lovely Greek women, but we were told they were all the wives and daughters of well-to-do Greeks.

The Greeks as we found them appeared an exceedingly odd jumble of education and barbarity. Latin and French they are taught at school, and yet they think nothing at night of all sleeping in a row on the floor in one room—beginning with the father and mother down to any stranger that might happen to turn up. At the date we visited Greece (April, 1892), all education was free—from A B C up to the university at Athens, and a free education a Greek looked upon as his birthright. No doubt this was a reaction from the time when under Turkish rule it was impossible for many a Greek child to receive any education at all. In

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## FREE EDUCATION.

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like manner a reaction the other way seems to have set in, helped perhaps by the financial position, and the result has been the introduction of a bill for payment by students in the three higher schools, the lowest or elementary school being still entirely free. As the highest fee, that of the university, is only proposed to be 100 drachmas a year (4*l.* at the outside), the fees in the schools below cannot be called excessive; yet, of course, this bill is producing great agitation among "the politicians." The Greeks rightly are very proud of their free education, but the present generation do not appear to have found it the panacea they expected, and I was very much surprised to hear both young men and middle-aged men speaking against this unlimited free education.

"We manufacture nothing but professors and writers," exclaimed one, "whilst what Greece requires are men to cultivate her waste lands, artisans, and engineers. Look at our railways; they are laid out by foreign engineers, the same with our mines, the same with our canals. The Greek should be educated to be able to perform the work which the advancement of his country requires;" and he seemed to think that anything that would check the absorbing desire of coming up to the University of Athens would be a step in the right direction.

Another national institution against which the

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young Greek is beginning to inveigh is “the politician.” Now, as far as we understood, cabinet ministers and members of Parliament were not included in this term, which they used to designate the professional amateur ; in a word, all Greeks are “politicians,” from the shepherd upwards. This gift of everlasting political talk appears to have come to them as a heritage, and is styled by the practical party “the curse of the nation.” In the railway carriage, on board the boat, in the streets, at the khans, verily, where two or three Greeks are met together, there will politics be talked. Of course, as we visited Greece just before the elections that put M. Tricoupis into power again, we had the benefit of this mania far into the witching hours of night.

The characteristic of the Greek that struck me most—and I do not think that this was due to the force of contrast—was his intense patriotism. The rich Greek may make his money abroad, but he spends it freely for the embellishment of his own country ; witness Athens alone, with its streets of marble palaces and its beautiful public buildings, all built at the expense of private individuals. Then talk to the people, and their intense love of their country is at once apparent. Perhaps some of their patriotism may be credited to the rebound to liberty after centuries of oppression ; anyway their late servitude accounts for their bitter hatred of the



Turk. Although the nightmare is over, the horror of it is easily kept up in a country where there is hardly a family that has not some curdling domestic tragedy dating from that dark hour.

Then again the Greeks appear to excite the dislike of many tourists by their dark and often distrustful look, their forbidding silence, and slowness to comprehend the wants of a stranger which are shouted at him in an unknown tongue. Over and over again you hear, "Those stupid Greeks, they never understand what you want, so different to the dear, delightful Italians, who are always so bright and smiling." So humbug, even with both hands held out for coin, ever wins the day.

I quite admit that the Greek peasant has not the charm of manner, the attractive beauty, the inimitable power of telling pleasant fibs, which is possessed by his brother in Italy; but then our experience of the Greek taught us that he never begged, never expected money for doing nothing, was always satisfied with what he got; in many cases more than pleased. I was told, however, that the English, and our still more self-indulgent cousins beyond the sea, were doing their best to destroy this happy state of things. The Greek of to-day carries in his face an epitome of the modern history of his nation; the slightest scratch below the surface shows a man who, under oppressive servitude, found safety alone in silence, that stealthy

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tread is the outcome of those years of hunted life, that dark suspicious glance was bred by repeated treachery, whilst the women are only to be glanced at to see that every good-looking one has been swept out of the land. The War of Independence is still green in the memory ; it is only ninety-four years since the protomartyr Rhigas, poet and patriot, was murdered in prison at Belgrade, and his body thrown into the Danube. The people have not had time to shake themselves free of those years of gloom ; no doubt the rising generation will be lighter of heart. The poems may sing of "the gay pallikar," but the life he led, which was little removed from that of the wild beast, had in it no element of gaiety, and it was only through sacrifice, such as this, that the sons of Greece won through to freedom.