

ANNIE VIVANTI

A JOURNEY TO CRETE,
COSTANTINOPLE,
NAPLES AND FLORENCE:
THREE MONTHS
ABROAD

Annie Vivanti

**A Journey to Crete, Constantinople,
Naples and Florence:
Three Months Abroad**

«Public Domain»

Vivanti A.

A Journey to Crete, Costantinople, Naples and Florence: Three Months
Abroad / A. Vivanti — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER I. | 6 |
| CHAPTER II. | 17 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 19 |

Annie Vivanti

A Journey to Crete, Costantinople, Naples and Florence: Three Months Abroad

Dedication

TO MY HUSBAND

To Thee, whose hand has kindly led me forth
Far o'er the land, across the deep blue sea,
Whose care and love watch'd o'er me every where,
I dedicate this little History.

May it recall to thee the motley crowd
Of strange and kindly people we have seen,
The golden days of the enchanted Isle,
How wondrous bright and happy they have been.

The smiling Bosphorus and grand Stamboul,
The glorious bay of beauteous Napoli,
The festive days at Florence,—and accept
This as a sign of gratitude from me.

*Lower Norwood,
Dec. 1st, 1865.*

CHAPTER I. FROM LONDON TO CRETE

“O Wandern, Wandern, meine Lust! O Wandern.”

W. Müller.

It was on the morning of the 18th of March, 1865, that, “equipped from top to toe,” I kissed all my little ones, shook hands with the kind friends who were to take care of them, and started with my husband on our grand wedding tour. Yes, this was to be our wedding tour; for the one we made directly after our wedding, more than ten years ago, did not deserve that name; and since then we had never travelled without, what is most properly called encumbrances, not meaning trunks or bandboxes, but babies of different sizes and ages. Our first wedding trip! Shall I confess that it did not extend farther than Broadstairs! How times change! Our wishes were more limited then; I am sure we thought we had gone quite as far as people could wish to go, for we went by water, and the weather being rather windy, we were both very nearly sea-sick when we arrived. But no more of these old bye-gone times, I have other things to tell. When we drove off, and I looked once more back, my baby clapped her little fat hands together, and called out, “Lumps of delight, lumps of delight.” A turban! a sword! a drum! screamed the boys, and off we drove on our way to Crete. Yes, to Crete! where nobody has ever been that I know of, since Theseus.

But before we got there, we arrived at London Bridge. There we met dear Mme. M—, whom we had promised to see safely to Cologne. She is the mother of one of the greatest scholars of our time, and the widow of one who would certainly have been one of the greatest German poets, had he not died at the age of thirty-three.

On the evening of the 18th we arrived safely and well at Brussels, and had a few hours time before the train started for Cologne. So we set out for a short stroll through the town by gaslight. It looked just as I had thought it would look, gay and lively. “A little Paris,” as it is so often called. The “Galleries” reminded me of the Palais Royal, and the people that leisurely walked about seemed as well dressed, and as much “on pleasure bent,” as those of the Boulevards. The shops where “knicknacks” are sold look as elegant as those of Paris, and in others there is the same delightful display of fruit and flowers, delicacies, and confectionary.

I could, of course, not walk through the streets and market-place of Brussels without thinking of Egmont and Hoorn, and of the splendid scene in Goethe’s Egmont, where Klärchen calls upon the people to save her lover. I also remembered the poor sisters, Charlotte and Emily Brontë. My husband thought of Napoleon and Wellington, and Becky Sharp, and laughed again at the thought of Jos Sedley’s flight from Brussels.

With an appetite stimulated by the walk, the keen March air, and the very inviting exhibition of dainties in several shop-windows, we dined, and then left for Cologne, where we arrived at five in the morning, and parted from Mme. M—, our dear friend, for such she had become to us, we feeling rather anxious how she would get on without us; she full of gratitude for the little we had been able to do for her, blessing us many times, and wishing us a safe return to our children; to which I said “Amen,” with all my heart.

As we had a few hours to spare before the train started for Coblenz, we went out to look at the Cathedral, which I had not seen for several years. I was pleased to see that the giant work has advanced much in that comparatively short time; they told me it would be quite finished in about six years, but that I humbly doubt.

It was a wretchedly cold morning; a sharp easterly wind blowing, which after a night passed in a railway carriage, seemed to freeze me. It chilled my love for the beautiful. I was not very deeply impressed; not even by the interior of the Cathedral, although I know it is wondrous grand and beautiful.

What a comfortable hotel, "The Giant," at Coblenz is! And how we enjoyed our dinner at the table d'hôte, sitting down to it like civilized people after a thorough toilette. As March is not the time for English tourists on the Rhine, we had, instead of whispered English conversation, the loud talk of the Prussian officers, who had the table almost to themselves. They were most of them fine looking men, and had such a number of stars and crosses, and medals, that after seeing them I wondered that there should be still some poor little Danes left alive. I thought that these young giants must have killed them all, being all so distinguished for valour, which many of them were too young to have proved even against the rebels in Baden in 1848.

After dinner we drove to Stolzenfels, and enjoyed the view, which all who have seen it will remember with pleasure. I had looked from Stolzenfels upon Lahneck and Upper and Lower Lahnstein, when the hills that rise behind were covered with the glory of September foliage; but even without that gay dress, the scene is lovely still. We drove back to the hotel in spirits that were in harmony with the bright scene around us and the merry people that animated it. The influence of the fine continental air and the bright sunshine upon the spirits of those who have breathed the thick air of London for a whole year, with the exception perhaps of a few months at Brighton, is wonderfully exhilarating. All who have experienced it must wish for the Continent again and again, and will prefer to spend the autumn abroad, although the English lakes, Wales and Scotland, offer perhaps as much scenic beauty as Germany or France.

