

Théophile Gautier

Constantinople (1852)

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The Galata Bridge, Constantinople
Hermann David Salomon Corrodi (Italian, 1844-1905)
[Artvee](#)

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Part I: Malta, Syra, Smyrna, The Troad, The Dardanelles

Translator's Introduction

Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) was born in Tarbes, in the Hautes-Pyrénées region of south-west France, his family moving to Paris in 1814. He was a friend, at school, of the poet Gérard de Nerval, who introduced him to Victor Hugo. Gautier contributed to various journals, including *La Presse*, throughout his life, which offered opportunities for travel in Spain, Algeria, Italy, Russia, and Egypt. He was a devotee of the ballet, writing a number of scenarios including that of *Giselle*. At the time of the 1848 Revolution, he expressed strong support for the ideals of the second Republic, a support which he maintained for the rest of his life.

A successor to the first wave of Romantic writers, including Chateaubriand and Lamartine, he directed the *Revue de Paris* from 1851 to 1856, worked as a journalist for *La Presse* and *Le Moniteur universel*, and in 1856 became editor of *L'Artiste*, in which he published numerous editorials asserting his doctrine of 'Art for art's sake'. Saint-Beuve secured him critical acclaim; he became chairman of the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts* in 1862, and in 1868 was granted the sinecure of librarian to Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, a cousin of Napoleon III, having been introduced to her salon.

Gautier remained in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and the aftermath of the 1871 Commune, dying of heart disease at the age of sixty-one in 1872.

Though ostensibly a Romantic poet, Gautier may be seen as a forerunner to, or point of reference for, a number of divergent poetic movements including Symbolism and Modernism.

In June of 1852, Gautier travelled to Constantinople, where his common-law wife Ernesta Grisi, an opera singer, and the sister of Carlotta Grisi, the ballet-dancer, was on tour. Estelle, the younger daughter of Theophile and Ernesta, who was four years old, was also there with her mother. It was not the happiest of sojourns, the tour went badly, and Gautier was in financial difficulty. His guide to the city was Oscar Marinitsch, a French-speaking Levantine who had previously accompanied Flaubert and Maxime Du Camp in their travels in the Levant in 1850. Gautier, Ernesta and Estelle returned to France, via Athens and Venice, at the end of September.

This enhanced translation has been designed to offer maximum compatibility with current search engines. Among other modifications, the proper names of people and places, and the titles given to works of art, have been fully researched, modernised, and expanded; comments in parentheses have been added here and there to provide a reference, or clarify meaning; and minor typographic or factual errors, for example incorrect attributions and dates, in the original text, have been eliminated from this new translation.



Map of the Mediterranean, and Turkish Empire

Chapter 1: At Sea

Those who have drunk, will drink more,' the proverb declares. One could slightly modify the formula, and say with no less accuracy: 'Those who have travelled, will travel more.' The thirst for seeing, like the former, is irritated not quenched by being indulged. Here I am in Constantinople, and already I dream of Cairo and Egypt. My visits to Spain, Italy, North Africa, England, Belgium, Holland, parts of Germany and Switzerland, the Greek isles, and to sundry *Scales* (*ports where the French had trading privileges*) on the coast of Asia-Minor, at several times and on various occasions, have only increased my desire for cosmopolitan vagabondage. Travel may prove a dangerous element in our life, since it disturbs us deeply and, if some circumstance or duty prevents our departure, stirs an anxiety similar to that of caged birds when the time for migration arrives. We know we are about to expose ourselves to fatigue, privation, trouble, even peril; it pains us to renounce dearly-loved habits of mind and heart, to leave our family, our friends, our relations for the unknown, and yet we feel that it is impossible to stay, while those who love us refrain from detaining us, and silently shake our hand on the steps of the carriage. Indeed, should we not travel a little on this planet, as it orbits through the immensity of space, until the mysterious author of all transports us to some new world so that we might read another page of his infinite work? Is it not culpable laziness to re-read the same sentences without ever turning the page? What poet would be satisfied to see the reader repeat only a single one of his stanzas? So, every year, unless I am nailed to the spot by the most pressing necessity, I traverse some country in this vast world that seems lessened to me as I travel through it, as it emerges from the vague cosmography of the imagination. Without visiting the Holy Sepulchre specifically, or Santiago de Compostela, or Mecca, I nonetheless

make a pious pilgrimage to those places on earth whose beauty renders divinity more visible; on this occasion I will view Turkey, Greece, and a little of that Hellenic Asia where beauty of form unites with Oriental splendour. But let me end this short preface here (the shorter the better), and set out without further delay.

Were I Chinese or Indian, and had just arrived from Nanking or Calcutta, I would describe with care and prolixity the road from Paris to Marseille, the railway to Châlons, the Saône, the Rhone, and Avignon, but you know them as well as I do, and besides, to view a country, one must be a foreigner: contrast offers material for a writer. Who, of the French, would note that in France men give women their arm, a peculiarity which astonishes an inhabitant of the Celestial Empire? Suppose then, that with scarcely a transition, I am in Marseille, and that the *Léonidas* is about to steam on its way to Constantinople (*Istanbul*). The South has already declared itself in its cheerful sun which warms the flagstones, and sets hundreds of exotic birds chirping in the cages displayed in the shop-windows of two traders in creatures: macaws rattle through their repertoire with delight, Bengali finches flap their wings, believing themselves at home; marmosets gambol lightly, scratch their armpits, gaze at you with well-nigh human eyes, and extend their little cool hands to you in a friendly manner through the bars, heedless as yet of the consumption that will make them cough beneath their cotton wool covers in cold Parisian salons; even dull tortoises have no difficulty reviving in the invigorating rays; in a mere forty hours I have passed from torrential rain to a sky of the purest blue. I have left winter behind, and embraced a summer ardent and splendid; I wish for an ice-cream; the idea would have made me shiver the day before yesterday on the Boulevard de Gand (*Boulevard des Italiens, Paris*); I enter the Café Turc (*on the corner of La Cannebière and Rue Beauvau, Marseille, opened in 1850*). I owe it to myself, since I am leaving for Constantinople; a very beautiful café, indeed. However, I would not mention it, despite its luxurious mirrors, gilding, columns and arches, were it not for a charming room on the mezzanine floor, decorated exclusively with paintings by artists from Marseille: it is a most curious and interesting local museum. The woodwork is divided into panels representing various subjects according to the painter's fancy. Émile Loubon, whose landscapes dusted with sunlight and depicting vast herds traversing pumice-stone terrain, were admired in Paris, has painted his masterpiece here, and what a masterpiece; a *Descent of Buffaloes* through a ravine on the outskirts of some city in Africa. The light burns the white earth on which are projected the blue deformed shadows of the foreshortened cattle, who follow the slope, knock-kneed hips swaying, raising their shiny slobbering muzzles to sniff the torrid air; the latecomers urged on by the goad of a haggard, savage and swarthy shepherd. In the background, the chalk-white walls of a city, against an indigo sky, form the horizon. It is strong, free, and open. Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps could do no better. Germain-Fabius Brest, who exhibited a beautiful forest scene at the Salon two years ago, has painted a pair of landscapes charming in their use of colour, delightful products of the imagination: the one, shows a pond, in the midst of a grove of exotic trees reflected in its slumbering waters, on the edge of which are stationed, on their slim legs, phoenicoptera with pink wings (*red-winged Pytilia*), watching for the passage of a fish or a frog. The other, a path through parkland with an architectural foreground, a flight of steps with columns and balustrades, down which ladies and lords descend, awaited by horses held by servants. To highlight the name of the café, Eugène Lagier has represented a Turk taking a *kief* (*resting*)

after smoking opium or hashish, and gazing at a crowd of houris, in a bluish mist, who are infinitely more seductive than those of Henri-Frédéric Schopin's *Paradise of Mahomet*. There is also a kind of *Oriental Conversation*, by François Reynaud, the figures in bright, capricious costumes, which is set in front of a white wall half draped in a mantle of greenery and flowers in superb tones, and seascapes by an artist whose name unfortunately escapes me at this instant, but which are most remarkable and could well hang beside those of Jean-Baptiste Isabey, Henri Durand-Brager, Théodore Gudin and Wilhelm Melby. His name, which eluded me while writing the previous line I now recall, by one of those inexplicable oddities of memory; it is Landais (*Paul-Louis Bouillon Landais*), such is that skilled painter called. I must not not forget two landscapes by Jules-Édouard Magy, solidly drawn and robust in tone, interspersed with animals the like of which Filippo Palizzi would not disavow. It would be desirable if the paintings in this Marseille gallery, lost in the depths of a café, were lithographed and the results published. This example of artful and intelligent decoration should be followed in Paris, where stupidly luxurious mirrors, gilding, and fabrics, are somewhat overdone.

You have doubtless read Joseph Méry's witty comments regarding Marseille's sad deterioration and the pitiful state of its fountains, that by means of their architecture seek to make one forget their lack of water. The work of diverting the Durance is finished, and each country-house now boasts a basin and a fountain. There are some which extend their conceit to the point of displaying a waterfall. Marseille will soon be surrounded by a host of miniature parks like those of Versailles, Marly and Saint-Cloud; before long, I fear, this magnificent terrain scorched with light, these beautiful rocks the colour of cork or toast, will be covered with vegetation, and a mass of spinach-green, the joy of owners and the terror of landscapers, will make this sparkling aridity disappear.

The anchor is raised; the paddle-wheels strike the water; we are free of the port; we are voyaging along steep, bare, crumbling coasts, similar to those on the far side of the Mediterranean. Has any other traveller noted that Marseille and its environs seem much more 'of the South' than their latitude would appear to suggest. They possess an air of African harshness, seem as hot as Algeria, and the physiognomy of the South is outlined here in a violent manner. Countries situated two or three hundred leagues further south often have a more northerly appearance. These rocks, scored with ravines, whose base plunges into a sea of the darkest blue, sometimes open to allow a glimpse of a distant city surrounded by bastides (*fortified towns*) which speckle the countryside with a myriad of white dots.

Here and there, we encounter ships with billowing sails, heading towards the port, at which they hope to arrive before nightfall; then all is solitude, the coast vanishes into the distance, the swell of the open sea is apparent; nothing can be seen but sky and water. A few light whitecaps flake the blue pastures of the sea. An ancient poet might have beheld Proteus (*a shape-shifting sea god in Greek mythology*) herding his flocks there. The sun, unaccompanied by clouds, sinks in the west like a red cannonball, seeming to emit steam as it enters the water. Night falls, without a moon; a salty dew falls on the deck and penetrates clothes with its acrid humidity; cigars slowly turn to ashes, sucked at by lips to which nausea rises at the first slight pitching of the vessel. The passengers retire one by one to accommodate themselves as best they can in the drawers that serve them as beds. Though rocked by the waves more steadily than a child

ever was by his nurse, one sleeps no better for it, while one experiences extravagant dreams interrupted by the ship's bell which strikes the hour, and marks the quarters, for the crew.

At dawn we are on our feet; nothing to see yet but the circle, seven or eight miles in diameter, of which the ship is the centre, which moves with it, and which we consent to call the vast deep, and designate as an image of infinity, I know not why, as the horizon one views from the summit of the smallest tower, or the most commonplace mountain is a hundred times vaster.

It is plain daylight, and to the left the captain points out an island, which is Corsica. I can see, even with binoculars, nothing but a light mist barely discernible against the pale hue of the morning sky. The captain is right. The boat advances: the greyish vapour condenses, hardens; mountains undulate, highlighted in places, yellow touches mark the bare escarpments, blackish patches, forests, and rocks covered with vegetation. Over there to the north, towards that headland, must be Isola Rossa; further on, that chalky whiteness which merges with the land, is Ajaccio. But we pass too far offshore to discern any details, which annoys me greatly. Thus, we rub shoulders all day long but at a distance with that wild and vigorous Corsica, possessed of its poetically ferocious customs and eternal vendettas, which progress will soon render similar to a suburb of Paris, Pantin perhaps or Batignolles. - This would perhaps be the moment to pen a brilliant piece on Napoleon; but I prefer to avoid that ready commonplace, and limit myself to remarking, in passing, the influence that islands had on the destiny of the hero, already almost a man of fable whose legend we see forming before our eyes: an island bears him; fallen from grace, he quits an island, and dies on an island, slain by an island; he rises from the sea, and plunges back into it once more. What myth will the future found on this, when the fleeting reality has vanished, yielding the eternal poem? But we pass the Seven Monks (*the Lavezzi Isles*), a line of rocky reefs with the appearance of hooded Capuchins; we approach the narrow passage which separates Corsica from Sardinia on the Bonifaccio side.

'Greece, we know too well, Sardinia, we ignore.'

(See Victor Hugo's *Les Feuilles d'Automne*: XXVII)

An extremely narrow channel divides the two islands, which must have been one before some diluvian cataclysm and volcanic upheaval parted them; the shore of each is distinctly visible: the hills are mountainous and quite steep, but lacking in character; a few scattered houses with yellow walls and tiled roofs dot the shore, which otherwise seems that of a desert island, since no trace of cultivation can be seen; two or three boats with lateen sails flutter like seagulls from one coast to the other.

On the Sardinian side, the main curiosity of the place is pointed out to me, a bizarre aggregation of rocks on the summit of a hill, whose outline, in its angles and sinuosities, has the shape of a gigantic polar bear; I can distinguish, without feigning to, as is frequently necessary with these kinds of prodigies, the spine, legs, and elongated head of the creature: the

bearing, the stride, the colour, everything is there. As we approach, the profile is lost, shapes merge or present themselves unfavourably to the eye. The bear turns to a rock again. The passage is traversed. We will follow the entire length of the Sardinian coast that faces Italy, as during the day we have skirted the coast of Corsica facing France. Unfortunately, night is falling, and we will be deprived of the spectacle; Sardinia will pass by like a dream in the shadows. I know of nothing in the world more annoying than to traverse at night a scene one has long desired to view. These misadventures happen frequently, now that the traveller is only an appendage to the journey, and human beings are subjected like inert objects to their means of transport.

On waking, the empty sea is a harsh blue, making the sky seem pale. A few porpoises play in the wake of the ship, swimming with a speed that outstrips the steamboat and seems to defy it; they chase each other, leap above one another, and pass amidst the prow's foam, then linger behind and vanish after performing a few somersaults. - To starboard of the ship, at some distance, an enormous creature of leaden colour appears, armed with a dorsal fin blackish and pointed like a needle. It dives and fails to reappear: such are, with the distant sight of three or four sails pursuing their route in various directions, the only events of the day. The weather is quite cool; the jib and foremast sails are hoisted, which accelerate our progress by a few knots. In the evening, the island of Maretimo is sighted, off one of the points of that island which the ancients named Trinacria, from its shape, and which is now called Sicily. We shall pass, in the dark once more, this ancient and picturesque shore, and tomorrow, in daylight, will reach Malta.

At around two in the afternoon, below a band of striped cloud, I discern a slightly opaquer streak; it is the island of Gozo. Soon the silhouette is more clearly defined. Huge sheer cliffs, at the foot of which the sea boils tumultuously, rise from the depths of the water, like the summit of a mountain drowned at its base; it is said that these great white rocks can be followed with the eye for several hundred feet beneath the transparent azure by which they are bathed, which produces a somewhat fearful effect for those who skim them in a frail boat, like to hanging above an abyss. Along these escarpments like the walls of a fortress, fishermen suspended from ropes, in the manner of Italians whitewashing their houses, cast their lines, and take their catch. The breaking of a rope, a badly-tied knot, would send them plunging to the bed of the sea. - We advance; slightly less abrupt undulations allow a degree of cultivation: small stone walls, which from a distance look like lines drawn in ink on a topographical map, enclose and separate the fields; the clouds have vanished; a beautiful warm glow gilds the land with a mantle of gold. A pile of white Spanish loaves, a few with rounded domes, beneath a blinding sun, powder the top of a hill or rather a mountain. This is Rabat (*Victoria*), the island's capital. The main curiosities of Gozo are the caves in the sea-cliffs, round the entrances to which swirl clouds of aquatic birds that nest there; a reef, on which grows a particular species of highly esteemed mushrooms, the monopoly over which the Knights of Malta held; and the Saltworks of the Clockmaker, a bizarre hydraulic phenomenon, of which the following is a brief explanation. A Maltese clockmaker (*Stiefnu l-Arloggier*), having had the idea of creating a saltworks near Żebbuġ, where he owned land close to the shore, had the rock dug out to evaporate the salt water; but the sea, undermining the works, leapt from this well like a waterspout, or like one of those Icelandic geysers, to a height of more than sixty feet, and nearly

drowned all the fields about. The opening was stoppered with great difficulty, and from time to time this marine volcano tries to erupt. I have not seen the Clockmaker's Saltworks. I am simply relating what I have been told.

Gozo and Malta are separated in the same manner as Corsica and Sardinia; a narrow channel parts them, and in primitive times they too must have formed a single island. The aspect of the coast of Malta is similar to that of Gozo: evidently a continuation of the same rock, and the same terrain, the geological stratifications continuing from one island to the other.

The weather is greatly altered since yesterday; the sky acquiring ultramarine tones. The burning breath of neighbouring Africa is apparent. Malta produces oranges; the Indian fig tree and the aloe thrive there; I can see the fortifications of the city of Valetta, marked by two windmills each in the form of a tower with eight sails forming a circle, an odd arrangement common to the whole of the Orient, and it would be worth Charles Hogue, our Raphael of windmills, making a special trip here, so original are the sails, like the spokes of a rimless wheel. The water turns from blue to green as it approaches the land; we round Dragut Point (*Tigné Point*). The steamboat makes a half-turn and enters the port's narrows, passing Fort St. Elmo and Fort Ricasoli.

The fortifications, with their precise angles and sharp edges, lit by a splendid sun, stand out almost geometrically between the dark blue of the sky, and the raw green of the sea. The smallest details of the shore stand out clearly: to the left rises an obelisk in memory of Captain Sir Robert Cavendish Spencer, and the spires of Città Vittoriosa (*Burgo*) and the town of Senglea, stand forth; to the right, the city of Valetta is arranged in tiers like an amphitheatre; the port, which bears the local name of Marse, extends into the land as a bifurcated notch like the northern end of the Red Sea; English vessels, Sardinian, Neapolitan, Greek, ships of all nations, are at anchor at various distances from the shore, according to their draught. On the quay, on the side of the Valetta citadel, one can distinguish English soldiers in their obligatory red coats and white trousers, and a few carts with large scarlet wheels, recalling the ancient *corricoli* (*two-wheeled carriages with giant wheels*) of Naples; all this standing forth against walls of a dazzling whiteness. Though their siting is different, there is in this spread of fortifications, in these British faces mingled with the southern, something that makes one think of Gibraltar; the idea presents itself naturally to all those who have seen the two English possessions, the two keys which open and close the Mediterranean.

We have been seen from shore. A flotilla of little boats heads at full speed towards the steamer; we are surrounded, hemmed in, invaded, a peaceful boarding of sorts takes place; the deck is covered in a moment with a crowd of varied rascals squawking, shouting, yelling, chattering in all sorts of languages and dialects; one would think one was at Babel on the day its builders dispersed. Not knowing to what nation you belong, these comical polyglots try English, Italian, French, Greek, even Turkish, until they have found an idiom in which you can say to them intelligibly: 'You're smothering me! To the Devil with you all!' Domestics and hotel waiters pursue you, harass you, nigh-on assassinate you with their offers of service. They stuff cards into your hands, into your waistcoat, trouser pockets, overcoat pockets, into the brim of your hat; the boatmen drag you right and left, by the arm, the collar of your overcoat, the tail of your frock-coat, almost tearing you apart, a detail about which they care little; they

quarrel, and fight over you, vociferating, gesticulating, stamping their feet, struggling like the possessed; but, to be brief, though bruised till as good as dead, no one dies, and this scene of tumult could be titled, like Shakespeare's play: 'Much Ado About Nothing.' The din dies down, the passengers are distributed around in several lots, and each boatman seizes his prey. The boatmen and local domestics are joined by the cigar-merchants, who offer you enormous packs at fabulously low prices: in truth, their cigars are execrable.

I noticed among this motley crowd some rather characteristic types. Brown heads with short glossy black curling hair, and fleshy mouths and sparkling eyes of almost African type on faces essentially Greek, presented themselves frequently, and seemed to me to belong specifically to the Maltese. These heads implanted on necks with visible tendons and solid chests have not been reproduced yet by artists, and would provide fresh models. As for the mode of dress, it is of the simplest: canvas trousers tightened at the hips by a woollen belt, a puffed-out shirt, a red cap tilted over the ear, and neither stockings nor shoes.

While the passengers, in a hurry to disembark, were crowding the ladder, I gazed at the boats gathered beside the ship like little fish around a whale, noting their peculiarities of construction and ornamentation. Intended for the service of the port, where the water is usually calm, these boats lack a rudder; prow and stern are marked by a raised portion resembling the beak of a Venetian gondola to which they have not yet added that key-shaped piece of serrated iron like a violin's neck; each side of the prow is a crudely-painted open eye, as on the boats of Cadiz and Puerto Real; beside each eye, a hand, extending a pointing finger, seems to indicate the course. Is it a symbol of vigilance, a safeguard against the *jettatura*, the evil eye? I cannot say exactly; but those eyes thus placed give the boats the vague appearance of fish skimming in a strange manner over the surface of the water. On the back of the prow are painted the arms of England, with the lion and the unicorn, their heraldic supporters, in raw and violent colours, or else a fierce hussar rears an impossible horse, like some fantastic creation of a designer of stained glass. The more modest boats are content with a large but simple pot of flowers.

The crowd thins; I descend into a boat, am rowed ashore, and pass beneath a rather dark portal. A stepped street presents itself to me: I climb, at random, according to my custom of wandering about without a guide in towns previously unknown to me, given a certain instinct for topography which rarely deceives me, and, after a few zigzags, I emerge on Government Square (*St. George Square*), at the moment when the English are about to sound the retreat.

This ritual deserves particular description: the players on side-drums, bass-drum, and fife, line up silently at one end of the square; I have no desire to ridicule the English army, but I suspect the music of having been borrowed from some Cremona organ: at a sign from the band-leader, the drummers raise their sticks, the bass-drummer his beater, the fifer his instrument, but with movements so dry, so mechanical, so controlled, that they seem produced by springs not muscles. Eight white trouser-legs rise and fall in regular rhythm, and a wild discordant hurricane is unleashed.

The bass-drum grunts like an angry bear, the side-drums sound with a crack, and the fife, having attained an impossible pitch, emits extravagant trills; but the musicians, nonetheless, despite all this fury, hold themselves motionless and inert, frozen figures of northern ice whom

the southerly breeze has been unable to melt. Reaching the far end of the square, they turn abruptly and retrace their path, raising the same hullabaloo. - You have doubtless seen those German toys equipped with a handle which plucks a brass wire in a hollow quill and causes a Prussian soldier to emerge from a sentry box to the sound of a shrill little tune; the soldier advances on a slide to the end of the box, turns about and returns to his starting point. Quadruple the number of German toys, and you will have an exact idea of the English 'retreat'. I would never have believed men could imitate painted wood so precisely. It is a perfect triumph of discipline.

As I descend towards the sea once more, I see through the door of a church the glow of blazing candles. I enter. Hangings of red damask, trimmed with gold, envelop the pillars. On the altar, plated with silver, filigree and rhinestone suns glitter. A handful of lamps cast a mysterious half-light over the side chapels. In front of a gilded Madonna are hung *ex-votos* of wax and silver; fierce paintings, in the style of Espagnolet (*Jusepe de Ribera, Lo Spagnoletto*) or Caravaggio, can be vaguely discerned in the candlelight; I feel as if I am in a church in Spain, amidst an atmosphere of convinced and fervent Catholicism.

Little boys, crouched in a row on wooden benches, are gutturally chanting a hymn whose tone is set by an old priest. I retire, more edified by their intent than by the music. Night has fallen, fully. Lanterns shine at the corners of the streets in front of the images of Madonnas and saints. The shops of food merchants and refreshment-sellers are lit by night-lights which shimmer amidst the verdure of the stalls like glow-worms in the grass. Women clad in the *faldetta* (*a combined hood and cape*) ascend and descend the stepped streets, mysteriously skimming the walls, like bats in the seductive twilight. I believe, my goodness, I have just now heard the copper discs of a tambourine quiver; a practiced hand taps the belly of a guitar, brushing the strings with a thumb. - Am I in Malta (an English possession), or in Granada, in the Antequerula quarter? It is a long time since I heard this strumming in the open street, and I was beginning to believe, despite the memory of my three voyages to Spain, that it only occurs in romantic vignettes. My heart feels a few years younger, and I board my boat to return to the *Léonidas*, humming as well as I am able the motif I heard. Tomorrow I will return to see, by the pure light of day, what I have unravelled in the shadows of evening, and I will attempt to give you some idea of the city of Valetta, this seat of the Order of Malta, which played such a brilliant role in history, and which has vanished, like all institutions which no longer serve a purpose, however glorious their past may have been.

Chapter 2: Malta

I have found, once more, in Malta, that beautiful Spanish light, of which even Italy, with its much-vaunted skies, offers only a pale reflection. It is truly bright here, not some more or less pale twilight granted the name of day as in northern climates. The boat drops me at the quay, and I enter the city of Valetta by the Lascaris-Gate, as the inscription written above the archway says. The Greek name and English word, welded together by a hyphen, create an odd effect.

The whole destiny of Malta is in those two words; beneath the arch, in the passage, as in the Gate of Justice in Granada, behind a grille, there is a chapel to the Virgin at the rear of which a night light flickers, and whose threshold is obstructed by beggars, who, given the splendour of their rags, would not be out of place among the beggars of the Albaicin; the sun in hot countries gilds and scorches them as desired for the painters' palette. Through this gate, a motley and cosmopolitan crowd comes and goes; Tunisians, Arabs, Greeks, Turks, Smyrniots, Levantines of every port in their national costume, not to mention the Maltese, English, and Europeans of various countries.

A tall North African, his only clothing a woollen blanket in which he has draped himself majestically, elbows a young English woman dressed as correctly and strictly in the British manner as if she were treading the green grass of Hyde Park or the pavements of Piccadilly; he looks so calm, so sure of himself in his filthy cloak, that he would not wish to change it, I am sure, for the brand new tailcoat of some dandy from the Boulevard de Gand (*Boulevard des Italiens*) in Paris. The Orientals, even of the lower classes, have a surprising natural dignity; Turks pass by whose entire rags are not worth a sou, but who might be taken for princes in disguise. This aristocratic air their religion endows, causing them to look upon others as dogs: red-painted carts cut through the crowd, crossing paths with strange carriages whose wheels are set far back from the body which projects forward, somehow recalling through the arrangement of the whole, those Louis XIV carriages in Adam Frans van der Meulen's landscapes. I believe this type of carriage is unique to Malta, not having seen it elsewhere. Their circulation is, moreover, restricted to a few main streets, the others being formed of steps or steep ramps.

The Lascaris Gate opens on a very lively, very animated market, its booths and huts displaying strings of onions, sacks of chickpeas, heaps of tomatoes and cucumbers, bundles of peppers, baskets of red fruit, and all sorts of edible goods picturesquely displayed and adding a deal of local colour. A beautiful fountain with a marble basin surmounted by a large bronze Neptune leaning on a trident, in a cavalier and rococo pose, produces a charming effect in the midst of these shops. Among the cafés, café-bars, and eateries, one comes across an English tavern here and there, its signs advertising single and double porter, Old Scots ale, East India pale ale, gin, whisky, brandy and other vitriolic mixtures for the use of the subjects of Great Britain, which contrast strangely with the lemonades, cherry syrups and iced drinks of the open-air sherbet-sellers. The policemen, armed with a short stick inscribed with the arms of England, tread, like those in London, at a regulated pace through this southern crowd, and ensure that order reigns there. Nothing is more sensible, doubtless; yet these cold and serious looking men, in every sense of the word proper and impassive representatives of the law, produce a singular effect between this luminous sky and this ardent earth. Their profile seems expressly wrought to loom from the mists of High Holborn or Temple Bar.

The city of Valletta, founded in 1566 by the Grand Master (*Jean Parisot de Valette*) from whom it takes its name, is the capital of Malta; the town of Senglea, and Città Vittoriosa (*Burgo*), which occupy two points of land on the other side of the port of Marse, with the suburbs of Floriana and Bormla (*Cospicua*), complete the city, which is surrounded by bastions, ramparts, counterscarps, fortresses and small forts such as to render any siege

impossible. At every step one takes, in following one of the streets which circumscribe the city such as the Strada Levante or the Strada Ponente, one finds oneself face to face with a cannon. Gibraltar itself bristles with no greater a number of guns. The disadvantage of these multiple works is that they embrace a wide radius and that a large garrison, something always difficult to maintain and renew far from the mother country, is needed to defend them in the event of attack.

From the summit of these ramparts one sees, as far as the eye can see, the blue and transparent waters, embossed with moiré patterns by the breeze, and dotted with white sails. Red-coated sentinels stand guard at a distance from one another; the heat of the sun is so strong on these glacis that a piece of canvas, stretched over a frame and able to be rotated about a pole, provides shade for each of the soldiers, who, without this precaution, would be roasted on the spot.

Mounting to the second gate, I encounter a church in the Jesuit and Rococo style, like those of Madrid, which offers little of interest within. This gate, reached by a drawbridge, is surmounted by the triumphal coat of arms of England, and its moat, transformed into a garden, is filled with luxuriant southern vegetation of a metallic and varnished green: lemon-trees, orange trees, fig-trees, myrtles, and cypresses, planted pell-mell in bushy and charming disorder. Above the enclosure, beyond the terraces of the houses, a series of white arches open onto the blue of the sky, and frame the promenade of the Piazza Regina, located at the top of the city, from which one enjoys a magnificent view.

The city of Valetta, though built to a regular plan, and all of a piece so to speak, is no less picturesque. The extreme slope of the land compensates for whatever feeling of monotony the precise layout of the streets might engender, and the city climbs the hill, by steps and degrees, which it covers like an amphitheatre. The houses, very tall, like those of Cadiz, so as to enjoy a view of the sea, end in terraces of *pozzolana* (*volcanic ash*). They are all built of this white stone of Malta, a kind of tuff very easily worked, and with which one can, without much expense, indulge one's caprices as regards sculpture and ornamentation. These rectilinear houses stand forth admirably and possess an air of strength and grandeur which they owe to the absence of roofs, cornices, and attics. They pierce the azure of the sky, at right angles, an azure which their whiteness renders more intense; but what grants them their most original character are the projecting balconies, applied to their facades like Arab *moucharabiehs* or Spanish *miradors*. These glass cages, decorated with flowers and shrubs, which resemble greenhouses projecting from the houses, rest on consoles and voluted modillions (*decorative brackets supporting the cornice*), denticulated battlements, twisted foliage, and ornamental chimeras of the most varied and fantastic design.

The balconies happily break the lines of the facades, and, seen from the end of the street, present the happiest of profiles; the shadows cast by their sturdy projections contrast fittingly with the light tone of the facades. The thin twigs of Algiers peas, the red stars of the geraniums, the porcelain flowers of the succulents which overflow from their open windows, enliven with their bright colours the blue and white local tones of the picture. It is in these *miradors* that the well-to-do women of Malta spend their lives, seeking the slightest breath of sea breeze, or slumped beneath the enervating influence of the sirocco. From the street one sees a white arm

leaning on a rail, or a gleam from the corner of an eye, its dark pupil shining, which pleasantly distracts you from your architectural contemplation. Maltese women, have had the good sense to preserve their national costume, at least in the street, a rare thing among women who are guided in their dress rather by fashion than by taste. This garment, called a *faldetta*, consists of a kind of hooded cloak of a particular cut, the opening of the hood widened or narrowed and held in shape by a small whalebone stick, according to whether the face is to be more or less visible.

The *faldetta* is uniformly black like a domino, all the advantages of which it possesses, plus a grace denied to those shapeless satin bags of the carnival babble in the Opéra foyer; one hides a cheek and an eye on the side occupied by the person by whom one wishes not to be seen, one throws the *faldetta* back, or raises it as far as one's nose, according to circumstance. It is as if a masked ball were transported to the open street. Under this hood of black taffeta, rather similar to the *thérèses* of our grandmothers, the women usually wear a pink or lilac dress with large flounces. As far as I can judge, whenever a propitious breath makes this mysterious veil flutter, the Maltese women are similar in type to Oriental women with large Arab eyes, pale complexions, and mostly aquiline noses. As I have found myself unable to view a complete face, but only the pupil of this, the nose of that, and the cheek of another, and not a single chin (except at the windows, in vertical foreshortening), because the *faldetta* covers them, I cannot make a definitive judgment, but deliver my observations for what they are worth.

