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Charles Fellows

Excerpt

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JOURNAL.

CHAPTER I.

LYDIA.

Arrival at Smyrna—Costume—Description of the Town—Casino Ball—
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atira, one of the Seven Churches—Its Antiquities.

February 12th, 1838.—I AM now in the Frank town of Smyrna, having this evening set foot for the first time in Asia Minor. The whole of the Greek Islands which I have passed since leaving Syra appeared barren and uncultivated, with scarcely a tree to be seen. As we drew near the coast of Asia Minor, the Bay of Smyrna came in sight, bounded by mountains and woods, all green, rich, and beautiful. The approach to the city is very imposing, and the multitude of little boats scudding about, though not so picturesque as those of the Italian or Greek Isles, have a striking and characteristic

effect, the boats being gaily painted, the men all wearing turbans, and the women concealed in white drapery.

I can scarcely believe that I am in Asia Minor, for my inn (the Navy Hotel) is just like an English public-house. I have heard the guns firing and drums beating on board the different men-of-war stationed opposite to my window, and the band of the Sapphire frigate has been playing “ God save the Queen,” and “ Home, sweet Home.”

February 13th.—On looking out of my window this morning, I found that I was really in the East. I beheld a whole city of Turks, a very gay scene ; but the people struck me as being disgustingly fat. The variety of costume, occasioned by the different orders or sects of the Turks, is quite curious. It would be an endless task to describe the varieties, all very unlike the European ; and nothing but the pencil could convey an idea of the various head-dresses. I have just seen a man with a turban, which I took for a small sack of flour placed upon his head. The women, although they contrive to have a good view of strangers at a distance, cover up all but one eye as they approach ; and some are always thus ensconced, having a horse-hair mask or cowl over the upper part of the face, and the lower part concealed in the same white sheet which covers the rest of the body. The dresses are most splendidly embroidered, a Turk thinking it nothing extraordinary to give fifteen or twenty pounds for a jacket. I saw a child whose clothes must have cost sixty or seventy pounds, the embroidery

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being a mass of gold, and one set of clothes was put over another : the child was not above eight years old, but was probably the pet of some wealthy merchant. The expenditure of the Turks in dress is enormous, and of the Greeks also ; at Syra I saw a celebrated Albanian chief of great wealth in his full dress, which I heard, independently of the jewels, was worth many hundred pounds.

Smyrna is a thickly inhabited town, and the streets are extremely narrow and dirty. The appearance of the people generally seems to me not pleasing ; there is no trace of simplicity of manners, but they look as if they had always lived in the bustle of commerce. I do not like any trait in the character of the Turks which I have yet seen ; what a contrast do they form to the Greeks, who appear all intelligence, and who are certainly simple and unaffected ! At Syra a little boy, eight or nine years of age, acted for an hour as cicerone to our party, and on dismissing him I gave him a piastre, a coin of less value than twopence halfpenny of our money ; on taking it he looked gravely in my face, and tears glistened in his eyes ; he kissed my hand, and then pressed it to his forehead : it would require a far larger sum here to obtain such an expression of gratitude.

The town of Smyrna, which I have now viewed from all sides, in situation is beautiful, but in appearance is exactly like a large town of Swiss chalets. The houses are very much alike, and all of wood, with brown roofs and without chimneys. The few tiers of warehouses on

the Marina or quay are whitened over, but these also are built of wood, the better to bear the shaking of the earthquakes. I do not think that there is a house more than one story above the ground-floor in the town; the ground-floor is always the bazaar or store-house, the residence being above. The churches, with the exception of the mosques, are like wooden barns, and without tower or belfry.