On the morning of the 20th we left Coblenz, and went by rail to Mayence, passing the most beautiful spots of the Rhine, enjoying it much, and forming the resolution to buy one of the ruined castles, restore it and live for ever on the Rhine, with a boat to row on the river and a guitar to accompany the German ballads we would sing on a summer evening. At Mayence we left the Rhine, and turned eastward across the Hessian plains towards Bavaria. The cold wind we had now to face made us shut all the windows, and I must confess in spite of my belonging to the Ladies' Sanitary Association, and having read Florence Nightingale's book and Combe's too, we shut also the ventilators, and unstrapped all our shawls and wrappers. I looked wistfully at the snow that had appeared on the ground soon after we left Mayence, and which grew thicker and thicker, glittering in the sunshine, like a cold beauty that smiles but does not melt. The sky was perfectly cloudless, the sun brilliant and warm, the wind cutting and sharp; the shades deep and cold; after sunset the window panes became covered with frost, but not like in England, where it springs up in a very short time, and afterwards disappears as quickly, and which is of a poor tame pattern, always resembling artichoke leaves. Here the cold worked slowly, deliberately and elaborately, like a careful artist: each pane became a picture, showing a variety of beautiful and fanciful shapes and forms, flowers, miniature forests, multitudes of stars, brilliants and crystals. Gradually, it shut us completely out from the world, and after we had passed Nuremberg and Erlangen, we heard and saw no more of it, till we arrived at Passau, the Austrian frontier, where people have to undergo the ordeal of the douane.

We arrived there at 2 o'clock in the morning and had to extricate ourselves from shawls and wrappers in order to be present at the examination of our luggage. On re-entering the carriage, the guard told us that there were sixteen degrees of frost,¹ after which information, I felt that I had a right to shiver and to complain. The guard himself wrapped up in an immense fur, wearing top-boots lined with fur, and a fur cap drawn over his ears, looked provokingly cheerful and comfortable, and told me when he heard my grumbling at the cold, that in spite of that it was much better there than in England where, that he knew for certain, the sun, even in the month of June, was never visible

¹ 16° Reaumur equal to 36° of Fahrenheit.

before 9 o'clock in the morning, for till then there was always fog and mist. He had been in London, but did not like it at all. The coffee was horrible, although he suspected with much acuteness, that it was partly the fault of the milk. The tea was worse still, for they gave no rum with it, and tea without rum was little better than hot water, and he concluded, "how can you expect an Austrian to live in a place where six cigars cost a shilling or more? What are six cigars a day for a man that likes them?" There were but two things in London that had pleased him, the Crystal Palace and Mme. Tussaud's Exhibition. The wax figures of that celebrated artist had made a deep impression upon him. We found in Vienna the weather as cold and ungenial as on our journey; but feeling that it would have been a shame not to see something of the town, we walked and drove about, and were glad when we had performed that troublesome duty.

Schönbrunnen alone, which awakens so many recollections, aroused also some degree of interest in me. The pretty pictures painted by the Emperor Francis I., especially those he painted on the fans of his wife Maria Theresa, the embroidery of that great woman, the drawings of her unhappy and beautiful daughter, Maria Antoinette, the family portraits of the Hapsburgs, down to the present Empress and her sisters, the room in which the Duc de Reichstadt died, his portrait as a fair and beautiful boy; all that interested me much. The gardens and park surrounding this pretty summer residence were still covered with snow, and the air was so cold that I was glad to get back again to the hotel, where, looking in Continental fashion from the window into the street, I spent some pleasant hours. The passers by although less elegant in appearance than in Paris, look more picturesque and appear in a much greater variety of costume. All the ladies wear large fur capes and large muffs. Many have also their little hats and bonnets trimmed with fur, and the young girls tripping along briskly, look decidedly pretty. I liked also the costume of the Hungarian men. They wear top-boots, short braided coats lined and trimmed with fur, and high fur caps. Many of the peasants of the different provinces of Austria have also a very picturesque appearance.

If the days, on account of the weather, were not the most enjoyable, the evenings were all the more so. We spent them in the theatre. Now the Burg Theatre of Vienna is old, ugly, and dark; but perfectly comfortable, and the acting first-rate; and to see first-rate acting is a great enjoyment. All the Viennese seem to think so too, for the Theatre was filled in every part; and one evening the Imperial box was adorned by the presence of the beautiful Empress of Austria. Everybody who has visited the Exhibition of 1862, and who has not been there? must recollect the charming portrait of the Empress. She is quite as beautiful, indeed even more so, for the portrait showed only the face, not her elegant commanding figure, and graceful movements. There were beside her in the box, the father of the Emperor, the Archduchess Sophia, and Count Trani, brother of the ex-King of Naples.

The journey from Vienna to Trieste must in summer be very beautiful, but when we took it, although it was already the 23rd of March, there were 10 degrees of cold,² enough to chill anybody that is neither a Russian nor Polar Bear. My husband was much interested, and declared the railroad across the Alps one of the finest works of modern engineering. The railway winds zig-zag up the mountain like the road over the Splugen, or the Mont Cenis. But the wind was cutting and cold; the snow that fell incessantly penetrated even through the closed windows. We had left Vienna in the morning; about six o'clock at night we arrived at Semmering, which is the highest point. Here the snow lay mountain deep. I had never seen it in such masses. What a feeling of solitude and desolation, deep, far-extending snow gives one. It covers the earth like a shroud. The sea in winter with a leaden sky, is a lively cheerful thing, compared to such a snowy desert. I saw in the waning light, a man at some distance, plodding apparently with difficulty through it. How lost and desolate he seemed. I was quite glad when I discovered about two miles farther on a house, from the chimney of which a thin column of smoke arose, and which I thought was probably the end of his journey; where at all events he would find shelter. Beyond Semmering, the road for many miles leads along the top of deep

² 22½ F.

precipices, to look down which while travelling in a train gives one anything but a feeling of security. Wherever the road is not protected from the North wind by the mountains, there are strong high oaken palings to shelter it, for the Bora, a north-easterly gale, blows here often with such violence, that unless protected by the mountain or these palings, the whole train might be easily overthrown and hurled down some precipice. Near Adelsberg, where we arrived about midnight, the train came suddenly to a standstill; the snow being so deep on the line, that the engine could not move on. Like a good horse, it seemed to try its utmost to pull us through, but all its efforts resulted in some very uncomfortable shakings it gave us while endeavouring to push through the snow.