Traveller's guides, and individual works on different countries, claim that the Maltese women are of a flirtatious disposition and possess susceptible hearts. I am no Don Juan with the power to assure myself of the truth of this assertion in a stay of only a few hours; but the houses have two or three stories of miradors, the women uniformly wear a headdress, which is the equivalent of the old Venetian mask, and the current Spanish mantilla, the sirocco blows three days out of four, and the temperature is usually twenty-eight degrees or so, guitars are strummed in the streets in the evening, and the confessional boxes in church are very well attended. It is, moreover, difficult to be glacially puritanical when located between Sicily and Africa. This moral freeness is always attributed, in those same serious books, to the corrupt attitudes of the Knights of Malta; but the poor knights have been sleeping for many years in their tombs beneath the mosaic paving of St. John's Cathedral, and the fault, if there is a fault, is entirely that of the southern sun. All I can say is that they seemed very piquant to me, dressed as they are, and poking their noses out of the window through the opening in their cloaks.

Waking about at random, I came across charming street-corners that would delight the watercolourist. Balconies wrap around corners and form multi-storied turrets, or galleries depending on their size. A life-size Madonna or saint, its head beneath a stone canopy, its feet on an enormous wooden corkscrew-spiral sheath base, presents itself unexpectedly to the adoration of pious people, and the pencils of artists; large lanterns, supported by complicated ironwork brackets, light these devout images and provide pretty motifs for sketches. I did not expect to find crossroads of so Catholic a nature in British Malta. At the foot of most of these statues is written, on a convoluted cartouche, with inscriptions like this placed thereon: 'Monsignor Ferdinando Mattei, Bishop of Malta' (or His Most Reverend Excellency Don Francesco Saverio Caruana) 'grants forty days of indulgence to all those who will say a *Pater*,

an *Ave*, and a *Gloria* before the images of the most holy Virgin' (or of Saint Francis Borgia). Since I have spoken of sacred sculpture, I will add here a rather odd detail that I noticed on the portal of a church.

It bore death's heads adorned with cravats like butterfly wings. These hieroglyphs, funereal tokens of the brevity of life seemed to me to associate the emblems of the boudoir with the ornaments of the tomb in a new way. One could not be more gallantly sepulchral, and the idea must have been entertained by a charming little courtier of an abbot. If the meaning of this funereal rebus was clear to me, it was not so with regard to a small bas-relief that I saw over the door of several houses, and which represents, with slight variations, a naked woman plunged in flames up to her waist, raising her arms to the sky. A banner is engraved with the word: *Valletta*. A Maltese, whom I consult, explained to me that the income from the houses thus designated goes to the Confraternity of the Souls of Purgatory after the death of their owners, for whom prayers and masses are said. The naked woman symbolises the soul.

The Grand Master's Palace, today the seat of government, displays nothing particularly remarkable in terms of architecture. Much of it is of a more recent date, and fails to correspond to the idea that one has of the residence of Philippe de Villiers de l'Ile-Adam, Jean Parisot de Valette, and their successors. However, it has quite a monumental presence, and produces a beautiful effect set on the large square (*St. George Square*), of which it occupies one of the sides. Two portals with rustic columns break the uniformity of the long façade; an immense mirador, forming a covered gallery, and supported by strong, sculpted corbels, surrounds it at the height of the first floor, and gives the building the Maltese stamp. This local detail highlights the plainness of the architecture. The palace, vulgar in its magnificence, is thus rendered original. The interior, which I chose to visit, offers a series of vast rooms and galleries containing frescoes, representing land and sea battles, sieges, and the boarding of Turkish galleys and galleys of 'The Religion' (as the Order of St. John is collectively called), by Matteo da Lecce. There are also paintings by Francesco Trevisani, 'Espagnolet' (*Jusepe de Ribera*), Guido Reni, 'Calabrese' (*Mattia Preti*) and Michelangelo Merisi de Caravaggio.

The guide walks you through vast apartments, their floors covered in fine mats, with stucco or marble columns, high-warp tapestries after Maerten de Vos or Jean Jouvenet, and ceilings of diamond-shaped or squared wooden panels, adapted, with more or less taste, to the current purpose. The coats of arms and portraits of the Grand Masters here and there recall the former inhabitants of this knightly palace, which is currently an English residence; I was surprised to find there a portrait by Thomas Lawrence, of George III or IV, all in white satin and scarlet, facing a likeness of Louis XVI, quite well painted, though less shimmering with pearly highlights than the English monarch. One of the enormous rooms, when I passed through Malta, was arranged as a ballroom, and from one of the columns hung printed charts of waltzes, polkas and quadrilles; this detail, though quite natural, made me smile; it would cheer the shades of the young knights if they chose to return at night to their old home: old bores alone would be offended, for those soldier monks led a cheerful enough life, and their inns were more like barracks than monasteries. The throne of England, with its canopy, its coat of arms and its mantling, proudly replaces the chair occupied by the Grand Master of the Order, and the portraits in coloured lithographs of the numerous offspring of Prince Albert and Queen

Victoria, are hung on the astonished walls of this asylum of celibacy, as they must be in every loyal subject's residence

I would have liked to visit the Armoury museum, to touch those helmets scored by Damascene blades, those cuirasses dented by stones from the catapults, beneath which so many noble hearts once beat, those shields emblazoned with the cross of the Order, in which the Saracen arrows quiveringly implanted themselves; but, after an hour of waiting while a search took place, I was told that the keeper had gone to the country and taken the keys with him. Receiving this proud reply, I thought myself yet in Spain, where, seated before the door of some monument, I waited for the concierge to finish his nap and show himself willing to open the door for me. I was forced to relinquish my idea of viewing those heroic bits of iron, and direct my attention elsewhere.

To complete my tour of what appertained to the knights, I headed towards St. John's Cathedral, which is the Pantheon of the Order. The façade, with a triangular pediment, flanked by towers ending in stone pinnacles, having for ornament only two pairs of superimposed pillars, and pierced by a window and a door without sculpture or arabesque, scarcely prepares the traveller for the magnificence of its interior. The first thing that arrests the sight is an immense vault painted with frescoes which takes up the whole length of the nave; these frescoes, unfortunately marred by time, or rather by the poor quality of their materials, are by Mattia Preti, called 'Il Cavalier Calabrese', one of those excellent minor masters who, if they possess less genius, sometimes possess more talent than the princes of art. The technique, skill, wit, and abundance of resource displayed in this colossal work, which is hardly spoken of, is truly unimaginable.

Each division of the vault contains a subject from the life of St. John, to whom the church is dedicated, and who was the patron of the order. These divisions are supported, at their borders, by groups of captives; Saracens, Turks, Christians, and others; half-naked, or covered with the shattered remains of armour, in humiliated and constrained poses, like some species of barbarian caryatids, befitting the subject. This whole part of the fresco is full of character and vigour, and shines with a strength of colour rare in this kind of painting. These solid tones set off the lighter tones of the vault, and make the 'skies' flee to a great depth. I know of no other work so grand except the ceiling by Gian Antonio Fumiani, in the church of San Pantalon, in Venice, representing the life, martyrdom and apotheosis of the saint of that name. But the taste for decadence is less felt in the work of the Calabrian than in that of the Venetian. If one wishes to know this pupil of Guercino (*Giovanni Francesco Barbieri*) in depth, then it is Malta, and Saint John's Cathedral, that one must visit. As a reward for this vast work, Mattia Preti had the honour of being received as a knight of the order, as was Caravaggio.

The pavement of the church is composed of almost four hundred tombs of various knights, inlaid with jasper, porphyry, *antica verde*, and breccias of all colours, which must surely form the most splendid funeral mosaic; I say 'must', because, at the time of my visit, they were covered by those immense esparto-reed mats with which southern church floors are covered; a custom which is explained by the absence of chairs and the habit of kneeling on the ground to perform one's devotions. I greatly regretted it; but the chapels and the crypt contain enough sepulchral riches to compensate one. The richness of these chapels, copiously decorated with

arabesques, volutes, sculptured branches and foliage interspersed with crosses, coats of arms, and fleurs-de-lis, all gilded in ducat-gold, only surprises those who know no more than the churches of France, which are of such severe bareness and Romantic melancholy. The profusion of ornaments here, the gilding, the varied marbles, doubtless seem to the French to be more suited to the decoration of a palace or a ballroom, since our Catholicism is somewhat akin to Protestantism.

The tomb (*in the Chapel of Aragon*) of Frà Nicola Cotoner, one of those Grand Masters who contributed most to the splendour of the Order, and spent their private fortune in endowing Malta with useful or luxurious monuments, is not in very good taste, but it is rich and composed of precious materials. It consists of a pyramid attached to the wall, surmounted by a ball and cross accompanied by a trumpet-blowing Renown and a little winged spirit holding the Cotoner coat of arms. The bust of the Grand Master occupies the base of the pyramid in the midst of a cluster of trophies, helmets, cannons, mortars, flags, shields, boarding-axes and pikes. Two kneeling slaves, their arms tied behind their backs, one of whom twists around in an attitude of rebellion, support the plinth and form the pedestal. I have described this tomb in detail, because it resembles others in manner, whereby the emblems of faith are mixed with symbols of warfare, as is fitting for an order that is both military and religious. One should also cast a glance at the mausoleum (*in the Chapel of France*) of the grand master Emmanuel de Rohan, very magnificent and coquettish, and (*in the Chapel of Aragon*) at that of Don Ramon Perellos y Rocafull, a Spanish grand master, whose ‘canting arms’ (*symbolic of the owner’s name, here pears, or ‘peras’ in Spanish*) are quartered with Greek crosses, and trios of pears.

I gazed at all these tombs with no other feeling than the respectful sadness that the stone beneath which is concealed a being who lived and thought like oneself always gives to a living and thinking being. But what was my emotion on encountering at the corner of an arch (*in the Chapel of the French*) a marble signed Pradier (*the sculptor Jacques Pradier*), in half-Greek, half-French characters, with that irregular *sigma* which one longs with all one’s heart to treat as an *epsilon*! The last lines that I had written in France, two hours before my departure, deplored the sudden death of this beloved artist, who might yet have created many a masterpiece. Here I had found, unexpectedly, in Malta one of his most gracefully melancholic statues, wherein he had managed to retain all the charm of youth, despite it being a portrait of the dead, that of the unfortunate Comte de Beaujolais, a work which was so admired at the Salon, some ten years ago. His recent death had been recalled by a tomb now already old, if tombs have an age and the Pyramid of Cheops more years, in truth, than yesterday’s sealed grave in Père-Lachaise (*the Paris cemetery*). Happy, however, is he who bequeaths his name to the hardest material there is, and assures himself by the beauty of his work of the brief immortality of which human beings can dispose!

A subterranean chapel, somewhat neglected, contains the tombs of Philippe Villiers de l’Île-Adam, Jean de Valette and other grand masters lying in their armour on armorial pedestals, supported by lions, birds and chimeras; some in bronze, others in marble or some other precious material. This crypt has nothing mysterious or funereal about it. The light of southern countries is too bright to lend itself to the chiaroscuro effects seen in Gothic cathedrals.

Before leaving the church, I must mention a group of *Saint John Baptising Christ*, by the Maltese sculptor Melchiorre Cafà, which is set above the high altar, and displays great skill, though being a little affected in manner; and a painting of superb ferocity, by Michelangelo da Caravaggio, having as its subject the beheading of that same saint. Through the dust of neglect, and the smoke of time, one can make out astoundingly realistic features, truculent outlines, and a work of extraordinary vigour.

Time is slipping away, and the steamboat declines to linger for latecomers. Let us walk once more along St John's Street, and picturesque St. Ursula Street, with their steps and platforms, their projecting balconies, the shops that line them, the crowd that perpetually goes up and down their staircases, and Strada-Stretta (*Strait Street*), which formerly had the privilege of serving as a duelling ground for the Order, whereon no one troubled them; let us glance, from the summit of the ramparts, over the wild countryside divided by stone walls, without shade and without vegetation, devoured by a harsh sun; let us gaze at the sea from the top of Piazza Regina (*Republic Square*), studded with English tombs; we will cross the Marse by boat, traverse the main street of Senglea, and clamber on board, regretting being unable to take with us a pair of those pretty vases carved out of Maltese tuff, which the inhabitants shape with a knife in the most ingenious and elegant way.

It is half-past four, and the boat weighs anchor at five. An entertaining local display is performed for us as a memento of our all too brief stay in Malta. Small boats surround us burdened with half-naked boys. The Maltese swim like ducks when hatched, and are excellent divers. A silver coin is thrown from the deck into the sea; the water is so clear in the harbour that it can be viewed to a depth of twenty feet or so. The boys watch for the coin to fall, dive after it at once, and it is caught three times out of four, an exercise no less favourable to their health than their purse. You will forgive me for not describing the catacombs; Fort Bingemma; the possible remains of a temple of Hercules (*Ras ir-Raheb*); or Calypso's Cave (*Ramla Bay, Gozo*), scholars claiming that Malta is Homer's Ogygia: I have no time to view them, and there is little point in repeating what others have said about them.

Tomorrow morning, I shall view the shores of Greece. I am no fanatic where classicism is concerned, far from it, but the thought troubles me. One always feels a degree of apprehension as regards viewing in its reality a land glimpsed in childhood through the mists of poetic dream.

Chapter 3: Syra (Syros)

It is the following day, and we are in sight of Cape Matapan, a barbarous name which hides the harmony of its ancient name (*Taenarum*), as a layer of lime coats a fine sculpture. Cape Tenaro is the extreme point of that white mulberry leaf with deep hollows spread on the sea, which is now called the Morea, formerly the Peloponnese. All the passengers were here on deck, gazing at the horizon, in the direction indicated, three or four hours before it became possible to distinguish anything. The magical name of Greece sets the most inert imaginations

to work; the bourgeoisie most foreign to the realm of art are themselves moved and remember Chompré's dictionary (*Pierre Chompré's 'Dictionnaire Abrégé de la Fable', 1727.*) At last, a faint violet line had appeared above the waves: it was Greece. A mountain raised its hip from the water, like a nymph resting on the sand after bathing, beautiful, pure, elegant, and worthy of this sculpted land. 'What mountain is that?' I asked the captain. 'Taygetus,' he answered me good-naturedly, as if saying 'Montmartre'. At the name Taygetus, a fragment of verse from the *Georgics* instantly sprang to mind:

... virginibus bacchata Lacænis

Taygeta!

Taygetus of the Spartan virgin's Bacchic rites!

(See Virgil's *'Georgics', Book II, 485*)

It fluttered on my lips like a monotonous refrain, filling my thoughts. What better quotation can there be regarding a Greek mountain than a line from Virgil? Although it was mid-June and quite warm, the summit of the mountain was silvered with streaks of snow, and I thought of the pink feet of those beautiful girls of Laconia who roamed Taygetus as Bacchantes, and left their charming prints on the white paths!

Cape Matapan juts out between two deep gulfs, which its ridge separates: the Gulf of Corone (*Koroni, or the Gulf of Kalamata*) and that of Kolokythia (*the Laconian Gulf*); it is a point composed of arid and barren land, like all the coasts of Greece. Once passed, on the right, a block of tawny rocks, cracked by dryness, and calcined by heat appears, without a sign of verdure or fertile soil: it is Cerigo (*Kythira*), the ancient Cythera, the island of myrtles and roses, the beloved abode of Venus, whose name summons dreams of voluptuousness. What would Jean-Antoine Watteau have thought, he of *The Embarkation for Cythera* with all its blues and pinks, face to face with this harsh shore of crumbling rock, with its severe eroded and shadeless contours, offering a cavern perhaps for the penitent anchorite, but not a single grove in which lovers might embrace: Gérard de Nerval (in his *'Voyage en Orient'*) at least had the dubious pleasure of viewing, on Cythera's shore, a hanged man wrapped in oilcloth, witness to a careful and considerate execution of justice. The *Léonidas* passes by too far from land for the passengers to enjoy so charming a detail were all the gallows of the island to be furnished at this very moment.

Did the ancients deceive us, speaking of delightful sites where now there is only a stony isle and bare earth? It is hard to believe that their descriptions, the accuracy of which was easy to verify at the time, are pure fantasy. Without doubt, this soil, rendered less fertile by human activity, was finally exhausted; it died with the civilisation it supported, whose masterpieces, genius, and heroism had likewise been exhausted. What we see is nothing more than its

skeleton: the skin, the sinews, all else has fallen to dust. When a country loses its soul, it dies like the body; how can one explain otherwise such complete and general alteration, for what I have said can be applied to almost the whole of Greece; though, these coasts, however desolate they may be, still display beautiful contours and a purity of colour.

We pass between Cerigo (*Kythira*) and Servi (*Cervi, Elafanisos*), another pumice island, and round Cape Malea (*Maleas*) or Saint Angelo's Cape, and emerge amidst the archipelago; the horizon is populated with sails. Brigs, schooners, caravels (*sailboats*), and argosils (*fishing boats*) furrow the blue water in all directions; the weather is admirable; the vessel neither rolls nor pitches. A light breeze swells our foresail somewhat and aids our paddle-wheels a little, that whip at a sea smooth as ice, which the mythological entourages of Amphitrite and Galatea (*the two were Nereids in Greek mythology*) might swim; a sea unruffled even by the leaping porpoises, those tritons of natural history, that from a distance give the illusion of being sea gods. The land has fled, and reveals itself only as a mist at the edge of the sky. Since there is nothing to see afar, let us examine awhile the new guests who embarked at Malta.

They are Levantines, squatting or lying on a piece of carpet, at the front of the boat, near the bags containing their provisions and the rolled-up mattresses on which they stretch out at night. A Levantine on a journey always takes three things with him: his carpet, his *chibouk* (*tobacco pipe*) and his mattress. One of these passengers, quite aged, is dressed in a faded pistachio-coloured pelisse decorated on the back with gold arabesque, although the rest of his costume is very simple, even a little ragged. He has with him a young child with very lively and intelligent dark eyes. Two or three Greeks have established a presence not far from this Levantine. They wear the *fustanella* (*pleated kilt*) and a rather elegant white jacket; but, dreadful to say and even more dreadful to contemplate, these noble Hellenes wear cotton caps like the men of Lower Normandy! O Greece! Classical land! Is it your intention to break my heart, and rob me of my last illusions, by appearing to me in the form of two of your sons crowned with a cloth helm and bourgeois locks! It is true that these cotton caps, seen up close, offer some thread trimmings, which mitigated their commonplace ugliness somewhat, and, after all, it is claimed that Paris seduced Helen wearing a Phrygian cap, which is nothing other than a cotton cap dyed purple.

On the deck, Eugène Vivier, the famous horn player, whose witty individuality equals his talent, whom a steamer from Italy had brought, is telling the prodigious story, in the midst of a circle of charmed listeners, of Mastoc Riffardini and his lieutenant Pietro, while a beautiful young girl with blue eyes, going to Athens with her father, lies lazily on a sofa and allows her gaze to wander in the serenity of the air, all the while smiling vaguely at the tale.

On the captain's assurance that no island would be in sight before six or seven in the evening, we agree to go down to dinner. When we rise from the table, Milos and Antimilos are evident, already bathed in violet hues by the approach of dusk; the view is always the same: sterile escarpments, bare slopes, but what matter? has not a wondrous fruit sprung from this meagre ground? Did not this infertile soil, richer than that of Beauce or Touraine, conceal that masterpiece of art, that purest and most vibrant form, the radiant Venus de Milo, adored by poets and artists; she who has only to rid herself of the dust of centuries to reconquer her altars? For before her pedestal all are pagans; the ages that have elapsed vanish, and one feels ready

to sacrifice doves and sparrows. What a civilisation the Greeks must have had for this little island of Milos to have produced such a finished work of art? I am told that, on the island, anyone who will listen is informed that the missing arms, the object of such devout lamentation, were found in the soil near the statue, and were exhumed, but went astray through fatal negligence. I do not in any way vouch for this rumour, which can but revive vain regret; but such is the legend current on Milos.

The sun disappeared behind us, but it was not yet night; the Milky Way streaked the sky in a broad opal band, and the infant Hercules must have been sucking hard at Juno's breast, for innumerable white dots dotted the nocturnal azure; the stars shone with inconceivable brilliance, and their reflections sparkled in the water forming long streaks of fire; millions of phosphorescent spangles glittered and vanished like glow-worms in the wake of the steamer. This phenomenon, frequent in the warm seas of the Levant, and the tropics, is produced by myriads of microscopic infusoria, and nothing more magically picturesque could be imagined. That night will remain in my memory as one of the most splendid of my life. We sailed between two abysses of lapis lazuli, transected by veins of gold and powdered with diamonds. The moon, being absent, or as yet so thin a crescent that the shape of her silver sickle could hardly be distinguished, relinquished the heavens to this blue and golden night, whose silvery stars she would have rendered pale. Two steamships on an opposite course to our own contributed, with their red and green lanterns, to the general illumination. Almost all spent the night on deck, and it was the chill of morning that drove us to our cabins.

When daylight reappeared, we passed between Serifos and Sifnos. Serifos, which we skirted close to, was the Roman Seriphus, a place of exile under the emperors; Serifos still seems suited to such a lugubrious destination; nothing is barer, drier, or more desolate, at least when seen from the sea. Mountainous hills, tawny and dusty, stud the surface of the island. With binoculars, one can distinguish a few small stone walls, a few blackish spots which must be enclosures and crops; a city or rather a town terraced in an amphitheatre on an escarpment stands out due to its whiteness. All this, without the transparent air and admirable light of Greece, would present a wretched appearance; but the scorched ground takes on, beneath this sunlight, superb tones.

At sea, as in the mountains, one is often mistaken about the distance and dimensions of objects. On the side towards Seriphos lay an islet named Vodi (*modern Greek βόδι, an ox*) or Vous (*ancient Greek βοῦς*), which seemed to me to be about twenty feet tall, until a schooner passed by and, skirting it, re-established the scale. The islet, which appeared to me like a large stone projecting from the water, was at least two or three times the height of the schooner.

After Serifos and Sifnos, we passed Anti-Paros and Paros, whose quarries furnished the sublime sculptors of Greece with the eternally sparkling bodies of their divinities, and its architects with the white pillars of their temples. Amidst this archipelago of the Cyclades, the islands succeed one another without interruption, and each turn of the paddle-wheels brings forth a new one. Scarcely has one shore dropped below the horizon than another rises, azure with shadow or gilded with sunlight. To right, to left, you always see some land adorned with a famous or sonorous name, and are astonished that so much history, poetry and legend could have been contained in so small a space. There they are, sitting in a circle on the blue carpet of

the sea, all those islands which gave birth to some god, hero, or poet, devoid of their crowns of verdure, but still beautiful, and acting, unconquerably, on the imagination. From each of these arid rocks there came a poem, temple, statue, or medallion, which our civilisation, which believes itself so perfect, lacks the power to equal.

In the morning, we were in front of Syra (*Syros*). Seen from the harbour, Syra looks much like Algiers, though on a smaller scale, of course. Against a mountainous background of the warmest tone, burnt sienna or topaz, imagine a pyramid, of sparkling whiteness, whose base plunges into the sea and whose summit is occupied by a church, and you will have an exact idea of this city, yesterday but a shapeless heap of hovels, which the passage of the steamboats will soon crown queen of the Cyclades. Windmills with eight or nine sails, varied its sharply defined silhouette; otherwise, not a tree, not a blade of green grass, could be seen as far as the eye could reach. The slender rigging of a large number of vessels, of all shapes and tonnages, tightly packed along the shore, was outlined in black on the white houses of the town; ship's boats went to and fro with joyful animation: the water, earth, and sky, all streamed with light; life burst forth on all sides. Some of the boats, driven by oars, headed towards our ship, creating a *regatta* of which we were the focal point.

Soon the deck was covered with a crowd of swarthy fellows, with aquiline noses, blazing eyes, and fierce moustaches, who offered us their services in the same tone in which elsewhere they might demand your purse, or your life; some wore Greek skullcaps (possessing every right to do so), immense wide trousers forming a skirt and cinched with woollen belts, and dark-blue cloth jackets; others, the *fustanella* (*kilt*), white jacket and cotton bonnet, or else a small straw hat encircled with a black cord. One of them was superbly costumed and stood as if posing for an album watercolour; he was worthy of the epithet that orators in Homer address to those they wish to flatter: '*Euknémides Achaioi*' (*well-greaved Achaeans*) since he wore the most beautiful *knemides* (*padded shin-guards*), stitched and embroidered decoratively, and adorned with red silk tassels, that it is possible to imagine; his *fustanella*, well-pleated and of dazzling cleanliness, flared to a bell shape; a well-fitted belt strangled his wasplike waist; his waistcoat, braided, embroidered, and embellished with filigree buttons, allowed passage for the sleeves of a fine linen shirt, and over the corner of his shoulder a beautiful red jacket, stiff with ornaments and arabesques was elegantly thrown. This triumphant character was none other than a dragoman who served as a guide to travellers on their tour of Greece, and no doubt wished to enhance his attractiveness with this luxurious show of local colour, like the beautiful girls of Procida and Nisida (*islands in the Neapolitan archipelago*), who only wear their costumes of velvet and gold for the English tourists.

As I set foot on land, the first thing that struck my eye was an inscription in Greek announcing the European and Turkish baths. It has a strange effect, seeing the characters of a language that one thought quite dead, inscribed on walls, a language one knows only through the pages of Claude Lancelot's *Le Jardin des Racines Grecques* ('*The Garden of Greek Roots*', 1652). From my eight years of schooling, I had just enough knowledge left to read the street signs and names fluently. So, you see, the time had not been entirely wasted. Thanks to these classical memories, I understood that I was in Hermes Street (*Odos tou Hermou*), which led to Othonos Square (*Miaouli Square*). In the middle of this square rises a triumphal arch of timber

entwined with branches of dried laurel, which testifies to the recent passage of King Otto (*the second son of Ludwig I of Bavaria*), a Bavarian monarch of the land of Pelops.

Eugène Vivier, who was with me, declared that he felt the need to civilise this savage island and to teach the natives the true way of creating soap-bubbles full of tobacco smoke; a mark of progress which they seemed unlikely to anticipate, were one to rely on their physiognomy. We entered a café, where Vivier asked, with imperturbable phlegm, for water, soap, paper and a pipe. This request surprised the café owner a little, who surely thought to himself: 'This traveller is keen on cleanliness, he wishes to wash his hands,' and quite innocently brought all that was necessary for blowing bubbles. At the first bubble which escaped from the tube, opalised by the white smoke blown into its frail envelope, surprise halted the cups of coffee raised to the lips of his customers. Another transparent globe, forming, like a balloon, an opaque parachute, rose in its turn into the air and displayed all the hues of a prism in the sun; their admiration knew no limits: a large circle formed, as they followed the flying bubbles with interest. Once their enthusiasm had been more than sufficiently aroused, Vivier, who knows how to manage an audience, as if emptying the pockets of a billiard table and replacing the ivory balls on their green cloth, sent a corresponding number of bubbles rolling and caroming at the slightest breath.

'See how civilised they are becoming', Vivier said to me, pointing out a moustachioed Greek with a colourful face who was turning a piece of soap about in a glass of water, seized by the fever of imitation, 'already their severity has softened'.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, one might have thought the café occupied by a band of Indian jugglers: it was a mass of bubbles ascending and descending. An hour later, the whole island was busy blowing soap-water and smoke from paper cones, with all the gravity such a serious occupation deserves. - Why be surprised that the inhabitants of Syra were amused by a spectacle that kept all the onlookers of Paris standing in the open air for six months on the Place de la Bourse?

While my friend was working these wonders, I was examining the interior of the whitewashed café, decorated with a few poorly-coloured pictures of the Rue Saint-Jacques. Most characteristic were two items embroidered in petit-point, representing Turks on horseback, and signed: Sophia Dapola, 1847, a masterpiece by a lodger there.

The quay was lined with shops of all kinds, fishmongers, butchers, and confectioners, as well as cafés, eateries, taverns, tobacconists, and so on, presenting a most animated aspect. It teemed with a motley assortment of sailors, porters, shoppers, and curious people from every country, wearing every style of costume. From the shore one can touch the boats, and the island thus lives in most intimate familiarity with the sea. Nothing is more amusing and more picturesque. Amongst the tarred *cabans* (*pea-jackets*, *reefers*) and breeches, the beautiful Greek costume of a Palikari (*soldier*) or Armatole (*policeman*) worn theatrically, gleamed from time to time.

Tired of the noise, in a street parallel to the harbour, I took my seat at a café furnished with outdoor sofas, – for on the island of Syra one lives in the open air – and there was served with lemon ices, infinitely superior to those of Tortoni's in Paris, and worthy of those of the Café

de la Bolsa, in Madrid, which says everything; there I saw a Greek of admirable beauty pass by, in full costume devoid of all French amendment; there is no garment at once more elegant or nobler than the modern Greek costume. The red skullcap with a mane of blue silk; the waistcoat and jacket with hanging sleeves, both braided and embroidered; a belt bristling with weapons; the pleated and piped *fustanella* like drapery carved by Phidias; and gaiters like those greaves the Homeric heroes wore, form an ensemble full of grace and pride. The Greek costume is of an extremely tight fit, and more than one hussar or fashionable woman would envy their slender waists. The bust flares, emphasising the chest, and giving a lightness to the white kilt that sways when walking. I mentioned just now that this Greek was very handsome: but do not imagine his profile as that of Apollo or Meleager, the nose perpendicular to the forehead as in ancient statues. The present-day Greeks have aquiline noses mostly, and are closer to the Arab or Jewish type than is commonly imagined. It is possible that there still exists in the interior of Greece some group among whom the ancient features are preserved. I speak only of what I have seen.

Syra presents the phenomenon of a city in ruins alongside a city under construction, a rather singular contrast. In the lower city, there is scaffolding everywhere, rubble and plaster clutter the streets, houses spring up before one's eyes; in the upper city, everything is crumbling and collapsing; life is leaving the head to take refuge in the feet.

I first traversed modern Syra, climbing from alley to alley, for the escarpment begins almost from the edge of the sea. One thing struck me, the small number of women I met. With the exception of a few old women and a few little girls whose respective ages were too advanced or too tender to arouse suspicion, the women hurried past or retreated indoors as I passed. Their clothing is not at all characteristic: a vulgar English cotton dress and a dark scrap of gauze over the hair, that is all. An Oriental seclusion seems already present. One sees none of them in the shops, it is the men who sell goods, shop the markets, and bear provisions about.

A joyful burst of laughter came from a house I passed; a boarding school for little girls to whom it seems I appeared profoundly ridiculous, I know not why.

The schoolmistress was at the door and motioned to me to enter and examine the interior of the school. I saw a fine collection of dark eyes, white teeth, and long braids of hair. Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps would find enough there to make a pretty pendant to his *Sortie de l'École Turque* (his painting 'Leaving the Turkish School', of 1849). I also examined a Greek church, its architecture of great simplicity, the interior decorated with images in the Byzantine style, passing among plaques of goldsmith's work, and heads and hands of a brown colouring, such as I had already seen at Leghorn (*Livorno*); a kind of portico forming a partition prevents the faithful from viewing the sanctuary, which contains only an altar covered with a white cloth; we were shown a cross and various ornaments of worship in silver gilt, of crude and barbarous workmanship but sufficient character.

A steep causeway of sorts separates the new Syra from the old. This bridge once crossed, the ascent begins through paved and sloping streets like the beds of torrents. I climbed, beside two or three comrades, between crumbling walls, collapsed hovels, and among shifting stones and pigs that ran about squealing and rubbing their bluish backs against my legs. Through half-open doors, I saw haggard shrews cooking dishes unknown to me over a fire glowing in the

shadows; the men, with the looks of brigands from a melodrama, left their *hookahs* (*water-pipes*) to watch our little caravan pass by with its less than graceful air.

The slope became so steep that we climbed almost on all fours, through a dark maze of vaulted passageways, and ruined staircases. The houses are stacked one on top of the other, so that the threshold of the upper one is at the level of the terrace of the one below; in order to ascend the mountain, each one seems to have set its foot on the head of the one it precedes, on a path made more for goats than for men. The merit of ancient Syra seems to be that it is readily accessible only to kites and eagles. It is a charming site for nesting birds of prey, but most improbable as one for human habitation.

Panting, and bathed in sweat, we finally reached the narrow platform on which Saint George's Cathedral stands, a platform paved with tombs, where the aerial dead repose, and there we were amply compensated for our fatigue by a magnificent panorama. Behind us rose the crest of the mountain on which Syra is set; to the right, facing the sea, an immense ravine, rugged and scored in the most savagely Romantic way, plunged to an abyss; at our feet stood the white houses of upper and lower Syra; further away shone the sea with its luminous moiré patterns, the island of Delos, and those of Mykonos, Tinos, and Andros in a line, clothed by the setting sun in pink and pigeon-breast tones that would seem fanciful if employed in a painting.