I have been admitted to the Casino or public rooms, where there are papers, card-rooms, and billiards, and invited to a ball there on Monday, previously to which I am to dine with our kind and attentive Consul, Mr. Brant. I have been introduced to many Europeans here; their manners are peculiar and not pleasing, displaying the caution of the English merchant, without the varied acquirements which in England are united with mercantile habits. The Frank people here, having no interest in the country they inhabit, and no voice even in the local government of the town, devote their thoughts wholly to business; their goods are all the stake they have, and even this interest is limited by the climate and government: no one has a house of value, for the frequent earthquakes place them in jeopardy; and ships of every nation are constantly stationed here, that, on any outbreak of the Turks or the plague, they may at a moment's notice put all they possess on board.

I have inquired of several gentlemen for some ruins discovered about two years ago in or near the town;

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some had only heard there were such ruins, others said they were by the Castle Hill, but they had never been to that point, or not for several years past ; yet the Castle Hill is not half a mile from the centre of the city, and is the only point commanding a view of the town or country ; it has consequently been my daily walk.

I have been much surprised by finding really beautiful suites of rooms forming the houses of the gentry here ; they consist of long corridors, opening into apartments generally of excellent proportions ; all these are over the warehouses, and have no rooms above them.

The Casino Ball was extremely gay : many of the women, and particularly the middle-aged and old, wore the Greek costume, which is very elegant, although custom has prejudiced me in favour of the more compressed waist. The gold-embroidered skull-cap, the braided turban of hair blended with flowers and jewels, the velvet jacket, richly embroidered, with the gay mameluke sleeves, form a strikingly beautiful dress. The band from the Sapphire frigate, and the officers in their uniform, added to the gaiety of the room. I came away at about one, but find that most of my friends remained until five, and some until seven o'clock. I have had much attention paid to me, and can truly join with all other visitors of Smyrna in acknowledging the hospitality of its inhabitants.

Before the ball I dined at the Consul's, with a large party of English, principally officers of the army and navy. When dinner was over (at about eight o'clock) the

Governor of Smyrna sent to know if he might pay the Consul a visit, who first asked our consent, and then the Governor was ushered into the room. He takes every opportunity of showing respect to the English, and now came to request to be allowed to go to the ball with the Consul. He is an old, merry-looking fellow, but yet with the appearance of deep cunning. He was dressed for the ball in the very undress costume of the Turkish Government,—blue cloth clothes and red cap; but he was distinguished by a splendid locket of diamonds, and rings of the same stone. As soon as he had, by his interpreter, welcomed us all, his pipe-bearer handed him his pipe, which was of great value, having the mouth-piece of lemon-coloured amber, encircled with diamonds. He refused to drink wine, and persisted in declining; but, fortunately for him, rum and brandy are not verbally forbidden by the Prophet. The Chief Judge of the town afterwards called, attended by his suite. These two men are despotic, the one condemning and the other executing at his pleasure. The Governor farms his town of the Sultan, paying a certain sum for the year, and makes what he can of the taxes, fees, and fines: immense fortunes are thus made in a short time, frequently in the most tyrannical way; but the Governor's power only extends over Asiatics. Life and death are in his hands; but money will always satisfy him, and he alone has to be satisfied.

With the Slave-market I was not so much shocked as I expected, and noticed that the children seemed healthy

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and happy. I never saw negroes so black ; their skin was bright, and looked as if it had just been black-leaded and well brushed ; they had beautiful teeth, and the necks and wrists of the children were ornamented with beads ; there were only thirty or forty slaves in the market, and they were all young.

The people, from their custom of sitting cross-legged, and having their feet generally bare, make much use of them. I observed the men who were working the lathe, in turning the amber mouth-pieces for the pipes, press the chisel always with the toes, which were applied as quickly and dexterously as the fingers. With all four paws together at work, they reminded me of the Sun Bears at the Zoological Gardens eating an orange. The tailors iron their work by putting one foot into the iron, and working it about, while with their hands they are arranging the plaits and braiding. The weight carried by the porters in Smyrna is wonderful ; I never saw such burdens borne by men, or men apparently so able to bear them ; the development of muscle in their naked legs amounts almost to deformity.