After about an hour's delay they had cleared the line sufficiently for the train to move on, and in the morning we arrived at Trieste. It is a pretty modern town, in a charming situation. The villas which are scattered over the hills, that rise behind the town, look very pretty and pleasant. "Mira Mare," the property of Prince Maximilian of Austria, Emperor of Mexico, is a beautiful marine residence. The streets of Trieste are paved as those of Florence, Naples, and Messina, with large stones, like our London footpaths, they present an animated appearance, for one sees many different costumes. I remember, especially that of the Mexican soldiers, of which there were many in Trieste, and who, in their long white woollen cloaks, and broad-brimmed straw hats, are wild and picturesque-looking fellows.

All the day there blew a strong north-easterly wind, which the Triestines however, called a Boretta, meaning a little Bora; but I must confess that in spite of that, I looked rather suspiciously at the many little white-headed waves of the Adriatic, which looked just the kind to give one an incipient sea-sickness; considering that we were to embark the next afternoon for a five days' sea voyage, and that possibly the Boretta might become a Bora. This time however, I was luckier than I had hoped. The sun rose the next day in a cloudless sky, and when I looked out of my window, the flags on the masts of the ships, lying in the harbour, waved gently, instead of violently turning and twisting about as they had done the day before; and the sea was smooth and smiling as "The Bride of the Doges" at Venice, which I had seen, and remembered with delight.

In high spirits therefore, we went on board the Lloyd steamer "Neptune," which was to take us to Sira. I had but one bad foreboding. We had been told, that as it was so early in the year, we might chance to have the boat almost entirely to ourselves. As I am of a sociable disposition, I did not relish the idea of being locked up in a large ship without travelling companions.

How agreeably surprised was I therefore, to find the deck absolutely crowded when we arrived, and not by chance travellers, but by forty excursionists to the Holy Land, who wished to spend the Easter week at Jerusalem. I at once anticipated an interesting and singular company, very different from every-day tourists, and I was not mistaken. I became more or less acquainted with many of them, and they made the five days of our voyage together pass very pleasantly. The great majority of them were Germans from all parts of the Fatherland; but there were also a few Hungarians and Poles, four Americans, and one old Italian amongst them. They all belonged to the "lords of creation," with the exception of two who were of the gentle sex, that wears crinoline. This mixed company I divided, however, into two classes only; the devout and the profane, viz. those that went, or said they went, to the Holy Land from devotion, and those that avowed they were going there from different motives.

Of those belonging to the first class, the old Polish General, Count T-, in consideration of his high position and great age, deserves to be mentioned first. He was an old man of 77, with an enormous appetite, who said that he had not tasted water he could remember when, and believed he would be ill if he ventured to drink any. He had spent his life on horseback, and looked as hale and strong as a young man. His head was of a very peculiar shape. A phrenologist would have said that in it the propensities preponderated largely over the sentiments. His white hair and long white moustache could not make him look venerable. I was glad when he told me that he was going to Jerusalem for devotion, for I felt sure he had plenty of cause for repentance, he looked such a sensual old sinner.

In his manners he was pleasant and gallant, and his conversation was not uninteresting. He had travelled much, been every where; and seemed especially to remember all the places famous for beautiful women. There were two Catholic priests among the passengers. One a Curé from Galicia, a young man, with a thin bent figure, a sickly voice, and spare fair hair; looking altogether more an object of pity than of interest; the other a young, yet venerable looking Dominican friar, with a beautiful face and fine oriental beard. I was sorry that I understood neither Polish nor Latin, the only languages he spoke; for I think he had many interesting things to tell. His convent in Warsaw had been lately abolished by the Russian Government, and the poor friars who were suspected of having Polish sympathies were now wandering beggars, so the Curé told me. This one was, however, a very comfortable and venerable looking beggar, and seemed to be well provided with more than friars are supposed to require, viz. warm stockings and strong shoes and a large wide-a-wake hat. An old Italian sailor, owner of some barges, which were now managed by his sons, was going to the Holy Land, from a beautiful sentiment of pure devotion and gratitude. He had been prosperous in his trade and fortunate in his family. All his sons were doing well, all his daughters happily married. He had lost his wife many years ago, but time and religion had soothed that sorrow. He was going to Jerusalem now to offer there thanks to the Divine Being for the joys of a long and honourable existence, to pray for the soul of his departed wife, and for the salvation of all his children. He showed me a letter from his youngest daughter, in whose house the old man lived, and who had sent him this letter to Trieste. It was badly spelt, but most touching. She called upon the Holy Virgin and all the saints to take her dear father under their kind and powerful protection and bring him safely back to his home, which seemed desolate without him. The old sailor was of great use to me, he knew, as he called it, 'every stone of the coast,' and was always willing and often able to tell me what I wanted to know about the places we passed. When we arrived at Corfù, he went on shore, but not from any curiosity, the place was well known to him, but in order to perform his devotions at the silver shrine of St. Spiridion, the patron saint of the island. At Sira, where there seemed to be no particular saint, he did not leave the boat; it is a new town, and in our times saints seem to have become scarce. But if the old sailor seemed to be intent upon nothing but praying to all the saints on the road, a little German master miller had apparently undertaken this pilgrimage in order only to buy photographs of all sizes and descriptions at every place we stopped at. Not knowing any other language but Viennese-German, he must have had sometimes great difficulty in accomplishing his object in places where people understood only Greek and Italian. But where there is a will there is a way. He seemed to find by instinct the places where photographs were to be got, and succeeded in buying some very nice ones in Corfù, where I, not being equally persevering, had failed in procuring any. When we arrived in Sira, the funny little man, as soon as he reached the land by means of a boat that had taken several of his companions ashore, left them who were satisfied with seeing in reality what he wanted on cardboard. While they were going up the hill, on which the Roman Catholic church stands, and from whence there is a fine view over the town, the harbour, and the sea, he remained in the town in search of photographs. This time, however, he was destined to be disappointed; for, although he found a place where they sold photographs, and where they showed him many, he found they were views of every place and country in the world, especially of Paris and Vienna; but not of so common a place as Sira, which every one there had always before his eyes. In looking over all the photographs in search of those he wished, the time must have passed more rapidly than he was aware of, for he was not at the "embarcader" when his travelling companions arrived there, in order to return to the boat. The wind that was fresh when they landed had much increased, and the boatmen told them they had better get on board the steamer as soon as possible, and after waiting a little while, they did as they were advised, and left the poor little miller behind. When he arrived at the place of embarkation, the Greeks somehow made him understand that the others had left Sira, and that he must take a boat for himself. By this time the wind had become very strong, and when we perceived the boat that carried the little miller, the waves were constantly breaking over it, wetting him to the skin, and what was worst of all, spoiling his new