When we had seen enough of this admirable spectacle, we slid down like an avalanche to the lower town, and ended our evening at a kind of redoubt situated on a headland jutting out into the sea, smoking cigarettes and listening, over a lemonade, to a band of Hungarian musicians performing extracts from Italian opera. A few women, dressed in the French style apart from their hair, were walking together, beside a husband or a lover, on the central reservation surrounded by tables and chairs on which the Palikaris' *fustanellas* were spread, as the men drank their coffee, or splashed water from their hookahs.

In front of us, the sea was starry with ships' lanterns; behind us, the lights of Syra scattered golden spangles over the mountain's violet dress. It was charming. The rowing boats were waiting for us at the jetty, and a few strokes of the oars bore us back to the *Léonidas*, weary but delighted. The next day we were to set sail for Smyrna, and I would set foot, for the first time, on the soil of Asia-Minor, that cradle of the world, that happy soil where the sun rises, quitting it with regret so as to light the West.

Chapter 4: Smyrna (*Izmir*)

At ten in the morning, when the scheduled steamship that touches at Piraeus had picked up the passengers bound for Athens, the *Léonidas* set off again peacefully over a superb sea, as pure and as calm as Lake Geneva. Since I have mentioned Athens, let me say that it is absurd

to have altered the former route, thus obliging one to remain at Syra for twenty-four hours which would be much better employed in visiting the Acropolis and the Parthenon.

Delos, which we were skirting, is part of a singular mythological cosmogony. I know not if any professional geologist has pursued the scientific studies required to unravel what truth there might be in the legend; in the meantime, here is the origin of Delos according to myth: Neptune, with a blow of his trident, made the island emerge from the depths of the sea, to assure Latona, persecuted by Juno, of a place where she could give birth to Apollo and Artemis; Apollo, in recognition, rendered it immobile, as it had previously been a 'floating' isle, and fixed it in the midst of the Cyclades. Should we identify the source of this tale as one of those underwater volcanic eruptions producing islands, some of which vanish again after a while, like Julia's Isle (*which appeared temporarily in July 1831 off the coast of Sicily*), which returned to the sea from which it had emerged? Should we take the epithet 'floating' literally, and assume that Delos was originally a bank of algae, seaweed, fucus-fronds, and tree-trunks, bobbing on the water, then caught in the shallows, and transformed as it dried into habitable land by the sun? Or should we believe that because of its location in the middle of a Pleiad of almost similar islets, Delos must have been variously encountered by the first navigators, deprived of a sure means of direction, which earned it the reputation of a wandering island?

This is not the place to discuss this question *ex-professo*; I only raise it, leaving it to more learned men to resolve, because it came to my mind as I passed close to that sacred place where Apollo and Diana were born. Delos was, in antiquity, the object of extreme veneration. There was an altar of Apollo, which the god himself had erected at the age of four, employing the horns of goats killed by Artemis on Mount Cynthus, and which was considered one of the wonders of the world. This sacred soil was so venerated, that dogs were not allowed there, and sufferers on the point of death were borne from the island, since it was not permitted to bury anyone in this divine ground, revered even by the barbarians. The Persians, who ravaged the other isles of Greece, landed at Delos in their fleet of a thousand ships, but abstained from all acts of depredation and violence. Today Delos is an arid place, where Latona would have difficulty finding an olive tree to shade her childbed, yet it still justifies its luminous etymology ('revealed', 'made visible' at Apollo's birth), and the sun seems to gild it lovingly.

The Cyclades are of so limited an extent that, by skirting them in a steamship, one can trace the reality of their shapes and contours as indicated on the map: Nature itself seems a map on a large scale ornamented in relief and coloured. This produces the strange effect of rendering geography palpable, allowing one to grasp all the details of things as if on an embossed chart, and to traverse in only a small passage of time, that sea which holds so great a place in imagination and history.

Having crossed the channel that separates Tinos from Mykonos, we entered the open sea, devoid of islands. The day passed clear and serene: the perfect placidity of the sea allowed those with a more sensitive stomach to consume a full meal without fear or remorse. After strolling on deck, and setting their watches on the dial in the captain's cabin, for there is a difference of an hour and a quarter between Constantinople and Paris, all retired to bed so as to be up early in the morning, and see the sun rise on the horizon behind Smyrna, and the city turn pink.

During the night, we stopped for a while at Chios, the ‘island of wine’, as Victor Hugo says in *Les Orientales* (see ‘*L’Enfant*’ line 2), so as to take on merchandise. The sound of bales being rolled along the deck and the tramp of the porters’ feet woke me. I climbed to the top of the stairway, but saw nothing but a dark mass over which lights moved, like the sparks that burnt paper emits.

At daybreak we entered Smyrna harbour, a graceful curve at the end of which the city is spread. What first struck my eyes, from a distance, was a great curtain of cypress trees rising above the houses, their black tips mingling with the white summits of the minarets; and a hill, still bathed in shadow and surmounted by an old ruined fortress whose dismantled walls stood forth against the clear sky, rounded like an amphitheatre behind the buildings. Here no longer was the harsh and desolate aspect of the isles of Greece. The face of Asia-Minor appeared fresh and smiling in that pink glow of morning.



Smyrna, from the Harbour

I confess, to my shame, that as yet I had seen only two of the seven continents of the world, Europe and Africa. It gave me an almost childish joy to view a third, Asia. The same site removed to the coast of Europe would certainly not have given me a like pleasure. When shall I visit America or Polynesia? God alone knows! How many years of our lives are stupidly lost! Should not every education be completed by circumnavigating the world? How is it that there is not a ship at the service of every college, which would take its pupils in the third year, and

see them complete their studies in the universal book, the most splendidly written of of all, because it is written by the good Lord himself? Would it not be charming to teach the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* while accomplishing the voyages of their Greek and Trojan heroes (*Ulysses and Aeneas*)?

A local boat took us ashore. It was very early, but sea air is appetising, and our little band, composed of Eugène Vivier, Monsieur R... and two young students from the school of Rome travelling from Athens, were unanimous in wishing to dine, before dispersing so as to fulfil our duty as visitors to the city. Unfortunately, in the hotels, the official hour for dining had not yet arrived, and we were obliged to have recourse to a cup of coffee and a bread roll. The establishment in which we ate this frugal meal occupied a kind of jetty made of planking on the shore, from which one could see the ships in the harbour, and beneath which the waves gently lapped; This café had for its only ornaments a stove, on which the black liquid was boiled in a small yellow-copper coffee-pot containing a single cup, and a table on which shone a row of well-cleaned and translucent hookahs, for in Smyrna only the hookah is employed, while the chibouk is in general use in Constantinople (*the traditional hookah consists of a long flexible pipe with a mouthpiece, attached to an upright vessel; the traditional chibouk a long solid stem and a bowl, more akin to a western pipe in concept*). In these latitudes, the cigar becomes a chimerical object, and smokers must alter their habits.

It would have been a breach of a fine tradition to leave Smyrna without having visited the Caravan Bridge. A Jewish dragoman, owing to a smattering of French and Italian, collected for our use, after a few minutes, a number of donkeys equal to our French ones, the Caravan Bridge being at the end of the city and we not having time to race there on foot. In the East, riding an ass is not considered ridiculous, and the most serious of people lounge along on this peaceful animal, on which Christ himself did not disdain to make his triumphant entry into Jerusalem; these donkeys were adorned with pack-saddles, head-pieces, and cruppers decorated with designs in small shells of different colours, and lacked the pitiful air of our poor Aliborons (*Aliboron is the name of a donkey in La Fontaine's 'Fables': The Thieves and the Donkey' Book I, Fable 13*) who feel they are being mocked. We each mounted our beast, and were launched swiftly through the streets, the dragoman in front, the donkey-driver in the rear. Excited by the guttural cries of the latter, a thin, nervous, swarthy lad, forever running about in the dust after his greys, and busily thrashing the dawdlers or the stubborn ones, our donkeys had taken on a rather lively pace. As we raced along, we glanced at the houses, cemeteries, gardens, and passers-by; but this is not the place to describe them; let us hurry on, so as to arrive at the Caravan Bridge; since it is still morning, it is quite possible we will find a convoy leaving from there.

This famous bridge, now unfortunately dishonoured by an ugly balustrade of cast iron, spans a small river a few inches deep, on which half a dozen ducks were swimming familiarly, as if the blind, divine singer had not washed his dusty feet in these waters, still flowing two and a half thousand years later. The stream is the Meles, from which Homer took the epithet of Melesigenes. It is true that some scholars refuse to grant this gutter the name of Meles, but other scholars, even more learned, claim that Homer never existed, which simplifies the matter greatly. I, who am a mere poet, readily admit the legend which prompts reflection and memory,

in a place already pleasant in itself. Immense plane trees, beneath which a café is sited, shade one of the banks; on the other, superb cypresses indicate a cemetery. Let this word not awaken lugubrious thoughts in you: pretty tombs of white marble, speckled with golden Turkish letters on sky-blue or apple-green backgrounds and of a form quite different from Christian sepulchres, shine gaily under the trees revealed by a ray of sunshine; there is nothing funereal about the place, which at most stirs, in those who are not accustomed to it, a slight melancholy which is not without its charm.

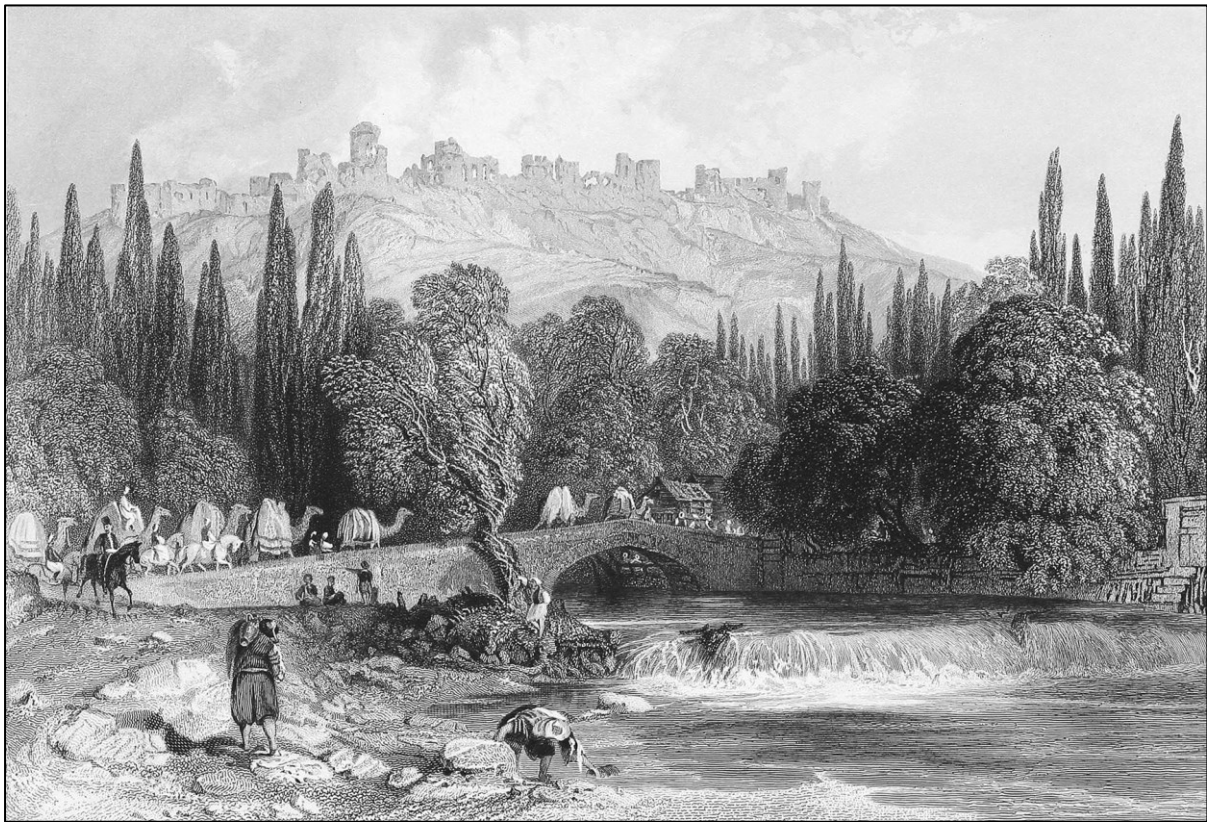
At the head of the bridge stands a sort of Customs guardhouse, occupied by some of those Zeybeks (*irregular militia*) whose physiognomy Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps's Oriental paintings have made familiar to everyone: a tall conical turban, short white linen trousers forming a pocket at the rear, an enormous belt rising from the small of the back almost to the armpits and formidably bristling with the pommels of *yatagans* (*short sabres*) and *kandjars* (*daggers*); lower legs bare and the colour of Cordoba leather; and a tanned face with aquiline eyes, a hooked nose, and the moustaches of an old *grogner* (*a 'grumbler' of Napoleon's Old Guard*). There were a handful of these scoundrels, nonchalantly sprawled on a bench, doubtless very honest, but looking more like bandits than Customs officers.

To breathe our mounts, we seated ourselves beneath the plane trees, where pipes and *mastika* were brought to us. *Mastika* is a kind of liqueur imbibed in the Levant, especially the Greek islands, and the best of which comes from Chios. It consists of distilled wine in which a kind of perfumed resin has been melted. The liqueur is drunk mixed with water, which it freshens, and also whitens to the colour of Eau de Cologne; it is the absinthe of the East. This very local drink reminded me of the little glasses of *aguardiente* that I drank twelve years ago, on the road from Granada to Malaga, on my way with the muleteer Lanza to the bullfight, and dressed in the costume of a *majo* (*a dandy of the lower class*), a costume, now consumed by moths, alas, which had a splendid vase of flowers embroidered on the back.

While we were smoking, and sipping our drinks, a string of about fifteen camels, preceded by a donkey with a bell, passed in procession over the bridge, with that singular ambling step also displayed by elephants and giraffes, arching their backs, and undulating their long ostrich-like necks. The strange silhouettes of these deformed animals, which seem created for a special purpose, surprises and disorients one to the last degree. When one encounters in the field these curious beasts exhibited in menageries in France, one feels decidedly far from the Boulevard de Gand (*Boulevard des Italiens*). We also saw two carefully veiled women accompanied by a North African with a sullen countenance, a eunuch no doubt. The Orient was beginning to take shape before me in an irrefutable way, and the most paradoxical of minds could not have maintained our being still in Paris.

Before entering the city, I planned to visit the ruins of the ancient castle, on the summit of Mount Pagus which the acropolis (*Kadifekale*) of ancient Smyrna covers. I care little for ruins if beauty is absent and they are reduced to the status of mere piles of rubble. I lack that facility for swooning at will with which travellers more susceptible to retrospective enthusiasm are endowed. But at the top of a mountain, one always gains a beautiful view, and I saw no objection to the ascent of Mount Pagus the paths to which are not strewn with roses, but with stones of all sizes that the donkeys skirt with the sureness of foot which characterises those

creatures. The paths are traced vaguely, in the Oriental manner, on the side of the hill, and through the intersection of their well-trodden courses, resemble rather a net than a ribbon. First of all, we were obliged to traverse old abandoned cemeteries gradually returning to the state of being woodland or fields, the tombs gradually obliterated by vegetation, dust, and neglect. Reaching a certain elevation, the view is superb: Smyrna stretches beneath your feet, with its red and white houses, its bright red fluted-tile roofs, its curtains of cypress trees, groves, domes, and minarets like ivory masts, its countryside with its varied crops, and its harbour, a sort of liquid sky but even bluer, all bathed in a fresh and silvery light amidst incredibly transparent air.



The Castle of Smyrna

Having admired the panorama sufficiently, we descended by steep slopes and switchback alleys, through districts less macadamised than picturesque. The houses of Smyrna are generally low in height, a ground floor and an overhanging upper floor, that is all. Whitewash, dotted with painted lines, rosettes, palmettes and other arabesques in azure blue brightens their facades and grants them the appearance of fresh, clean English porcelain. Between the windows small plaster bird-boxes sometimes hang, pierced with several holes to invite the swallows to make their nests therein, a touching act of hospitality offered to the birds, which the latter accept with a confidence which is never mislaid in Asia Minor, to which the ideas of the

Brahmins regarding respect for the lives of the creatures, those humble brothers and sisters of humankind, seem to have travelled from the depths of a less distant India.

It is to these ideas, no doubt, that the number of stray dogs that infest the public highway is owed, barely tolerating the passers-by who are obliged to give way to them. They can be seen in groups of three or four, lying in a circle in the middle of the street, allowing themselves be trampled underfoot rather than stirring. They must be walked around or stepped over. The lines of Alfred de Musset, in his poem *Namouna*, concerning beggars ‘whom one might take for gods’ can be applied perfectly, with a slight variation, to the dogs of Smyrna and Constantinople:

‘Ne les dérange pas; ils t’appelleraient *homme*;
Ne les écrase pas; ils te laisseraient faire.’

‘Don’t trouble them; they might call you *Man*;
Don’t trample them; that they would let you do.’

(See De Musset: *Namouna*, Canto I: LXXI)

While walking, I admired some pretty fountain on a street corner with a flared Turkish roof, its verses from the Koran carved in relief, its little columns and ornaments in an Oriental rococo style, or a small cemetery surrounded by walls pierced with barred windows through which one could see chickens pecking between the tombs, cats sleeping in the sun on the marble gravestones, and laundry hung from one cypress to another. In the East, life is not neatly separated from death as with us, rather the two continuously rub shoulders together like old friends: sitting, sleeping, smoking, eating, talking of love, on a tomb, implies no thought of sacrilege or profanation; cows and horses graze in the cemeteries and traverse them at all times; people walk there, and meet there quite as if the dead were not a few feet, or even a few inches deep below, their corpses busily rotting away beneath the larch-wood planks. But let me quit a subject which might seem less than cheerful to my readers, and especially my European readers; though Paris, in the Middle Ages, had its cemeteries and charnel houses; and in London, the city of civilisation *par excellence*, people are still buried within the grounds of Westminster Abbey, St. Paul’s and other churches.

The districts we had passed through were quite deserted, so that figures were somewhat lacking in the landscape. Consequently, we asked the dragoman to lead our caravan through the Bezesten (*on Gazazhane Street*) the bazaar in an Oriental city being always a most interesting place, because of the contrasting costumes and people of every country, attracted there by the desire to buy and sell, or simply stroll about. The English axiom: ‘Time is money’ lacks meaning in the Orient, where all occupy themselves with doing as little as possible in an admirably conscientious manner, such that they spend the day seated on a mat, motionless.

The Bezesten consists of an infinite number of little streets lined with shops, or rather half-height alcoves, occupied by merchants crouching or lying down, smoking or sleeping, or else rolling a *komboloi* (in Arabic a 'misbaha') through their fingers, a kind of Turkish rosary formed of ninety-nine beads which correspond to ninety-nine names or epithets of Allah. By stretching out a hand, the merchant can reach all the corners of his shop: the buyers stand outside, and the transactions are concluded on the counter-top. There is nothing less luxurious, as one can see, than these shops formed of a square hole in a wall, but they nevertheless contain precious fabrics, fine weapons, magnificent saddles, and masterpieces of gold and silver embroidery.



A Street in Smyrna

Just as in Constantine (*the capital of eastern Algeria*), where this detail had previously struck me, the streets of the Bezesten are shaded by boards laid flat on transverse beams, but with spaces between them, otherwise one would no longer be able to see. These interstices allow the sun to filter through, streaking the ground with bright bars and producing the most strange and unexpected effects of chiaroscuro: a man passing through one of these beams displays a point of light on his nose as in a Rembrandt portrait; a woman's *feridgi* (*a loose sleeveless cloak*) lights up like a pink flame, a hookah struck by a ray gleams like a heap of garnets, and the riches of Ali Baba's cave seem to blaze at the rear of some confectioner's shop. It is strange that these streets have not been covered with lattices for vines or climbing plants; probably the over-bright sun would scorch them, but tents and canvas awnings, as in Spain, could replace, advantageously, it seems to me, that aerial storey.

Not far from the Bezesten is a mosque composed, as they almost all are, of an agglomeration of small domes flanked by minarets which I can best compare to ships' masts, their topsails represented by the balconies atop them from which the muezzins invite the faithful to prayer. Near this mosque, there is a fountain for ablutions, formed by a rotunda of columns with barbarous Corinthian capitals, roughly painted blue and connected by a grille of very pretty workmanship, the whole covered with a projecting, upturned roof; the water trickles through a channel in which the Muslims wash their feet up to the knees, and their arms up to the elbows, according to the prescriptions of Muhammad, not to mention a more intimate ablution that the fullness of oriental clothing allows to be accomplished with decency, even in public.

It was the hour of prayer; we climbed the stairs of the mosque to the forecourt, which it would have been risky to cross, since the crowd was considerable, and the enclosure, being overly narrow, could not contain all the faithful. A mountain of *babouches* (*slippers*), boots and shoes, was heaped at the door of the temple, and three rows of devotees, aligned beneath a portico with heart-shaped arches followed the liturgy performed within by the mullah, their faces turned towards Mecca. Whatever belief they may hold, those who worship God with a sincere spirit should not be subjected to ridicule; however, the pious evolutions of these good Muslims, executed like the twelve-step military routine a Prussian corporal's baton might direct, seemed to me, despite that sentiment, tolerably strange.

I told myself that our Catholic ceremonies must seem reciprocally baroque to them, but had difficulty stopping myself from laughing when, leaning forward, nose first, they offered, three rows deep, a sight that would have charmed Molière's *matassins* (*buffoons*, see Molière's *comedic ballet 'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac', 1669*). Nothing can be grotesque in the eyes of its creator; but I believe that if I were a god, and found my devotees so comical, I would suppress religion.

On leaving the mosque, we visited the Greek church, which was hung with red calico of a rather hideous effect and daubed all over with modern frescoes painted by Italian artists. It looked rather like the salon of Café Momus (*in the Rue des Prêtres St Germain l'Auxerrois, it was celebrated by Henri Murger in 'Scenes de La Vie de Bohème', and is the setting for Act Two of Puccini's opera 'La Bohème'*) or a suburban ballroom. A priest, with many gestures and shouts, delivered a sermon from the pulpit in modern Greek, very edifying no doubt, but

which I was unable to appreciate. In the outer cloister, I noticed on the wall a commemorative plaque in memory of Clément Boulanger, painter of the *Procession of the Corpus Domini* (1830, Lille Museum), the *Tarasque*, and the *Fountain of Youth* (1839, Narbonne Museum), who died a few years ago on a scientific expedition to the ruins of Ephesus. The grave of a compatriot abroad has something particularly sad about it, either because of selfish self-concern, or because of the thought that the earth of a foreign and barbarous land lies heavier on the bones it covers. I knew Clément Boulanger, and the unexpected sight of his funeral inscription caused me a more painful feeling than many another.

An opera entrance or a church porch is a very convenient place from which to review the *fair sex* (as the Empire styled them). Though one may see many an old woman wrinkled, yellowed, mummified, and veiled in a black headdress, one is compensated from time to time by some young, pure, fresh face beneath a concoction of butterflies, flowers, and gauze. Sadly, local fashion ends there: a silk dress from Brousse (*Bursa*) or Lyon, a shawl worn in the European manner, complete the toilette. The elegant ladies wear the hoods of cabriolets from which the wheels have been removed as hats! I also noticed that most of these ladies wore *make-up*, as the actresses and lorettes (*courtesans*) of Paris say, that is to say, had created a pastel mask with tints of white, red, blue and black. I have no objection to such a daub when it is applied to a young face and not there merely to hide a woman's wrinkles.

Prowling on foot through the town, for we had dispensed with the donkeys, we crossed the courtyard of a kind of refuge, founded by Baron de Rothschild (*James Meyer de Rothschild, the banker*) for the benefit of the Jewish poor. A cradle, suspended from two trees like an Indian hammock, brought a little grace, amidst this asylum of misery, deformity and old age, to some child with an incurable infirmity. He was covered with a piece of gauze to protect him from flies, and his little hand, resting, and damp with the sweat of sleep, alone hung from the cradle, flexing as if to grasp a rattle pursued in a dream.

We thus arrived at the Slave Market, a courtyard surrounded by ruined arcades and dilapidated buildings. There were only two young North African girls for sale there, who squatted sadly on a wretched piece of carpet, guarded by their master, a rascal with a sulky, cunning face. As soon as we set foot on the threshold, a swarm of ragged little children, whose poor parents lived in these ruins, ran to meet us, begging us for alms in screeching voices.

I was moved by the inexpressibly nostalgic expression in the eyes of one of the two girls, and her melancholy, that of an animal so to speak, a captive gazelle. European eyes cannot attain such a look, in which the pain is no longer that of thought, but instinct. She had fine features, recalling the gracefully snub-nosed appearance of the Sphinx, or the caryatids of Egyptian columns; a bluish-black complexion with a bloom at the edge, like Monsieur's plums (*from the title of the Duc d'Orléans, brother to Louis XIV, who was said to have been particularly fond of the Ente plums of south-west France*). I would have purchased her, if I had known what to do with her, as Victor Hugo would have bought the little pink pig in the meat-market in Frankfurt (*see Hugo's 'Le Rhin', Lettre XXIV*). The slave-trader asked two hundred and fifty francs for her, which was not expensive. I had to be content with giving her a few piastres and some sweets, which she received with an age-old gesture, her arm pressed to her

body, the palm of her hand turned upside down. Her fingers, which I touched, were cool and soft like those of a monkey.

Weary of charging about, our little troop settled down in front of a café in the Bezesten, to which our circumvolutions had returned us, and we remained there, until the hour of departure, watching a motley procession of Turks, Persians, Syrian and North African Arabs, Armenians, Kurds, Tartars, and Jews, in costumes sometimes splendid, often ragged, but always picturesque, parade before our eyes. Never did a more varied kaleidoscope circle before curious eyes, and, in an hour, we saw authentic examples of all the facial types of the Orient, not excluding India represented. I would happily give you a detailed description of each of these characters, were I not afraid of failing to re-board the *Léonidas* in time; but we will see their like in Constantinople, in which I intend to make a fairly prolonged stay.

Chapter 5: The Troad, The Dardanelles

How sad to leave Smyrna so soon, that city of voluptuous Asian grace! As I hurried back to the boat, my eager eyes caught sight, through half-open doors, of courtyards paved with marble and refreshed by fountains much like the *patios* of Andalusia, and of verdant gardens, oases of calm and shade embellished with charming young girls in white or pastel-shaded casual clothing, their heads adorned with elegant Greek headdresses, grouped as the painter or poet might desire. My regret at leaving was addressed to the beautiful streets of the city, to the Rue des Roses (*Gul Sokak*, now *1328 Sokak*) and those which adjoin it; for in the Jewish quarter and certain parts of the Turkish quarter all is poverty and disrepair. Justice obliges me not to hide the reverse of the coin.

Despite its great antiquity, for it already existed in the days of Homer, Smyrna contains few remains of its former splendour. For my part, as regards ancient ruins I saw only three or four tall Roman columns rising above the frail modern constructions which surrounded them. These crude pillars, remains of a temple of Jupiter or Fortune, I know not which, produce a fine effect, and must exercise the sagacity of scholars. I merely caught a glimpse of them from my perch on the donkey in passing, which prevents my giving a reasoned opinion.

The coast of Asia Minor is much less barren than that of Europe, and I remained on deck as long as the evening light permitted me to distinguish the outlines of the land.

By next day, when dawn broke, we had passed Metelin (*Mytilene*), the capital of ancient Lesbos, the island of Sappho, the Cythera of that mode of love from which man is banished, and which still counts today more than one priestess. A flattish coastline stretched, before us, on the right: it was the Troad:

‘Campos ubi Troia fuit,’

‘The fields where Troy once stood,’

(See Virgil’s *Aeneid* Book III, line 11)

the very ground itself of epic poetry, the theatre of two immortal epics, the place twice rendered sacred, by Greek and by Latin genius, by Homer and by Virgil. It is a strange feeling to find oneself thus in the midst of a poem and surrounded by mythology. Like Aeneas relating his adventures to Dido from the summit of her lofty bed, I could say from the heights of the deck, and with even greater veracity:

‘Est in conspectu Tenedos...’

‘Tenedos is within sight...’

(See Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Book II, line 21)

for this is the island from which the serpents sprang that coiled about the unfortunate Laocoön and his sons, and furnished the subject of one of the masterpieces of statuary (*The Laocoön group, Vatican Museum*); Tenedos, over which Phoebus Apollo reigned in all his power, the god of the silver bow invoked by Chryses (*the Trojan priest of Apollo*); and, further on, here is the beach which Protesilaus, the first victim of that war which destroyed a whole people, stained with his blood, as with a propitiatory libation. That dubious pile of ruins which can be divined in the distance, may be the remains of the Scaean Gates (*the main gates of Troy*), from which Hector emerged, wearing that helm with the red crest which frightened little Astyanax (*his son*), and before which the old men whom Homer depicts saluting Helen’s beauty, sat in the shade; that dark mountain, clothed in a forest mantle which rises on the horizon, is Ida, the scene of the Judgment of Paris, where the three rival goddesses, Hera with arms of snow, bright-eyed Pallas Athene, and Aphrodite of the magic *cestus* (*girdle*), posed naked before the fortunate shepherd; and where Anchises knew the intoxication of a celestial marriage, and fathered Aeneas on Venus-Aphrodite. The Greek fleet was ranged along this shore, on which the prows of their black ships rested, half moored upon the sand. Homer’s exactitude is confirmed by every detail of the terrain; a military strategist, *Iliad* in hand, could follow there, all the events of the siege.

As, recalling my classical studies, I gaze at the Troad, Stalimene, the ancient Lemnos, which received in his fall Hephaestus (*the god of metallurgy*) hurled from the sky (*from the heights of Olympus, by Zeus*), rises from the sea and displays its yellowish promontories to my rear. I would like to possess two faces like Janus. Two eyes are really too few, and man is far inferior in this respect to the spider, which possesses eight, according to Antonie van Leeuwenhoek and Jan Swammerdam. I turn my head away for a moment to cast a glance at

that volcanic island where the weapons were forged to test those heroes favoured by the gods, and the golden tripods, living slaves of metal, that served the Olympians in their celestial dwellings, and as I do so the captain pulls me by the sleeve to point out to me a rounded mound, a conical hill, on the Trojan shore, whose regular shape attests to the hand of man. The tumulus covers Antilochus, son of Nestor and Eurydice, the first Greek who killed a Trojan at the commencement of the siege, and who himself perished at the hand of Hector, while parrying a blow that Memnon dealt his father. 'Does Antilochus truly rest beneath that mound?' the critical reader will doubtless ask. Tradition affirms it, and why should tradition lie.

As we advance further, I discover two more *tumuli*, not far from a small village called Yenisehir, recognizable by a row of nine windmills, similar to those of Syra. The first, as we approach from Smyrna, and the one closest to the seashore, is the tomb of Patroclus, the bosom friend, brother-in-arms, and inseparable companion of Achilles. There the gigantic pyre, drenched with the blood of innumerable victims, was erected, which the hero, drunk with grief, burdened with four prize horses, two thoroughbred dogs, and twelve young Trojans sacrificed by his own hand, on behalf of his friend's shade, and around which the mourning army celebrated funeral games that lasted several days. The second, further inland, is the tomb of Achilles himself. At least, that is the name given to it. According to Homeric tradition, the ashes of Achilles were mixed with those of Patroclus in a golden urn, so that the two great friends, inseparable in life, remained so in death. The gods were moved by the death of the hero. Thetis (*the sea-goddess, Achilles' mother*) emerged from the waters accompanied by a plaintive chorus of Nereids; the nine Muses wept, and sang songs of mourning around the funeral bed, and the bravest of the army performed fierce games in honour of the hero. This third tumulus must be that of some other Greek or Trojan leader, probably Hector. In the days of Alexander, the location of the tomb of the Greek hero of the *Iliad* was still identifiable, for the conqueror of Asia halted here, declaring that Achilles was fortunate to have had such a friend as Patroclus and such a poet as Homer. He himself had only Hephaestion and Quintus Curtius, and yet his exploits surpassed those of the son of Peleus, history having superseded mythology.

While I discourse on Homeric geography, and the heroes of the *Iliad*, a most innocent and pardonable act of pedantry near the site of Troy, the *Léonidas* continues its course, though somewhat thwarted by a northerly blowing from the Black Sea, and advances towards the Dardanelles Strait, defended by two fortresses, one on the Asian shore, the other on the European shore. Their crossfire would bar the entrance to the strait, and render access to it if not impossible at least difficult in the extreme for any enemy fleet. In order to complete my account of the Troad, let me say that beyond Yenisehir a river which some say is the Simois, and others the Granicus, empties into the Bosphorus.

