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Second Excursion in Asia Minor

Charles Fellows

Excerpt

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JOURNAL.

CHAPTER I.

Smyrna—Climate—Bazaars—Horses—Provisions—Ball—Road to Thera, the ancient Caystrus—Passage of the Mountains to Idin, the ancient Tralles—Tahir Pasha—his Museum—Inscriptions—Valley of the Mæander—Sultan Hissá—Soldiers—Antiocheia—the Valley of the Mosynus—Karasoo—to Yeerah, the ancient Aphrodisias.

Smyrna, February 14th, 1840.—WHEN the Turkish peasant said, as I left this country a year and a half ago, “Mountains never meet, but men may,” he expressed an idea of our again meeting, stronger than I entertained of renewing my visit to Asia Minor. Nothing but an earnest desire of knowing more of the highly interesting monuments found in this country, and of the natural features peculiar to it, together with the total absence of any published accounts whence I could obtain such information, would have induced me to wander thus far from the society of friends I so much value, and from the description of civilization to which an European is habituated. I have just left

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Rome, where, in visiting its museums, which mark the ebbing and flowing of art from the earliest ages, I have wondered at the incomparable distance at which the works of the ancient Greeks stand, raised like the Acropolis of their cities, above the productions of all succeeding ages. How changed is Greece now!—for I look upon this country, in its earliest ages, as a part of Greece—the present inhabitants knowing nothing of its history, and being entirely ignorant of the arts which distinguished its former people from the rest of the world.

In this, now almost unknown part of ancient Greece, three of the seven Wise Men, in the early history of the world, had their birth*. Poetry, History, Fable, and Philosophy, had each their fathers in this country†. Among the wonders of the world, it boasted its Temple at Ephesus, its Mausoleum in Caria, and its Colossus at Rhodes. The finest work of art, the celebrated Venus, is attributed to this people. The most wealthy of kings‡, and the greatest of armies§, arose in this region, and their tumuli remain still undisturbed||. The sites of its cities are unknown to us; and even the language of a considerable portion, abounding with inscriptions, has hitherto almost escaped the observation of the philologists of Europe. Impressed with this feeling, and attracted by the natural beauties of the

* Thales, Bias, and Pittacus.

† Homer, Herodotus, Æsop, and Pythagoras.

‡ Croesus.

§ Xerxes' expedition.

|| Of Alyattes at Sardis.

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country, as well as by the hospitality of its inhabitants, I have returned hither to accumulate information and materials for future study.

Smyrna is at this season intensely cold, the distant hills are covered with snow, the wind blows keenly from the north-east, and the pools in the town are frozen over. English coal, which is amply supplied for the numerous steam-vessels, affords the comfort of a fire, as welcome here as on the coldest of our winter days in England.

February 26th.—This morning we had intended to quit Smyrna for the interior, but could not obtain horses; they are promised us for tomorrow morning by six o'clock. The Bazaars are to me always a pleasing lounge; the variety of trades, the novelty of the articles for sale, the busy scene among the camels and porters contrasted with the composure of the shopkeeper, who, with his luxurious pipe in his hand, awaits patiently on his cushioned couch the call of a chance customer, offer ceaseless novelty to an European. By the assistance of my companion, Mr. Scharf, I hope to possess many sketches, to call to mind these scenes; but the harmonious cries of the traders, and the sonorous bells of the passing camels, can be retained only in the memory. The shops for the sale of eatables are very numerous, and mostly for dried fruits and sweetmeats. There are also many for the favourite food of the Turks, which is principally composed from the produce of the dairy. Among the most novel to me was a dish called Moha-

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lahbee, a kind of blancmange, which is served in white plates, sifted over with sugar and sprinkled with rose-water; this hasty-pudding-like substance is made of rice-flour boiled in milk; it is semi-transparent, and in consistency like blancmange. Saloop is also much sold about the streets, as well as kymac, youghoort, and all kinds of curd, cream, and milk, flavoured with scents of various kinds. The total absence of shops for the sale of stimulants, of spirituous or fermented liquors, still continues a striking feature to an European.