beaver hat, which he had put on to go to Sira in, for what reason is best known to himself. When the two boatmen at last boarded the vessel, the rapacious Greeks asked so exorbitant a price for their trouble that the little German, although in great fear and longing to get on board, would not pay it, when they pushed off from the steamer again, one thrusting his hand in the terrified traveller's pocket with the intention of paying himself. At that moment one of the officers of the steamer observed the danger he was in, and came to his rescue by telling the Greeks in an imperious voice to put the poor man immediately on board.

The four young Americans that belonged to the party went to the Holy Land for the same purpose as they had visited England, France and Germany, viz. to see what the place was like. They were four modest and courteous young gentlemen; and if their Christian names had not been Lucius and Homer, and such like, and if they had not called the Russians "Rooshions" and America "Merico," I should not have "guessed" where they came from. Homer was evidently smitten with Mdlle. S—, one of the lady travellers; and always on the watch for an opportunity of offering her his opera glass or fetch a chair for her. The worldliest of the worldly was Mr. St—, a painter from Düsseldorf, a young man with a satirical face and roguish disposition. He was as good a sailor as the Captain, and enjoyed his meals as if he worked with a spade instead of a brush and pencil. He tried to flirt with the ladies, and drew most charming sketches of land and people. The portraits of General T— and the little Jew doctor of the ship, were wonderfully true and humorous. He was always either drawing or talking, and delighted in teasing the poor curé, who generally answered in a gentle and becoming manner.

Between the devotees and the worldlings, belonging to both and yet to neither, uniting in himself all their good qualities and apparently free from their faults, stood Mr. H—, a clergyman from Cologne. A man of most venerable looks, highly cultivated mind, and a warm pious heart. With him I spent some of the pleasantest hours of our journey to Smyrna. He told me that for thirty years a journey to the Holy Land had been his wish by day, and his dream by night. When at last it was to be realised, his wife from mistaken kindness had much opposed it; had used entreaties and tears to prevent what she considered a dangerous journey; but the wish had been all too strong, she had been obliged to let him go. His face had a bright look of happiness, softened by what seemed a stronger and deeper feeling still—gratitude. And that bright look did not vanish, even when between Corfu and Sira, the sea became very rough, and prostrated most of the company, that had been so lively till then. When I asked him how he was, he answered with a smile, "To be or not to be, that is the question"! When, as we neared Sira, the sea became calmer, and that troublesome question was satisfactorily settled, I enjoyed his conversation again. When he spoke, the land and islands we passed, became peopled with gods and heroes. He did not, like M. R—, from Paris, who came on board our boat at Sira, chill my heart by telling me that there never was a Homer; that at the time when the songs of the Iliad and Odyssey originated, hundreds could sing in that style, as in the 17th century almost everybody in France could write a good letter, while in the 18th, nobody could.

Mr. H— was no sceptic, and when I declared myself in favour of Chio, as the birth-place of the great bard, he said it was not impossible that I was right.

But I shall never get to Smyrna, if I describe all my travelling companions on the way, so I must come to an end, not however before I have said a few words of the two ladies. Mme. de H—, a Hungarian lady, sister of the Archbishop of Carthage, and formerly a governess to some of the grandchildren of Louis Philippe, was a strong minded woman. She had been a widow these twenty years, but not having been very happy in her first union, had never yielded again to a proposal of marriage, although many had been made to her since. She said she was very much shocked and grieved, that so many of her companions should go to the Holy Land from curiosity, or seeking amusement; but I must confess that for a pilgrim to the Holy Land, she was rather gaily dressed. The cap she used to wear in the morning, when she appeared "en negligée," especially surprised me, being trimmed with (what my boys would have called) stunning bright green ribbon.

She had travelled much, and seen a good deal of the world and its life. She spoke indifferent French with a loud voice, and had generally two veils over her face to protect her complexion, trying to remedy defective sight by looking at one through an eye-glass.

Fräulein S— was a pretty girl of eighteen, who went to Jerusalem “because Papa took her there,” and he went there, as he had gone to many other places, for the simple love of change and travelling. She was, as I said, pretty, wore a neat becoming travelling dress, and was of course the centre of attraction to all the young men of the party. But being engaged to be married (this she told me in private), and apparently of a naturally modest and retiring disposition, the young men found it difficult to approach her. She stayed a great deal in the ladies’ saloon, writing long letters, which I suppose went to Prague, where she was shortly going to live.

