

GREECE AND ITS ISLANDS.

A TRIP TO NAUPLIA, IN THE MOREA.

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ALTHOUGH not in the regular track of summer tourists, there are now such frequent facilities for reaching Greece, and so many of our own countrypeople and Americans are to be found who have seen the Acropolis and the other lions of Athens, that this modern town, most inopportunately planted among the grandest ruins in the world, and flirting its formal streets and new buildings in the face of the student of antiquity, has become almost familiar to the Western world. Thanks to illustrated papers and pictorial journals, assisted by the photographic representations so easily obtained, most readers have some general notion of the external appearance of the land of Homer and Ulysses, rendered, perhaps, more familiar to us Englishmen by the poetry of Byron than by the histories, poems, and dramas of the great men of antiquity.

But the real charm of Greece does not lie near the streets of Athens, and the route for which tickets are supplied by the great excursionists will not enable those who use them to see more than the external surface of the country—indeed, they will hardly become familiar even with the coast-line. The dread of brigands, also, although they have really not been active now for several years, still hangs over the country; and trips into the interior, or even to Marathon or Eleusis, are not undertaken without a sense of danger. Only a year ago an escort was suggested and provided for a small party who wished to drive across Attica, thirty miles from Athens, through an inhabited and perfectly quiet country in the direction of Cape Colonna. There is not really any danger in this trip, which I have frequently made alone, but the Government would not risk the chance of a repetition of the terrible slaughter that occurred a few years since, which will not easily be forgotten by the British public, and still less easily fade from the recollection of the official representative of England in that country.

Circumstances required me to reside in Greece during a large part of the past year. My residence was on the south-east coast of Attica, just opposite the long, narrow, uninhabited island of Macronisi, while the smaller but more fertile and inhabited island of Zea was always in sight from the rising ground behind the town. Not far off was the picturesque island of

Andros; while at a short distance, and a little to the north, was the important and rich peninsula of Eubœa, or Negropont, connected with the mainland only by a bridge, and often in the latter part of the year white with snow, almost to the sea.

The fine group of islands of the Ægean Sea were thus our near neighbours, and a short trip by sea brought us to the much more celebrated and better-known islands of Chios, or Scio, Patmos, Samos, and many others. From these there is easy communication with Smyrna and New Ephesus, on the mainland of Asia Minor.

In this classic spot it may well be supposed that time passed away quickly, for the *genius loci* would alone prevent tedium. My occupations were far too numerous and absorbing to allow me to think much of other things than those immediately before me, but I had occasion to visit the Peloponnesus, to travel over part of the mainland of Greece, and to examine carefully some of the Turkish islands inhabited by Greeks, as well as the part of Asia Minor lying between New



ACROPOLIS, CORINTH.

Ephesus and Smyrna. A few reminiscences and reflections connected with these visits may possess an interest for the general reader.

The country on the eastern side of the Morea or Peloponnesus is not very accessible, but is extremely interesting. It can be reached by taking advantage of a steamer which plies regularly between the Piræus—the port of Athens—and the head of a large gulf, which, if it joined the Gulf of Corinth (which it would do if a canal were cut through the three miles of land forming the narrow Isthmus of Corinth), would convert the Morea into an island. This steamer stops at Kalamaki, and after receiving the passengers and goods brought from the Ionian Islands and Patras—who are landed at Corinth, and conveyed across the isthmus by a regular service of carriages—returns immediately to the Piræus. From Kalamaki there is a horse-path on the eastern shore of the isthmus, past the ancient city of Kenchraea, entering a wild and narrow gorge, which opens into the more inhabited part of the Peloponnesus. Kalamaki itself is worth a visit, although there is but little and very bad accommodation. Near it, on the northern shore of the gulf, are some curious remains of ancient volcanoes, and several remarkable solfataras, or emanations of sulphurous vapour at a

very high temperature, resembling the Grotto dei Cani, near Naples. Attempts are being made to obtain for economic use a large quantity of sulphur, collected in the rocks near the crevices and open fissures that allow the sulphur vapours to escape. Not far off there are marks of ancient volcanic rocks, and these extend to a considerable distance on the other or western side of the Gulf of Corinth. The Acropolis, or ancient citadel of Corinth, shows a considerable quantity of ancient lava, or basalt, especially on the western side. Old Corinth, that celebrated city, which was once the pride of Greece, has been at various times injured and was in recent years totally destroyed by earthquakes, and shocks have been experienced in recent times up to the present day. Numerous slight shocks have also been felt at Kalamaki within the past year, though not to such an extent as to throw down the low houses, which are the principal buildings there.

