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Travels and adventures in Egypt, Arabia and Persia

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London [u.a.], [1875]

Chapter XXV. Visit to the Public Institutions

CHAPTER XXV.

VISIT TO THE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.

I take leave of the Pasha—A Pleasant Interview—A Suggestion to President Grant—Euphrates Valley Railway—Invited to Visit the Public Institutions—The Pasha's Barge—Arsenal and Machine Shops—The New Steamers—The "Tale of a Traveler"—The Military Hospital—An Accomplished Turk—The Palace—Beautiful Horses—The Industrial School—Midhut Pasha—A Wise and Honest Ruler—No "Story with a Moral," but something better substituted—Cheers for America—The Printing Office—A Newspaper in Turkish and Arabic—An Official Organ without Politics—Suspension Bridge Wanted—A Chance for American Engineers The Barracks—Hope in the Future for Young Bagdad.



FEW days after my return from Babylon I called at the palace to thank the Pasha for his kindness and attention, and to take leave of his Excellency, as I expected soon to start on my return to Europe. I was received as before, with much politeness, and when I told him of some of my adventures in search of the ruins, leaving out, of course, all mention of Bass' ale and moonlight flitting, he expressed the hope that I should come again next year and complete my explorations. He said that the *cordon sanitaire* was now extended entirely around the city, three miles outside the walls, and orders had

been issued to shoot every man that attempted to cross the line. But the increasing heat of the weather he thought would soon check the spread of the plague, although its effect would be the opposite in case of cholera.

He hoped President Grant would send a diplomatic or consular representative to Bagdad; but I reminded him of how few Americans had ever found their way to Turkish Arabia, and that at present we have no commercial intercourse with this country. He then unrolled a map and pointed out to me the line of the Euphrates Valley Railway, already commenced, from the port of Alexandretta on the Mediterranean to Aleppo, and thence to a point on the Euphrates eight hundred miles from Bagdad. This road when completed will be about one hundred and fifty miles long, and will open a new route by railway and river from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, and thence to India. The Pasha pointed through the open windows to the government machine shops on the opposite side of the Tigris, where he is building two iron steamers for the navigation of the upper Euphrates, and asked if I would like to inspect them, as well as the Arsenal, Military Hospital, Palace and other public buildings. I was most happy to accept his invitation, and taking my leave, he accompanied me to the door, an especial mark of honor, and told his *aide-de-camp*, the young Turkish officer whom I had before met, to take me round in his own barge. These attentions were quite unexpected by me, and were doubtless the result of the credentials sent to me from Constantinople. They were very gratifying, not so much from the *prestige* they gave me, as from the opportunity they afforded to see everything of interest to a stranger, and to obtain the information I was seeking as to the country, the people, and their institutions.

The Pasha's barge was moored at the garden steps on

the river in front of the palace. It was an elegant affair, manned by eight oarsmen, the cushioned seats protected from the sun by a scarlet awning on which were embroidered the "Star and Crescent."

Mr. Stanno accompanied us as interpreter, and we were first rowed across the river to visit the arsenal, machine-shops and foundry. Here about sixty men are employed under the charge of an English engineer. The machinery is all imported from Europe, but the workmen are natives, and seem skillful and intelligent. Some pieces of work were shown me by the superintendent, which to my inexperienced eye would be creditable to any workshop in Europe. I examined with much interest the two iron steamers pointed out by the Pasha, which were built on the Clyde, sent out in pieces, put together here, and are now nearly ready to launch. They are one hundred and ten feet long, flat-bottomed, covered with thin steel plates, furnished with powerful engines, and are expected to draw when loaded but one foot of water. They are intended to ply on the upper Euphrates, where the river during the dry season is very shallow and rapid.

Being an American I was supposed to know something about river navigation, and both the Englishman and the Turk expressed great astonishment when I told them that we have steamers in America, which, it is said, can go anywhere, if there is *only a heavy dew*. As I was careful to explain that I could not vouch for the literal truth of this statement, I trust they will not repeat it except as one of the "tales of a traveler."