After a pleasant voyage of about forty-eight hours, we arrived at the island of Corfu, which is separated from the mainland by a small sheet of water only, resembling a lake rather than the sea; for when one nears the town of Corfu, the water seems entirely enclosed by land, and the view is then most charming. On the left, the rocky coast of Albania looks wild and picturesque; while the island to your right, covered by a luxuriant vegetation, has altogether a smiling and cheerful aspect.

But how strange and new everything appeared to me when we arrived at Corfu, the country, the town, the people. Fifty hours before I had been among mountains of snow, in an almost Siberian cold. Here, under a golden sun, palm trees were growing, and roses and geraniums were in full bloom. When we had gone on shore, we went through dirty, narrow little streets, up to the Spianata, a beautiful promenade, where the palace stands in which the English Lord High Commissioner formerly resided. I was sorry to think that this beautiful land enjoys no longer the blessing of English protection, under which it would surely have prospered. It has not much chance of doing so now.

Mr. H—, from Cologne, reminded me that Corfu was old Scheria, where King Alkinous lived, whose beautiful, innocent daughter, Nausikaa, the “lily-armed maiden” had saved the life of the noble sufferer Ulysses.

Before we had gone on shore, about a hundred Montenegrin labourers, going to Constantinople, came on board our vessel; their arrival, in about ten boats, was the strangest thing I had ever witnessed; the noise, the violent gesticulations, the scramble in getting on board, was indescribable, and quite frightened and perplexed me, who had not yet become accustomed to such manners. Some, finding that they could not approach the steps that led up to the deck, climbed like cats up the side of the vessel; and their luggage, consisting of dirty bundles, was hurled after them by their companions below. They wore the Greek costume, which is becoming and picturesque, loose blue pantaloons instead of trousers; a white, or coloured shirt, and a red fez for a head covering. Feet and legs were bare, and over their shoulders hung a shaggy cloak, with a three-cornered capuch to it. Their features were generally good; the straight line of the Greek profile well defined in many. They had lively eyes, and a profusion of dark curly hair.

When, after a few hours stroll through the town, and on the Spianata, we returned to the boat, I found that we had also an addition to our saloon passengers. They were all Greeks. One of them was M. Brilas, who had just been called to Athens to fill the office of Foreign Minister there. His only child, a fine, intelligent looking boy, accompanied him. A fortnight after, at the festivities in commemoration of the Greek Revolution, the boy had a sunstroke, and died. I grieved for the poor father when I heard of it. Mr. Conemenos, with his wife, also embarked at Corfu. He is a Greek, in the diplomatic service of the Ottoman Empire. Between myself and his young wife, an amiable and accomplished lady, an almost friendly relation soon sprang up. I was sorry to part from her at Sira, and promised to go and see her when I got to Constantinople, to which place she was now going on a visit to her parents. And there came another young Greek on board, whom I remember only because he was very beautiful, and looked exactly as Homer describes some of the “curly-headed Achaians.” He sat at meal-times next to General T—, and nearly opposite me. The contrast they formed was most striking. It being Lent, the pale-faced young Greek ate nothing but a little bread, and a few olives,

while the old soldier, with his florid complexion, swallowed at breakfast alone, four eggs, a quantity of garlick sausage, and uncooked ham, besides fish and fowl, potatoes and rice.

The weather, which had been so fine on our way to Corfu, did not continue so favourable. The Sirocco blew fresh against us, and gradually the sea became very rough. The vessel rocked so much, that I did not care to remain long on deck, but retired early to my little cabin. I am a good sailor, and therefore did not suffer, but I slept little that night, being disturbed by the movements of the ship, which near Cape Matapan became lively in the extreme. How disappointing it is in such a night to wake after a short doze, thinking it must be near morning, and to find that it is just eleven o'clock, then dozing again, waking up with a start, and discovering by the dim light of the cabin lamp that it is not yet one. And how glad one feels when the morning dawns through the thick little pane of glass, and the scrubbing of the deck is heard overhead. Now it is day; the terrors of the night are passed, fear vanishes like an uneasy dream. And how refreshing is the morning breeze on the still wet deck, when the foaming sea begins to look blue and clear again, and the sun breaks forth through the clouds. The Montenegrins on the foredeck, also seemed to enjoy the bright morning after the rough night they had spent there. They made an early breakfast of brown bread, curd-cheese, and garlick; and looked very happy in their picturesque rags. A lad who sat on a kind of mat, his legs crossed, smoking a long Turkish pipe, looked the image of contemplative contentment. After another rough night we arrived the next morning in Sira, from whence we intended to proceed to Crete. Unfortunately there was no boat leaving for that island for four days, and thus the question arose what to do with those days. Remaining in Sira was out of the question, for although, in a commercial point of view, I am told that it is the most important Greek town; all that anybody can care to see of Sira is seen from the harbour. Perhaps I should mention that from the top of the hill on which the Roman Catholic Church stands, there is a fine view over the town; the harbour, which is full of all kinds of vessels, and looks very animated, and the blue Ionian Sea.

But then the way up that little hill is very steep, and the sunbeams strike down upon the streets paved with slippery stones, which makes the going up fatiguing, and the coming down difficult. Carriages cannot be used at all. The houses of Sira are all painted white, or of some very light colour, and look neat and clean, but the country around wants entirely the charm of vegetation. There are about a dozen trees planted round a little square in the town, which form the only promenade of its inhabitants. I saw no other tree or shrub anywhere on the hills around, so that the inhabitants know only by the higher or lower degree of temperature whether it is summer or winter; nothing else tells them of the pleasant changes of the "circling year." And what is worse still, Sira has no fresh water. This indispensable necessary of life, this great element of our existence, which I always thought belonged to every man like the air he breathes, as his birth-right, is brought to Sira from a distance and sold like wine by the quart, and of different qualities; that fit for drinking being the dearest.

The town has no historical recollections, no antiquities, no art treasures, ancient or modern; nothing but ships and warehouses, and stones, and a burning sun. We could not stop four days in such a place; that was evident. But where to go?