Thursday, February 27th.—No horses came this morning as promised, and we waited until four in the afternoon before we could even be assured of obtaining them for tomorrow morning: these are to be hired horses, at the rate of one dollar (4s. 4d.) a day, and half a dollar for their return; even more than this was expected, and we have had to collect them from various small proprietors. We should not be able to obtain them from the Post, for which we are prepared with all the powers of a firman from Constantinople, for four days, several Governors being now detained awaiting the return of horses from other expeditions. The greatest inconvenience is now felt from the want of horses in Smyrna, where the supply is very limited, although a few years ago the town abounded with them; but the establishment of steam-vessels has superseded the more than daily lines of Tartars hence to Constantinople. Scarcely any horses are now kept for the service of the post, the ordinary demand being very trifling.

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Another great pecuniary inconvenience has arisen since I was last here, but it will probably be temporary. Smyrna is now the market for the combined fleets of several nations, stationed in her gulph ; at Vourlah are five English ships of war, and one here : the French have six, and the Austrian three, lying in front of the town of Smyrna ; these bring an additional population of many thousand consumers. Meat, poultry, eggs, game, butter, and indeed all provisions, are four and five times the price they were two years ago. The charges at the inns are more than doubled, as well as the hire of horses for riding about the neighbourhood, in consequence of the demand occasioned by the officers of the navy. The appearance, and I fear the morals, of the “ Frank town ”—the designation of the quarter near the sea, which is occupied by Franks of all nations—are also much changed by the immense number of French sailors, who seem to be allowed to spend their days on shore : hundreds are each evening reeling into their crowded boats, and many, too much intoxicated to walk, are put on board by their less drunken mates. This irregularity has caused the total absence of our sailors from Smyrna ; for a few weeks ago they resented an affront received from some French sailors, and, although double their own number, so severely treated them, that it was thought better they should not come again in contact while such disorder prevailed among the sailors of that nation. The Austrian seamen appear to be under much better discipline.

On Tuesday last, Prince Frederick of Austria gave the people of Smyrna a ball at their Casino, which was enlarged for the occasion by the erection of temporary rooms, formed of sails and flags, upon the terraces of the building. Everything was done by the prince most handsomely and liberally, but the Smyrnesse want of taste and style was very apparent. The great redeeming feature was the elegance and splendour of the costumes of the ladies, who generally appeared in the Greek dress, which does not seem overloaded by the costly addition of jewels and embroidery ; the wearers are also particularly good-looking. Among the Frank population, a study of dress is on all occasions a marked characteristic of the females of Smyrna. This must be observed by every passer through their streets : at every window and doorway is seen, at all hours of the day, a fully-dressed head, ornamented with flowers or jewels.

Determined not to delay the commencement of our expedition another day, I made arrangements for the men and eight horses to join us in the morning at Boojah, a village composed of houses of the Frank merchants, to which we walked, passing the Caravan Bridge at four o'clock, on Thursday the 27th of February. Instead of turning to the south-east or to the right hand, soon after crossing the bridge, we continued on the road which led eastward, lengthening our walk by passing through Cooklajah and over the mountain to Boojah, and enjoying the splendour of the view

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SMYRNA TO CAYSTRUS.

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of Smyrna and its lovely bay, carried into the mountains by the most luxuriant valleys. It was seven o'clock, and quite dark, before we arrived at the small inn recently opened by our landlord of the Navy Hotel at Smyrna.

Friday, February 28th.—Our horses arrived at eight o'clock, and we started, returning nearly half the way to Smyrna, to join the route leading up the valley toward the south-east, the same road as that to Ephesus. On our right lay the pretty village of Sideecooe, on our left that of Boojah: for many miles the country is scantily cultivated with mulberry-trees, but much of the land is capable of far greater produce; the alluvial soil of the valley is deep, and of a nature to grow excellent corn. The spring had scarcely as yet unfolded a single leaf; only a few anemones of various colours sparkled among the bushes, and one or two creeping plants* were blossoming on the winterly stems of the wild pear-tree.