The Hellespont, or Sea of Helle, is quite narrow; at its mouth, one might rather think oneself sailing on a great river than a true sea. Its breadth is less than that of the Thames at Gravesend. As the wind was favourable for vessels emerging into the Aegean, we passed amidst a host of ships coursing towards us with all sails set, which from a distance, their sails taut and low in height, took on the shape of women carrying a pail in each hand and waddling as they walked. This comparison, so natural that it occurred to several persons on deck at once, seems absurd

to me now that I write it, and will doubtless appear more so to those who read it, and yet it is quite accurate.

The coast of Europe, to which we were closest, consists of steep hills dotted with a few patches of vegetation of rather arid and monotonous appearance; the coast of Asia Minor is far more cheerful and presents, I know not why, an appearance of northern verdure which, according to received ideas, would befit Europe more. At a certain moment, we were so close to the shore, that we discerned five Turkish horsemen following a small path like a thin yellow ribbon stretched along the foot of the cliff. Their relative size gave an idea of the height of the coastline, which was greater than I would have believed. Nearby, Xerxes had the famous bridge built for the passage of his army and whipped the disrespectful sea, which had caused him inconvenience by destroying the work. Judged on the spot, this enterprise, cited in all the moral treatises as the height of human folly, and a madness prompted by pride, seems, on the contrary, a very reasonable one. Sestos and Abydos, made famous in turn by the love between Hero and Leander, are also thought to have been situated at about this point, where the Hellespont is less than a mile wide.

Lord Byron, as we know, without being in love, repeated Leander's exploit by swimming the strait; but, instead of Hero, raising her torch like a lighthouse on shore, gained only a fever. He took an hour and ten minutes to make the journey, and was prouder of this feat than of having written *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* or *The Corsair*, a swimmer's pride, which all who have properly taken a dip in the Piscine Deligny (*a floating swimming pool on the Seine*) and pretended to the honour of a red bathing costume will understand.

We stopped for a while, but without anchoring, before a town above which floated the flags of the consulates of several nations and was animated by the sails of furiously-turning windmills; outside the town, the beach was dotted with white and green tents where troops were encamped. I cannot give the name of this place, since each person I asked gave me a different one, which is more than usual in a country where the Latin name is superimposed on an original Greek name, and hidden in turn by a Turkish name, the whole whitewashed by the Frankish name for greater clarity; however, I think it was Chanak-Kalessi (*Canakkale*), which we Europeans have freely translated as the Dardanelles.

The wind, the current, and the narrowness of the strait rendered the water choppy, and leaping waves rocked, somewhat roughly, a boat rowed by several oarsmen that was trying to draw alongside the *Léonidas*, which had paused to wait for it in the midst of the Bosphorus. The boat was carrying a pasha travelling to Gallipoli at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara. He was a large fellow, with a thick neck, and a broad fat face, but well-formed beneath his plumpness. He was dressed in the hideous uniform of the Nizam (*the regular Turkish army*), a red fez, a blue frock-coat tightly buttoned; and his extensive retinue crowded about him, his steward, his secretaries, his pipe-holders and other minor officers, not to mention the *kavasses* (*armed guards*) and servants. All these people unfolded carpets and unrolled mattresses to squat on; the better-educated seated themselves on the benches, content to grasp a foot in one of their hands, to maintain composure.

The luggage was curious. It consisted of hookahs in red morocco cases, bundles of cherry-wood and jasmine-wood pipes, leather-covered basket-like trunks, embossed with gold around

the locks and studded with the prettiest designs, rolls of Persian carpets, and piles of tiles. There were some rather odd folk in this group, among others an obese young boy, blond, chubby, and pink, who looked like an enormous English baby dressed as a Turk, and a thin, sharp-faced, angular Greek with a fox's muzzle, his body enveloped in a long cinnamon-coloured cloth robe edged with fur, like the *dolmans* (*Turkish robes*) in which the actors in *Bajazet* (*the play by Racine*) are dressed, in the theatre on the Rue Richelieu (*the Comédie-Française*); the large pasha was enclosed by them as if in parentheses, and they seemed to enjoy, in various ways, their master's favour; the costumes of the lower orders had retained their native character: wide belts stuffed with weapons, braided waistcoats and jackets, the latter with brightly-coloured elbows, producing the fine appearance of *Arnauts* (*Albanians serving in the Turkish military*), or those Albanian bandits who are the delight of painters, and the despair of manufacturers of waterproofs made of rubber or gutta-percha; thus dressed, the slaves looked like Oriental princes, and their masters like unemployed servants.

As it was Ramadan, neither masters nor slaves touched their chibouks, and were content, to pass the time, sleeping or telling the beads of their rosaries between their fingers.

Of the Sea of Marmara itself, I can give little detail, since it was night when we crossed it, and I was sleeping in the depths of my cabin, tired by a fourteen-hour turn on deck. Above Gallipoli, it widens considerably, narrowing again near Constantinople. The pasha and his suite were deposited at Gallipoli, whose minarets appeared, confusedly, amidst the evening shadows. When day broke, on the Asian side, the Olympus of Bithynia (*Mount Uludağ*), frozen with eternal snow, rose from the rosy vapours of the morning, with the gleam of a pigeon's throat and a silvery shimmer. The European shore, infinitely less rugged, was speckled with a fringe of white houses and clumps of greenery, above which rose long brick chimneys, the obelisks of industry, whose vermilion brick, from a distance, imitated quite effectively the pink granite of Egypt. If I were not fearful of the accusation that I seek to flaunt a paradox, I would say the whole environment reminded me of the appearance of the Thames, between the Isle of Dogs and Greenwich; the sky, very milky, very opaline, almost white and drowned in a transparent mist, added still more to the illusion; it seemed as if we were voyaging to London aboard the Boulogne steamboat, and to avoid deception, were obliged to fly the flag, red with a silver crescent, that had been hoisted to our masthead on our entry to the Dardanelles.

In the distance the archipelago of the Princes' Islands, the Hyères Islands (*the 'Golden Isles' on the Mediterranean coast of France*) of Constantinople, which people visit on Sundays for pleasure, turned bluish; a few more minutes, and Stamboul (*Istanbul's old town*) appeared to us in all its splendour. Already, on the left, through a silver gauze of fog, the spires of a few minarets sprang forth; the Castle of the Seven Towers, where ambassadors were once imprisoned, bristled with massive turrets linked together by crenellated walls; it bathed in the sea at its foot, leaning against the hill; it is from this fortress that the ancient rampart surrounding the city as far as Eyoub (*Eyüp*) begins. The Turks call the castle Yedikule, and the Greeks Heptapurgon. Its construction dates back to the Byzantine emperors. It was begun by the Emperor Zeno and completed by the Komneni (*and heavily modified in 1458 by Sultan Mehmed II*). Seen from the sea, it appeared to be in poor condition, well-nigh falling to ruin;

however, it creates a fine effect with its heavy shape, squat towers, and thick walls, its appearance being that of a bastille, a true fortress.

The *Léonidas*, slowing so as not to arrive too early, skirted the Seraglio headland. The Seraglio displays a series of long whitewashed walls, their crenellations rising against a curtain of terebinths and cypresses; rooms with latticed windows; and kiosks with projecting roofs lacking all symmetry; it is far from being the magnificent dwelling-place of the *Thousand and One Nights* which prompts, with that single word 'seraglio', the laziest of imaginations to dream, and it must be admitted that these wooden boxes with serrated grilles, that enclose the beauties of Georgia, Circassia and Greece, the houris of this Islamic paradise over which the Padishah (*sovereign*) is god, wholly resemble chicken coops. We confuse, despite ourselves, Arab architecture and Turkish architecture, which are unconnected, and involuntarily make an Alhambra of every seraglio, which is far from the reality. Cold observations of this kind fail to prevent the ancient Seraglio from presenting a most pleasant aspect, with its sparkling whiteness and dark verdure, between the clear sky and the blue water, whose rapid current washes its mysterious walls.

As we passed, an inclined chute was pointed out to me, which springs from an opening in the wall and projects, like the termination of a roller coaster, above the sea. It is through this, it is said, that unfaithful odalisques (*concubines*) or those who had displeased the master, for some reason or other, were sent sliding into the Bosphorus, wrapped in a bag containing a cat and a snake. How many beauties have drowned in this deep blue water, with its impetuous current! Now the moral code is purer or at least more tolerant, for one no longer hears of these barbaric executions. However, the legend may be false, and I in no way vouch for its authenticity. I give it here without judgement; if it is not true, it at least possesses local colour.

Doubling the tip of the Seraglio, the *Léonidas* hove to at the entrance to the Golden Horn. A marvellous panorama unfolded before my eyes like the set of an opera based on a fairy-tale. The Golden Horn is a gulf, whose two capes are formed by the old Seraglio and the harbour of Tophane, and which borders the city built in an amphitheatre, its shores stretching as far as the Eaux Douces d'Europe ('*The Sweet Waters of Europe*' are the two stream valleys of the *Kağıthane Suyu* and *Alibeyköy Suyu*, located at the top of the inlet of the Golden Horn, *Haliç*, near the suburb of *Eyüp*) and the mouth of the *Kağıthane Suyu*, the small river which flows into it. Its name of Golden Horn doubtless comes from the fact that it represents for the city a veritable cornucopia, by the facility it provides for ships, trade and shipbuilding.

While waiting to disembark, let me make a light pencil sketch of the larger picture I will paint later. On the right, beyond the sea, stands a huge building regularly pierced with several rows of windows and flanked at each corner by a species of turret surmounted by a flagpole: it is a barracks, the most considerable building, but not the most characteristic of Scutari, or Üsküdar the Turkish designation for this Asiatic suburb of Constantinople which spreads, in ascending the coast towards the Black Sea, over the site of ancient Chrysopolis, of which no vestige remains.

A little further on, amidst the water, a dazzling white lighthouse, which is called the Tower of Leander or the Tower of the Maiden, though the place has nothing to do with the legend of the two lovers celebrated by Alfred de Musset (see '*La Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*'

Chapter V, 1836), stands on a small island of rocks. This tower, of a rather elegant shape, to which the purity of light grants the appearance of being made of alabaster, stands out admirably against the dark azure tone of the sea.

At the entrance to the Golden Horn, Tophane juts forth, with its landing stage, its cannon foundry, and its mosque, with a bold dome and slender minarets, built by Sultan Mehmed II. The palace which houses the Russian embassy raises, proudly, above the red-tiled roofs and clumps of trees, its dominant facade, which attracts the eye and seemingly takes possession of the city in advance, while the palaces of the other embassies content themselves with a more modest appearance. The tower of Galata, a district concerned with Frankish trade, rises amidst the houses, is topped with a pointed cap of verdigris-tinted copper, and dominates the ancient Genoese walls falling to ruin at its feet. Pera (*Beyoğlu*), the residence of the European community, with its cypress trees and stone houses, which contrast with the Turkish huts made of wood, is at the summit of the hill, and extends to the Great Field of the Dead (*the larger cemetery, with a Frankish section*).

The tip of the Seraglio forms the other cape, and along this shore the city of Constantinople itself unfolds. Never did a more magnificently rugged line undulate between sky and water: the ground rises from the sea, and the buildings form an amphitheatre, the mosques, topping this ocean of verdure and houses of every colour, raise their round bluish domes, and launch their white minarets, each surrounded by a balcony and ending in a sharp point, into the clear morning sky, granting the city an Oriental and fairy-tale like physiognomy to which the silvery glow which bathes their vaporous contours contributes greatly. An officious neighbour named them for me in order, starting from the Seraglio and ascending towards the base of the Golden Horn: Hagia Sophia, Hagia Irene, Sultan Ahmet (*the Blue Mosque*), Nuruosmaniye, Sultan Bayezid, Süleymaniye, Şehzade, Sultan Mehmed II (*the Fatih Mosque*), and Sultan Selim (*Yavuz Selim*). Amidst all these minarets, behind the Sultan Bayezid Mosque, and rising to a prodigious height, stands the tower of the Seraskier (*the Bayezit Tower*), from which fires are reported.



Constantinople from the Heights Above Eyup

Three boat-bridges link the two shores of the Golden Horn, allowing unceasing communication between the Turkish city and its suburbs with their varied populations. The main street of Galata ends at the first of these points. But let us not anticipate these details, which will be presented in their proper place, and limit ourselves here to the general aspect. As in London, there are no quays in Constantinople, and the city everywhere plunges its feet into the sea; ships of all nations approach the houses without being kept at a respectful distance by granite walkways. Near the bridge, in the middle of the Golden Horn and offshore, were stationed flotillas of English, French, Austrian, and Turkish steamboats: omnibuses of the sea, manned by the watermen of the Bosphorus, that Thames of Constantinople on which all the movement and all the activity of the city are focussed. Myriads of canoes and caiques furrowed the azure waters of the gulf like shoals of fish, and headed towards the *Léonidas*, anchored some distance from the Customs House, located between Galata and Tophane. In every country of the world, the Customs House has columns and an architrave in the style of the Odéon in Paris. That of Constantinople was careful not to betray the architectonic structure of the genre. Fortunately, the huts which surround it are so dilapidated, so out of plumb, projecting so far forward, while leaning against each other with such an oriental nonchalance, that they correct the classical appearance of the Customs House.

As usual, the deck of the *Léonidas* was covered in an instant with a polyglot crowd: there arose an incomprehensible din of Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Italian, French and English. I was feeling somewhat embarrassed amidst this varied gibberish, despite having studied, before

leaving France, *Covielle's* Turkish and the ceremony performed in Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (in the play, *Covielle is a valet who purports to speak Turkish*), when there appeared, in a caique, like an angel of salvation, the person to whom I had been recommended and who speaks as many languages as the famous Mezzofanti (*Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti, a polyglot who spoke numerous languages*); she sent all the scoundrels who surrounded me to the devil, each in his own particular idiom, had me enter her boat, and carried me off to the Customs, where they contented themselves with casting a distracted glance at my meagre trunk, which a *hamal* (*porter*) loaded, as if it were light as a feather, on his broad back.

The *hamal* is a species peculiar to Constantinople: a two-legged camel without a hump, living on cucumbers and water, and bearing enormous weights through impassable streets and up perpendicular ascents, despite the oppressive heat. Instead of hooks, the *hamal* carries on its shoulders a leather pad on which it sets its burden, under which it walks, bowed down, and taking the weight on its neck, like an ox. Its attire consists of large linen breeches, a jacket of coarse yellowish material, and a fez encircled by a kerchief. *Hamals* possess an extremely developed torso, and often surprisingly slender legs. It is difficult to conceive how those thin tibias, covered with tanned skin and resembling flutes in their cases, can support loads which would inconvenience a Hercules.

Following the *hamal*, who had headed towards the lodgings reserved for me, I plunged into a maze of narrow, winding, ignoble and badly-paved streets and alleys, full of holes and quagmires, and clogged with leprous dogs, and donkeys laden with beams or rubble, as the dazzling mirage that Constantinople presents from afar swiftly vanished. Paradise was transformed to a cesspool, poetry turned to prose, and I wondered, with a certain feeling of melancholy, how these ugly hovels could take on such seductive aspects, such a tender and vaporous colour, when distantly viewed. On the heels of my *hamal*, and clinging to the arm of my guide, I reached the room intended for me, at my Smyrna hostess's, she being akin to that *Copa Syrisca* ('*Syrisca the Barmaid*'), of the *Appendix Virgiliana* (*a collection of poems once ascribed to Virgil*); the place being sited close to the main street of Pera, and lined with insignificant but tasteful buildings, like the third-ranked streets of Marseille or Barcelona.

I had journeyed there from Paris in twelve and a half days, travelling as fast as the post, for it is a principle of mine when I do travel, to speed as swiftly as possible to the furthest point of my itinerary, and then return at leisure. I had promised myself to devote the day to the rest I had well deserved; but curiosity got the better of me, and, after a few mouthfuls swallowed in haste, unable to resist any longer, I began my wanderings and set off, at random, through this city unknown to me, without the aid of a compass to orient myself, as a friend of mine, full of sagacity and prudence, was accustomed to do.

Part II: The Golden Horn, Ramadan, The City

Chapter 6: 'The Little Field of the Dead', The Golden Horn

The lodgings that had been prepared for me occupied the first floor of a house situated at the end of a street in the Frankish quarter, the only quarter Europeans are allowed to inhabit. This street runs from the main street of Pera (*Beyoğlu*) to the 'Little Field of the Dead', (*a cemetery in the western part of Beyoğlu, the Great Field being in the northern part*), but I cannot designate it to you any more clearly, for the peremptory reason that in Constantinople the streets bear no name-plaques at their corners, neither in Turkish nor French. In addition, the houses themselves are un-numbered, which magnifies the difficulty. Each must traverse this anonymous maze, and find their path, using their own observation and judgement. Ariadne's thread, or the white pebbles left by Tom Thumb, would prove most useful here; as for leaving breadcrumbs along the way, it is not to be thought of: the dogs or birds would soon eat them. Apropos of dogs, my landmark, which allowed me to recognise my lodgings throughout the first days after my arrival, was a large hole dug in the middle of the public street, in the depths of which a bad-tempered bitch suckled four or five pups in perfect security and with complete disregard for pedestrians and riders. Some streets do possess a traditional name derived from a khan or a mosque in the vicinity, and the one on which I lodged, as I learned later, was called Dervish Street, but the name was not apparent and is no use as a guide.

My lodgings were built of stone, a circumstance which was emphasised in conversation, and not to be disdained in a city as combustible as Constantinople. For greater security, an iron door, its leaves consisting of plates of thick sheet metal, was intended to intercept the sparks and flames in the event of a fire in the area, and isolate it completely. I had a drawing-room, with whitewashed walls and a wooden ceiling painted grey and decorated with threads of blue, furnished with a long divan, a table, and a Venetian mirror in a black and gold frame; the bedroom contained an iron-framed bed and a chest of drawers. There was nothing very Oriental about it, you see; though my hostess was from Smyrna, and her niece, while dressed in the European style in a pink dressing-gown, displayed languidly Asiatic eyes in a pale face fringed by matte black hair. A Greek servant, very pretty under the little kerchief twisted on the top of her head, completed, along with a kind of simpleton from the Cyclades, the staff of the house, and gave it a tinge of local colour. The niece knew a little French, the aunt a little Italian, by means of which we ended up understanding each other, more or less. Constantinople is, indeed, a real Tower of Babel, and one might believe oneself at that same Biblical place on the day of the confusion of tongues. The knowledge of four languages is indispensable for the everyday intercourse of life: Greek, Turkish, Italian, and French, are spoken in Pera by its polyglot children. In Constantinople, the abilities of the famous Cardinal Mezzofanti would surprise no one; it is we French, who know only our own language, who remain confounded by this prodigious facility.

My habit, when travelling, is to set off alone through a city previously unknown to me, like Captain Cook on his voyages of exploration. Nothing is more delightful than to discover a fountain, a mosque, a monument, and to grant it its true name without an idiot of a dragoman informing you, with the hiss of a boa constrictor, of that same; besides, by wandering about in this way, you discover what you will never be otherwise shown, that is to say, what is truly interesting in the country you are visiting.

Wearing a fez, dressed in a buttoned-up frock-coat, my face tanned by the sea air, my beard six months long, I looked enough like a Turk of the Tanzimat Reforms (*The Tanzimat is the name given to the series of Ottoman reforms from 1839 onwards*) not to attract attention in the streets, and I bravely advanced towards the 'Petit-Champ-des-Morts', carefully noting the location of my house, and the path I was taking, so as not to lose my way.

This 'Little Field of the Dead', commonly abbreviated, so as to avoid its melancholy resonance, to the Little Field, covers the rear of a hill which rises from the shore of the Golden Horn to the crest of Pera, marked by a terrace bordered by tall houses and cafés. It is an old Turkish cemetery where no one has been buried for some years, either because there is no more space, or because the dead Muslims would have had to be buried too close to the living *giaours* ('*infidels*').

A bright sun scorched this slope bristling with cypresses, with black foliage and greyish trunks, beneath which stood an army of columnar marble headstones, topped with painted marble turbans; these semi-pillars, leaning some to the right, others to the left, some forward, some backward, according to how the ground had given way beneath their weight, vaguely simulated a human form, and recalled those children's toys depicting a blacksmith, whose head alone is shown, beating an anvil with a wooden hammer stuck to his belly. In several places, the marble decorated with verses from the Koran had yielded to the force of gravity, and, carelessly sited in crumbling earth, had overturned, or broken to pieces. Some of the funerary columns were decapitated, and their turbans lay at their feet like severed heads. It is said that these truncated tombs cover old Janissaries (*the Sultan's infantry guards*) pursued beyond death by Muhammad's rancour. No symmetry is observed in this scattered cemetery, which extends, in a swathe of cypresses and tombs dividing the houses of Pera, as far as the *tekke* or monastery of the whirling Dervishes. A few paths, paved and revetted with the debris of funerary monuments cross it diagonally; and here and there rise earthworks of a kind, sometimes surrounded by small walls or balustrades, forming sepulchres reserved for rich or powerful families. These enclosures usually contain a pillar ending in a majestic turban, adorned with three or four marble leaves, rounded at the top like the handle of a spoon, as well as a dozen small childish-looking *cippuses* (*stellae*): there lies a pasha with his wives, and their offspring who died in infancy, a sort of funereal harem keeping him company in the other world.

In the open spaces, workmen create door frames and treads for stairs; idlers sleep in the shade or smoke their pipes, seated on a tomb; veiled women pass, in yellow boots at a nonchalant pace; children play hide-and-seek among the tombstones, uttering little joyful cries; cake-sellers offer their light wares encrusted with almonds. Between the interstices of the dilapidated monuments, chickens peck, cows search out a few meagre clumps of grass, and, in

its absence, graze on the remnants of slippers and old hats. Dogs have settled themselves in holes caused by the rotting away of the coffins, or rather the boards that support the ground around the corpses, and have made hideous burrows for themselves, the refuges of the dead having been enlarged by their voracity.

The most transient tombs are in places worn by the careless feet of passers-by, and are gradually obliterated amidst dust and debris of all kinds; broken pillars are scattered over the ground like pieces from a game of *jonchets* (a pick-up game played with carved sticks), and are buried like the corpses they designated, buried by those invisible gravediggers that make everything that is neglected disappear, tomb, temple or city; here, it is not solitude that clothes oblivion, but life that reclaims a place temporarily granted to death. More compact clumps of cypresses have, however, protected some corners of this desecrated cemetery, and preserve its melancholy. Turtledoves nest in the black foliage, and bearded vultures hover above the dark spires, tracing great circles in the azure sky.

A few small wooden houses, made from boards, slats and trellises, painted a red turned pink by rain and sun, are grouped among the trees, sagging, swaying, out of true, and in a state of disrepair most favourable to English watercolours and engravings.

Before descending the slope which leads to the Golden Horn, I stopped for a moment and contemplated the admirable spectacle which unfolded before my eyes: the foreground was formed by the Little Field and its slopes planted with cypresses and tombs; further off rose the brown tiled roofs and reddish houses of the Kasimpasa quarter; next the blue waters of the gulf which extends from Sarayburnu to the Eaux Douces d'Europe, and then by the line of undulating hills, on the far side of which Constantinople unfolds like an amphitheatre. The bluish domes of the bazaars, the white minarets of the mosques, the arches of the old Aqueduct of Valens, highlighted in black against the sky, the clumps of cypresses and plane trees, and acres of sloping roofs punctuated the magnificent horizon line extending from the Seven Towers to the heights of Eyüp: all this silvered by a pale light like transparent gauze amidst which floated the smoke of the steamboats on the Bosphorus heading for Therapia (*Tarabya*) or Kadi-Keuï (*Kadikoy*), their lightness of tone forming the happiest contrast with the warm, raw strength of the foreground.

After a few minutes of thoughtful admiration, I set off again, sometimes following a vague path, sometimes stepping over tombs, and arrived at a network of alleys lined with black houses, inhabited by charcoal-burners, blacksmiths, and other members of the ironworking industry. I said 'houses' just now, but the word is rather too splendid, and I retract it. Say huts, hovels, lean-tos, slums, everything you can imagine that is smokiest, dirtiest, and most wretched, but without those fine old walls, patched, scored, leprous, rotten, mouldy, and crumbling, that Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps' palette knife depicts so happily in his paintings of the Orient, and which grant such a high tone to the corresponding prints. Sad little donkeys, with flaccid ears and thin bloodstained backs, laden with coal or scrap iron, scraped past black workshops. Old beggar women, squatting on their flattened thighs, bent like the joints of a grasshopper, stretched out toward me, pitifully, from a ragged *ferace* (a loose robe with full-length sleeves), their bare mummified hands. Their owlish eyes punctuated the muslin veil, dented by the arch of their hawkish beaks and thrown like a shroud over their hideous faces;

others, nimbler, passed by, backs bent, heads bowed to their chests, one hand resting on a large cane, like Mother Goose in the pantomime intros at the Théâtre des Funambules (*on the Boulevard du Temple, in Paris*).

One can scarcely credit the fantastic ugliness at which old women in the Orient arrive, women who, to speak frankly, have renounced their sex, and are no longer disguised by the learned artifices of a laborious toilette; here the face-covering even adds to the impression; what one sees is dreadful, yet what one dreams of is more terrible. Sadly, the Turks lack a Sabbath which might prompt these witches to soar away on their broomsticks.

A few Albanian or Bulgarian *hamals*, bowed beneath enormous loads, like those whom Dante depicts in his *Purgatorio* (see the '*Divine Comedy*': *Canto X*), and not raising a foot till the other was securely grounded, went up and down the alleys; horses clattered on their way noisily, drawing showers of sparks at every pace from the rough, uneven paving of a district rather more working-class than fashionable.

I thus arrived at the Golden Horn, emerging near the white buildings of the arsenal, raised on vast foundations and crowned with a tower in the form of a belfry. This arsenal, built in a civilised style, holds little of interest for a European, though the Turks are very proud of it; I did not stop long to contemplate the buildings, as a consequence, but reserved my attention for the movement in the harbour, crowded with ships of all nations, and furrowed in all directions by caiques (*fishing-boats*), and especially for the marvellous panorama of Constantinople in view on the far shore.

The sight is so beautiful and strange one doubts its reality. One would think one had before oneself one of those opera canvases made for the set of an Oriental fairy-tale and bathed, by the stage-painter's fantasy and the radiance of the footlights, in the impossible gleams of the Apotheosis. The palace of Serai-Bournou (*the fourth courtyard of the Topkapi Palace*), with its Chinese capped roofs, crenellated white walls, trellised kiosks, gardens of cypresses, umbrella pines, sycamores and plane-trees; the mosque of Sultan Ahmed (*the Blue Mosque*), its rounded dome rising amidst its six minarets like ivory masts; Hagia Sophia, its Byzantine dome raised on thick buttresses striped transversely with white and pink courses, and flanked by its four minarets; the Bayezit Mosque, over which clouds of doves hover; Yeni Cami (*the New Mosque*); the Seraskier (*Beyazit*) tower, an immense hollow column which bears on its capital a perpetual stylite gazing to every point of the horizon to detect fires; and the Süleymaniye Mosque with its Arab elegance, its dome like a steel helm; are outlined in lines of light on a background of bluish, pearly, opaline hues, of inconceivable finesse, and form a picture which seems to belong rather to the mirages of the Fata Morgana than to prosaic reality. The silvery water of the Golden Horn reflects these splendours in its quivering mirror, adding yet more to the magic of the spectacle. Ships at anchor, and Turkish boats their sails brailed like birds' wings, serve, with their vigorous tones and the black hatching of their rigging, as foils to this backcloth of vapour through which the city of the Emperor Constantine and of Mehmed II is outlined in dreamlike colours.

I know from friends, who have made the journey to Constantinople before myself, that these marvels need, like theatre decorations, lighting and perspective; when one approaches too near, the glamour vanishes, the palaces are nothing more than worm-eaten hovels, the

minarets nothing more than large whitewashed pillars; the narrow, steep, and filthy streets lack character; but what matter, as long as the incoherent assembly of houses, mosques and trees tinted by the sun's palette, produces an admirable effect between sky and sea? Its appearance, though the result of illusion, is truly beautiful nonetheless.

I remained for some time at the water's edge watching the seagulls fly, the caiques swim past with the agility of sea-bream, and types of every people, represented by one or more examples, swarming by, a perpetual carnival of which one never tires; I was very keen to risk crossing the bridge of boats which joins the two banks, and walk *eis tin Polin* (εἰς τὴν πόλιν, *into the City*), as the ancient Greeks said: a phrase which the Turks, by dint of hearing it repeated, turned into Istanbul, the modern name of ancient Byzantium, though certain learned folk claim that one should pronounce it Islambol, the city of Islam. But that would have been a truly bold undertaking that the already advanced day left me no time to accomplish. I therefore turned back, and ascended the Little Field of the Dead to return to Pera. I turned right, which brought me, following the ancient Genoese walls, at the foot of which there is a dried-up moat half filled with rubbish, where dogs sleep and children play, to the front of the Galata Tower, a tall building that can be seen from far out at sea, and which, like the Seraskier Tower, has a fire-lookout at its summit.

It is a true Gothic keep, crowned with a circle of machicolations and topped with a pointed roof of copper oxidised by time, and which, instead of the crescent, might well bear the dove-tailed weather-vane of a feudal manor. At the bottom of this tower are grouped an agglomeration of huts and low houses which give one the scale of its elevation, which is very great. Its construction dates back to the heyday of the Genoese traders. These merchant-soldiers made fortresses of their warehouses, and crenellated their district as if prepared for war; their trading posts could withstand sieges, and indeed withstood more than one.

At the top of the hill occupied by the Little Field there is a broad path, bordered on one side by houses, which enjoys an admirable view: I followed it to a corner where an old cypress tree stands, its trunk ribbed with thick veins, and soon found myself, quite weary and dying of hunger, facing the street where I was lodging.

I was served a dinner, borne from the neighbouring *locanda* (*tavern*), which quickly lessened my appetite, though, alas, more through disgust with the food than by sating my quite legitimate hunger. I am not in the habit of writing elegies on my culinary disappointments when travelling, and a thready omelette flavoured with rancid butter is a minor misfortune which I do not seek, like some choosy gastronome on tour, to elevate to the status of a public catastrophe, but I note here, in passing, that this initial revelation of Constantinopolitan cuisine seemed to me a sad omen for the future. Spain had accustomed me to wine smelling of goat and tar, and I had resigned myself quite readily to the black wine of Tenedos brought in a kid's skin; but the yellow, brackish water, carrying the slime of old aqueducts, made me regret the *gargoulettes* of Algiers and the *alcarrazas* (*water-jugs*) of Granada.

Chapter 7: A Ramadan Night

In Paris, the idea of walking about from eight in the evening to eleven at night in Père-Lachaise, or the Montmartre cemetery, as if in a vignette from Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, would seem excessively odd and cadaverously Romantic; the most courageous dandies would be frightened at the idea; as for women, the very proposition of such an excursion, for pleasure, would make them faint with fear. In Constantinople, no one pays any attention to the act. The Boulevard de Gand (*Boulevard des Italiens*) of Pera is situated on the crest of the hill occupied by the Petit-Champ-des-Morts. Imagine, my dear sir, or my beautiful lady, that seated in summer on the steps of Tortoni's, you see before you, in the shadow of the cypress trees, pale in the moonlight, like tapering silver columns, thousands of gravestones and tombs, all the while carving away at your ice-cream, and talking about love or the like.

A frail fence, collapsing in several places, traces the demarcation line, crossed at every moment, between the funereal field and the lively promenade. A row of chairs and tables where customers lean over their cup of coffee, their sorbet or glass of water, runs from one end of this terrace to the other, which curves further on to join the Grand-Champ-des-Morts, the Large Field of the Dead, behind upper Pera. Ugly houses, six or seven stories high, belonging to that dreadful order of architecture unknown to Da Vignola (*the architect Giacomo Barozzi*), the bourgeois order that is, an amiable cross between that of a barracks and that of a cotton-mill, line the roadway on one side and enjoy an admirable view of which they are unworthy. It is true that these houses are considered the most beautiful in Constantinople, and that Pera is proud of them, deeming them capable, with good reason, of figuring honourably amongst those of Marseilles, Barcelona, and even Paris. They are indeed of the most civilised and modern hideousness; however, it is fair to say that at night, lit by the vague light of the lanterns and the twinkling of the stars, or the violet glow of the moon glazing their whitewashed facades, they take on, because of their very mass, a rather imposing appearance.

