

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-07442-1 - The City of the Sultan, and Domestic Manners of the
 Turks, in 1836: Volume 2
 Julia Pardoe
 Excerpt
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THE
 CITY OF THE SULTAN.

CHAPTER I.

Departure for Broussa—Rocky Coast—Moudania—The Custom House
 —Translation of the word *Backshich* — The Archbishop of Broussa
 —The Boatman's House — The Dead and the Living — Laughable
 Cavalcade—Dense Mists—Fine Country—Flowers, Birds, and But-
 terflies—The Coffee Hut — The Turkish Woman — Broussa in the
 Distance — The Dried-up Fountain — Immense Plains — Bohemian
 Gipsies — Mountain Streams — Turkish Washerwomen — Fine Old
 Wall—The Jews' Quarter—The Turkish Kiosk—Oriental Curiosity
 —A Dream of Home.

HAVING decided on visiting Broussa, we hired an island caïque with four stout rowers, and provided ourselves with plenty of coats and cloaks, a basket of provisions, and a few volumes of French classics; and thus we set sail from the Golden Horn on the last day of May, leaving Stamboul all splendour and sunshine.

A brisk northerly wind carried us rapidly out into the Propontis; all sails were set; my father and myself comfortably established among "the wraps," our Greek servant ensconced between

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ROCKY COAST.

two baskets, the steersman squatted upon the poop of the boat grinning applause, and revealing in his satisfaction a set of teeth as white as ivory; and, ere long, excepting this last, our attendant, and myself, every soul on board was asleep.

In less than two hours, Stamboul had vanished like a vision, and could only be traced by the line of heavy mist which skirted the horizon. The coast of Asia Minor was darkening as we advanced, wearing the dense drapery of vapour woven by the excessive heat—the mountain chain, fantastic in outline, stretched far as the eye could reach, and we had already left behind us the two quaint rocks which form so peculiar an object from the heights above Constantinople. But here the wind failed us altogether; the slumbering caïquejhes were awakened, the oars were plied, and we moved over the Sea of Marmora, of which I had such horrible memories, from the night of pain and peril that I had passed upon it on my way to Turkey, as though we had been traversing a lake.

Twilight darkened over us thus; and then a light breeze tempted us again to set the sails, and we glided along smoothly, skirting the rocky coast until we reached the point opposite Broussa; which, sloping rapidly downwards to the beach, suddenly revealed to us the glorious moon, that was rising broad and red immedi-

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MOUDANIA.

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ately on our track, and tracing a line of light along the ripple which gleamed like gold.

After having sated myself with the bright moon, the myriad stars, and the mysterious mountains, at whose base the waves had hollowed caverns, through which they dashed with a noise like thunder, and once or twice almost deluded me into a belief that I could distinguish the sound of human voices issuing from their depths, I at length yielded to the excessive fatigue that overpowered me; and, wrapping myself closely in my mantle, I stretched myself along the bottom of the caïque, and did not again awaken until the boatmen announced our arrival at Moudania.

It was an hour past midnight, and not a sound came to us from the town. A score of Arabian barks were anchored off the shore, whose seaward houses overhang the water; the white minarets of the mosques were in strong relief upon the tall, dark, thickly-wooded mountains which rose immediately behind them, and whence the song of the nightingales swept sweetly and sadly over the ripple; and had we not been drenched with the heavy dew that had fallen during the night, I should have been quite satisfied to remain until daylight in the caïque, which soon entered a little creek in the centre of the town.

But, previously to casting anchor, we were

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obliged to pull considerably higher up the gulf in order to show ourselves at the Custom House, and to exhibit our Teskarè, or Turkish passport, as well as to submit our two travelling portmanteaux, and our provision-hamper, to the inspection of the examining officer. After a vast deal of knocking and calling, an individual was at length awakened, who came yawning into the caïque with a paper-lantern in his hand, and his eyes only half open; and who, after looking drowsily about him, murmured out "*backschish*," and prepared to depart; upon which a few piastres were given to him, and he returned on shore.

The word backshich is the first of which a traveller learns the meaning in Turkey; it signifies fee, or present. The Pasha receives backshich for procuring a place or a pension for some petitioner; then, of course, it is a present, and precisely as unwelcome as it is unexpected: the boy who picks up your glove or your whip, as you ride along the street, demands backshich — he must be fee'd for his civility. Nothing is to be done in the country without backshich.

On entering the creek we despatched the servant and one of the caïquejhes to the house of the Greek Archbishop of Broussa, to whom we had brought a letter, and who had removed to the coast for the benefit of sea-bathing; but

THE BOATMAN'S HOUSE.

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his Holiness was from home, and there was consequently no ingress for us. In this dilemma, for hotels there are none, we had no alternative but to accept for a few hours the hospitality of one of the boatmen, until we could procure horses to carry us on to Broussa; and we consequently made our debût in Asia Minor in an apartment up two flights of rickety stairs, walled with mud, and shivering under our footsteps. But it suffices to state that the caïquejhe was a Greek, for it to be understood at once by every Eastern traveller that the house was cleanly to perfection; and our reception by the hostess, even at that untoward hour, courteous and attentive.

Before the servant had brought the luggage up stairs, my father, worn out by fatigue, was sound asleep upon the divan; and, when the attendant had withdrawn, I also gladly prepared myself for the enjoyment of a few hours' repose; and, casting off my shoes, and winding a shawl about my head, I took possession of the opposite side of the sofa, and should soon have followed his example, when I was aroused by the light foot of the caïquejhe's wife in the apartment, who, opening a small chest, cast over me a sheet and coverlet as white as snow, and then retired as quietly as she came.