By half-past twelve o'clock we had ridden six post hours, or about twenty-three miles, and arrived at Tri-andeer, a few huts on the bank of a river, which we had previously crossed about six miles from this place. We here learned that our baggage, which had kept the direct road from Smyrna, and which we fancied was before us, had not yet passed. We therefore waited an hour at the café, which, with an adjoining hut, frequently serves as a halting-place on the first day's

* *Clematis cirrhosa* (Evergreen Virgin's Bower).

journey towards Idin. Biendeer, the place of our destination for the evening, was still distant seven hours. About five miles on the way, the track lay through several Turkish burial-grounds, each containing remains of ancient sculptured marbles—columns, cornices, and squared stones; upon one was the following inscription:

MANTONIV///
NICEPHORY///
ΜΑΡΚΟΣΑΝΤΟΝΙΟΣ
ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΣ *

which could not have been moved far from its original site. Its first intention may have been to commemorate the course of a great conqueror; at present it marks the grave of some unknown Yourook, or herdsman, whose race occupy the black goats-hair tents scattered over the widely extended plains. The country for several hours before us was perfectly level, forming as it were an immense lake, bounded on the south by the long range of Mount Messogis, whose promontory (the ancient Trogilium), with its detached island of Samos, is concealed by the ranges of intervening hills rising behind the ancient Colophon and Teos in the west. To the east the range of Mount Tmolus rises, with its barren crags capped with snow. Perhaps no valley in the world would produce more than this if well cultivated. The quantity of olives grown on the sloping base of the mountains is very great, but the

* “ Marcus Antonius Nicephoros.”

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rich plains are abandoned to the scattered sheep or goats, and in the more swampy parts the buffalo is seen wallowing in the marshes.

Before eight o'clock, after a ride of nearly fifty miles upon the same horses, we arrived at Biendeer, a town which seems only occupied in crushing the produce of the surrounding forest of olive-trees. The oil from this district ranks high in the Smyrna market ; and this, as well as other articles of merchandize sold there, has within the last three years risen to four times the price formerly paid.

February 29th.—The situation of Biendeer, a large Turkish village with four minaretted mosques, is very beautiful, commanding a view of the wonderfully fine valley in which we travelled yesterday, and across which our road continues today, to the large town of Thera, about eleven miles distant, which is distinctly visible to the S.S.E. on the steep side of the Messogis mountain.

Saturday Evening.—I have just returned to my room in the picturesque Greek khan at Thera. What a country we have passed through today !—teeming with produce, and promising a still greater abundance to more active cultivation. For three or four miles before we crossed the river Caystrus, the plains were covered with the stems of last year's cotton plants, and the rich soil is again yielding to agricultural implements* of the same form as those which tilled it more than two

* See Journal of 1838, pp. 70 and 333.

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thousand years ago ! while the seeds of another crop are scattered over it. Crossing the very considerable river by a newly built bridge, the land gradually rises, and is well cultivated with corn ; and ascending still further up a slight range of rocky mounds, we found them covered with vines and in high cultivation. These continued, as we travelled over this undulating ground, until we arrived in front of the long and beautifully situated town of Thera, the minarets of whose mosques (of which we counted twenty-eight) are scattered over a range of nearly two miles.

This town, which occupies the site of the ancient Caystrus, is built on so steep an acclivity, that almost every house is visible, peering above its neighbour's roof ; the cypress and plane, of splendid growth, enrich the whole extent of the place. In the streets, as is often the case in Turkish towns, are rapid streams of water, up which we rode, and crossed several well-stored bazaars. The most striking articles exposed for sale were the largest grapes I ever saw ; these are grown in the neighbourhood in great quantities, for the making of raisins, which, from being sent to the port of Smyrna, acquire the name well known in our shops of Smyrna raisins : each grape is as large as a nutmeg, and on sending a man with a piastre and a half (not quite $3\frac{1}{2}d.$), to purchase some for us, he returned with two okes and a half—about seven pounds weight. Each bunch is plaited with a cord of rushes, and in the manufacture of raisins these strings of fruit are dipped into boiling