At either end of the terrace is a *café-concert*, that is to say, a café combining the delights of eating with the pleasure of an open-air orchestra of bohemian musicians who perform German waltzes and overtures from Italian operas.

Nothing is more cheerful than this promenade lined with tombs; the music, which never stops, the one orchestra starting up as the other finishes, gives a festive air to the customary gathering of strollers, whose friendly murmur serves as a bass to Verdi's brassy phrases. Vapour from the *latakyeh* (*Latakia, aromatic tobacco*) and *tombeki* (*Turkish tobacco*) rise in perfumed spirals from chibouks, narghiles and cigarettes, for everyone smokes in Constantinople, even the women. The shadows are dotted with bright points of light, like swarms of fireflies. The cry: 'A light!' resounds in all possible languages, and the waiters rush to satisfy these polyglot calls each brandishing a red-hot coal held at the end of a little pair of tongs.

Numerous clans of the families of Pera, dressed in European style, except for a few insignificant amendments to the hairstyle and the women's attire, walk about in the space left free by the seated customers. The young men are dressed as in the engravings of Jules David, in the latest-but-one style; one could distinguish them from elegant Parisians only by a slightly too raw air of novelty; they seek not to follow fashion, but anticipate it. Each item of their attire bears the signature of some famous supplier from the Rue Richelieu or the Rue de la Paix; their shirts are *from* Lami-Housset; canes from Verdier; hats from Bandoni; gloves from Jouvin; some, however, mostly along the Armenian families, wear red skullcaps with a black silk tassel, but they are few in number. The Orient is recalled to mind in this gathering only by some Greek who passes by, throwing back the sleeves of his embroidered jacket, his white fustanella flared like a bell swaying, or by some Turkish official on horseback, returning to Constantinople from the Grand-Champ and heading towards the Galata bridge, followed by his *cavass* (*armed guard*) and his pipe-bearer.

Turkish custom has survived the advances of European custom, and the women of Pera live very withdrawn lives, a voluntary seclusion of course, being scarcely seen outside except to take a walk in the Petit-Champ and breathe the cool night air; there are many who still do not allow themselves even this innocent distraction, which deprives the traveller of an opportunity to review the feminine types of the country, as one can in the Cascine Park (*Florence*), the Prado (*Madrid*), Hyde Park, or on the Champs-Élysées; only Man appears to exist in the Orient, Woman occupies a mythical state, and the Christians there share the Muslim view of the matter.

That evening, the Petit-Champ was very animated; Ramadan had commenced with the new moon, the appearance of which above the summit of the Bithynian Olympus (*Mount Uludağ*), watched by pious astrologers and proclaimed by the whole Ottoman Empire, announces the return of the great Mohammedan jubilee. Ramadan, as everyone knows, is Lent doubling as a carnival; the day belongs to austerity, the night to pleasure; penance is entwined with debauchery, as a legitimate reparation. From sunrise to sunset, the precise moment of which is indicated by the firing of a cannon, the Koran forbids the partaking of food, however light the sustenance may be. One cannot even smoke, the most painful deprivation of all for people whose lips rarely quit the amber mouthpieces; to quench the most ardent thirst with a mouthful of water would be a sin and destroy the merit of abstinence; but from evening to morning everything is permitted, and one is amply compensated for the privations of the day. For, then, the Turkish city celebrates.

From the promenade of the Petit-Champ, I enjoyed the most wondrous spectacle. On the other side of the Golden Horn, Constantinople sparkled like the jewelled crown of some emperor of the East; the minarets of the mosques bore bracelets of lanterns on each of their galleries, and from one spire to the other ran, in letters of fire, verses from the Koran, inscribed on the azure as on the pages of a divine book; Hagia Sophia, Sultan-Ahmet, Yeni-Cami, Süleymaniye, all the temples of Allah which rise from Sarayburnu to the hills of Eyüp, shone with lights, and proclaimed in fiery exclamations the religion of Islam. The crescent moon, accompanied by a star, seemed to embroider the coat of arms of the Ottoman Empire on a celestial standard.

The water of the gulf multiplied, in scattering them, the reflections of this million-fold phosphorescence and seemed to roll in their flow torrents of half-melted gems. Reality, it is said, is always inferior to dream; but here the dream was surpassed by reality. The tales of the *Thousand and One Nights* offer nothing more magical, and the heaped treasure of Harun al-Rashid, if poured forth, would have paled beside this colossal and flamboyant scene extending over a league in length.

During Ramadan, one enjoys complete freedom; carrying a lantern is not obligatory as at other times; the streets, brilliantly lit, render this precaution, insisted on by the police, unnecessary. The *giaours* (*infidels*) can enjoy Constantinople until the last lights are quenched, a show of boldness which would not be without its dangers at another time. So, I eagerly accepted the proposal made to me by a young Constantinopolitan, to whom I was recommended, to descend to the harbour of Tophane, charter a caique, make a visit to see the Sultan say his prayers in his Ciragan Palace, and end our evening in the city.

We descended from Pera to Tophane by a sort of switchback alley, similar to the bed of a dry torrent. For Parisian feet accustomed to the elasticity of bitumen, the softness of macadam, this tumble is a salutary exercise. Thanks to the arm lent me by my companion, who was an expert in the geography of the daredevil slopes of this Calvary, I arrived at the bottom without injury - an unexpected and surprising result. I even avoided stepping on the paws of the dogs lying there, or a single of those amiable animals leaping at my legs.

As we progressed, and especially after passing a small Turkish fountain with a projecting roof where the street divided, the crowd increased and was compacted; the shops, brightly lit, illuminated the public way, which had been invaded by Turks squatting on the ground or seated on low stools, smoking with that show of voluptuousness which a day of abstinence gives; the to-ing and fro-ing of this perpetual swarm, creates the most animated and picturesque scene in the world; for, between the two banks of motionless smokers, flowed a stream of walkers of all nations, all sexes, and all ages.

Borne along by the flow, we arrived at Tophane Square, traversing the arcaded courtyard of the mosque, which, on this side, forms the corner, and we found ourselves in front of that charming fountain in the Arab style (*built by order of Sultan Mahmud I, in 1732*) which English engravings have made familiar to everyone, and which has been stripped of its pretty Chinese dome of a roof, now replaced by a vile hollow iron balustrade.

Gustave's Masked Ball (the opera '*Gustave III, ou Le Bal Masqué*' by Danial Auber, 1833) offers no greater variety of costume than Tophane Square during a Ramadan night: the Bulgarians, with their coarse sleeveless jackets, and hats encircled by a crown of fur, accoutrements scarcely differing from those of a Danube peasant; the slender-waisted Circassians, with flared tunics adorned with cartouches which make them look like organ cases; the Georgians, their short tunics tightened by a metal band, in Russian caps of patent leather; the Albanians, wearing embroidered sleeveless jackets over bare torsos; the Jews, designated by their robes, slit at the side, and their black skullcaps surrounded by a blue kerchief; the Greeks of the Isles, with their immense high-waisted trousers, their belt-straps, and tarbooshes (*similar to a fez*) with silk tassels; the Turks of the Reform Movement, in straight frock-coats and red fezzes; the traditionally-dressed Turks, with their flared turbans and their pink,

daffodil-yellow, cinnamon-coloured, or sky-blue kaftans, recalling the fashion of the days of the Janissaries; the Persians, with their large black lambskin caps from Astrakan; the Syrians, recognizable by their gold-striped kerchiefs and their large *mashlas* (a surcoat, like an *aba*) shaped like a Byzantine dalmatic; the Turkish women, draped in white yashmak (a veil, or *niqab*) and *feredje* (a light-coloured surcoat); the Armenian women, less strictly veiled, dressed in violet and shod in black, form for the eye, in groups which are constantly forming and dissolving, the most interesting carnival one can imagine.

Open-air stalls selling yogurt (*curdled milk*), or kaymak (*clotted cream*); confectionery shops, of which the Turks are very fond; water-merchants' counters on which are rung, by means of a hydraulic device, little chimes of bells, crotals, or glass orbs; and refreshment stands vending sorbets, granitas, and snow-water; are lined up along the edges of the square, brightened by their illuminations. The tobacco-merchants' shops, brilliantly lit, are filled with high-ranking personages who watch the festive goings-on while smoking quality tobacco in cherry or jasmine pipes with enormous stems. At the rear of the cafes the *darbuka* (*drum*) hums, the tambourine quivers, the rebab (*an instrument like a lute*) screeches, and the reed-flute squawks; monotonous, nasal chants, mingled now and then with Tyrolean calls, and shrill cries, rise from the clouds of smoke. It took us all the trouble in the world, amidst this crowd that would not yield, to reach the waterfront of Tophane, where we could board a caique.

In a few strokes of the oars, we had put out to sea, and from the middle of the Bosphorus could gaze at the illumination of the Sultan Mahmud II Mosque (*the Nusretiye Mosque*) and the cannon foundry which adjoins it and gives its name to the port ('*Top*', in Turkish, means cannon; '*hane*', place, square, or store.) The minarets of the Sultan Mahmud Mosque are considered the most elegant in Constantinople and are cited as classic examples of Turkish architecture; they rose slenderly into the blue night air, sketched in lines of fire, and linked by verses from the Koran, producing the most graceful of effects. In front of the foundry, the illuminations depicted a gigantic cannon complete with gun-carriage and wheels, the fiery coat of arms of the Turkish artillery symbolised most precisely by that naive outline.

We skirted the European shore of the Bosphorus, glittering with light, bordered by the summer palaces of the viziers and pashas, and punctuated by illuminations mounted on iron frames presenting sentences from the Koran in a complicated calligraphy, in the Oriental manner, as well as the outlines of steamboats, and bouquets in fiery vases, and arrived at the Ciragan palace, composed of a main building with a triangular pediment and slender columns, in the style of the Chamber of Deputies in Paris, and two wings latticed with windows and resembling immense cages. The name of the Sultan written in lines of fire sparkled on the facade, and through the open doorway one could see a vast room where, amidst the luminous glare from the candelabra, moved several opaque shadows seemingly agitated by pious convulsions. The Padishah (*emperor*) was praying, surrounded by his great officers kneeling on carpets; a nasal murmur of psalmody escaped from the room along with the yellow glow of the candles, and rose into the calm blue of the night.

After a few minutes contemplation, we signalled to the caique to return, and I was able to gaze across at the far bank, the shores of Asia-Minor, on which stood Scutari (*Üsküdar*), the

ancient Chrysopolis, with its illuminated mosques, the background draped in the folds of its curtain of cypress trees with funereal foliage.



Cavalry Barracks on the Bosphorus

During the passage I had the opportunity to admire the skill with which the oarsmen in these frail craft navigate the currents, and thread the crowd of boats, which would render a crossing of the Bosphorus extremely dangerous for less skilful boatmen. The caiques have no rudder, and the rowers, unlike the gondoliers of Venice who face the prow of the gondola, turn their backs to the goal towards which they are heading, which means that at each stroke of the oar they must turn their heads to assure themselves that some unexpected obstacle is not about to obstruct them. They also employ certain conventional cries, by means of which they warn each other, and avoid collisions with inconceivable agility.

Seated on a cushion in the depths of the caique, next to my companion, I enjoyed the admirable spectacle, in silence and absolute immobility since the slightest movement is enough to capsize these narrow gondolas, designed more for the weight of a Turkish crew; the night dew pearled on our pea-jackets, and made the Latakia tobacco in our chibouks crackle, because, however hot the day, the nights are cool on the Bosphorus, always fanned by the sea breezes and affected by the columns of air displaced by its currents.

We entered the Golden Horn, and, skimming the tip of Sarayburnu, we were able to disembark, in the midst of a flotilla of caiques, between which ours, after turning about, insinuated itself like an axe-head, near a large kiosk with a Chinese roof and walls hung with green canvas, the Sultan's pleasure pavilion, now abandoned by him and changed to a guardhouse. It was a pleasure to see the long boats with gilded prows carrying the approaching pashas and high officers, who were awaited at the quayside by fine Barbary horses, magnificently harnessed and held by North-Africans, Albanians or the imperial guards, the crowd moving aside respectfully to give them passage.

In normal times, the streets of Constantinople are unlit, and one must carry a means of illumination in one's hand, as if in search of someone; but, at the time of Ramadan, nothing is more joyously lit than its usually dark alleys and squares, in which paper lanterns flicker near and far; the shops, open all night, blaze and emit bright streaks of light which are gaily reflected by the houses opposite; the stalls display nothing but lamps, candles, and night-lights swimming in oil; the rotisseries, where mutton cut into small pieces (*kebab*) sizzles on perpendicular skewers, are illuminated by the ardent glow of embers; the red mouths of ovens, baking baklava cakes, yawn; the open-air tradesmen surround themselves with little candles to attract their customers' attention and make visible their merchandise; groups of friends dine together, around a lamp suspended by three strands of wire, whose flame flickers in the fresh air, or around a large brightly-coloured lantern; while smokers, seated at the doors of the cafés, revive the red coals of their chibouks and narghiles with each inhalation, and over this crowd in good spirits the light falls and is mirrored in strangely picturesque reflections.

These folk ate, and with an appetite whetted by a fourteen-hour fast, rice balls and minced meat wrapped in vine leaves, or kebab rolled in a kind of crepe, boiled or roasted corn, enormous cucumbers or Smyrna *carpous* (*figs*), with green skin and white flesh; some, richer or more sensual, were served large portions of baklava or gorged themselves on sweets with a childish greed laughable in big, bearded men hefty as sappers; others feasted more frugally on white mulberries, piled up in heaps in the windows of the fruit shops.

My friend took me into a confectioner's shop, which is the Boissier's (*Pierre-Bélisaire Boissier founded his confectionery stall and then shop, Maison Boissier, at 9 Boulevard des Capucines, Paris, in 1835*) of Constantinople, to introduce me to the delights of Turkish gourmandising, which are more refined than Paris might think.

This shop deserves an individual description: the shutters, half-raised, like those on the portholes of a ship, formed a kind of sculpted awning, chequered and painted in yellow and blue, above large glass vases filled with pink and white sugared almonds; stalagmites of *rahat-lokoum* (*Turkish Delight*), a kind of transparent paste made with fine flour and sugar, and variously coloured; jars of preserved roses; and jars of pistachios.

We entered the establishment, in which three people would have had difficulty moving about, but which is nonetheless one of the largest in Constantinople, and the master, a substantial Turk with a dark complexion, a black beard, and a good-naturedly fierce countenance served us, with a friendly yet terrifying air, pink and white *rahat-lokoum*, and all sorts of exotic sweets, both fragrant and exquisite, though a little too honeyed for a Parisian palate. A cup of excellent mocha came to enhance, with its salutary bitterness, these sickening

sweets, which I had abused out of love for the local colour. At the back of the shop, young lads, a tightly-fastened Rouen-calico apron around their waists, a rag around their heads, their arms bare, were stirring copper basin-loads of almonds and pistachios over a hot fire, dressing them in their sugar coats, or rolling out sausages of white-powdered *rahat-lokoum*, making no secret of their recipes.

Seated on one of those low stools which, with the divans, alone form seats for the Turks, I watched a compact, motley crowd, threaded by sellers of sorbet and criers of iced water and cakes, pass along the street, a crowd through which a mounted official, preceded by his *kavas* and followed by his pipe-holder, would make his way imperturbably and without warning, or which would part before a *talika* (*a four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage*) jolting horribly over stones and through quagmires, and led by a coachman on foot. I was scarcely sated by this scene so new to me, and it was after one in the morning when, guided by my companion, I headed towards the landing stage where our boat awaited.

On the way, we crossed the courtyard of Yeni Cami (*the New Mosque*), which is surrounded by a gallery of ancient columns surmounted by Arab arches, in a superb style, that the moon whitened with its silvery light and bathed in bluish shadow; beneath the arcades lay various groups of beggars rolled up in their rags, with the tranquility of folk who are at home. Any Muslim who has no place of refuge can, without fear of the night patrols, stretch out on the steps of a mosque; he will sleep there as safely as a Spanish beggar beneath a church porch.

The celebrations in Constantinople would continue until the cannon shot which announces, at the first rays of dawn, the return of the fast; but it was time to depart and seek a little rest, and we still had to make the ascent from Tophane to Pera, a sorry exercise after a day of physical fatigue and intellectual bedazzlement. The dogs grumbled to themselves a little as I passed, sensing that I was French and a new arrival; but they calmed down after my friend muttered a few words to them in Turkish, and they let me pass without harming my calves; thanks to him, I returned to my lodgings free of wounds from their formidable fangs.

Chapter 8: The Cafés

The Turkish café on the Boulevard du Temple in Paris (*the 'Jardin Turc' at No. 29*) has misled many Parisians as to the luxury of Oriental cafés. Constantinople remains far from that magnificence of heart-shaped arches, little columns, mirrors, and ostrich eggs: nothing is plainer than a Turkish café in Turkey.

I will describe one which might pass for one of the finest, yet nonetheless in no way recalls the luxury of Oriental fairy tales; you would look in vain for the glazed earthenware tiles, the stucco lacework, the beehive vaults, trefoil windows, and gold, green and red colouring of the rooms in the Alhambra, now well-known from the illuminated lithographs of Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey. Many establishments that serve Dutch broth, in Paris, are equally splendid.

Imagine a room about twelve feet square, vaulted and limewashed, surrounded by wood panelling at head height, and with a bench-sofa covered with a straw mat. In the middle, and this is its most elegantly Oriental detail, is a white marble fountain with basins on three levels emitting a trickle of water which tinkles in falling. In a corner blazes a stove with a hood, on which coffee is boiled, cup by cup, in small yellow-copper coffee pots, at the customer's request.

On the walls hang shelves loaded with razors, with pretty little mother-of-pearl mirrors above, shaped like shields, in which customers may check that their appearance is to their liking; for, in Turkey, every café is at the same time a barber's shop; and, while I squatted on the mat smoking my chibouk, between a big Turk with a parrot's beak, and a thin Persian with that of an eagle, a young Greek opposite, a dandy from the Phanar (*Fener*) district, was having his moustache waxed, and his eyebrows, previously plucked with a small pair of tweezers, darkened.

We choose to believe that, following the proscriptions in the Koran, Turks absolutely forbid images of human beings, and regard the products of the plastic arts as works of idolatry: this is true in principle, but is much less rigorously adhered to in practice, and the cafés are adorned with all sorts of engravings of the most baroque taste and choice, which do not seem to offend Muslim orthodoxy in any significant way.

The Café de la Fontaine, among others, contains a complete art gallery, characteristically grotesque enough for me to transcribe the catalogue of its works here, which I noted on the spot with the care it deserved: a drawing of a Dervish turban, placed on a tripod and accompanied by verses from the Koran; a scene involving the national dance; a *Santon* (*Turkish saint*) seated on a gazelle skin, taming a lion in vivid cinnabar, doubtless one of those red lions of which Henrich Heine speaks in his preface to his *Reisebilder* ('*Travel Pictures*', 1826); studies of animals, by Victor Adam; warriors from Khorasan with ferocious moustaches, and barbarous crests, brandishing maces and mounted on six-legged blue horses; Napoleon at the Battle of Regensburg (*The Battle of Ratisbon, of 1809*); the names of Allah and Ali in beautiful calligraphic script, interspersed with arabesques and flowers; *The Young Spanish Woman*, a print from the rue Saint-Jacques, with this epigraph in verse taken from a *mirliton* (*kazoo*) from the Saint-Cloud Fair, or a garter from Tembleque (*in Spain*):

‘J’ai cru voir dans tes yeux l’image du bonheur,
Aussi je te confie et ma vie et mon cœur.’

‘I thought I saw the image of happiness in your eyes,
So, I entrust my life to you, and my heart likewise.’

Also Turkish ships, steamboats and caiques, whose sailors are represented by Turkish letters their legs extended in the shape of oars; a battle between twenty-two Frenchmen and

two hundred Arabs; fakirs, followed in the desert by goats, antelopes, and snakes, of most primitive design; the Emperor of Russia and his august family; Turkish women's costumes; Grivas, a Greek hero (*one of a number of famous warriors from the Grivas family who fought in the Greek War of Independence*); a Turk, drawing his own blood; the Battle of Austerlitz; a portrait of Muhammad-Ali, the Pasha of Egypt and of phenomenal plumpness; the Tomaski balloon, which performed a famous ascent over Constantinople; a lion, a stag, and an Angora goat; various fantastic creatures, chimeras of natural history the likes of which one finds only in paintings of fairground menageries; various views of the arsenal and the principal mosques; a likeness of Geneviève de Brabant (*heroine of a story in the medieval 'Golden Legend'*), etc., etc. All these contained in little two-bit frames.

A similar bizarre mixture can be seen everywhere, with some variations of subject; Turkish calligraphy gives friendly aid to French imagery, and forms without malice the most bizarre antitheses of ideas on benevolent walls, which tolerate everything, like the daily paper: sirens swim there next to steamboats, and the heroes of the *Shahnameh* (*the Persian epic by Ferdowsi*) brandish their battle axes above the 'grumblers' of Napoleon's Empire.

It is a genuine pleasure to be served one of those little cups of cloudy coffee by a young rascal with big black eyes, who delivers it to the tips of your fingers in a large 'eggcup' of silver or copper openwork filigree, after a long walk through the oh-so-tiring streets of Constantinople, which refreshes you more than any iced drink could. The cup of coffee is accompanied by a glass of water, which the Turks drink before their coffee and the Franks after. There is a somewhat characteristic anecdote told on this subject. A European, who spoke the languages of the Orient perfectly well, and wore the Muslim costume with the ease acquired by long habit, and whose complexion tanned by the hot sun of the country displayed the local hue to the highest degree, was recognised as a Frank in a small one-eyed café in Syria by a poor Bedouin in rags, despite his being unable to find fault with the pure Arabic of this exotic customer. - 'How could you tell I was a Frank?' said the European, as annoyed as Theophrastus was when called a foreigner by the herb-seller in the Athens marketplace, for a misplaced accent. - 'You drank the water after your coffee,' replied the Bedouin.

Everyone brings their tobacco in a pouch, the café simply provides the chibouk, whose amber mouthpiece must be unstained, and the narghile, a rather complicated device that would be difficult to carry. The price of a cup of coffee is twenty paras (about two and a half sous); if you offer a piastre (four and a half sous), you are a magnificent lord. The money is deposited in a chest pierced with an opening, like a money-box, and placed near the door.

Although in Turkey any beggar in rags may seat himself on the café's sofa beside the most sumptuously dressed Turk without the latter drawing back so as to avoid his gold-embroidered sleeve coming into contact with the former's frayed and greasy rags, nonetheless members of the lower classes favour their usual haunts. The café by the marble fountain, situated between the Seraï Bournou (*Topkapi Palace*) and the mosque of Yeni-Cami (*The New Mosque*), in one of the most beautiful districts of Constantinople, is one of the most-frequented in the city.

A charming and very oriental detail poeticises this café in the eyes of a European. Swallows have built their nest in the vault, and, as access is always available, they come and go with quick beats of their wings, uttering little joyful cries and bringing insects to their young,

careless of the pipe smoke and the presence of the café's customers, their dark feathers sometimes brushing a fez or a turban. Their fledglings, heads poking from the opening to the nest, watch, calmly, with eyes like little black nails, these customers come and go, and fall asleep to the hum of the water in the hookahs' carafes.

It is a touching sight, the birds' confidence in mankind, sufficient for them to nest above the café; Orientals, often cruel to other men, are very gentle with animals, and know how to make themselves loved by them; and the animals approach them willingly. The customers do not trouble them, as do Europeans with their turbulence, loud outbursts, and incessant laughter. Those governed by fatalism possess something of the serene passivity of the creatures.

Near the *tekke* or monastery of the whirling Dervishes at Pera, opposite a cemetery annexed to, or an extension of, the Petit-Champ-des-Morts, there is a café frequented mainly by Franks and Armenians. It is a large square room, half-height panelled with yellowish woodwork enhanced with white fillets, surrounded by a tapestry-work divan, and brightened by mirrors, with gold and black frames supported on ropes with gilded tassels and adorned with small hooks of stamped copper on which napkins are hung; for this café, like every establishment of the kind in Constantinople, is enhanced by a *barberia* (*shaving area*) to borrow from Spanish a useful word which the French language lacks. On a board, at the back, are arranged hookahs of cut glass, Bohemian glass, and Damascene steel, the light striking their facets, entwined like Laocoon in their flexible morocco pipes, and ringed with brass wire. Near the hookahs, like shields on the sides of an antique trireme, gleam large copper basins in which the barber soaps the heads of his customers. One can sit, dreamily, on the bench by the door, and watch the tradesmen pass by on their way to their counters in Galata, or contemplate the skewed tombs, that lean above the public highway from the top of their cypress-planted terrace.

The café of Beschick-Tash (*Beşiktaş*), on the European shore of the Bosphorus, is of more picturesque construction; it resembles those huts on piles, from the summit of which fishermen watch for the passage of schools of fish; shaded by clumps of trees, made of trellises and planks on stilts, it is bathed by the rapid current which washes the quay of Arnaut Keuï (*Arnavutköy*) and freshened by the breezes of the Black Sea; seen from open water, it produces a graceful effect, its lights spreading their reflections on the water. A perpetual riot of caiques seeking shore animates the surroundings of this aerial café, recalling, but with more elegance, those which border the Gulf of Smyrna.

To conclude this monograph on Constantinople's cafés, let me mention another located near the Yeni-Cami harbour, which is rarely frequented except by sailors. The lighting is quite original: it consists of glasses full of oil in which a wick burns, suspended from the ceiling by a spiral wire, like those used in little children's wooden cannons, serving as a spring. The *kahveci* (*coffee-master*) touches the glasses from time to time, which, through the elasticity of the metal, rise and fall, performing a sort of pyrotechnic ballet, to the great delight of the assembly, dressed in such a manner as to fear no oil stains. A chandelier composed of a brass wire frame representing a ship and decorated with a quantity of candles which highlights its lines, completes this bizarre illumination, its delicate allusion easily grasped by the café's customers.

Seeing a Frank enter, the *kahveci* gave the light a furious thrust to honour me; and the glasses began to dance like will-o'-the-wisps, while the nautical chandelier pitched and rolled like a caravel (*sailing-ship*) in a storm, scattering drops of rancid oil like dew.

To render the physiognomy of the regulars of this den, one would need Auguste Raffet's pencil or Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps' brush; either would scarcely suffice. There were fellows there with forbidding moustaches, battered noses in violent tones, complexions coloured like Havana cigars or baked brick, large white oriental eyes with black pupils, shaved and bluish temples, ferocious attitudes and extraordinary accents; heads that one cannot forget once seen, and that make the savagery of the most truculent of masters appear mild.

The wavering brightness of the oscillating night-lights highlighted their figures amidst the tobacco smoke, revealing abrupt planes, unexpectedly flat areas, and deep shades of mummy, sienna, and bitumen, bathing them, vigorously, in a Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro. Instead of the tranquil wall of a café, one involuntarily dreamed a background, for them, of harsh rocks in a mountain gorge, or the black crevices of a brigand's cave, though they were, when all is said, the most honest people in the world; for curved noses, deep tans, bushy eyebrows, and skulls in exaggerated tones do not render the souls within villainous, and those beings of fierce appearance sniffed at their coffee and indulged in the sweetness of *kief* (*rest and idleness*) with a placidity astonishing for mortals so characteristic and so worthy as they were of serving as a model for the bandits of Salvator Rosa or Jean-Adrien Guignet.

Their attire consisted of old jackets over a bare torso, wide breeches of canvas glazed with pitch and tar, red belts reaching to the armpits, faded ragged tarbooshes twisted around their heads, down-at-heel slippers, and coarsely decorated peacoats stiffened with sea water and dried by the sun; marvellous rags which appeared picturesque rather than decrepit, the cast-offs of a *lazzarone* (*casual worker*) and not a poor man, the holes in which reveal muscles of steel and bronzed flesh.

The arms of nearly all these sailors were tattooed in red and blue. The crudest individual instinctively feels that *ornamentation* creates an insurmountable line of demarcation between himself and the animal kingdom; and, if he cannot embroider his clothes, he embroiders his skin. This custom is found everywhere: it was not the daughter of the potter Dibutades (*Butades of Sicyon*) tracing the shadow of her lover on a wall, but a savage tracing an arabesque on his tawny skin with a fishbone, who invented the art.

I was able to distinguish, first of all, on those swarthy arms, with their athletic biceps and prominent veins, talismanic *mashallahs* (*mashallah is Arabic for 'Allah has so willed'*) which protect against the evil eye so feared in the East; then flaming hearts pierced by an arrow, exactly like those on the arms of French military drummers or the letter-paper of amorous female cooks; suras from the Koran, pious souvenirs of the pilgrimage to Mecca, intertwined with flowers and foliage; anchors in saltire; and steamboats with their paddle-wheels and corkscrews of smoke.

I noted, among the rest, a strong young man, a little more elegantly ragged than the others, whose arms, bare to the shoulder, revealed, framed by arabesques: on the right a young Turk, in Reform costume, blue frock-coat and red fez, holding a pot of basil in his hand, and on the

left a little dancer in a short petticoat, and the corset of a *peri (fay)*, who seemed to have been arrested in the middle of her capers so as to accept the flowery homage of the tattoo's gallant owner. This masterpiece alluded, no doubt, to some tale of good fortune the memory of which the prudent sailor had commanded to be etched on his skin lest it fade from his heart.

Two fearful but very polite fellows graciously made room for me on the straw-filled divan; and the coffee I drank there was assuredly finer than the black concoctions of the most famous café in Paris. The absence of inebriation renders passable the lowest classes of Constantinople, and Orientals have a natural dignity unknown amongst us. Imagine a Turk entering, at night, the Cabaret Paul Niquet (*a tavern on the right bank of the Seine, popular among the Parisian working class*). Of what jeers and mockery, of what crude curiosity would he not have been the object and the victim! That was my position in this smoke-filled den, yet no one seemed to notice me or allow themselves the slightest impropriety. It is true that the only drink sold was water, peddled around the room by young Greek children repeating in monotonous, screeching voices: '*Cryonero, cryonero (ice-water)*'; while at Paul Niquet's they drink rough wine (*petit bleu*) and brandy (*eau d'affé*) being excessively civilised.

Let me also mention a rather remarkable café, located near the Old Bridge (*Cisr-i Atik, not extant*) at Oun-Capan (*Unkapani*), on the Golden Horn, mainly haunted by the Greeks of the Phanar (*Fener*) district. One approaches by caique, and, while smoking one's pipe, enjoys the view of the boats coming and going, and the evolutions of the gulls skimming the water with the tips of their wings, or the buzzards (*turkey vultures*) tracing great circles in the blue of the sky.

Such are, with a few variations, the main kinds of Turkish café, which hardly resemble the idea that one has of them in France, but which were no surprise to me, prepared as I was by having visited Algerian cafés which were even more primitive, if that is possible. They are often enlivened by troops of musicians, singing and playing instruments, in strange keys and rhythms unfamiliar to European ears, but which the Orientals listen to for hours on end with signs of pleasure I have sometimes shared, I confess, even if Giacomo Meyerbeer, Fromental Halévy and Hector Berlioz despise me profoundly for it, and treat me as a barbarian. I will have occasion to return to these Turkish musicians, who, if not harmonious, are at least picturesque.

Chapter 9: The Shops

The Oriental shop differs greatly from the European shop: it is a kind of alcove, cut into the wall, which is closed in the evening with shutters which are drawn down like porthole-covers; the merchant, crouching cross-legged on a piece of matting or Smyrna carpet, nonchalantly smokes his chibouk or spins the beads of his *komboloi* (*a cord of devotional beads, in Arabic a 'misbaha'*) through his distracted fingers with an impassive and detached air, maintaining the same pose for hours on end, and seeming to care very little for trade; the buyers usually stand outside, in the street, examining the goods piled up on the front counter, without the slightest

mercantile coquetry; the art of display, pushed to such a high degree in France, is entirely unknown or wholly disdained in Turkey; nothing recalls, even in the most beautiful streets of Constantinople, the splendid shops of the Rue Vivienne or the Strand.

Smoking is a primary need of the Turkish people; therefore, shops which sell tobacco, amber mouthpieces, and pipe-bowls abound. The tobacco, chopped very finely into long silky tufts of a blond colour, is arranged in piles on the display board, according to price and quality; it is divided into four main sorts, the names of which are as follows: *iavach* (*yavaş*, mild), *orta* (medium), *dokan akleu* (spicy), and *sert* (strong), and sells for eighteen to twenty piastres per *oke* (*the oke is about two and three quarter pounds in weight*), according to its origin. These tobaccos, of graduated strength, are smoked in the chibouk or rolled into cigarettes, the use of which is beginning to spread there. The most esteemed tobaccos are those from Macedonia.