We committed a grievous error in the way in which we solved that question. Athens, with its glorious remains of antiquity was, so to say, at our door, being but ten hours' journey from Sira. But unfortunately there was at the same time a boat leaving for Smyrna, which would return in time for us to catch the boat for Crete; and so, partly from a childish impatience to see an eastern town, as if I had not been going to Crete and Constantinople afterwards; partly because I liked to spend another day with the excursionists, we went on board the "Germania;" had forty-eight hours of rough sea (twenty-four each way) two days at Smyrna, with what enjoyment I shall tell by and by, and lost the opportunity of seeing Athens, to which I could afterwards only pay a flying visit of a few hours on my way from Constantinople to Messina.

The only point of interest on our journey to Smyrna was Chio, where we arrived at daybreak, and which, illumined by the rising sun, was a glorious sight. The high mountains of the island look bold

and stern, but they slope down to gentle hills covered with rich vegetation, and there, partly buried in woods of oranges and olives, lies the town. Ah! beautiful, unhappy Chio, so cruelly oppressed by the Turks, who fear the bold and daring spirit of its inhabitants, which has manifested itself so often in rebellion, and for which they have suffered so terribly.

From the consequences of the massacre in 1822, when many thousands were killed, sold as slaves, or fled the country, it has not yet entirely recovered. But seen from the steamboat, in the glory of the morning sun, it looked all smiling, and happy, and beautiful. As the men are renowned for their bold daring spirit, (an Ionian proverb says “A prudent Chiote is as rare as a green horse;”) so the women of Chio are famous for their beauty and sprightly grace. Surely I thought Chio must be the birthplace of the great bard, whose glorious works still delight the world, and are imperishable, like the “everlasting hills” that rise up there through the silver clouds into the blue sky. Here he saw men of such bold and adventurous spirit as those he describes so well, and women of such god-like beauty, that he could describe the immortals as if he had dwelt among them; and a mortal woman of such transcendent grace and charm as Helena. “May the cruel Turk be soon driven away from thy smiling shores,” I prayed, when our boat left the harbour of Chio on our way to Smyrna.

From Sirra to Smyrna we had some new travelling companions, among whom I must mention M. R— and his wife, from Paris, on a journey to the interior of Syria, where M. R— was going to complete the material for the continuation of his work, the beginning of which, published a few years ago, created so much sensation and controversy. Mme. de H— the sister of the Archbishop, looked at him with no friendly eyes, and confided to me, that she feared with such a man some misfortune would happen to the vessel; and she cast suspicious looks at the sky, which at that moment was overcast and threatening. I thought of this again, when two months later I was told at Naples the following little story. It is well known that no people in the world are so fond of saints as the Neapolitans. They adore an endless number of them, and have “tutti i Santi” always on their lips. When M. R—’s famous book was first published, the Roman clergy (as other clergy have done on another occasion) drew the attention of the whole laity to it by preaching violent sermons against it. In Naples, as at some other places, they also read masses and held processions for the purpose of mitigating, by such pious practices, the evil that book might create. A Neapolitan peasant woman, who had not understood much of the sermon, besides the words procession and the name of R—, thought he must be some saint whose name she had forgotten, there were so many; how could she remember them all? So she put on her “vestito di festa” and lighted her candle, and when asked for what purpose, innocently said that it was in honour of St. R—! I wonder which would have amused the sceptical and learned professor most, if I had told him of the superstitious fears with which he had inspired Mme. de H—, or of his canonization by the Neapolitan peasant woman.

At Chio some Turks came on board; the first Mussulmans I had seen. One of them was a venerable looking old man, and as soon as he came on board he spread out a piece of carpet, took off his slippers and knelt down, his face turned towards Mecca, his hands lifted up in prayer. Another one, a young man, had a monkey and three bears with him. The monkey was large, the bears short, shaggy things. They danced several times to his music, which consisted of a monotonous noise, meant probably to be a song, accompanied by the beating of a tambourin. The beasts danced with their usual grace.

We arrived “saufs et sains” at Smyrna, and the last few hours the journey was pleasant, for we had entered the Gulf and felt no more the movement of the sea. The colour of the water had changed from a deep blue to a bright green, and the vessel kept close to the southern shore of the coast, which was very lovely, being covered to the very tops of the mountains with rich vegetation of soft delicate colouring. Two mountains, called the “Two Brothers,” had a sterner look, having bare rocky crowns; but the “Three Sisters,” which are a little further on, were of a soft and gentle aspect.

The nearer we came to Smyrna the more animated became the Gulf with craft of different kinds. The small Greek sailing vessels having spread their white sails before the fresh blowing

“Levante,” the Eastwind, glided swiftly over the water, looking like some gigantic sea-fowl raising the waves with outspread wings. And then, at the foot of green mountains, in an emerald plain, among cypresses and olives, I beheld Smyrna, “The Amiable,” “The Crown of Ionia,” “The Pearl of the East.” We landed; a giant boatman took most of our luggage on his back, and conducted us to the hotel. I had difficulty in following the large strides of the tall fellow, who walked apparently with perfect ease, barefooted, over wretched pavement, with a heavy load on his back, whilst I picked my way painfully over heaps of rubbish, sharp pointed stones, open gutters, and holes in the pavement. I looked around me and saw, to my utter astonishment, that what had appeared a paradise, was a dirty, wretched place, worse than I should imagine Whitechapel to be. I was quite horrified when we entered the hotel to think that we were going to stay in such a wretched place. And the room we were shown into was not much better than the appearance of the house had led us to expect. Whitewashed walls, not over clean, a very dirty piece of carpet, which I pushed with my foot at once into a corner of the room, and hard beds, a ricketty wash-hand stand, a sofa, and one chair, was all the furniture. As this was however, the best hotel in Smyrna, and no other room to be had, we were obliged to consider this charming apartment our home for two days.

