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978-1-108-07612-8 - A Narrative of Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece

Pietro Gamba

Excerpt

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A NARRATIVE,

&c. &c.

CHAPTER I.

Lord Byron's departure from Genoa—His voyage to Cefalonia—His tour in Ithaca—His residence at Metaxata.

THERE are few either in the Old or the New World, whithersoever the light of civilization extends, who have not proclaimed themselves friendly to the regeneration of Greece. People of all nations, parties and sects the most opposed to each other, whether in politics or religion, have apparently

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always been unanimous in the wish of seeing that country liberated from the dominion of the Turks. Who would renounce the name of Christian, and incur the appellation of barbarian?—It would be useless and tedious to state the well-known causes which have contributed to awaken an interest so general, and to enlarge upon the influence which they might have had on the determination of Lord Byron to proceed to Greece.

If, as there are many who are fond of making vows for the liberation of Greece, a crusade had been planned in her favour, and the obstacles to be encountered had appeared trivial, Lord Byron would never have joined in the undertaking: he was not one to follow the crowd, or to engage in enterprises free from danger.

Doubtless, he bewailed the calamities of Greece, and none could have more earnestly

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desired her liberation from that shameful yoke which has reduced her to a state so degraded and deplorable. But such a wish might not have led, but for particular reasons, to any ulterior determination.

Lord Byron had once intended fixing his residence in Italy, but the political state of that country gave rise to feelings of disgust. He likewise had some thoughts of going to the United States of America, where he was known and esteemed ;—I once saw him nearly on the point of departure.

He often felt the want of some other occupation than that of writing ; and frequently said, that the public must be tired of his compositions, and that he was certainly more so.

Towards the end of February, 1823, he turned his thoughts towards Greece. No

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one could accuse him of being a blind enthusiast. In his travels during his younger days, he had imbibed a greater personal esteem for the character of the Turks than for that of their slaves. He may have persuaded himself that his personal endeavours and his pecuniary resources might possibly contribute to the liberation of Greece. No undertaking could interest him more strongly; the object, the scene, the danger, were powerful incentives.

It appeared that no Christian power was likely to take part in the struggle of the Greeks. Most of the Europeans who went to their assistance had either perished, or, discontented, had abandoned them. It was generally believed, that a powerful expedition was preparing on the part of the Turks; the eyes of all Europe were then turned not towards the East, but the West.

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Spain alone occupied the public attention. Such a state of things would have made others desist : it stimulated Lord Byron.

In the mean time, he received a letter from his friend Mr. Hobhouse, informing him of the interest that the English were beginning to take in favour of the Greeks ; that a committee had been formed, many of whom were his friends ; that Mr. Blaquiere had been sent into Greece to learn more exactly the state of affairs, and that he would touch at Genoa, to communicate with his Lordship. In the middle of April, Mr. Blaquiere arrived in company with Mr. Luriotti, afterwards Greek deputy in London.

They begged his Lordship to concur with his other friends : he replied, that he was fully disposed so to do, and to assist the cause not only with his means, but per-

sonally, if the Greeks would accept of his services, and if his going to Greece would be of any advantage to that country.

He then decided on as early a departure as possible. Mr. Blaquiere was to send information, and we were to be ready on the receipt of his letters.

I undertook the preparations. A physician acquainted with surgery was requisite, but a known and skilful one was difficult to be found in Genoa. I wrote to Leghorn and Pisa, but the time was too short. The celebrated Vacca, to whom I applied, answered, that if he had known of it earlier, he would have found some one of his pupils for the purpose. "If," said he, "I had not a family, and so many ties that bind me to the spot, I myself would most willingly accompany you." Doctor Alexander, formerly a surgeon in the English service,

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and his Lordship's physician at Genoa, recommended Doctor Bruno, who had just left the university with considerable reputation : he was engaged.

On the 1st of May, two unfortunate Germans came to ask charity of his Lordship. They had quitted Greece after the defeat of the European corps at Peta, and were reduced to the utmost want. They had landed at Ancona, whence, exposed to every privation, begging their bread, and sleeping in the open air, they set out for their own country, and arrived at Genoa, still having a thousand miles to go. Their situation was most pitiable : his Lordship relieved them.

Their accounts of Greece were certainly not encouraging ; but, far from cooling his ardour, they made him more resolved to proceed : it is useless to repeat, that opposition

and the prospect of the greatest dangers were to him the most alluring excitements.

The newspapers now announced that the Greeks had settled their dissensions, established a regular government, and stood prepared for a most vigorous defence. This favourable news had the contrary effect : “ What need,” said he, “ have they of the assistance of a stranger ?”

At the same time he became impatient, and feared lest he should arrive too late. At the end of May, a letter was received from Mr. Blaquiere from Zante. He likewise sent the most favourable intelligence, and begged his Lordship to hasten his departure, for he was expected with the greatest anxiety, and could be of infinite service. Mr. Blaquiere was then about to proceed to the seat of government, whence he promised to write. He advised Lord

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Byron to direct his course to Zante, where he would find letters containing every information, and that he himself would await his arrival in the Morea.

The preparations for our departure were hastened.

An English brig, the *Hercules*, Captain Scott, was freighted. Mr. Trelawny arrived from Florence by his Lordship's invitation: he waited till the middle of July for other letters from Mr. Blaquiere from the Morea—none arrived. He would now no longer delay his departure.

On the 13th of July we were aboard: Captain Trelawny, the physician, eight domestics, and myself, formed his suite. Lord Byron had likewise given a passage to a Greek named Schilitzy, of Constantinople, coming from Russia. We had five horses

aboard, arms and ammunition for our own use, two one-pounders, belonging to his schooner the Bolivar, which he left at Genoa. The uncertainty of the course he was about to pursue, and the information he had received from various quarters, induced him to carry his supplies in specie. He had ten thousand Spanish dollars, in ready money, and bills of exchange for forty thousand more. There were, likewise, some chests of medicine sufficient for a thousand men for a year.

At ten o'clock in the morning every thing was in readiness. There was no wind. He went with Mr. Barry, his banker, and Mr. Trelawny, to the Lomellina, one of the most beautiful villas in the environs of Genoa, about six miles from the city, on the shore, to the west. Lord Byron dined with us there, under a tree, on cheese and fruit. We slept aboard, and were able to clear the