But that sheet and coverlet changed the whole tide of my feelings — the chest in which

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THE DEAD AND THE LIVING.

they had been kept was of cypress wood—they were strongly impregnated with its odour — I was exhausted by fatigue and excitement—and a thousand visions of death and the grave came over me in the half dreamy state in which I lay, that by no means added to my comfort.

With a morbidity of imagination to which I am unhappily subject, I followed up at length one fantastic and gloomy image, until I began to believe myself in a state of semi-existence, habiting with the dead ; but the delusion was brief, for I was soon as disagreeably convinced that my affair was at present altogether with the living. I had been warned that Broussa was as celebrated for its bugs as for its baths, but I had never contemplated such martyrdom at Moudania! I sprang from the sofa, shook my habit with all my strength, and then, folding my fur pelisse for a pillow, I stretched myself on the carpet, and left the luxuries of the cushioned divan to my father ; who, fortunately for him, proved to be a sounder sleeper than myself.

At five o'clock, the horses came to the door ; and after partaking sparingly of the provisions which we had brought with us, we drank a cup of excellent coffee, prepared by our hostess, and descended to the street ; where my European saddle, by no means a common sight at Moudania, had collected a crowd of idlers.

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LAUGHABLE CAVALCADE.

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Had Cruikshank been by when we started, we should assuredly not have escaped his pungent pencil. My father led the van, mounted on a high-peaked country saddle, with a saddle-cloth of tarnished embroidery, and a pair of shovel stirrups; I followed, perched above a coarse woollen blanket, with my habit tucked up to preserve it from the stream of filth that was sluggishly making its way through the street; after me came our Greek servant, sitting upon a pile of cloaks and great coats, holding his pipe in one hand, and his umbrella in the other; and he was succeeded in his turn by the serudjhe who had charge of our luggage, and who rode between the portmanteaux, balancing the provision basket before him, dressed in a huge black turban, ample drawers of white cotton, and a vest of Broussa silk. The procession was completed by three attendants on foot, the owners of the horses; and thus we defiled through the narrow and dirty streets of Moudania, on our way to the ancient capital of the Ottoman Empire.

For a time the mists were so dense that, although we had the sea-sand beneath the hoofs of our horses, we could not distinguish the water; and, as we turned suddenly to the right, and traversed a vineyard all alive with labourers, the vapours were rolling off the sides of the hills immediately in front of us. Feathered

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FINE COUNTRY.

even to their summits with trees, they appeared to rest against the thick folds of heavy white mist in which they had been enveloped during the night, and presented the most fantastic shapes. I never traversed a more lovely country; vineyards were succeeded by mulberry plantations and olive groves, gardens of cucumber plants, beet-root, and melons, stretches of rich corn land, and immense plains, hemmed in by gigantic mountains, of which the unredeemed portions were a perfect garden.

I have spoken, in my little work on Portugal, of the beauty of the wild flowers in that country, but I found that those of Asia even transcended them. Delicate flowing shrubs, herbs of delicious perfume, and blossoms of every dye, were about our path: the bright lilac-coloured gumcistus, with a drop of gold in its centre—the snowy privet, with its scented cone—the wild hollyhock—the bindweed, as transparent and as variously coloured as in an European parterre—the mallow, with its pale petals of pink and white—the turquoise, as blue as a summer sky, and as large as a field-daisy—the foxglove, springing from amid the rocky masses by the wayside, like virtue struggling with adversity, and seeming doubly beautiful from the contrast; the bright yellow blossom which owes to its constantly vibrating petals the vulgar name of “woman’s tongue”—the sweet-scented

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FLOWERS, BIRDS, AND BUTTERFLIES. 9

purple starch-flower—wild roses, woodbine, and, above all, the passion-flower, somewhat smaller than that cultivated in Europe, but retaining perfectly its pale tints and graceful character, were mingled with a thousand others that were new to me.

Upon one spot on this plain I saw the richest clump of vegetation that I ever met with in my life. It was a small mound near the road-side, covered with dwarf aloes and arum; I made one of the seridjhes tear up a plant of the latter for me to examine, and it was perfectly gigantic; the blossom measured eighteen inches from the base of the calyx to the extremity of the petal; the colour was a deep, rich ruby, and the stem was five or six feet in height. I need scarcely add that the stench which it emitted was intolerable, and we were obliged to rub our hands with wild chamomile to rid ourselves of it.

The butterflies were small, sober-coloured, and scarce; but the birds which surrounded us were various and interesting — the bulfinch, the elegant black-cap, the nightingale, making the air vocal; and the cuckoo, whose sharp, quick note cut shrilly through the sweet song with which it could not assimilate — the skylark, revelling in light, and drinking in the sunshine — the partridge, half hidden amid the corn, or winging its way along the valley, kept us constant company; while the majestic storks

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sailed over our heads, with their long thin legs folded back, and their long thin necks stretched forward, steering themselves by their feet; or remained, gravely standing near the road-side, eyeing us as we passed with all the confidence of impunity.

After rising a tolerably steep hill, we descended into a plain of vast extent, through which brawled a rapid river crossed by a bridge of considerable span, wherein a herd of buffaloes were cooling themselves; some lying on their sides wallowing in the mud, and others standing up to their noses in water, and defying the fierce beams of a sun under which we were almost fainting. As I pulled up for an instant to observe them, a kingfisher darted from a clump of underwood overhanging the bank, glittering in the light, and looking as though it had pilfered the rainbow.

Having passed the plain, we again descended, and stopped mid-way of the mountain before a little hut of withered boughs, tenanted by a superb-looking Turk, who dispensed coffee and pipes to travellers; beside the hut a handsome fountain of white granite poured forth a copious stream of sparkling rock water: and on the other side of the road a very fine walnut tree overshadowed a bank covered with grass. Upon this bank the servant spread our mat; and, having removed the large flapping hats of leg-