When we were ready to go out I asked the Dragoman, as interpreters or guides are called here, to take us to some pretty street, when he answered, with a polite bow, “Madam, the pretty streets of Smyrna are like this,” and what was this one like? A narrow, wretched lane, paved in such a way as to make walking a penance. In the middle of the street an open gutter, full of mud and abomination, heaps of rubbish, and refuse, over which I had to climb, deep holes which I must try to avoid. The smaller streets seemed to serve not only as thoroughfares but as workshops and stables. In one that was but ten steps from our hotel a cooper and his men were at work all day, and close by, I noticed at all times, a cow tied to a post, so I thought she had no other stabling. I wanted to see the beautiful Greek women, of whom I had read in Eothen; but it being neither Sunday nor fête-day they did not show themselves; of the few I saw none answered to the description of the author of that clever book. But there were few women of any kind visible.

In Corfu and Sira I had been struck with the almost entire absence of women among the people in the streets; in Smyrna I observed the same thing, although in a less degree, owing, no doubt, to the residence of a large number of Europeans. (The Greeks are not called Europeans in Smyrna.) The private houses of the upper classes, especially of the rich Armenians, looked very well indeed. The doors of most of the houses being open, one can look into them. They appeared neat and clean, in their gardens there were cypresses and orange trees, and the sweet smell of flowers. But we Western women, although we love our home, do not like to be locked up in it, be it ever so fair a house or garden. We want to go about for pleasure and for health, but to do that would be an impossibility in Smyrna.

Alas! I thought if this is “the Pearl of the East,” I have no wish to see the beads. It is very old fashioned, I know, to find fault with any thing out of old England, and it is not “bon ton” to long after the English flesh-pots, but I must be honest, and therefore confess, that although I was very willing to be satisfied with the food, I sadly longed after English cleanliness and order.

One thing I remember however, with pleasure, that is the school for girls of the German deaconesses. It seems the abode of peace and piety, but without the restraint and superstition of a convent. Sister Mima is an able and excellent Directress, and the institution a blessing to the whole East. I went also and looked at the new railway station, which seemed an anomaly in a country where riding on horses and camels seems the most natural means of locomotion.

I also enjoyed my meals at Smyrna, not that they were particularly well cooked, but because we partook of them in company with Mr. R— and his wife. She is pleasing and amiable; he does not seem either. But his conversation is decidedly interesting. All he says secures attention. He expresses his thoughts with great precision. He speaks almost as well as he writes, and that is saying a great deal. I was however, very glad when the time came for our boat to leave for Sira; although the weather

was unfavourable and foretold a bad passage. The night was pitch dark with alternate showers and hail storms; the Captain told us that near Chio he was but thirty yards from another vessel before they saw one another. In Sira, the French steamer of the Messageries Impériales and several other smaller craft were driven ashore, but without serious damage. If the wind had not abated there might have been danger. There were on board with us more than two hundred poor Greeks, most of them beggars, that went on a pilgrimage to Tino near Sira, for a great fête of the Madonna there.

The Greeks are so anxious to go and adore the miraculous Madonna there, that even the Turkish Government took notice of it, and probably in order to propitiate the good will of the Greek subjects in Crete, placed a frigate at the disposal of the municipality of Canea, which had thus the means of giving a free passage to the many poor of the island who wished to go to Tino.

Those from Smyrna that were in our boat were all wretched and dirty-looking people. Many of them were very ill, and had undertaken this journey, hoping that the Madonna of Tino would do for them what doctors had not done. The cold pelting rain of the stormy night did at least for one poor creature what she thought of asking the Madonna to perform—it ended all her sufferings.

She was a woman of about thirty years of age and paralyzed. The doctor on board the “Germania,” when he found how ill she was, had tried to bleed her; but circulation had already ceased, and she died about an hour before we reached Sira. This caused some delay in our landing. The Captain had to go on shore and inform the sanitary officers that a death had occurred on board. After some time, they took the dead body ashore in order to have it inspected. I saw the poor creature lying in the boat in which they had placed her, propped up with pillows and carefully covered, but her white face was visible, and the breeze played with her dark tresses.

About an hour after a boat approached and the cry of “pratica,” meaning here “intercourse,” was heard from it; and we were now at liberty to leave the “Germania” and go on shore. There was the usual noise and bustle and confusion, and quarrelling and fighting. We waited till it had subsided, and then we went at once on board the little boat called “Shield,” which was to leave the same afternoon for Crete. It looked just like a common steamboat, only very small, but it was an enchanted vessel, which a kind fairy had sent to take me to fairy-land. There was nobody on board besides ourselves, the captain, and the crew, and some people on the foredeck. I had not been long on board, when I felt very sleepy. I thought it was because I had not slept the night before, but I know better now. That sleep came over me that I might not see the way into fairy-land, which people should only enter when the fairies send for them. When I awoke, after a long, deep sleep, it was morning, and I was in the enchanted island.

CHAPTER II. CRETE, OR THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

“Hier ruhn im Kranze
Von Blüth’ und Frucht, als Zwilling
Herbst und Frühling,
Doch Idas Scheitel strahlt im Silberglanze.”

E. Geibel.

Is it not a dream, a delusion? Am I really in Crete? Shall I not awake suddenly and find myself at home, and hear the voices of my children? Those flower wildernesses, which people call here “gardens,” those noble snow-covered mountains, they belong to fairy-land; and the strange crowd of people, and the curious little half clad black children that play on the sea-shore yonder, are they real beings of flesh and blood, or phantoms that haunt the enchanted island?