We were then rowed a short distance up the river to the military hospital, a large, handsome building, where I was introduced to the surgeon in charge. He conducted me through the wards, where there are one hundred and eighty patients, all soldiers, in various stages of convales-

cence. The rooms are lofty and well ventilated, the cots neat and clean, and the whole management as systematic and well conducted as in any European institution of the kind. I was shown through the dispensary, bath houses, and well shaded grounds, and then to the private offices of the superintendent, where cigarettes, coffee and sherbet awaited us. The Doctor spoke excellent French, but to my surprise informed me that he was a native Turk, born and educated for his profession in Constantinople.

Taking leave of the polite and accomplished surgeon, my conductors next took me to the Pasha's palace, about two miles up the river, on the eastern bank, beyond the city walls. It is an elegant modern villa, surrounded by a garden handsomely laid out in European style. It was built four years ago for the especial use of the Shah of Persia, on the occasion of his visit to Bagdad. It is now unoccupied, but is being put in readiness for the Pasha's family, or harem, who are soon expected from Constantinople. The apartments are furnished with the greatest luxury, and regardless of expense. Elegant crystal chandeliers, French furniture and *bijouterie*, soft Persian carpets and silken hangings seemed to make it a palace worthy of the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid, in the palmy days of Bagdad. In the garden was the most beautiful tent I ever saw. It was made of alternate stripes of blue and crimson silk, and above it floated the flag of the Pasha. In the stables were a score of the finest Arab horses, several of which were brought out for our inspection. I am not especially a horse fancier, but I thought if the Pasha, with all his kindness, would only ask me to select, as a souvenir of Bagdad, one of those beautiful animals, so intelligent, docile and graceful in every motion, I should be extremely grateful, and fully appreciate the present.

It was very fortunate for me that the harem had not

arrived, for then the palace and grounds will be tabooed to all male visitors.

As we passed out through the gates of the palace the guard presented arms, and entering the boat I was next taken to an institution by far more interesting than any I had visited. It is an "industrial school" for orphan boys. The superintendent, whose benignant face and white beard suggested his fitness for the position, received us with great courtesy, and conducted us through the building. Here are eighty boys from ten to fifteen years old, dressed in a neat gray uniform, and as bright, intelligent looking lads as any country can boast. Some were weaving different fabrics of silk and cotton on hand looms, others making shoes and sewing garments, while about a dozen were setting type in an adjoining building. The manufactured articles were shown me, and they certainly were creditable to the industry and mechanical skill of the boys.

In one of the school-rooms a class was receiving instruction in the elements of geometry from a teacher, formerly one of the pupils, which he illustrated on a blackboard. We were shown through the dining room, dormitories, and hospital, where the clean white cots were without an occupant. Our visit was unexpected, and we saw everything in its ordinary working condition. In reply to my inquiry as to how he enforced discipline, he said that he very rarely was obliged to resort to corporeal punishment, but "boys will be boys" all the world over, and he took me to a cell-like chamber where a bright eyed little fellow was being punished for some breach of discipline, by being made to stand upon a barrel in the middle of the room.

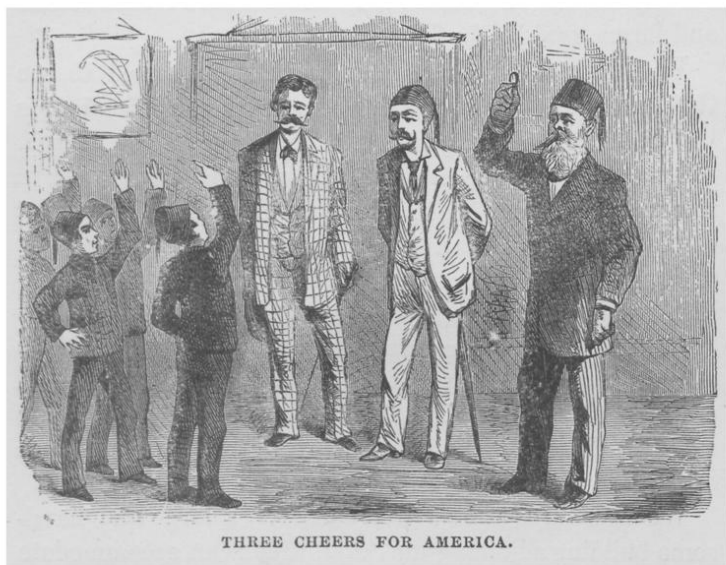
This charitable institution, as well as the hospital which I had before visited, was founded by Midhut Pasha, the predecessor of the present ruler. To this enlightened and intelligent governor, Bagdad is indebted for nearly all the