Tombeki (*tombac*), tobacco exclusively intended for the narghile, comes from Persia; it is not chopped like the rest, but crumpled and broken into small pieces; its colour is browner, and its strength is such that it cannot be smoked without having previously undergone two or three washings. As it might be at risk of being scattered, it is enclosed in glass jars, like apothecary's drugs. Without *tombeki*, the narghile is impractical, and it is unfortunate that this tobacco can only be obtained with great difficulty in France, since nothing is more favourable to poetic reverie than to inhale in small sips, on a cushioned sofa, this fragrant smoke, enlivened by the water it passes through, and which reaches you after having circulated in a red or green morocco tube which one winds about the arm, like a Cairo snake-charmer toying with a serpent. It is the sybaritism of smoking, the smoker, the smoking-den - a more precise word is lacking, and I try all three while waiting for the right term to arise of its own accord - taken to its highest degree of perfection; art is not foreign to this subtle pleasure; there are narghiles of gold, silver and steel, chiselled, damascened, nielloed, ornamented in a wondrous manner, and with a curve as elegant as that of the purest antique vases; coral, garnets, turquoises, and other more precious stones often stud its capricious arabesques, you inhale, from a masterpiece, tobacco metamorphosed into perfume, and the most aristocratically disdainful of Duchesses could not, I think, object to this pastime which provides Sultanas with long hours of peace and happy oblivion, by the rim of marble fountains, beneath the trelliswork of their kiosks.

The tobacco merchants in Constantinople are called *tutungis* (*tütiüncüs*). They are, for the most part, Greek or Armenian; as regards the former they are from Janina (*Ioannina*), Larissa, and Salonica (*Thessaloniki*); the latter are from Samsoun (*Samsun*), Trebizond (*Trabzon*), and Erzeroum (*Erzerum*); they have very engaging manners, and sometimes, especially in the evenings during Ramadan, viziers, pashas, beys and other great dignitaries, seat themselves, familiarly, in their shops, on small stools or bales of tobacco to smoke, talk and learn the news, as the British Lord Speaker seats himself on his woolsack.

An odd thing! Tobacco, so universally consumed today in the East, has been, on the part of certain Sultans, the object of the most rigorous prohibitions; more than one Turk has paid with his life for the pleasure of smoking, and the ferocious Murad IV more than once struck off the smoker's head pipe in mouth; coffee had no less blood-stained a beginning in Constantinople: it has spawned fanatics and martyrs.

In modern Byzantium, extreme care and often great luxury are dedicated to everything that concerns the pipe, the favourite instrument of Turkish pleasure. The shops of merchants selling mouthpieces, pipe-stems, and bowls, are very numerous and well supplied. The most esteemed stems are pierced lengths of cherry or jasmine wood, the branches having been trained appropriately, and they attain considerable prices, according to their size and degree of perfection.

A fine cherry-tree stem with its bark intact and shining with a dark lustre like a polished garnet, or a jasmine shoot with smoothed calluses and a charming blond hue, are worth up to five hundred piastres.

I sometimes lingered for a long time in front of the shop of a pipe-stem merchant, in the street that goes down to Tophane, opposite the walled cemetery, the rich tombs of which, variegated with gold and azure, one could see, through openings adorned with grilles. The merchant was an old man with a sparse grey beard, eyes surrounded by whitish skin, a curved nose, the overall physiognomy of a plucked macaw, and whose face was, in all innocence, an excellent caricature of a Turk, that the artist 'Cham' (*Amédée Charles Henri de Noé*) might envy. From the armhole of a waistcoat with worn buttons, protruded a flat, thin, yellow arm, in motion, like to that of a violinist sawing away at the E string with their bow when performing a difficult passage à la Paganini. On an iron spike, set in rotation by a like bow, a cherry-wood pipe was rotating, with dazzling rapidity, while the delicate operation of drilling was undertaken; which pipe the old merchant struck from time to time on the edge of his counter to shake off wood turned to dust; near to the old man a young boy, his son no doubt, was labouring; he was practicing on less valuable pipes. A family of little cats was playing nonchalantly in the sun, and rolling around in the fine sawdust; unworked lengths of wood, as well as those already worked, filled the back of the shop bathed in shade, and the whole formed a pretty Oriental genre scene that I might recommend to the artist Théodore Frère; a scene which, with a few variations, is to be found framed on every street corner.

The workplaces turning out pipe bowls are recognisable by the red dust with which they are sprinkled; an infinite number of bowls of yellow clay, which the firing will turn a pinkish red, arranged in order on boards, await the moment when they will enter the kiln; the bowls, of very fine and very soft material, on which the potter engraves various decorations using a wheel, and which he marks with a small seal, do not require curing like French pipes, and are sold at very low prices. Incredible quantities are consumed.

As for the amber mouthpieces, they are subject to their own individual craft, similar to that required for jewellery, due to the value of the material and the skill involved. Amber comes from the Baltic Sea, on the shores of which it is collected more abundantly than anywhere else; in Constantinople, where it is very expensive, the Turks prefer the pale, lemon-shaded, semi-opaque kind, demanding that the piece possesses neither stain, flaw, nor vein, conditions which are quite difficult to meet, and which considerably raise the price of the mouthpiece. A pair of perfect ones would fetch eight or ten thousand piastres.

A rack of pipes worth a hundred and fifty thousand francs is no rare thing among the high dignitaries and wealthy individuals of Stamboul; the valuable mouthpieces are encircled with a ring of enamelled gold, sometimes enriched with diamonds, rubies and other precious stones;

which constitutes an oriental way of displaying luxury, similar to our liking for English silverware and Boulle furniture (*André-Charles Boulle was furniture-maker to Louis XIV*); all these amber pieces, various in tone and transparency, polished, turned, and hollowed out with extreme care, take on warm and golden nuances in the sun that would have made Titian jealous, and which might create even in the most rabid sufferer from capnophobia the urge to smoke. In the humbler shops, one finds less expensive mouthpieces, possessing some imperceptible defect, but capable of doing their job no less well and just as pleasant to the lips.

There are also imitations of amber in coloured Bohemian glass, which are produced in large quantities, and cost very little; but these counterfeit items are sold only to Greeks or Armenians of the lowest class. To every self-respecting Turk, one may apply a line from Alfred de Musset's *Namouna*, thus modified:

‘Happy *Turk*! – He was smoking opium through amber,’

(*See De Musset's 'Namouna': Canto I, verse 9*)

I hope my readers will not hold it against me that I choose to record all these details of tobacco and pipes which a traveller's exactness forces me to utter, but Constantinople is, indeed, enveloped in a perpetual cloud of smoke, opaquer than the clouds which Homer's deities trod.

This stroll through the streets has caused my pen to wander despite myself; sentence follows sentence as step followed step; there is, I feel, a lack of continuity given so many disparate objects, but it would perhaps be useless to seek it; accept then, if you will, all these small characteristic details, usually overlooked by tourists, as you would glass beads of various colours strung unsymmetrically on the same thread, which, if they are worthless, at least have the merit of a certain baroque extravagance.

Near the store selling amber mouthpieces, I noticed a small confectioner's shop whose display offered, if not splendour, originality at least: a sugar steamboat, with paddle-wheels and imitation smoke, appeared next to a small child's cradle of the same material; a whirling Dervish, arms outstretched, head bent, and of a style even more primitive than that of gingerbread men, brushed, with the folds of his flying skirt, a chimerical lion with a green mane, a blue forelock, and a pink tail, vaguely recalling, in its pose, the great crouching lion brought from Piraeus to Venice (*by Francesco Morosini, in 1687*), or, better still, that by Antoine-Louis Barye, on the waterfront terrace of the Louvre; not far from the Turkish lion floated a squadron of birds of an indefinite species that Alphonse Toussenel, the naturalist, would himself find difficulty in classifying, and which were striped with tricoloured stripes like the trousers of a soldier of the Republic in summer uniform; I think, however, without daring to decide such a serious matter, that they were meant to represent ducks or seagulls, and that their blue, white, and red colour was a delicate and flattering nod to the French flag. Steamboats singularly occupy Turkish attention, and the sugar *Pyroscaphe* (*the Pyroscaphe*

was an early experimental steamship built by Marquis de Jouffroy d'Abbans in 1783) reminded me of the little steamboats in the English toy shops in the Strand; barbarism and civilisation united in the same idea.

The Turks, eating with their fingers, naturally have no silverware, with the exception of a few visitors to France or England who have returned from Paris or London with these luxury items almost unknown in the East, and even if they do possess such they use their forks and spoons solely in front of foreigners, to show their degree of civilisation. But one cannot eat yoghurt, *kaimak* (cream cheese) or cherry-compote with the fingers, so the tableware-makers produce pretty spatulas of tortoiseshell or boxwood of charming workmanship, which replace the absent silverware. In one of these merchants' shops, I saw a service of this kind, composed of a large spoon and six smaller ones fitting one within the other, thus forming a set in its case, of an exquisite originality of form and organisation.

The handle of the large spoon was decorated with fretwork piercings representing arabesques of a thinness and delicacy unmatched by the finest Chinese ivories; some light niello work, flowers, and foliage in the best of tastes, completed the ornamentation. The smaller spoons, less richly worked, also had their merit. It seems to me that Parisian goldsmiths, always in search of new ideas, might happily imitate this service in silver or silver-gilt, and that it might then appear with honour on the most splendid tables for the *entremets* (dishes served between courses) or dessert. I possess one exactly like it, from Trebizond, gifted to me by Monsieur R... of the Sardinian legation, which is at the disposal of François Froment-Meurice, or of any other modern Georg Wechter (the sixteenth century artist who made designs for goldsmith's work) or Benvenuto Cellini.

In the street that borders the Golden Horn, between the New Bridge and the Old Bridge, is the marble-works where they carve those herms topped with turbans that bristle, like white ghosts emerging from their tombs, amidst the numerous cemeteries of Constantinople. There is a perpetual noise of mallets and hammers; a cloud of sparkling micaceous dust sprinkles all this portion of the road with an un-melting snow; illuminators, surrounded by pots of green, red and blue, colour the backgrounds on which the name of the deceased will be highlighted in gold lettering, accompanied by a verse from the Koran, or such ornamentation of flowers, vines, and grape clusters as decorates the tombs of women more especially, being emblems of grace, gentleness and fertility.

It is here also that the marble basins of the fountains are fashioned, which are intended to refresh the air in courtyards, apartments, and kiosks, or serve for the frequent ablutions required by Muslim law, which elevates cleanliness to the height of a virtue, contrary to Catholicism, where filth is sanctified; so much so that for a long time, people in Spain who bathed frequently were suspected of heresy, and regarded as Moors rather than Christians.

This funereal industry seems not to sadden those who profess it, and they carve their sombre marble gravestones in the happiest mood in the world; in Turkey, the idea of death seems neither to scare anyone nor arouse the slightest melancholy feeling. Doubtless their familiarity with it, and the proximity of the cemeteries located within the living city, instead of being relegated as amongst us to some solitary place outside the walls, diminishes the impact of death's mystery and terror.

Beside this tomb-makers' yard, which is ever in operation and never lacks orders since death provides them with the busiest of occupations, life teems, swarms and buzzes joyfully: food-sellers display their victuals; everywhere there are barrels of whitish cheese, like greasy plaster, which the Turks use as butter; barrels of black olives and kegs of Russian caviar; heaps of watermelons and cucumbers; mounds of aubergines and tomatoes, violet and purple in hue; and blood-stained quarters of meat hanging from butchers' hooks, surrounded by a circle of skinny dogs in ecstasy; Further on, the fishmonger's fills your nose with an acrid maritime smell, while you grimace at the monstrous forms of cuttlefish, octopuses, wrasses, sea-scorpions and other bizarre inhabitants of the briny empire, that Nature seems not to have shaped for the clear light of day, but prudently hides in the greenish depths of the abyss.

The swordfish eaten in Constantinople are of a particularly formidable appearance: they are six to eight feet long, and are cut into large slabs; the severed heads, glaring from a round, glassy and blood-red eye, still threaten you with their blades, strong, rigid and blue as burnished steel. Nothing is stranger than this nose to which Nature has fixed a sword, completing the strange physiognomy of the creature. When I passed the fish-shop, there were four enormous swordfish, on slabs facing each other, brandishing their blades formidably like courtly seamen challenging each other to a duel. Frans Snyders, the Flemish artist, could have made excellent use of this motif.

What continually strikes the foreigner in Constantinople is the absence of women in the shops; there are only male tradesmen, no female ones. Muslim jealousy fails to accommodate itself to the relationships that commerce requires; so, it has rigorously excluded a sex in which it has little confidence. Many small public roles, granted to women in our country, are filled in Turkey by athletic fellows with bulging biceps, frizzy beards, and broad bull-necks, which seems to me quite ridiculous.

If, on the other hand, women are not the sellers, they are often the buyers; one sees them stationed in front of shops in groups of two or three, followed by their North African servants holding an open bag, to whom they pass their purchases, as Judith held out the head of Holofernes to hers. Bargaining seems to delight the Turkish women as much as it does the English; it is a way, like any other, to pass the time and exchange words with a human being other than their lords and masters, and there are few women who deny themselves this pleasure, especially women of the bourgeois class; *cadines* (*ladies*) have the fabrics and goods brought to them in their homes.

Chapter 10: The Bazaars

If you follow the winding streets that lead from the Yeni-Cami harbour to the Sultan Bayezid Mosque, you arrive at the Egyptian or Spice Bazaar, a large hall traversed from one door to the other by a broad alleyway intended for the circulation of goods and buyers. A penetrating odour, composed of the aromas of all the exotic products sold, rises to one's nostrils and

intoxicates. Displayed in heaps or open bags, one finds henna, sandalwood, antimony, powdery dyes, dates, cinnamon, benzoin, pistachios, ambergris, mastic, ginger, nutmeg, opium, and hashish, guarded by merchants seated, legs crossed, in a nonchalant pose, who seem as if numbed by the heaviness of an atmosphere saturated with fragrances. These 'beds of spice, towers of perfume', recalling the metaphors of the *Shir Hashirim* (*The 'Song of Songs' or 'The Song of Solomon'*, see verse 5:13), cannot but tempt one to linger.

One continues one's route amidst the deafening hammering of the boilermakers and the fatty exhalations from the eateries which display, on their counters, bowls full of Turkish ratatouilles, unappetizing to the Parisian, and you reach the Grand Bazaar, whose external appearance is in no way imposing: to its high greyish walls, surmounted by small leaden domes resembling warts, cling a host of lean-tos and stalls occupied by minor trades.

The Grand Bazaar, to retain the name with which the Franks endowed it, covers an immense area of land, and forms almost a city within a city, its streets, alleys, passageways, crossroads, squares, and fountains forming an inextricable labyrinth through which one has difficulty finding one's way, even after several visits. This vast space is vaulted, and the light falls from those little domes of which I spoke just now, which hummock the flat roof of the building; it is a soft, vague, shifting light, more favourable to the merchant than to the buyer. I would not wish to lessen the idea of Oriental magnificence that the phrase 'the Bedesten of Constantinople' inspires, but the best equivalent to the Turkish bazaar I can suggest is the Carreau du Temple in Paris (*the reference is to the wood-built market of 1811, replaced by an iron-framed one in 1863*) which it closely resembles in layout.

I entered through an arcade devoid of architectural character, and found myself in an alley reserved for the perfumers: it is there that they sell essences of bergamot and jasmine, bottles of attar of roses in velvet cases fringed with sequins, rose-water, depilatory pastes, pastilles from the seraglio embossed with Turkish characters, sachets of musk, rosaries of jade, amber, coconut, ivory, fruit-stones, rosewood and sandalwood, fine Persian mirrors with painted frames, square combs with broad teeth: the whole arsenal of Turkish coquetry. In front of these shops stand numerous groups of women whose apple-green, mauve-pink or sky-blue feredjes, their opaque and carefully closed yashmaks, their yellow morocco-leather boots fitted with galoshes of the same colour, proclaim them, in every way, to be Muslims; often they hold by the hand lovely children dressed in red or green jackets trimmed with gold, in Mameluke-style trousers in cherry, daffodil or any other bright colour of taffeta, who glow like flowers in the cool and transparent shade; African servants, wrapped in the blue and white cross-stitched *habbarah* (*abaya, a long, loose robe*) of Cairo, stand behind them, and complete the picturesque effect. Sometimes also a black eunuch, recognisable by his short chest, long legs, and broad, beardless, flabby head, sunk into the shoulders, watches with a morose air the small troop entrusted to his care, and waves, so as to make the crowd part, the *kurbash* (*whip*) of hippopotamus leather which is the distinctive mark of his authority. The merchant, leaning on his elbow, answers with a phlegmatic air the thousand questions of the young women who rummage through the goods, and turn his display upside down, interrogating him at random, asking the prices, and exclaiming at them with little bursts of incredulous laughter.

Behind these displays there are floors at the rear, which one ascends to by two or three steps, and where the more precious objects are locked away in chests and cupboards which are opened only for serious buyers. There, one finds beautiful striped scarves from Tunis; carpets and shawls from Persia, whose embroidery imitates most cunningly the palm-trees of Kashmir; mirrors framed in shell and mother-of-pearl; carved and inlaid tables to bear trays of sorbets; desks at which to read the Koran; perfume-burners in gold or silver filigree, in enamelled and guilloché copper; little hands in ivory or tortoiseshell with which to scratch one's back; narghile bowls in steel from Khorasan; cups from China or Japan: all the intriguing bric-a-brac of the Orient.

The main street of the Bazaar is adorned with arches of alternately black and white stone, and the vaulting offers arabesques in half-effaced grisaille in the Turkish-Rococo style, which is closer than one might think to the type of ornamentation employed under Louis XV. It ends in a crossroads where a historiated and painted fountain stands, the water of which is used for ablution, for the Turks never forget their religious duties, and they will halt calmly in the middle of a sale, leaving the buyer in suspense, to kneel on their carpets oriented towards Mecca and say their prayers, with as much devotion as if they were beneath the dome of Hagia Sophia or the Sultan Ahmed Mosque.

One of the shops most frequented by foreigners is that of Ludovic, an Armenian merchant who speaks French and allows you, with perfect patience, to turn his interesting store upside down. I lingered there for a good while, savouring excellent mocha coffee, in small Chinese cups held in silver filigree frames in the old Turkish fashion. Rembrandt would have found enough curiosities to enrich his museum of antiques: old weapons, old fabrics, bizarre goldwork, singular pottery, and heterogeneous utensils of unknown use. The wardrobes and odd furniture that sparkle amidst the shadows of his mysterious paintings are piled high in the corners of Ludovic's shop, where the picturesque Orient seems to have left its rags, forced as it now is to don the absurd costume of the Reform Movement, the false livery of civilisation clothing a barbarous body. On a small low table are spread *khanjars* (daggers), *yatagans* (short sabres), knives with embossed silver scabbards, sheaths of velvet, shagreen, Yemeni leather, wood, and copper, with handles of jade, agate, and ivory, and studded with garnets, turquoise, coral; long, narrow, broad, curved, wavy, of all shapes, times, and countries, from the damascene blade of the pasha, inlaid with verses from the Koran in gold lettering, to the crude knife of the camel-driver. How many Zeybec and Albanian irregulars, how many beys and effendis, how many *omrahs* (Indian Muslim courtiers) and *rajahs* (Indian kings and princes) have been deprived of the weapons from their belts to create this precious and baroque arsenal that would drive Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps mad with joy!

On the walls, beneath their helmets, hang gleaming iron suits of Circassian chainmail. Shields made of tortoiseshell, hippopotamus, and damascene steel, studded with copper bosses glitter; Mongol quivers crumple; long, nielloed and inlaid rifles lean against one another, at one and the same time both weapons and treasures; maces clash, similar to those the knights of the Middle Ages wielded, and which Turkish imagery never fails to place in the fists of Persians as a distinctive jibe.

The shelves and hangers are full of fluttering Brousse (*Bursa*) silks, shimmering like water in the moonlight beneath their sprinkling of silver; Lebanese slippers and tobacco pouches, with their light gold weave, intricate designs and coloured lozenges; fine silken crepe shirts with opaque or translucent stripes; kerchiefs embroidered with golden spangles; cashmeres from India and Persia; emir-green pelisses lined with marten or sable, jackets with braiding more complex than the arabesques on the ceiling of the Hall of Ambassadors in the Alhambra; stiff gold dolmans; diamond brocades with dazzling orphreys (*borders*); *mashlas* (*abas*, *short-sleeved surcoats*) from Cairo cut in the style of Byzantine dalmatics; all the fabulous luxury, all the chimerical wealth of those sunlit lands that we glimpse like the mirages of a dream from the depths of our cold Europe. Ludovic allows you to handle, unfold, examine, and toy in the light with, these oriental wonders; you rummage through the wardrobe of the *Thousand and One Nights*; for, if you wish, you may try on the jacket of *Prince Caramalzaman*, and unfurl the authentic robe of *Princess Boudroulboudour*.

Amongst the amber, ebony, coral, and sandalwood rosaries; the enamelled gold cassolettes; the Persian writing-cases; the caskets and mirrors whose paintings represent scenes from the *Mahabharata*; the fans of peacock or argus-pheasant feathers; the chiselled and nielloed silver Hookahs bells; all those delightful Turkish wares; one finds, unexpectedly, porcelain from Sèvres and Saxony, earthenware from Vincennes, enamels from Limoges, brought there who knows how. But nothing is impossible as regards bric-a-brac, and Mademoiselle Delaunay's antique shop (*on the Quai Voltaire, Paris*) finds itself transported to the Bedesten of Constantinople. I even noted, between two noble helmets from Kurdistan with chainmail gorgets, exactly like those of Godfrey de Bouillon's crusaders, one of those Prussian helmets (*pickelhaubes*), with lightning-rod spike, a romantic and medieval invention of King Louis, so pleasantly mocked by Heinrich Heine in his *A Winter's Tale* (See Heine's '*Ein Wintermärchen*' III: lines 39-60).

Whatever you desire, you will find it at Ludovic's, be it the Janissaries' cooking pot, the battle-axe of Mehmed II, or the saddle of Al-Buraq (*Buraq is Mohammad's supernatural steed in Islamic tradition on which he flew through the heavens*).

Each street of the Bazaar is assigned to some specialty. Here are the sellers of *babouches* (*light shoes*), slippers and boots; nothing is more interesting than the stalls cluttered with extravagant shoes with turned-up toes like Chinese roofs, with folded uppers, in leather, morocco, velvet, and brocade, stitched, spangled, braided, decorated with swans' feathers and flossed silk, impractical for European feet. There are some that are arched and raised at the prow like Venetian gondolas; others would drive *Rhodopis* (*a Greek girl in a Cinderella-like story first recorded by Strabo in his 'Geographica'*) and *Cinderella* herself to despair so charmingly small are they, looking more like jewel-cases than slippers; their yellow, red, and green disappearing beneath threads of gold and silver. The children's shoes are the subject of most charmingly capricious forms and ornamentation. As streetwear, the women employ yellow morocco-leather boots, of which I have already had occasion to speak; for all the wondrous charms of feet born for the mats of India and the carpets of Persia, would soon be lost in the deep mud of Constantinople.

Here are the sellers of kaftans, *gandouras* (*long tunics*), and dressing-gowns in Brousse (*Bursa*) silk. These costumes are modestly priced, though the colours are of a charming tone and the fabric of an extreme softness. I greatly regret not having bought a large cerise dolman densely woven, with long hanging sleeves, which in Paris would have lent me the air of a very respectable *mamamouchi* (*a self-important person, see Molière's 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme' IV, 3, 1670*) and in which I would have appeared as handsome as Molière's *Monsieur Jourdain* during the special ceremony. But the Customs show scant indulgence for these innocent fancies of a traveller. These merchants also sell Bursa fabrics, half-silk and half-thread, for dresses, waistcoats and trousers in the European fashion, very airy, light, and attractive. This manufacture is new, and is sponsored by the Sultan, Abdülmecid I.

Drapers display English cloth in garish colours, the edges of which are adorned with large gold letters and coats of arms in copper-foil, to satisfy Oriental taste. One recognises in them the dumb perfection of mechanical process, and the innate tastelessness of the British. I confess that such dissonances of colour make me grind my teeth, and send to the Devil, most wholeheartedly, the industry, commerce, and very civilisation which produce such hostile reds, cantankerous blues, and insolent yellows, disturbing, to what end I know not, the serene harmony of tones offered by the Orient.

When I consider the fact that I shall doubtless encounter these dreadful fabrics in the form of jackets, waistcoats and kaftans, in some mosque, street, or wider scene, the entire effect of which they will destroy with their unsociable colours, a secret fury rises within me, and I long for the sea to swallow the ships that carry these abominations, flames to destroy the factories where they are woven, and Great Britain itself to vanish in its own fog. Yet I would say the same of those execrable cottons from Rouen, Roubaix and Mulhouse, which are beginning to spread their frightful little flowery bouquets, atrocious garlands, and vile speckling like squashed insects throughout the Orient. If I speak of this with bitterness, it is because I felt the pain, one of which I shall never be eased, of seeing three little Turkish girls, between eight and ten years old, as beautiful as houris, more so since houris do not exist, who wore kaftans made of English cloth over dresses from Rouen. The sun's rays, though illuminating their charming faces, did not dare to shine upon these modern monstrosities, and recoiled in terror.

Fortunately, I was distracted from such painful thoughts by a display of Turkish children's clothes: there were charming jackets embroidered with gold and silver, baggy silk trousers, little braided kaftans, and childish tarbouches decorated with crescents, forming a miniature Orient, the prettiest and most attractive in the world.

Next, in their own dedicated alley, I found the weavers, who produce the silver and gold thread with which mottoes, slippers, kerchiefs, waistcoats, dolmans, and jackets are embroidered; behind the display windows those bright strands which, later, will be flowers, foliage, and arabesques gleam on their bobbins. There they also create the cords and knots, so gracefully and attractively interwoven, which our trimmings cannot match. The Turks make them by hand, using a bare toe as a point of anchorage.

Here are jewellers, also, whose precious stones are locked in chests from which they never take their eyes, or in glass cases placed out of reach of thieves; in these dark shops, rather like cobbler's stalls, incredible riches abound. Indian diamonds from Vijapur and Golconda brought

by caravan; the rubies of Jamshid (*a mythological Shah of Persia*), sapphires from Hormuz (*on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf*), pearls from Ophir (*an unknown region mentioned in the Bible*), Brazilian topazes, Bohemian opals, Macedonian turquoises, not to mention garnets, chrysoberyls, aquamarines, azurites, agates, aventurines, and lapis lazuli, piled in heaps, for the Turks employ many precious stones, not only as luxuries, but as items of worth. Unaware of the refinements of modern finance, they earn no interest on their capital, a means of profit, moreover, which is strictly forbidden by the Koran, hostile to usury as are the Gospels, as we witnessed in regard to the Turkish Loan, which was rejected by the old nationalist and religious party. A diamond easy to hide, and carry away, represents a large sum in a small volume. From the Oriental viewpoint, it is a safe investment, though it yields nothing; try and persuade Arab or Turkish avarice to part with the stoneware pot which contains his treasure, on the pretext of offering three or four percent, even if such a thing were permitted by Muhammad!

These stones are generally cabochons (*unfaceted*), because the Orientals do not cut diamonds or rubies, either because they have no knowledge of sanding powder, or because they fear to reduce their weight in carats by faceting the stones. The settings are rather heavy in the Genoese or Rococo styles. The refined, elegant, and pure artistry of the Arabs has left few traces among the Turks. Their jewellery consists mainly of necklaces, earrings, head-ornaments, stars, flowers, crescents, bracelets, leg-rings, and sabre and dagger hilts; but is revealed in all its brilliance only in the shadows of the harems, on the heads and chests of the odalisques, crouched in a corner of the divan beneath the eyes of their master, and as far as foreigners are concerned all this luxury is as if it never existed.

Though the opulence revealed by the preceding passages, studded with the names of precious stones, may have inspired you to think of the treasure of Harun al-Rashid and the cellar of *Aboulcasem* (see the *'Thousand and One Days'*, *'Les Mille et Un Jours'* by François Pétis de la Croix, 1710), refrain from imagining dazzlingly wild flashes of light cast to right and left. The Turks have no understanding of display in the manner of Parisian jewellers such as Jean-Baptiste Fossin, Alexandre-Gabriel Lemonnier, François Meller (*Mellerio*), and Paul-Alfred Bapst; and their rough diamonds, thrown by the handful into small wooden bowls, appear to be mere lumps of glass; yet one could easily spend a million in one of these humble shops.

The arms-bazaar may be considered the very heart of Islam. Nothing new has crossed its threshold; the old Turkish traditionalists sit there, gravely crouched, professing a contempt for us dogs of Christians as profound as in the time of Mahmud II. No time has passed for these worthy Osmanlis (*Turks of the Ottoman Empire*), who regret the Janissaries and their ancient barbarism, perhaps with reason. Here again are the large flared turbans, the dolmans bordered with fur, the wide Mameluke trousers, the belts worn high, and all the pure classical costume, such as one sees in the collection of the Elbicei Atika (*the Costume Museum in Constantinople*), in the tragedy of *Bajazet* (*the tragedy by Racine*) or the special ceremony in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. You see there, once more, those faces impassive as fate, eyes serenely fixed, aquiline noses curving over long white beards, brown cheeks tanned by frequent steam baths, and those bodies with robust frames ruined by the pleasures of the harem

and the ecstasies of opium; that whole aspect of pure-blooded Turkishness that is slowly disappearing, and that we will soon be forced to go and seek in the depths of Asia.

At noon the arms-bazaar closes disdainfully, and these millionaire merchants retire to their kiosks on the bank of the Bosphorus, to gaze with an angry air as the steamboats pass by, those diabolical Frankish inventions.

The riches heaped in this bazaar are of incalculable value: here are damascene blades, inscribed with Arabic letters, with which the Sultan Saladin, in the legend, cut feather pillows in flight in the presence of Richard the Lionheart, who in turn sliced an iron bar with his great two-handed sword; blades which bear on their edges as many notches as the heads they have severed; khanjars (*daggers*), whose dull, bluish steel pierces a breastplate as if the latter were a sheet of paper, and which possess hilts encased in precious stones; old wheel-lock and matchlock rifles, marvels of chiselling and inlay; battle axes which might have served Timur (*Tamerlane*), Genghis Khan, or 'Skanderbeg' (*Gjergj Kastrioti, an Albanian rebel against the Ottoman Empire*) to hammer at helmets and skulls; the whole ferocious and picturesque arsenal of ancient Islam. Here, in a shaft of sunlight falling from the high vault, gleam, sparkle, and glitter, saddles and covers embroidered with silver and gold, studded with sun-like precious stones, moons of diamond, stars of sapphire; and the bridles, bits, and stirrups of silver-gilt, the magical caparisons whose oriental luxury adorns the noble steeds of the Nedj (*the central plateau of Saudi Arabia*), the worthy descendants of Dahi, Rabra, Al Haffar, Al Naamah, and other equestrian representatives of the ancient Islamic turf.

Remarkably, given Muslim insouciance, this bazaar is considered so precious that smoking is not permitted; which says everything, for the fatalistic Turks would light a pipe on a powder magazine.

As a foil to all this magnificence, let me speak awhile of the Flea-Market. It is the morgue, the charnel house, the knacker's yard, the ultimate destination for all such beautiful things, having undergone their various phases of dilapidation. The kaftan which glowed on the shoulders of the vizier or pasha ends its career on the back of a hammal or a caulker; the jacket, which held the opulent charms of a Georgian slave from the harem, envelops, soiled and withered, the mummified carcass of some old beggar. It is an incredible jumble of tattered rags and shreds, where everything that is not a hole is a stain; all hang limply, sinisterly, from rusty nails, with the vague human appearance that long-worn clothes retain, and seethe, vaguely stirred by vermin. Formerly the plague was concealed beneath the crumpled folds of these indescribable rags stained with the pus from buboes, lurking there in some filthy corner like a black spider in the depths of its dusty web.

Madrid's El Rastro, the Temple district in Paris, the old Alsatia area of London (*Whitefriars*), are nothing compared to this Montfaucon (*the Gibbet area in Paris near the modern Place du Colonel Fabien*) of Oriental second-hand clothes, a market described by that significant qualifier I need not repeat.

I hope I will be forgiven this unpleasant description, and be granted credit rather for the precious stones, brocades, and flasks of rose-essence with which I began. Besides, the traveller like the doctor, is permitted to utter whatever is required.

I hope I will be forgiven this unpleasant description, and be granted credit rather for the precious stones, brocades, and flasks of rose-essence with which I began. Besides, the traveller like the doctor, is permitted to utter whatever is required.