The first entry to the Morea on this side is gloomy enough. Of the city of Kenchræa, once very populous, and the port of Corinth on the side of the gulf towards Athens, there is nothing left above ground. Coins, pottery, and occasionally some marble fragments, however, have been found, and extensive remains of ancient foundations of buildings extend out some distance beyond the present shore-line, and show that there has been a considerable subsidence of the coast, but this is all; and it is not easy to imagine a more complete scene of desolation. There are still a few fishermen inhabiting a couple of miserable huts, and this is all that remains. Few travellers now make this their way into the interior.

Once past the line of the shore, the way into the interior lies through a gorge very difficult of access, and in parts really dangerous, but gradually more and more densely clothed with vegetation, consisting chiefly of pine-trees, of which the intense and vivid green, contrasting with the deep blue sky overhead, gives great interest to the landscape.

As the horses carefully pick their way over the rough, narrow, and precipitous path, it occurs to one now and then what would happen if another party were advancing in the opposite direction. Several times, indeed, we did meet strings of horses conveying families from one point to another, and though this did not happen in the worst places, it was curious to see the ingenious way in which the difficulties were met and safely overcome.

Here and there also are comparatively open spaces. In these there are generally springs, with large open basins of great antiquity, used, as they probably had been for the last two thousand years and more, for washing the linen of the nearest village. The village was not to be seen, but the maidens and mothers were not wanting, and were following their avocations with little regard to the passing travellers.

Certainly there is at present in Greece little of the beauty which was so tempting in Homeric times, and which caused the destruction of Troy, and the production of the greatest poem the world has seen. Female beauty among the lower classes is now so exceedingly

rare that not only was I never fortunate enough myself to find any, but no one with whom I communicated on the subject had any better experience.

My route led me through wild and difficult country for several hours, until at last we emerged into tableland of much less picturesque beauty, though easier for horse and man.

In a village among some hilly ground, entirely without trees and partly cultivated, I and my companions passed the night. The people were hospitable, but could certainly have provided very little for our supper. Fortunately one of my companions, a most genial professor in the University of Athens, had taken precautions, and had brought with him an ample supply of food. We ate it in true Oriental fashion, lying on our cloaks, on a low dais about eight inches above the general floor of one of the two rooms of which the house was made up, and from small round tables less than a foot high, on which the food was piled. We passed the night on the same spot. My companion slept, but I was kept awake, as I often am under such circumstances, by the lively little inhabitants of the room, who were much excited by the arrival of a stranger, and inclined to profit as much as possible by the event.

Towards morning I turned out, though the sun had not yet risen, and sat myself down among some noisy turkeys, leaning against a ruined building near the house; and there, if I did not get sleep, I at least obtained immunity from my tormentors.

In due time the house-full of people turned out. I think there were about eight sleeping in the inner room—men, women, and children—and four in that occupied by ourselves.

The turkeys we saw in the village looked so tempting, that my friend was induced to purchase one for our eating at a future meal. Certainly for size and whiteness our bird could not have been equalled in Norfolk, but when it came forth as food the case was not quite so satisfactory. No deal board could have been harder, and teeth were of little use in the attempt to masticate it.

The habits of the villagers of the interior of the Morea are very simple, and even rude, but they are well inclined to do their best for the stranger who visits them. They are very patriarchal, and the head of the family is a person of great consideration. The women seem to occupy a low position, and do not mix with the male members of the group. All travel together gipsy fashion, and as they dress very much in sheepskins made into long pelisses, with the fur inside, their appearance is rather uncouth, and more picturesque than pleasing.