On buying a pair of slippers, I was told that last year they were not above two-thirds of their present price, but that so many workmen died during the last season, that all manufactured articles had become dearer. Fourteen thousand Turks and a thousand persons of other nations are said to have died in Smyrna alone.

The children are still brought up in national prejudices ; they hoot after a European and call him Frank,

Frank-dog, and other such epithets. One little monkey gave me a smart stroke on the back with his stick, but he was soon laughed into a friendly temper. They are afraid of the consequences of their impertinence, and generally secure a retreat behind some door-way before they even call after the stranger. The men are however losing many of these prejudices. Today, whilst I was sketching, (which is an act forbidden by their religion,) several Turks came and watched me for half an hour, and expressed their delight at any new object which they recognised. I was putting in some shipping in the distance, and as I drew each vessel, although on an extremely small scale, they told me what ships they were with great satisfaction; they also recognised several views I had previously taken.

The society of an infidel is not, as formerly, shunned by the Turk, and their commercial intercourse is daily increasing; they naturally appear more suspicious of the Greek than of other nations.

The annoyances to which a Frank is subject on entering the mosques here are so great that I shall delay visiting them until I arrive at Constantinople. I see the Turks barefooted, and kneeling round the doors and in the colonnades and lobbies round the mosques; there is much devotion in their attitudes and appearance.

The three classes of people here, the Turks, Jews, and Christians, have each their own Sabbath,—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. There is in consequence little observance of any one of the days in the town as a whole.

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I have witnessed a splendid funeral of a wealthy Greek, in which all the church power was engaged, including the highest authority, an archbishop I believe. In the Greek church the dresses are more splendid than in the Romish, but the whole effect is quite in contrast. In this church there is not the slightest semblance of devotional feeling, less even than in the Synagogue worship. The priests are ordinary-looking men of the world; they sing the service in merry time, in a common but rather nasal tone, and look about them as if they were in the crowded streets instead of a place of worship. They are honest-looking men, but have nothing of the priest about them; a long black beard seemed to be a distinctive part of their costume. There is a great deal of bowing and kissing of hands; but all the recitations seem addressed to one another, and I did not see an uplifted eye or any attitude of adoration. There is no altar, and therefore no fixed point for prayer. A candle, which is merely a waxed piece of cotton, is given to every person on entering, and they all keep their hats on during the ceremony. Celibacy is not enjoined upon the priesthood by the Greek Church; and from their appearance I should say, that they are more in their element in the noise and bustle of trade and of their families than in the offices of the church. A more different race of beings from the priests of Rome cannot well be imagined.

Camels are the only carriages in Smyrna, if I may use the expression, and you not unfrequently meet eight

or nine hundred in the course of a walk. The streets are so narrow, that an European, unaccustomed to these animals, requires some nerve when walking under their necks, or standing between them and the wall, while they pass in long strings with their bulky bales of goods suspended from either side. The sheep of the country are the Cape sheep, having a kind of apron tail, entirely of rich marrowy fat, extending to the width of their hind-quarters, and frequently trailing on the ground; the weight of the tail is often more than six or eight pounds. The common pigeon here is the turtle-dove.

In all the confined seas in the Mediterranean I have observed the phosphoric light sparkling in the waves caused by our paddle-wheels; but in the sea here the boats are actually lighted by the illumination from the motion of the oar in the water; and a belt of light, some inches in width, is drawn around the boat by its motion, whilst a stream of light follows its course.

The walls of all the buildings in the upper part of the town are formed out of the ruins of ancient Smyrna; and columns, busts, cornices, and entablatures are seen built in everywhere, and mixed indiscriminately with the volcanic stone of the country. The features of the busts are generally destroyed, to satisfy the scruples of their present owners, the Turks. Hundreds of tombstones are constructed of the ornamental parts of ancient temples, all of white marble. The Jews have bought one hill, formed of a pile of ruins of marble, for tombs for their burial-ground. Near the town I ob-