Part III: The Dervishes, Scutari, Karagöz, The Sultan

Chapter 11: The Whirling Dervishes

The whirling Dervishes, or Mevlevi Order, are a sect of Mohammedan monks who live in communities in monasteries called *tekkes*. The word 'dervish' means 'beggar', which does not prevent the Dervishes from possessing great wealth thanks to the legacies and gifts of the faithful. The designation, true in the past, has been preserved, even though it is now an antinomy.

The *muftis* (*jurists*) and the *ulama* (*scholars*) regard the Dervishes with little favour, either because of some private disagreement regarding doctrine, or because of the influence they have over the common people, or simply because of the contempt that the higher clergy have always professed for the mendicant orders; as for myself, who am not strong enough in Islamic theology to unravel the matter, I will confine myself to considering the Dervishes in their purely physical aspect, and to describing their bizarre exercises.

Unlike other Mohammedans, who prevent the *giaours* (*infidels*) from attending their ceremonies of worship as curious onlookers, and in outrage chase them from the mosques if they try to enter during times of prayer, the Dervishes allow Europeans to enter their *tekkes*, on the sole condition that they leave their shoes at the door, and enter barefoot or in slippers; they sing their litanies and perform their evolutions without the presence of the 'dogs of Christians' appearing to disturb them in the least; one would even say they are flattered to have an audience.

The *tekke* of Pera is located in a square cluttered with tombs, marble-headstones with turbans atop, and age-old cypress trees, a sort of annex or branch of the Petit-Champ-des-Morts, where the tomb of Claude Alexandre, Count of Bonneval, the famous renegade, is located.

The *tekke's* facade, simple in the extreme, consists of a door, surmounted by a cartouche decorated with a Turkish inscription; a wall pierced with windows fitted with grilles, revealing the graves of Dervishes, for in Turkey the living always rub shoulders with the dead; and an inbuilt trellised fountain, decorated with iron spoons hanging from chains, so that the poor can drink comfortably, customarily surrounded by groups of *hammals* (*porters*), worn out from their difficult ascent of Galata. It is scarcely monumental in appearance, yet not lacking in character; the tall cypresses in the garden, and the dome and white minaret of the mosque that can be seen beyond the wall rising into the blue of the sky, are appropriate reminders of the Orient.

The interior resembles any other Mohammedan dwelling; none of your long, arcaded cloisters, and interminable corridors onto which cells open, the dungeons of pious and voluntary recluses, or silent courtyards in which grass grows, and a fountain tinkles into a viridescent basin. Nothing of the cold, sad, sepulchral aspect of a monastery as it is understood

in Catholic countries; but bright lodgings painted in cheerful colours, lit by the sun and, in the background, a marvellous view of the Bosphorus, a magnificent panorama bathed in air and light: Scutari (*Üsküdar*, *ancient Chrysopolis*), Kadi-Keui (*Kadikoy*, *ancient Chalcedon*) spreading along the shore of Asia-Minor, the Olympus of Bithynia (*Mount Uludağ*) all frozen with snow, the Princes' Islands, spots of azure on the moiré of the sea; Sarayburnu, with its palaces, its kiosks, its gardens; the Sultan-Ahmet Mosque, flanked by its six minarets; Hagia Sophia, striped pink and white like a Yemeni sail, and a forest of ships of all nations, a spectacle always changing, ever new, and of which one never tires!

The room where the whirling dances of the religion are performed occupies the rear of this courtyard. Its exterior appearance indicates the purpose of the building only by means of interlaced script, *suras* from the Koran traced with the certainty of hand that Turkish calligraphers possess in such high degree. The convoluted and flowery characters play the happiest of roles in Oriental ornamentation; they are arabesques as much as letters.

The interior recalls both a dance hall and a theatre; a perfectly smooth, waxed parquet floor, surrounded by a circular balustrade at platform height, occupies the centre; slender columns support a gallery of the same shape, providing space for distinguished spectators, the Sultan's box, and the stands reserved for women. This part, which is called the *seraglio*, is protected from profane glances by tightly interwoven trellises like those seen at the windows of harems. The orchestra faces the *mihrab* (*the niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the qibla, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca towards which Muslims should face when praying*) decorated with panels coloured with verses from the Koran and cartouches of sultans or viziers who were benefactors of the tekke. All this is painted in white and blue and extremely clean: one might think it a classroom arranged for pupils of 'Cellarius' (*Martin Borrhaus, the Protestant reformist*) than the place of exercise of a fanatical sect.

I sat down, cross-legged, amidst Turks and Franks also barefoot, close to the lower balustrade, in the first row, so as not to lose anything of the spectacle. After a somewhat prolonged wait, the Dervishes slowly appeared, two by two. The head of the community crouched on a carpet covered with gazelle skins, below the *mihrab*, between two acolytes: he was a little old man with a worn and leaden complexion, his skin creased with a thousand wrinkles and his chin bristling with a sparse and greying beard; his eyes, glittering in transient flashes in his dull face, in the centre of a large aureole of bistre, alone gave a little life to his otherworldly physiognomy.

The Dervishes filed past him, saluting him in the Oriental manner with marks of the deepest respect, as one does a sultan or a saint; it was at once a show of politeness, a testimony of their obedience, and a religious evolution; the movements were slow, rhythmic, hieratic, and, the rite having been accomplished, each Dervish went to take his place before the *mihrab*.

The headgear of these Muslim monks consists of a felt cap, an inch thick, of a reddish or brownish hue, which I can best compare, for shape, to an upturned flower-pot, in which the head has been entered; a waistcoat and a jacket of white fabric; and an immense pleated skirt, of the same colour and similar to the Greek *fustanella*. Narrow white trousers beneath, reaching as far as the ankle, complete this costume, which has nothing monastic about it to our eyes and possesses a certain elegance. For the moment, I could only glimpse it, since the Dervishes were

decked out in a kind of cloak or surcoat in green, blue, Corinthian-currant black, cinnamon, or some other shade, which was not part of the uniform, and which they had to remove when they began their dance, and don once more when they withdrew, panting, streaming with sweat, and overcome by ecstasy and fatigue.

The prayers began, and with them the genuflections, prostrations, and commonplace rituals of the Islamic religion, so bizarre to us, and which might easily seem laughable but for the conviction and gravity with which the faithful perform them. Their alternations of abasement and elevation inevitably make one think of chickens bowing to the ground to peck with their beaks and rising again having seized the grain of seed or the worm they covet.

Their orisons are fairly long, or at least a desire to see the dance makes them seem so, especially for a European full of curiosity, who has no expectation of resting after his death beneath the shade of the Tuba tree (*referenced in the Koran: surah 13, Ar-Ra'd, verse 29*) in the paradisial *serai* (*seraglio*) spoken of by Muhammad, and being reflected there, for eternity, in the dark eyes of the ever-virgin *houris* (*according to sundry Hadith or Sayings of Muhammad*); nevertheless, this pious murmur, through its monotonous persistence, acts strongly, in the end, on the mind of the unbeliever, and one can understand that it impresses souls who do believe, and *attracts* them wonderfully to those strange exercises, beyond normal human strength, which can only be explained by a sort of religious catalepsy like to the unnatural insensitivity of martyrs in the midst of the most atrocious tortures.

When sufficient verses of the Koran had been chanted, heads had nodded enough, and a satisfactory number of prostrations had been made, the Dervishes rose, threw off their cloaks, and circled in procession, in pairs, around the hall. Each couple passed before the leader, who stood, and, after an exchange of greetings, made a gesture of blessing or a 'magnetic' pass over them; this kind of consecration is performed with singular etiquette. The second Dervish blessed selects one from the couple following, and presents him to the *imam*, a ceremony which is repeated from pair to pair until all have been blessed.

A remarkable change had already taken place in the physiognomies of the Dervishes thus prepared for ecstasy. On entering, they had a gloomy, dejected, somnolent air; their heads bent beneath their heavy headgear; now their faces brightened, their eyes shone, their stance grew more elevated and firmer, the heels of their bare feet questioned the floor with a nervous trembling motion.

The nasalised Koranic chants, in falsetto, were joined by an accompaniment of flutes and *tarboukas* (*darbukas, goblet drums*). The *tarboukas* marked the rhythm and provided the bass part, the flutes executed, in unison, a song in high tones of infinite sweetness.

The thematic motif, returning invariably after a few undulations, ends by taking possession of the soul through an imperious feeling of empathy, as a woman's face might whose beauty reveals itself progressively, seemingly increasing the longer one contemplates her. This air, with its strange charm, gave birth within me to a nostalgia for countries unknown, to an inexplicable mixture of sadness and joy, to a mad desire to abandon myself to the intoxicating beat of the rhythm. Memories of previous existence crowded about me, physiognomies *known* to me, though I had never encountered them in this world, smiled at me with indefinable

expressions of reproach and love; a host of images and scenes from dreams long forgotten were outlined luminously in the mists of a bluish distance; I began to sway my head from one shoulder to the other, yielding to the evocative and incantatory power of this music so contrary to our habitual practice, and yet of such penetrating effect. I greatly regret that one of our composers, say Félicien David or Ernest Reyer, both so skilled in grasping the strange rhythms of Oriental music, was not there to note this melody of a truly celestial sweetness.

Motionless in the centre of the enclosure, the Dervishes seemed intoxicated by this music so delicately barbaric and so melodiously wild, whose primitive melody dates perhaps to the first ages of the world; finally, one of them opened and raised arms, spreading them horizontally in the pose of a crucified Christ, then began to turn about himself, slowly moving his bare feet, which made no noise on the parquet floor. His skirt, like a bird that seeks to take flight, began to quiver and beat its wings. His speed became greater; the supple fabric, lifted by the air that rushed into it, spread out in a circle, flaring to a bell-shape in a whirlwind of whiteness of which the Dervish was the centre.

The first dancer was joined by a second, then a third, then the whole troop followed, overcome by an irresistible vertigo.

They whirled, arms outstretched in a cross, heads inclined on their shoulders, eyes half-closed, mouths half-open, like confident swimmers, allowing themselves to be carried away in a flow of ecstasy; their movements, regular, undulating, showed an extraordinary suppleness; there was no perceptible effort, no fatigue apparent; the most intrepid German waltzer would have died of breathlessness; they continued to rotate on themselves as if driven by the force of their efforts, like spinning-tops pivoting, seemingly motionless at the moment of greatest rapidity, lulled by the sounding murmur.

There were twenty or more present, pirouetting amidst their skirts, spread like the chalices of gigantic Javanese flowers, without ever colliding, without escaping their whirlwind orbits, without losing, surprisingly, for a single instant, the meter marked out by the *tarboukas*.

The *imam* walked among them, sometimes clapping his hands to tell the orchestra to quicken or slow the rhythm or to encourage the dancers, and applaud them for their pious zeal. His impassive countenance formed a strange contrast with all those illuminated, convulsed figures; the gloomy and cold old man traversed their frenetic evolutions with a ghostly step, as if doubt had touched his arid soul, or as if the intoxication of prayer, the vertigo of sacred incantation, lacked the power to hold him in its grip, as it had for so long, like those *teriakis* (*opium-eaters*) and *hassasins* (*hashish-smokers*) jaded by the effect of their drug, who are obliged to raise the dose till they reach the point of poisoning themselves.

The dance stopped for a moment; the Dervishes formed up again, pair by pair, and circled the room in procession two or three times. This evolution, executed slowly, gave them time to catch their breath and to collect themselves. What I had seen was, in fact, only the prelude to the symphony, the preface to the poem, the rehearsal for the main event.

The *tarboukas* began to drum a more urgent measure, the song of the flutes became livelier, and the Dervishes resumed their dance with redoubled energy.

However, there was nothing disorderly or feverishly demonic about it, unlike the epileptic convulsions of the Isawiyya (*a Sufi mystical sect*); for rhythm rules and constrains it. The rotation became faster, the number of revolutions performed per minute increased, but the hieratic waltz remained mute and calm like that of a spinning-top falling silent at the height of its speed. The Dervishes raised or let fall their arms slightly, according to the degree of fatigue or ecstasy they felt; they looked like bathers who had lost their footing and now stretched their hands out, abandoning themselves to the current; sometimes their heads tilted backwards, showing the whites of their eyes, their features luminous, lips half-open in an indescribable smile and soaked in a light foam; or drooped on their chests as if overwhelmed by voluptuousness, beards bent against the white fabric of their waistcoats; or most often, lay against a forearm, as on the pillow of some divine dream.

A poor old man, wearing a Socratic mask which was rather ugly when at rest, waltzed with incredible vigour and persistence for his age, and his commonplace face assumed, amidst the enchanted intensity of the whirling, a singular beauty; his soul, so to speak, rose to the surface, and an internal pressure moulded and corrected the imperfection of his features, from within. Another, of twenty-five to thirty years of age, with a noble, regular and gentle face, ending in a reddish-blond beard, made me think involuntarily of the young Nazarene - the most handsome of men - with his arms raised above his head, arms which the nails of an invisible cross seemed to hold in a fixed position. I have never seen a more beautifully ascetic expression. Not the 'Angel of Fiesole' (*Fra Angelico*), nor the divine Luis de Morales, Hans Memling, Fra Bartolomeo, Bartolomé Murillo, or Francisco de Zurbarán, ever created in their religious paintings a head more lost in love of the divine, more drowned in mystical effluvia, more alight with a celestial glow, more drunk with paradisiacal hallucination; if, in the other world, souls retain a human face, they must certainly resemble that of the young whirling Dervish.

His expression was repeated in lesser degrees on the ecstatic faces of the other dancers. What did they see in vision that lulled them? Emerald forests with ruby fruits, mountains of amber and myrrh, the diamantine kiosks and pearly tents of Muhammad's paradise? Their smiling mouths doubtless seemed to receive perfumed kisses of musk and benzoin from the white, green and red *houris*: their fixed gaze contemplated the splendours of Allah, shining with a brilliance that would make the sun appear black, a blaze of blinding light; the earth, to which they held only by the tips of their toes, had vanished like a paper tissue thrown on a fire, and those twin aspects of God floated madly in the eternal infinite.

The *tarboukas* murmured, the flute raised its notes to an impossible pitch, tenuous as a crystal thread; the Dervishes were cloaked in their own brightness; their skirts swelled, expanded, rounded, spread wider, bringing a delicious freshness to the burning air, and fanning me like a flight of celestial spirits or great mystical birds, swooping down upon the earth.

Sometimes a Dervish would cease. His *fustanella* would continue to quiver for a few moments; then, no longer supported by the whirlwind-like motion, would slowly sag, and the flared fabric would fall, resuming its perpendicular folds, like those of ancient Greek drapery. Then, after whirling intensely, he would throw himself on his knees, face to the ground, and a comrade, there to serve, would run to cover him with one of those cloaks of which I spoke but now; just as a jockey throws a blanket over a thoroughbred after the race. The *imam* would

approach the Dervish, prostrate and frozen in complete immobility, murmur a few sacramental words, and pass on to another. After some time, all had dropped to the floor, overcome by ecstasy. But they soon rose, repeated their circular walk in pairs, and left the room in the same order in which they had entered; while I went to retrieve my shoes at the door, from a pile of boots and slippers, and, dazed, until evening, by the dizzying spectacle, saw wide white skirts spreading and whirling before my eyes, heard the relentlessly sweet melody of the little flute sounding in my ears, and skipped to the thunderous bass rhythm of the *tarboukas*.

Chapter 12: The Howling Dervishes

When one has seen the whirling Dervishes of Pera (*Beyoğlu*), one is obliged to visit the howling Dervishes of Scutari (*Üsküdar*); so, I took a caique at Tophane, and two pairs of oars, handled by vigorous Albanians, carried me towards the shore of Asia-Minor, despite the violence of the current. The bubbling waters broke, beneath the sun, into millions of silver flakes, sliced through by swarms of white and black birds, designated under the poetic name of *souls in pain*, because of their perpetual agitation; one sees them darting over the Bosphorus, in flights of two or three hundred, legs in the water, wings in the air, with extraordinary speed, as if they were pursuing an invisible prey, which has also won them the name of *wind-chasers* ('*yel kovan*', *shearwaters*, *puffinus yelkouan*). I myself am ignorant of their ornithological label, but these two popular nicknames are abundantly sufficient for me. When they pass near the boats, they look like dry leaves carried away by an autumn whirlwind, awakening all sorts of dreamy and melancholy ideas.

The landing stage of Scutari presents the most picturesque aspect. A sort of floating platform, composed of large beams on which the gulls and albatrosses perch, forms one of those foregrounds of which English engravers know how to make such good use; a café, surrounded by benches populated by smokers, projects into the water, set on a small pier alongside feluccas, caiques, canoes and boats of all kinds, moored or at anchor, and the fig-trees, and other vegetation, of a perennial green hue, in a small garden adjoining the café, which they highlight with their vigorous tones.

The white walls of the Buyuk Djami Mosque appear in the background. This mosque creates a fine effect, with its dome, minaret, terraces with small lead domes, Arab arcades, staircases on which soldiers and *hammals* sleep, and its masses of masonry interspersed with tufts of greenery.



Mosque of Buyuk Djami

A fountain bordered with arabesques, foliage and flowers, varied by Turkish inscriptions sculpted in relief in the marble, and surmounted by one of those charming canopied roofs of which modern *good taste* has robbed the fountain of Tophane, gracefully occupies the centre of the small quay-shaped square where the main street of Scutari ends.

At the foot of this fountain, whose dried-up spouts no longer pour water, shelter swarms of women in white, pink, green or lilac *feredjes*, sitting, standing, or crouching in poses of graceful nonchalance, rocking beautiful children in their arms, and watching the games of the older ones with long glances from their black eyes.

Renters of horses with their beasts; *sais* (*grooms*) holding the bridles of their masters' mounts; *talikas*, a kind of Turkish hackney-carriage; old-fashioned *arabas* (*carts*), harnessed to black buffalo or silver-grey oxen; and reddish dogs sleeping in heaps in the sun, enliven the picture with their varied groupings and their contrasting shapes and colours.

In the background lies the town of Scutari with its red-painted houses; its white minarets standing out against the black curtain of cypresses of its Field of the Dead. The main street of Scutari, which rises gradually to the summit of the hill, has a physiognomy much more Turkish in appearance than the streets of Constantinople. One feels that one is in Asia, on the true soil of Islam. No European idea has traversed this narrow arm of the sea which a few strokes of the oars are enough to cross. Traditional costumes, flared turbans, long pelisses, light-coloured kaftans, are much more frequently found in Scutari than in Constantinople. The Reform Movement seems not to have penetrated here.

The street is lined with tobacco-merchants displaying on a board their blond wheels of Latakia topped with a lemon, with tavern-owners roasting kebabs on perpendicular spits, with pastry-chefs sliding trays of baklava into their ovens, with butchers hanging quarters of meat on chains amidst a whirlwind of flies, with writers tracing messages of supplication in shops plastered with calligraphic paintings, and coffee vendors bringing to their occupation the narghile with its clear glass carafe and long flexible leather pipe.

Sometimes the street is punctuated by a small cemetery inserted familiarly between a confectionery shop and a corn-cob seller. Further on, about twenty houses are missing, turned to a pile of ashes amidst which rise the brick chimneys which alone were able to resist the violence of the fire.

Arabas, filled with women seated cross-legged, go up and down the street, at the moderate pace of the large bluish oxen drawing them, led by a *sais*, who often grips the horn of a beast with his hand. Dogs, asleep in the middle of the public roadway, barely move, at the risk of being crushed under the hooves of these heavy fissipedes, or the rims of the massive wheels. Happily, the pace of these primitive chariots is slow, and the Turks are never in a hurry.

From these gilded and painted *arabas*, covered with canvas stretched on hoops, come loud voices and bursts of joyful laughter; the eye plunging, furtively, into them glimpses less strictly veiled faces, belonging to those who believe themselves sheltered from profane gaze. At the front, little girls of about ten years old, not yet masked by the pitiless yashmak, betray, by their precocious beauty, the incognito of their mothers crouching a little behind. By accentuating those long black almond-shaped eyes, eyebrows marked as with Indian ink, slightly aquiline noses, regular oval faces, and mouths flushed the colour of pomegranate seeds, a little, it is not difficult to divine an overall type mysteriously stolen from some Turkish equivalent to Venus.

Here a convoy passes: a coffin, covered with green drapery, supported on the shoulders of six men walking at a rapid pace, is heading, in all haste, to the 'Large Field of the Dead' of Scutari; it will find there, beneath the shade of the tall cypresses, in the Asian motherland, a rest that the Franks of Europe will not disturb.

Shepherds, dragging a monstrous sheep, of phenomenal obesity, rendered even vaster by its long wool, cross paths with the convoy, which races on as if the Devil himself were bearing it away; soldiers on horseback pass by with a proud and indolent air; a line of camels, led by a small donkey, parade along, swinging their ostrich necks, shaking their hairy lips, leaving for some distant caravan, and, amidst this motley crowd in motion, I and my companions arrive in upper Scutari, at the tekke of the Howling Dervishes.

We are too early. Turkish time, which counts the hours from sunrise, fails to coincide with French time, and requires perpetual calculation, the cause of many errors, especially at first. In the meantime, we partake of coffee, smoke a chibouk and drink glasses of water on the benches outside a café located at the entrance to the cemetery. We are served by a little boy with lively eyes and an intelligent face, who is everywhere, meeting the often-opposing demands of the customers. He brings fire in one hand and water in the other, like the little spirits attendant on ancient initiations hovering on the brown background of Etruscan vases.

Having exhausted all the resources that Turkish coffee can offer enforced idleness, we entered the courtyard of the *tekke*, adorned with a fountain in the form of a tomb, recalling those coffins with sloping 'roofs' covered with cashmere, which one sees, through the grilles, in the *turbés* (*funeral chapels*) of the sultans. A vendor of cakes made with rice starch, which one eats sprinkled with a few drops of cherry-water or rose-water, provided us with the means of appeasing or rather cheating our appetite, awakened by the sea air, the long wait, and the space of time elapsed since our frugal and tasteless breakfast, taken that morning in Constantinople. The merchant displayed his cakes on a spotless tin tray, placed in front of him in the form of a counter, and his merchandise, which Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin and Marie-Antoine Carême would doubtless have criticised, at least had the merit of being inexpensive. For a few small coins, one could fill up on them.

Near the door of the *tekke* sat a very strange character, wrapped in a coarse threadbare camel's-hair *sayon* (*tunic*), his head encircled by a piece of rag twisted in the manner of a turban. I shall never forget his short, snub-nosed, broad face, which seemed to have been crushed under the pressure of a powerful hand, like those grotesque rubber masks the expression on which is altered by pressing a thumb into them. Large bluish lips, thick as those of an African; toad's eyes, round, fixed, and protruding; a nose lacking cartilage, a short, sparse, curly beard; a complexion the colour of tawny leather, glazed in rancid hues, and more seasoned in tone than an *españolito* (*Spanish commoner*) made a strangely hideous ensemble, more like a figure from nightmare than a real human being. If, instead of his sordid rags, this monster had worn a parti-coloured surcoat, he might have been taken for one of those court jesters that one sees in old ceremonial paintings, with a parrot on his fist, or holding a greyhound on a leash.

He was, in truth, a madman. The Turks let them wander about, and venerate them as saints. They think that the deity dwells in these minds empty of rational thought, and forgive them just as they forgive little children, because they know not what they do.

This fellow had taken a liking to the courtyard of the *tekke*, and would remain there on his block of stone all day long, nodding his head, mumbling the formulae of Islam, rolling a rosary between his fingers, and following with his idiotic eye some vague vision that made him smile. Stupefied, in a *kief* (*idle rest*) from which he was distracted only by a too importunate swarm of lice, which he rid himself of in the manner of Murillo's *The Young Beggar*, he seemed to enjoy the most perfect bliss. A pipe with a worn mouthpiece, a maple stem, and a bowl blackened by long use, was leaning against the wall near him, and from time to time he would inhale a few mouthfuls of smoke with a profound and childish satisfaction.

Various devotees, piously and with a fanatical air, embraced this disgusting personage, who permitted their attentions like some deformed Hindu or Japanese idol; then, taking off their slippers, entered the inner room of the *tekke*. As for ourselves, we were not allowed to enter until the introductory prayers had been said; we listened from outside to those serious psalmodies of a beautifully religious character recalling Gregorian plainsong, to which the guttural accent peculiar to men of the Orient gave a wilder stamp.

We added our shoes to the pile of slippers piled up at the door, and took our places behind a wooden balustrade with a few other people, among whom were two Capuchins in costume,

in sackcloth robes with a rope around the waist. There was no sign of their being viewed with disfavour by the Mohammedan part of the assembly, a laudable show of tolerance, especially amidst a conventicle of fanatics.

The hall of the Howling Dervishes of Scutari was not circular in shape like that of the Whirling Dervishes of Pera. It was a rectangle devoid of any architectural character; on the bare walls were hung fifteen or so enormous Basque drums and a few signs inscribed with verses from the Koran. On the side containing the *mihrab*, above the carpet where the *imam* and his acolytes sat, the wall offered a kind of savage display, recalling the workshop of a torturer or inquisitor; it consisted of darts of a kind terminating in a lead heart, from which hung small chains, sharpened larding-rods, maces, pincers, tongs and all sorts of instruments, disturbing and barbarous in shape, intended for some incomprehensible but frightening use, which made one's flesh crawl like the surgeon's set of instruments unfolded before an operation. It is with these atrocious tools that the howling Dervishes scourge, slash and perforate themselves, when they have reached the highest degree of religious fury, and when cries are no longer sufficient to express their sacred and orgiastic delirium.

The imam was a tall, bony, dry old man, with a scored and furrowed face, most dignified and majestic. Beside him stood a handsome young man wearing a white turban held by a transverse gold band, and an emir-green pelisse, such as is worn by descendants of the prophet or *hadjis* who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca; his profile, pure, sad and gentle, was of the Arab type more than the Turkish, and his complexion, of a uniform olive tone, seemed to confirm such an origin.

Opposite were the Dervishes in sacramental attitudes, repeating, in unison, a kind of litany intoned by a large fellow with a Herculean chest and the neck of a bull, and endowed with iron lungs and a stentorian voice. At each verse, they swayed their heads from front to back, and from back to front, with the motion of those ape-like *poussahs* (*tumbler toys*) which ultimately produce an empathetic feeling of vertigo when looked at long enough.

Sometimes one of the Muslim spectators, dazed by this irresistible oscillation, would stagger from his place, mingle with the Dervishes, prostrate himself, and then begin padding about like a bear in a cage.

The sound of the singing rose higher and higher; the swaying became more rapid, faces grew livid and chests heaved. The coryphaeus (*leader of the chorus*) accentuated the sacred words with redoubled energy, and we awaited, full of anxiety and terror, the scenes which might follow.

A few Dervishes, well-accustomed to the rite, had risen and continued their jolting, at the risk of striking their heads against the walls, and dislocating their neck vertebrae through their furious movements.

Soon all were on their feet. This was the moment when the drumming usually picked up speed, but this time did not do so, the subjects being roused enough; moreover, because of the Ramadan fast, the drummers did not want to over-excite them. The Dervishes formed a chain, each placing their arms on the shoulders of the fellow in front, and began to justify their name

by drawing from the depths of their chests a hoarse and prolonged howl: *Allāhu!* which did not seem to belong to the human voice.

The whole band, united in movement, stepped back and threw themselves forward with a simultaneous burst of energy, howling in a dull, hoarse tone, which resembled the sound of zoo creatures, in a bad mood; lions, tigers, panthers, and hyenas that think the hour of feeding is long overdue.

Inspiration arose little by little, the Dervishes' eyes shone like the pupils of wild beasts in the depths of a cavern; an epileptic foam frothed at the corners of their lips, their faces melted and gleamed, lividly, with sweat; the whole line bowed down and rose again as if beneath an invisible gust, like ears of corn in a storm, and always, with each burst of activity, the terrible *Allāhu!* was repeated with increased energy.

How such screams, repeated for over an hour, fail to burst the bony cage of the chest and cause blood to spurt from the ruptured vessels, I cannot explain.

One of the Dervishes, in the middle of the line, had a very characteristic head; you have seen, without doubt, hanging on the wall of some studio, the plaster mortuary mask of Théodore Géricault (*in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen*) with its hollow temples, sunken eye sockets, cheekbones sculpted in relief, aquiline nose pinched in death, and its beard wet and sticky with the sweat of agony; spread an old yellow parchment over that funereal cast, and you would have an exact image of that howling Dervish of Scutari, emaciated, and as if dissected, by fanatical effort. His wild and vigorous leanness made me think of those fierce verses in which Al-Shanfara, the pre-Islamic poet, sketches his rugged physiognomy. The Dervish could have said like him: 'At dawn I set out to run, where one wilderness leads to another, having eaten only a mouthful, like a wolf with lean buttocks and greying fur; when the callused soles of my feet strike the harsh ground strewn with pebbles, they draw sparks, they shatter them; lean as I am, I choose the ground for my bed, on the earth I stretch, a spine held high by dry vertebrae; for a pillow, my bony arm whose protruding joints look like knuckle bones thrown down by a gambler, cast to the field.'

The howls became roars; the Dervish whose portrait I have sketched swung his head scourged by his long black hair, and drew from his skeletal chest the hoarse snarls of a tiger, the growls of a lion, the yelps of a wounded wolf bleeding in the snow, cries full of rage and desire, death-rattles of strange voluptuousness, and sometimes sighs of mortal sadness, protests of the body crushed by the millstone of the soul.

Excited by the feverish ardour of this raging devotee, the whole troop, gathering a remnant of strength, threw themselves backward in unison, then launched themselves forward, like a line of drunken soldiers, howling a supreme *Allāhu!* unrelated to any known sound, such as one might imagine the bellow of a mammoth or a mastodon to have been amidst the colossal horsetails (*equisetum*) of the antediluvian marshes; the floor trembled under the rhythmic trampling of the howling band, and the walls seemed ready to split, like the ramparts of Jericho, at this horrid clamour.

The two Capuchins laughed imbecilely in their beards, finding all this most absurd, without reflecting on the fact that they themselves were Catholic Dervishes of a kind, mortifying

themselves in a different way to draw closer to a different god; the Dervishes sought Allah and called upon him with their howls, as the Capuchins seek Jehovah through prayer, fasting and ascetic exercises. I confess that their lack of empathy stirred a bad mood in me, I who understand the priests of Attis (*the Galli*), the Hindu fakirs, the Trappists and the Dervishes writhing beneath the immense pressure of infinity and eternity, seeking to appease the unknown god by immolation of the flesh and libations of their blood. This Dervish who roused the Capuchins to laughter seemed to me as beautiful, with his ecstatic face, as Francisco de Zurbarán's painting of some monk, livid with a like ecstasy, revealing in the shadows a praying mouth and two eternally joined hands.

The excitement was at its height; their howls followed one another without pause; a wild menagerie odour was released from all those sweating bodies. Through the dust raised by the feet of these madmen, their convulsed, epileptic masks, illuminated by white eyes and strange smiles grimaced vaguely, as through a reddish fog.

The *imam* stood before the *mihrab*, encouraging the growing frenzy of voice and gesture. A young boy broke from the group and advanced towards the old man; I realised then what the terrible instruments hanging on the wall were for; acolytes took from its nail an exceedingly sharp larding-skewer and handed it to the *imam*, who pierced the young devotee's cheeks from side to side with the pointed iron, without the lad giving the slightest sign of pain. The operation done, the penitent returned to his place and continued his frantic nodding. Nothing was more bizarre than this head on a spit; one might have thought it one of those pantomime piercings whereby Harlequin passes his stick through Pierrot's body; only here the piercing was real.

Two other fanatics, naked to the waist, hurled themselves into the centre of the room; they were given two of those sharp darts ending in a lead heart and iron chains, and, brandishing one in each hand, they began to perform a sort of violent disorderly dagger-dance, full of unexpected jolts and galvanic somersaults. Only, instead of avoiding the points of the darts, they rushed at them furiously in order to prick and wound themselves; they soon rolled on the ground, exhausted, panting, streaming with blood, sweat, and foam, like horses ploughed by the spur and dropping from fatigue near to their goal.

A pretty little girl of seven or eight, as pale as Goethe's *Mignon*, with black wistful eyes, who had been standing by the door during the whole ceremony, advanced all alone towards the *imam*. The old man received her in a friendly and paternal manner. The little girl stretched out on a sheepskin unrolled on the ground, and the *imam*, his feet in large slippers, supported by his two assistants, stepped onto her frail body and stood there for a few seconds. Then he descended from this living pedestal, and the little girl rose again all joyful.