Thus I felt when first I came to Crete. My life here seemed so strange, so new, that it was like a dream. But when I awoke to it morning after morning, then that brilliant sky, and the flowers that grew beneath it, the deep blue sea, down upon which I had sometimes looked through the latticed windows of the Pasha’s harem, the pretty little Circassian slaves, and the ugly black ones, in gay fantastic dress, that stood at the open doors, the strange sounds of the Turkish band playing on the old walls of the city, and the melancholy Greek songs of Leilà, the Pasha’s daughter—all became a reality that neither dazzled nor confused me any longer. But they were happy days, those days in Crete; and when I think of them, it is as if I felt again the fresh breeze of the sea, and the balmy one that blows from the south; and wafts to us the smell of orange-groves in blossom, and of all the roses that bloom in the gardens of Crete, and I see the land and the sea smiling under the bright sun of the East.

There was no hotel of any kind on the island; we had therefore, accepted the invitation of an Italian gentleman residing there, who, when apprized of our intention to visit Crete, had asked us most pressingly to stay at his house in Canea, the principal town.

He expected our arrival on the 3rd of April, and came on board our steamboat as soon as it had anchored in the harbour of Canea.

There was no difficulty in identifying us, we were the only first-class passengers on board. After exchanging some kind words with Signor A—, and seeing to our luggage, we stepped into the little boat which had brought him on board, and crossed the harbour. How strange and new a world it seemed in which I was; the town, the people, the sky, the sea, the very air I breathed.

What is that large white palace on the left side of the harbour? I asked. “The Pasha’s Seraglio,”³ Sig. A— answered: “and do you see that part of it which faces the sea, and where all the windows are covered by thick lattice work, that is the Harem.” Not far from the Seraglio I noticed a row of large vaults. Sig. A— told me that they had been built by the Venetians, who used to keep their gallies in them. The fortress at the right hand of the harbour was also built by them. So were the fine strong city walls, on which I afterwards noticed in several places the sign of the Lion of St. Mark. We landed and wound our way through a crowd of strange looking people. They were Turks and Greeks in their national dresses, and Africans with not much dress of any kind. The streets were decently clean, and would have looked almost cheerful if there had not been a great number of large dogs, with a wild, hungry, wolf-like look, who were lying everywhere on the pavement. Most of the houses round the harbour were coffee houses, the doors of which were wide open. In these open places, and outside the

³ Seraglio means a palace. Harem means sacred, and is that part of the Seraglio which is assigned to the women.

doors too, a great number of Turks and Greeks were sitting and smoking long chiboucs and hookahs; I noticed but very few people that wore the European dress. A walk of about five minutes brought us to the house of Sig. A—, a modest dwelling, although it was perhaps the best furnished private house in Canea. But if the floors were bare, they were faultlessly clean, and the plain bed and window curtains, were of a dazzling whiteness.

Round the windows of my bedroom grew some pretty creepers, and the sky that peeped through this green frame into my room was of a brilliancy such as I had never seen before, and the air that streamed through the open window was so soft and fresh at the same time, that but to breathe was an enjoyment. Sig. A— was, as I said before, an Italian by birth. Chance had brought him, when a young naval officer, from St. Remo, near Genoa, to Crete, and fate had ordained that he should fall in love with the daughter of the Italian consul there, who made him forget his home, which he never saw again, for he gave up his profession and settled at Crete. He had been a widower now, poor man, for several years, his wife having died young, leaving him four little children and a wretched portrait of herself, which some roving dauber had made, which he however held in high estimation, and could never look at without emotion. Towards us he was the most amiable of hosts, and showed his pleasure in entertaining us in a kind and hearty manner. We found it difficult to remember under how many obligations we were to him, for he almost succeeded in persuading us that it was he who was beholden to us. His children were kind, good-natured and timid, and never more pleased than when they could be of some little service to me. The Genoese housekeeper, a tall, masculine-looking, middle-aged woman, who had a moustache many a young ensign would have coveted, did also what she could to make me comfortable, and appeared to feel over-rewarded for all her trouble by my listening now and then to her complaints against Canea and its wooden houses, the slovenly Greek servants, and the wicked Turks, the lean butcher's meat, and the coarse flour; it was an endless catalogue of complaints, interrupted only by her praises of her Genoa, which, through the distance of time and space, appeared to her even more beautiful than it is. There all the people live in marble palaces, which have nothing of wood but the window frames and doors; the ladies wear only silk and velvet, and the large beautiful churches are covered with rich paintings. But if her praises were somewhat exaggerated, I must own that her complaints were not wholly groundless. The beef I found decidedly uneatable, as they kill only cows which are too old to give milk, and oxen too old for work. The mutton was of the very poorest quality, lamb and chicken only just eatable, but very inferior to what we are accustomed to. The people seem to eat a great deal of salted sardines, caviare, olives, and such like things. I did not care for them, and lived principally upon eggs, salad, and oranges, the latter of a size and flavour unknown in England. With Nicolo and Marico, the Greek servant boy and maid, I could however find no fault. It is true they wore no stockings, and I suppose Marietta, the housekeeper, did not accuse them without reason of having but a very slight feeling of the obligation of telling the truth, but then they were so nice looking, their dress was so picturesque, their manners so gentle and winning, that I could not help liking them.

We were a fortnight under the roof of kind Sig. A—, with the exception of the few days we spent on an excursion to Rettimo, and a pleasant, never to be forgotten time it was. I generally spent my mornings alone most quietly and happily at the little table, near my open bedroom window, reading or writing, and sometimes forgetting both, and looking dreamily into the blue sky, or at the fragrant flowers in the glass before me. For there were never wanting some flowers from garden and field to sweeten my room. The kind people with whom I lived finding that I was fond of flowers, supplied me abundantly with bouquets of such marvellous beauty, that to look at them and to breathe their fragrant odours gave me a lively pleasure, even now the recollection produces a gentle emotion, like the remembrance of some happy childhood's Christmas, or some moonlight walk in spring time, when the heart has just learned what love is. The wild flowers I gathered myself, and that I did so much astonished my host and his family. They thought it decidedly eccentric to gather wild flowers, put them into water, and look at them with pleasure, as if they had been garden roses or orange blossoms.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.