Once past the fringe of hills on the coast, my path lay through valleys half cultivated, and narrow gorges not cultivated at all, to a very remarkable open valley, opening to the sea nearly opposite the island of Ægina, and not very far from Nauplia. The country here is very much broken and is picturesque. It is remarkable for indications of volcanic action, and also for deposits of copper ore, recently laid bare by a Greek company. Their head-quarters are in an old

convent, a picturesque and rambling place, which served me as a shelter for the night. I found, however, that though situated on a hill, and apparently very dry, the manager of the mines was lying on a sick-bed, greatly reduced by the insidious malaria fever which is unluckily too common on all parts of the Grecian shores, whether of the mainland or the islands.

The towns of Greece rarely possess any interest to the traveller. Often they are not even on the site of ancient towns bearing the same name, but even when they are they contain no mark whatever of their former importance. The ancient towns were built round isolated hills, if there was a possibility of such an arrangement; and the top of the hill, or Acropolis, was made into a fortified enclosure, within which the women and flocks could be sheltered, in the common event of the landing of an enemy.

Nauplia* offers little that can interest the general traveller. It is a place of some local importance, as it enjoys steam communication with the Piræus and the ports of the Morea. It is also not far from Ægina, of which the only present production consists of pottery of ancient form and good material, exported to all

parts of Greece. The water jars, with two, three, four, or sometimes six handles, are seen in all the little towns along the coast, where they are brought from time to time in "caiques"—a kind of barge with picturesque sails, used throughout the East to convey all kinds of goods from place to place. In a country where there are no roads, and which has a very extended coast-line, this arrangement is convenient. The caiques represent the gipsy carts, loaded with baskets, mats, and sundries, still seen in many parts of England, but they also carry nearly all kinds of goods, and are indeed the chief and in some cases the only means of carrying bulky or heavy goods. They are thus very important, and doubtless serve to keep up the maritime character of the population. Now, as in ancient times, the constant communication with the outer world enforced by this incessant circulation by sea, renders the inhabitants of the islands, and of the coasts of the mainland, far more quick and intelligent than those who cultivate the valleys in the interior. Education is now extended to the whole of the juvenile population, but the effects of it are much more rapidly shown on the shores than in the interior of the country. It must be remembered too that a large proportion of the men now living, and having influence as the fathers of families, were actually slaves under the Turks in their youth or early manhood.

* In its origin the name of Nauplia is identical with that of Naples, and means the new city (Nea-polis), called in Italian Napoli.

THE OLD HOME.



H! yonder, 'midst the beeches green,
Like some half-hidden glory,
Still stands before our gladden'd eyes
The house, rose-wreathed and hoary,
Where first, dear wife, I saw thy face,
Like some sweet, heavenly wonder,
And found in thy pure soul a love
That death can never sunder.

And here we're hand-in-hand again,
With more than the old gladness;
Though in our life, dear love, we've passed
Through sacred, holy sadness;
When little eyes grew dim, and o'er
Our hearth Death's hush descended:
But grief's divine, for how our souls
In love it stronger blended!

Yes, gladder than when o'er us dawned
The light of love's young vision—
Revealing vistas green and gold,
And far-off fields Elysian;
Romance came up on hurrying wings,
But left on pinions fleeter;
But stern, true life with love has been,
Dear wife, to us far sweeter.

Mark the quaint parlour's windows still,
With roses dancing round them—
Unchanged as when, in summer eyes,
We oftentimes have found them,

When, hand-in-hand, in joy we came
From wandering o'er the meadows,
While in the dusk those beeches green
Threw deep and solemn shadows.

We shall not enter the old house—
The charm would then be broken;
We shall not lose the glorious joy
We had at what was spoken
In yon dear room, so quaint and old,
When even the fire-light glistened
With merry gleam, and from the walls
Stern heads approving listened.

Around the rose-wreathed garden bower
The humming wild bee hovers;
We'll go and sit in the old place
Where we sat, happy lovers;
Perchance some memory of the past,
On radiant wing, shall reach us,
And, as it sinks into our souls,
A nobler faith shall teach us.

Dear wife, the lilies, as of old,
Amongst their sword-leaves glimmer;
If they are less bright than of yore,
'Tis that our eyes are dimmer;
But yet affection's gaze is bright,
Though we are young no longer;
While Time carves wrinkles on our brows,
Our love grows all the stronger.

ALEXANDER LAMONT.