benevolent institutions and public enterprises of which it can boast. He built a tramway, or street railroad, to Kasmaine, six miles up the river, and a great resort of pilgrims, encouraged steam navigation on the Tigris and Euphrates, and built the military barracks, by far the finest buildings in the city. He was very popular with both natives and foreign residents. But the home government was displeased at his spending the money instead of remitting it to Constantinople, and perhaps was alarmed at his increasing popularity. He was superseded, and carried away with him the regrets and good will of all his people ; but was so poor that he was obliged to borrow money to pay his expenses home. This last fact was an evidence of honesty almost without a precedent, for a Pasha is expected to retire immensely rich. On the wall of the superintendent's office, to which I was invited for coffee, etc., was hanging an engraving of Midhut Pasha, and my attention was called to it with every mark of respect.

Before we left, the boys were collected in the large room, and the superintendent introduced me to them as the first American who had ever visited the institution. I was so much gratified at what I had seen that I longed once more to be able to speak Arabic or Turkish, that I might tell the boys something about my own country. I do not suppose that even the teachers had very definite ideas of America ; and the lads before me probably knew less about our land, its institutions and history, than an American school-boy does about the Hottentots. I did not care to make them a speech, or give them a lesson in geography ; but it is not often in one's life that he can have an attentive audience of bright, intelligent lads, not one of whom has ever heard of Washington and his little hatchet, or of Franklin munching his roll through the streets of Philadelphia. What an opportunity was lost, to be sure ! But

it occurred to me that the present of a gold *lirah*, as a prize for the best boy at the next examination, would be quite as acceptable, and perhaps do more good, than a "story with a moral."

It was no affectation in the superintendent to say that he was "taken by surprise," and he accepted it in behalf of the boys with many thanks. Holding up the coin, he explained the matter to the lads, and the scene that followed I shall not soon forget. Instantly every boy rose to his feet and three ringing cheers for America echoed through



the building. Far more gratifying it was to me than if the cheers had come from a whole regiment of Turkish soldiers. If this little story has a moral, I respectfully commend it to the visitors of similar institutions at home.

Adjoining the industrial school is the government printing office, the next object of our visit. I had never suspected that such an institution existed in Bagdad.

Here I found a steam-power press with the capacity of thirty-five hundred impressions an hour, besides several hand presses and a machine for cutting and folding envelopes. All the type-setting and light work is done by the boys from the industrial school. Everything looked neat and orderly, and it seemed in every respect a well managed establishment. They were working off an edition of a weekly paper, printed on one side in Turkish and on the other in Arabic. Besides the newspaper, which being an official institution, is probably neither republican nor democratic in politics, they execute here all the blanks and forms used by the Pasha's government.

While crossing the river Mr. Stanno mentioned to me that among the projects of the present ruler of Bagdad, is the building of a suspension bridge across the Tigris. They are obliged for two or three months every year to remove the present floating bridges, to prevent their being carried away by the rapid current. I surprised him by saying that the greatest number, as well as longest suspension bridges in the world were in America. He earnestly requested that on my return home I would put the Pasha's government in communication with some of our most eminent engineers. The feeling here is very favorable towards our countrymen, and I have no doubt there is an opening in this matter for American science and skill.

We afterwards visited the barracks, a large and handsome building adjoining the Serai, which can accommodate several thousand troops. The bakery of this establishment is on a most extensive scale, and is fitted up with machinery which to me was quite novel. Bread in this country is a much more important article of diet with all classes than in western lands.

Having finished our tour of inspection, I said good-bye to my polite escort with a much better impression of the

civilization of Bagdad than I had ever before conceived of. Who will say that there is no hope of future progress among a people where an hospital, an orphan asylum and a printing office have been established, and are in successful operation ! And who would expect to find these evidences of refinement and civilization in a city which is only associated in the minds of Europeans, as well as Americans with the barbaric splendor of the Caliphs in the time of the “ Arabian Nights ! ”