Women brought little children of three or four who were laid down one after the other on the sheepskin and gently trampled underfoot by the *imam*. Some took it well, others cried in a lively manner like jays being plucked. One could see their eyes popping out of their heads, and their little ribs bending under the enormous pressure; the mothers, their eyes shining with faith, took them up in their arms and soothed them with a few caresses; the children were succeeded by youngsters, grown men, soldiers, and even a senior officer, who submitted to the salutary imposition of those feet, since, according to Muslim notions, the pressure cures all illness.

As we left the *tekke*, we saw the young boy again, whose cheeks the *imam* had pierced with the larding-pin. He had withdrawn the instrument of torture, and two slight purple scars, already closed, alone indicated the passage of the iron skewer.

Chapter 13: The Scutari Cemetery

I know not why, but Turkish cemeteries fail to inspire me with the same sadness as Christian ones. A visit to Père-Lachaise plunges me into a funereal melancholy for several days, yet I have spent entire hours at the Champ-des-Morts of Pera and Scutari without experiencing any other feeling than a vague, sweet reverie. Is it to the beauty of the sky, the brilliance of the light, and the romantic charm of the site that this indifference should be attributed, or to religious prejudice, acting without one's knowledge and making one despise the tombs of *infidels* with whom one has no shared destiny in the other world? This is what I have not been able to clearly unravel, although I have often reflected on it; it is perhaps due to some purely physical cause.

Catholicism has clothed death with a dark and terrifying poetry unknown to paganism and Mohammedanism; it has clothed its tombs with lugubrious, cadaverous forms, combining to evoke dread, while Classical urns are surrounded by charming bas-reliefs in which graceful spirits play amidst foliage, and Muslim *cippi*, dappled with azure and gold, seem, beneath the shade of beautiful trees, rather kiosks of eternal rest than abodes for corpses. In Istanbul I often smoked my pipe seated on a tomb, an action which would seem irreverent to me at home, and yet a thin slab of marble alone separated me from the body buried at ground level.

More than once I have crossed the cemetery of Pera, at the most enchanted of moonlit hours, when the white funeral columns rise, amidst the shadows, like the nuns of *Sainte-Rosalie* in the third act of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*, without my heart gaining a single beat; a thing I could not perform in the Montmartre cemetery except with a feeling of unconquerable horror, with an icy sweat on the skin of my back, and shuddering nervously at the slightest noise, though I have, a hundred times, faced in my life as a traveller, objects of terror far more real; yet, in the Orient, death is mingled so familiarly with life, that one no longer dreads it. The dead beside whom one drinks one's coffee, and smokes one's *chibouk*, cannot rise as ghosts. So, on leaving the menagerie of howling Dervishes, I accepted with pleasure, as a relief from that hideous spectacle, the proposal of a walk to Scutari's 'Field of the Dead', the best situated, largest, and most populated in the Orient.

An immense cypress wood covers its hilly terrain, transected by wide avenues and bristling with *cippi* over an area of more than a league. One can gain no idea, in the countries of the North, on seeing the thin poles we designate as cypresses, of the degree of beauty and development which the tree acquires in warmer latitudes, a friend of tombs, but one which awakens no melancholy thoughts in the East and adorns gardens as well as cemeteries.

With age, the cypress trunks reveal rough ribs similar to the aggregations of Gothic columns in cathedrals; their crumbling bark becomes silvery with shades of grey, their branches project unexpectedly, and bend curiously in unsymmetrical curves, without however destroying the pyramidal design and upward ascent of the foliage, massed sometimes in thick clumps, sometimes in sparse tufts. Their bare and tortuous roots grip the earth at the edge of roads, like the talons of a vulture perched over its prey, and sometimes resemble serpents half-retracted into their holes.

The cypress-tree's dense, dark verdure resists the harsh fires of the sun, and always retains enough vigor to contrast in hue with the intense blue of the sky. No tree has a more majestic attitude, at the same time graver and more serious than that of others. Its apparent uniformity shows chance variations appreciated by the painter, but not disturbing the general order. It complements, admirably, the architecture of Italian villas, and the black tips of tall specimens mingle fittingly with the white columns of the minarets; while such trees' brown drapery forms, on the higher slopes of the hills, a background against which the coloured wooden houses of the Turkish cities are highlighted in flickering touches of vermilion.

I had already acquired a love of cypresses in Spain, in the gardens of the Generalife and the Alhambra itself, which my stay in Constantinople, by satisfying it, only increased. Two cypresses in particular indelibly engraved their silhouette in my memory, and the name Granada cannot be pronounced without my seeing them spring up immediately above the red walls of that ancient palace of the Moorish kings, of which they are certainly contemporaries. With what pleasure I perceived them,

‘Noirs soupirs de feuillage élancés vers les cieux,’

‘Black sighs of foliage launched towards the skies,’

(See Gautier's poem: *‘La Fontaine du Cimetière’*)

when I returned from my excursions in the Alpujarras, mounted on a mule, its harnesses covered with frills and bells, in the company of that hunter of eagles, Romero, or my guide, Lanza! But let us return to the cypresses of Scutari, worthy of posing for Prosper Marilhat, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, or Louis Godefroy Jadin.

A cypress is planted beside each grave; every standing tree represents a dead person lying flat, and as, in this earth saturated with human fertiliser, the vegetation enjoys rapid growth, and every day new graves are dug, the funereal forest swiftly increases in breadth and height. The Turks do not know the system of temporary concession and reclamation of land which renders the cemeteries of Paris like regularly-felled woodland. The economics of death are not understood as thoroughly by these honest barbarians: the dead, rich or poor, once stretched on

their last bed, sleep there till the trumpets of the Last Judgment shall waken them, and the hand of Man, at least, does not disturb them there.

Close to the living city, extends the wide necropolis, recruiting peaceful inhabitants who never emigrate. The inexhaustible quarries of Marmara provide each of these mute citizens with a marble headstone that gives their name and home, and, though a coffin occupies little space and the ranks are tight-pressed, the city of the dead covers more area than its counterpart: millions of corpses have lain there since the conquest of Byzantium by Mahmud II. If time, which destroys everything, even the grave, did not tumble the tombstones and rob them of their turbans, and if the dust of the ages, and its invisible gravediggers, did not slowly cover the ruins of shattered tombs, a patient statistician could, by counting these funeral columns, obtain a total for the past population of Constantinople, since 1453, the date of the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire. Without the intervention of Nature, which everywhere tends to resume a primitive form, the Turkish empire would soon be nothing more than a vast cemetery from which the dead would drive the living.

I first followed the main path, bordered by two immense curtains of a dark green that produces the most magically funereal effect; marble-workers, squatting quietly on their haunches, were sculpting tombs at the edge of the way; *arabas* passed filled with women going to Haydarpaşa; Muslim ladies of pleasure, their eyebrows joined by a stroke of Indian ink, and whose rouge showed through under yashmaks of light muslin, strolled by, irritating Turkish citizens by means of their lascivious glances and loud laughter. Soon I left the beaten path, and, quitting my companions, headed at random among the tombs to study the Oriental funeral style more closely. I have already said, concerning the Petit-Champ of Pera, that Turkish tombs consist of a kind of marble term ending in an orb vaguely simulating a human face and topped with a turban whose folds and shape indicate the rank of the deceased, the turban is these days replaced by a coloured fez. A stone decorated with a lotus-stem or a vine-stock, with branches and bunches of grapes sculpted in relief and painted, designates a woman. Usually, at the foot of each *cippus*, varying little except in the degree of richness of the gilding and colours, lies a slab, scooped out at the centre to form a small basin a few inches deep, in which the relatives and friends of the deceased place flowers, and into which they pour milk or perfume.

One day the flowers fade and are no longer renewed, for no grief is eternal, and life would be impossible without forgetfulness. Rain-water replaces rose-water; little birds come to drink these tears fallen from the sky, where tears from the heart once fell. Doves dip their wings in this marble bathtub, and dry themselves, cooing in the sun on a neighbouring *cippus*, and the dead, deceived, think they hear a loyal sigh. Nothing is fresher and more graceful than this winged life warbling among the tombs. Sometimes a *turbé* (*funeral chapel*) with Moorish arcades rises, monumentally, between the humbler tombs, serving as the sepulchral kiosk for a Pasha surrounded by his family.

The Turks, who are serious, slow, and majestic in all the actions of life, hasten only to death. The body, as soon as it has undergone the lustral ablutions, is carried to the cemetery at a run, then oriented towards Mecca, and promptly covered with a few handfuls of dust; this is due to ancient superstition. Muslims believe that the corpse suffers as long as it is not returned to the earth, from which it came. The *imam* questions the deceased on the principal articles of

faith of the Koran, silence being taken for acquiescence; the assistants answer *Amin*, and the procession disperses, leaving the dead alone for all eternity.

Then Munkar and Nakir, two funereal angels whose turquoise eyes shine in their ebony faces, question him about his virtues or perversities in life, and, according to his answers, assign him the place that his soul should occupy, in Hell or Paradise, though the Muslim Hell is merely purgatory, since, the deceased's faults having been expiated by means of more or less lengthy and atrocious torments, every male believer ends up enjoying the embraces of the *houris*, and both sexes the ineffable sight of Allah.

At the head of the grave, a kind of hole or conduit is left open leading to the ear of the corpse so it may hear the moans, utterances, and protests of family and friends. This opening, too often widened by dogs and jackals, is like an air vent for the sepulchre, or a peephole through which this world can gaze into the other.

Walking without a specific aim, I had arrived at a portion of the cemetery that was older and consequently more deserted. The funeral columns, almost all out of true, leaned to right or left. Many had fallen as if tired of having remained so long standing, and judging it useless to mark a grave now erased and un-remembered. The earth, compacted by the collapse of the coffins, or washed away by the rain, guarded the secrets of the tomb less closely. At almost every step my foot struck some fragment of a jaw, a vertebra, a section of rib, the head of a femur; through the short and sparse lawn, I sometimes saw a lone protuberance gleam, white as ivory and as spherical and polished as an ostrich egg. It was a skull, flush with the ground. In the pits that had been exposed, pious hands had placed the small bones that had been excavated more or less in the correct order; other skeletal fragments rolled like pebbles along the empty pathways.

I felt seized by a strange, horrible curiosity: a desire to look through those holes of which I spoke just now, so as to surprise the mysteries of the tomb and see death within its interior. I leaned through such a 'skylight' opening onto nothingness, and was able to view, at my ease, human remains in a state of undress. I could see the skull, yellow, livid, grimacing, with hollow eye-sockets and dislocated mandibles, and the slender cage of the chest half-obliterated by sand or black humus, over which the bones of an arm fell nonchalantly. The rest was lost in the shadowy earth: the sleeper seemed peaceful and, far from frightening me as I expected, the spectacle reassured me. There was really nothing there but phosphate of lime and, the soul having evaporated, Nature gradually took back into herself these physical elements, so as to produce new variants.

Though I had once dreamed a *Comedy of Death* (Gautier's poetic reflections, '*La Comédie de la Morte*', of 1838) in the Père-Lachaise cemetery, I could never have written a stanza of it in the cemetery of Scutari. In the shade of those tranquil cypresses, a human skull had no more effect on me than a stone, and the peaceful fatalism of the Orient took hold despite my Christian terror of death, and my Catholic studies of the sepulchre. None of the corpses in question answered me. All was silence, rest, oblivion, a dreamless sleep in the bosom of Cybele, the sacred Mother of all. I put my ear to each half-open coffin, but heard no other sound than that of the spider spinning its web; none of those sleeping forms, lying on their sides, had turned about, through feeling ill at ease; and I continued my walk, stepping over the fragments of

marble, walking on human remains, calm, serene, almost smiling, and thinking without too much fear of the day when the foot of some passer-by would make my hollow and sonorous skull roll about like an empty cup.

The sun's rays, gliding through the black pyramids of the cypress trees, fluttered like will-o'-the-wisps over the whiteness of those tombs; the doves cooed, and, in the blue of the sky, the kites described their circles.

A few groups of women, seated in the centre of a small carpet in the company of an African servant or a child, were dreaming melancholically or resting, lulled by the mirage of some tender memory. The air was charmingly sweet, and I felt life flooding through every pore, amidst this dark forest whose ground was composed of once living dust.

I rejoined my friends, and we traversed a modern portion of the cemetery. I saw, there, recent tombs, surrounded by railings, and small gardens in imitation of those in Père-Lachaise. Death also has its fashions, and there were none but decent folk there, buried in accord with the latest taste. For my part, I prefer those markers made of marble from Marmara, with a sculpted turban, and a verse from the Koran in gold letters.

The road leading from the cemetery led to the large plain of Haydarpasha, a sort of parade ground which extends between Scutari and the enormous neighbouring barracks of Kadi-Keui (*Kadikoy*); retaining walls, of old broken tombs, bordered both sides of the path, and formed a terrace three or four feet high which presented the most cheerful sight; one might have thought it an immense bed of animated flowers, for two or three rows of women, squatted on mats and rugs, draped elegantly in their *feredjes*, of contrasting colours of pink, sky-blue, apple-green, and lilac. In front of them, the red jackets, daffodil-yellow trousers, and brocade waistcoats of their children sparkled, adorned with luminous sequins and gold embroidery.

At first, the effect of the *feredje* and the *yashmak*, on the traveller, is that of the domino at an Opéra ball, where at first one can divine nothing; one experiences a sort of bedazzlement before those anonymous shadows which whirl before you, all similar to each other in appearance. One fails to distinguish them; but soon the eye grows accustomed to this uniformity, discovers differences, appreciates forms under the satin which veils them. Some ill-disguised grace betrays youth; mature age is marked by some forty-year-old feature. A propitious or fatal breath lifts the covering of lace; the mask allows the face to appear, the dark phantom changes to a woman. It is the same in the Orient: the ample drapery of merino, resembling a dressing-gown or a bath-wrap, ends up losing its mystery; the *yashmak* becomes unexpectedly transparent, and, despite all the envelopes with which Muslim jealousy burdens her, a Turkish woman, when one does not look at her too formally, ends up being as visible as a French woman.

The *feredje* that hides the form can also emphasise it: tightly-fitting folds outline what they should veil; by opening it under the pretext of adjusting it, a Turkish coquette (there are some) sometimes shows, through the notch of her gold-embroidered velvet jacket, an opulent throat barely clouded by a gauzy vest, a marble chest that owes nothing to the corset's deceit; those who have pretty hands knowingly extend their tapering fingers, the nails dyed with henna, outside the cloak that envelops them. There are certain ways of making the muslin of the

yashmak opaque or transparent by doubling the folds or leaving them be; one can make that initially unwelcoming white mask sit higher or lower, and enlarge or narrow, at will, the space between it and the head-dress. Between these two white bands shine, like black diamonds, like stars of jet, the most charming eyes in the world, further brightened by kohl, which seem to concentrate in them all the expression of the half-obsured face.

Walking slowly along the middle of the street, I was able to review, at my leisure, this gallery of Turkish beauties as I would have examined a row of boxes at the Opéra or the Théâtre-Italien. My red fez, my buttoned frock-coat, my beard, and my swarthy complexion, moreover, allowed me to blend in among the crowd, and my appearance was not too scandalously Parisian.

On the *turf* of Haydarpasha *arabas*, *talikas*, even coupés and broughams, paraded gravely, filled with richly adorned women whose diamonds sparkled in the sunlight, barely dimmed by the white mists of their muslins, like stars behind thin cloud; *kavasses* on foot and on horseback accompanied some of these carriages, in which odalisques from the imperial harem indolently displayed their boredom.

Here and there small groups, of half a dozen women or so, rested in the shade, sheltering there, beneath the guarded gaze of a black eunuch, near the *araba* which had brought them, and seeming to pose for a painting by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps or Narcisse Diaz. The large greyish oxen ruminated peacefully and waved, to disperse the flies, the tufts of red wool suspended from the curved projections planted in their yoke, or attached to their tails by a string; with their grave air and their foreheads studded with steel plates, those beautiful beasts had the air of priests of Mithras or Zoroaster.

Vendors of snow-water, sherbet, grapes, and cherries ran from one group to another, offering their wares to the Greeks and Armenians, and contributed to the animation of the scene. There were also vendors of sliced Smyrna *carpous* (*melons*) and pink-fleshed watermelons.

Riders, mounted on beautiful horses, indulged in fantastic evolutions at some distance from the carriages, doubtless in honour of some invisible beauty; thoroughbreds from the Nedj, Hejaz, and Kurdistan shook their long silken manes, proudly, and made their jewelled caparisons sparkle, feeling themselves admired, and sometimes, when a rider's back was turned, a charming head leaned out of the window of a *talika*.

The sun was setting, and I took the road to Scutari again, dreamily, and filled with vague desires, where my *caïdji* (*boatman*) was awaiting me patiently, enjoying a cup of cloudy coffee and a chibouk of Latakia as was his right, being a Greek Christian and not subject to the rigours of Ramadan.

Chapter 14: Karagöz

I am fearful, in talking endlessly about cemeteries, of seeming to write *The Travel Impressions of a Mortician*! But I am not at fault: my intention was scarcely lugubrious. I wished to take you with me to see Karagöz, the Turkish Punchinello; and, to get to his booth, one is obliged to cross the 'Great Field of the Dead' of Pera: what can one do? However, there is no trace of melancholy about the leading character that this Chinese shadow-theatre, lodged between two tombs, presents.

When you have pursued the long main street of Pera to its end, you reach a fountain shaded by a clump of plane-trees, near which stand renters of horses, offering you their beasts while shouting *çelebi*, *signor*, or *monsou*, according to whether they are more or less polyglot; *talikas* and *arabas* waiting for fares; and sellers of sorbets, lemonade, white mulberries, cucumbers, cakes and solid confectionery, always surrounded by a large clientele.

Groups of women seated at the edge of the road, which has widened vaguely into a square, fix their large black eyes on you, boldly, and amuse themselves by watching the motley crowd of Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Persians, Bulgarians, and Europeans, who come and go on foot, horseback, mules, and donkeys, and in carriages of every shape and from every country.

The cannon-shot that signals sunset, and ends the Ramadan fast, has just sounded. The cafés are filling, and clouds of tobacco-smoke are rising on every side; the *tarboukas* are sounding, the metal discs of the tambourines are shivering, the rebecs are screeching, the flutes shrilling, and the nasal voices of the itinerant singers are yelping and crying in every possible tone, forming a joyous charivari.

On the esplanade of the artillery barracks, elegant men parade their horses, and black eunuchs, with their puffy, hairless cheeks and enormous legs, launch their superb mounts at full speed. They challenge each other to races, uttering little shrill cries, and gallop along without displaying the least concern for the red and yellow dogs sleeping with imperturbable fatalism in the dust.

Further on, children play tag, perched on the flat graves of Armenians and Greek Christians, graves deprived of any religious emblem, as if this Muslim land only tolerates the dead of a different faith; these philosophical urchins seem wholly unaware that they are treading on ground kneaded from human dust; they display an ardour for life, bursts of gaiety, that folk would have difficulty comprehending in France, but which seem quite natural in Turkey.

The Petit-Champ-des-Morts represents our Boulevard des Italiens, the Grand-Champ stands in for our Bois de Boulogne: it is a kind of *turf* where fashionable Europeans and Turkish *çelebis* display their English or Barbary steeds; a few carriages, calèches, American buggies, or coupés, brought from Paris or Vienna by steamboat, transport the rich families of Pera to the spot. They would be more numerous if the execrable paving-stones and the narrowness of the streets allowed; but the picture is no less lively, and these products of

civilised coachwork contrast well enough with the heavy shapes, and outdated gilding and paintwork of the *arabas*, though the latter are much preferable from the artistic viewpoint.

Perhaps the dead lying beneath the cypress trees prefer this lively tumult to the chill silence, the gloomy solitude, the glacial abandonment which surrounds them elsewhere; they remain amongst their contemporaries, their friends, or their descendants, and are not relegated beyond their circle as sinister objects, in the way scarecrows are; the living city does not reject them in horror and disgust; this show of familiarity, which seems impious at first sight, displays more tenderness, in truth, than our superstitious reserve.

While waiting for the performance involving Karagöz, I entered a small café whose windows at the rear, wide open, framed an admirable view. Beyond the cypresses of the cemetery, one could see the Bosphorus and the shore of Asia-Minor. Through the rosy twilight air, Scutari was highlighted against its dark green background, and the minarets of the Buyuk-Cami and Grand Selimiye mosques were crowned with their illuminated tiaras; the tip of Chalcedon (*Kadikoy*) advanced, burdened with its monumental barracks, and Leander's Tower emerged, from the blue water, sparkling with foam, bearing on its brow a light like a gold spangle on a muslin turban.

Leaning on the window-sill against which the divan was placed, I was nonchalantly smoking my *chibouk*, which had already been renewed several times, when my Constantinopolitan friend, previously detained by some business matter, arrived to join me. We crossed the cemetery, and, in the shadow of a large curtain of cypresses, discovered a line of small wooden houses forming a kind of street, one side of which was composed of tombs.

At the door of one of these houses a yellowish glow flickered, shed by a night light set in a glass; a naive means of lighting widely used in Constantinople. The performance was to take place here. We entered after having thrown a few piastres to an old Turk, crouching near a chest which both represented the cash register and marked the entrance.

The performance took place in a garden planted with a few trees; low stools for the natives, straw chairs for the *giaours*, replaced the usual benches and stalls; the audience was numerous; pipes and hookahs emitted bluish spirals which met in a fragrant mist above the heads of the smokers, while the bowls of their pipes, propped against the ground, sparkled like glow-worms. The blue night-sky, dotted with stars, served as the ceiling, and the moon played the role of a chandelier; waiters ran about carrying cups of coffee and glasses of water, the obligatory accompaniment to any Turkish pleasure. We were seated in the front row, directly opposite the Karagöz Theatre, next to some young fellows, wearing *tarbooshes* whose long blue silk tufts fell to the middle of their backs like Chinese pigtails, who were laughing loudly in anticipation as they awaited the play.

The Karagöz theatre was even more primitively simple than a Punchinello booth: a walled corner over which an opaque tapestry was hung, from which a square of white canvas had been cut, and which was lit from behind, was enough to establish its form; a lantern illuminated it, a tambourine served as its orchestra; nothing could be less complex. The impresario stands in the triangle formed by the corner of the walls and the tapestry, surrounded by the figurines that he makes speak and move.

The luminous field on which the silhouettes of the little actors were to be projected shone amidst the darkness, the focal point on which all the impatient glances converged. Soon a shadow interposed itself between the canvas and the lantern flame. A translucent, coloured cut-out was placed against the gauze. It was of a Chinese pheasant perched on a shrub; the tambourine rattled and banged; a guttural and strident voice, singing a strange melody with a rhythm elusive to European ears, rose in the silence; for, at the appearance of the bird, the hum of conversation and the vague murmurs resulting from a crowd of men, even quiet ones, had suddenly died. It was the equivalent of raising the curtain to begin the performance.

The pheasant vanished, yielding to a kind of stage-set representing the exterior of a garden enclosed by gates and trellis-work, above which grew green trees quite similar, in their naivety of the form, to those of Nuremberg toys cut chip by chip from a piece of fir-wood.

A hoarse burst of laughter was heard announcing the entrance of Karagöz, and a grotesque figurine, six to eight inches high, came and planted itself before the garden trellis with extravagant gestures.

Karagöz deserves particular description. His mask, necessarily always seen in silhouette as his state, being a Chinese shadow-puppet, requires, presents a fairly successful caricature of the Turkish type. His parrot-shaped nose curves over a short, curly, black beard, projecting forward from a chin like a sabot. A broad eyebrow traces an inky line above his eye, viewed from the front of his profiled head, with a boldness of drawing that is wholly Byzantine; his face presents a mixture of stupidity, lust and cunning, for he is at once *Monsieur Prudhomme* (a foolish character created on-stage by the actor Henry-Bonaventure Monnier,), Priapus (the Greek god of fertility and sexuality), and Robert Macaire (a swindler, created on stage by the actor Frédérick Lemaître after an original character devised by Benjamin Antier); an old-fashioned turban covers Karagöz's shaved head; he removes it at every opportunity, a comic device that never fails to produce its effect; a jacket, a vest of variegated colours, and broad trousers, complete his costume. His arms and legs are mobile.

Karagöz differs from the *fantoccini* (puppet shows) of François Dominique Séraphin (who popularised shadow-plays) in that, instead of the shapes being highlighted in opaque black on oiled paper, they are painted in translucent colours, like the figures of a magic lantern. The most accurate idea I can give is that of forms in stained glass detached from the leaded surround that circumscribes and outlines them. To the black strips, made of cardboard, tinfoil or any other resistant material, which create highlights and shadows, are applied translucent films tinted green, blue, yellow, or red, according to the colour of the clothing, or the object that one sets out to represent. Javanese shadow-figures are therefore much closer to Karagöz's theatre than their Chinese equivalents. But enough of the structure and colouring of the Turkish Punchinello. This same description serves for all the other actors, constructed according to the same principles.

Like a prince in some tragedy, Karagöz has a confidant named Hadji-aivat (*Hacivat*), half *Mascarille* (the cunning valet in Molière's comedies) and half *Bertrand* (companion to Robert Macaire in the play *L'Auberge des Adrets*, by Benjamin Antier), a dubious aide, who gives him his cue, and mocks him while serving him: Karagöz cannot be conceived without Hadji-aivat, any more than Orestes without Pylades (in Greek myth), Euryale without Nisus (in Virgil's

'*Aeneid*'), or Castor without Pollux (*the twin Greek gods*), and the mischievous and quarrelsome pairing is employed throughout the entire burlesque repertoire; Hadji-äivat has a body slender as a sprite, and his slenderness contrasts with Karagöz's robust build.

The garden described a moment ago contains a mysterious beauty, a *houri* of Mahommed's, who excites Karagöz's libidinous desire to the highest degree. He would like to enter this paradise garden defended by fierce guards, and to achieve his aim invents all sorts of ploys which are successively thwarted: sometimes a eunuch threatens him with his sabre; sometimes a dog with sharp teeth, baying loudly, hurls itself at his legs and savages his ankles; Hadji-äivat, no less a libertine than his master, seeks to disguise himself as Karagöz and take his place close to the lovely girl. He complicates the action with all sorts of perfidious blunders, the cause of altercations and comical battles between himself and his master. This scoundrel does not even possess *Mascarille's* virtues, the latter at least refrains from courting the objects of *Lélie's* affection (see *Molière's* play '*L'Étourdi ou les Contretemps*').

A new character now presents himself. He is a young man, the son of people of note, dressed in a frock-coat and wearing a *tarbouch*, like a young Turk in an embassy. He holds in his hand a pot of basil, a symbol of the state of his soul, a visible and permanent declaration of love; Karagöz notes this naive lover and becomes attached to him; he extracts money from him by promising to send it to the one he loves, and leads him around like one of Molière's slavish characters, an idiotic and credulous *Valère* or *Éraste* (see *Molière's* plays '*Tartuffe*' and '*Le Dépit Amoureux*' respectively); Karagöz's aim is to follow the *effendi* into this paradise defended by black Africans with fiery whips, and villainously steal his sweetheart.

Persians, attracted by the reputation of the beautiful one, also arrive, and wait in front of the garden gates. They are mounted on horses, striped like tigers and strangely caparisoned. Tall Astrakan hats adorn their heads, and they hold in their hands battle axes from which they are inseparable. Karagöz tries to conciliate the newcomers, and tells them all sorts of tales, each more absurd than the last, but proportionate to the stupidity that the Turks suppose the Persians to possess. Hadji-äivat also captures their attention; and the competitiveness aroused incites a dispute which ends with a prodigious volley of kicks and punches administered by Karagöz to his confidant. During this brawl, the lover slips into the harem, the door of which closes in the faces of the astonished Persians who, with altered disposition, fall as one on Karagöz and Hadji-äivat, and a general melee ensues greeted by the audience with inextinguishable laughter.

I can only report here the action of the play; I know no Turkish unless it be the bizarre words inserted by Molière when penning the special ceremony in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, and besides it is not one of those transparent Romance tongues, say Italian, Spanish or Portuguese, the meaning of whose phrases can be guessed at, even if one has little knowledge of the language itself; but it seems the dialogue was mostly burlesque, judging by the hilarity and bursts of laughter of those onlookers capable of understanding it.

The Turkish language lends itself to a host of the most droll and bizarre puns and equivocations. A letter or an accent suffices to change the meaning of a word. For example, *acem* means Persian; *acemi* means a bungler. Instead of *acem baba*, Karagöz never fails to say *acemi baba* ('*master bungler*'), which excites Homeric laughter, the Persian playing, in Turkish theatre, the same role as the Englishman in vaudeville and the Frenchman

in English drama. The poor Persians serve as a foil for all jokes and mystifications: their looks, emphatic pronunciation, awkwardly stiff attitudes, strange costumes, and the maces they always carry in their fists, like heroes of the *Shahnameh*, are parodied, even in situations which least require warlike apparatus. Probably in Persia the comical characters are Turks, just compensation between nations for such usage.

My polyglot friend translated for me here and there some of the salient passages; but it is impossible to give the slightest idea in our language of these broad jests, this hyperbolic bawdiness, which would require, if such were attempted, the dictionary of François Rabelais or François Béroutalde de Verville, or of *Eutrapel* (a character in the works of Noël du Fail), supported by the *poissard*-genre catechisms of Jean-Joseph Vadé (*the 'poissard' theatrical and poetic genre imitated the language of the market halls, notably that of the fishmongers*). However, the Karagöz theatre of the Large Field-of-the-Dead has undergone censorship, or to put it more strongly, castration: he speaks obscenities, but no longer performs them; morality has disarmed him; he is a Punchinello without a stick, a satyr without horns, a god of Lampsacus in Abelard's state, and, instead of acting, he tells of his lewd exploits in speeches in the style of *Théramène* (a character in Racine's play 'Phaedra' whose speech at the end is notably turgid and lengthy). It is a more Classical style; but, quite frankly, tedious, and the originality of the drama loses much by it.

The dialogue is interspersed with pieces of poetry and ariettas (*brief arias*) in the style of vaudeville couplets, screeched to extravagant tunes, and supported by a ferocious tambourine accompaniment.

The *Marriage of Karagöz* is a spectacular piece. Karagöz has seen a charming young girl, and as he is of a very inflammable nature, has conceived a most lively passion for her. Let me note, in passing, that the female figures have their faces uncovered, contrary to Turkish custom. Karagöz's beloved is in truth a rather pretty Chinese-puppet, her eyes tinted with *surmeh* (*black eye-shadow*), with a red mouth, cheeks plastered with rouge, and dressed in the costume of a Sultana from a comic opera, who wiggles about very coquettishly. The marriage concluded, Karagöz sends her the wedding presents: four *arabas* (*carriages*), four *talikas* (*carts*), four saddle-horses, four camels, four cows, four goats, four dogs, four cats, four cages full of birds, followed by *hammals* (*porters*) bearing sofas, pipes, hookahs, stools, pedestal-tables, carpets, lanterns, jewellery-boxes, clothes chests, crockery and domestic pottery. This parade, most instructive for a foreigner, to whom it introduces the details of Turkish housekeeping, is performed to a persistent Tartar march, in 4/4 time, which ends up sounding quite pleasant and lodges the motif firmly in one's mind. All this magnificence does not save Karagöz from early marital misfortune. The young girl, erstwhile so slender, swells visibly due to a pregnancy in which her husband has no claim; poor Karagöz finds himself about to become a stepfather on the very day of his wedding, a phenomenon which singularly astonishes him, and to which he resigns himself, in the end, as a Parisian husband would.

All this amused me greatly, since it required, like the first, no knowledge of the language, and gave me the pleasure that ballet offers foreigners at the Opéra, who have no understanding of French.

The horses, camels, dogs, all the accompaniments to the parade were shaped with most delightful naivety, recalling the primitive style of Épinal prints (*brightly coloured prints of popular subjects produced in Épinal, France, by a local company, Imagerie Pellerin*); the Turks, whose religion forbids them to draw or paint likenesses of any living thing, have remained, in this respect, in a state of Gothic barbarity, and the Karagöz theatre puppets, the only representations of the human figure tolerated, suffer from a lack of sophistication; however the figures, like everything primitive, possess character, which a more skilled execution would take from them.

I returned to Pera through a deserted section of the cemetery, following an avenue lined with enormous cypress trees. The moon's silver rays, filtered by their dark masses, highlighted, against a background of blackest opacity, the many white tombs which stood beside the path, like ghosts in their shrouds. A profound silence reigned within this funereal forest, disturbed from time to time only by the distant barking of a dog; I seemed to hear my own heartbeats, being the only living thing amidst the crowd of dead, when suddenly a voice rang in my ear, like the trumpet of the Last Judgment, and spoke a sentence to me, in French, which scarcely justified the shudder it provoked: 'Monsieur, do you wish to buy the last of my rolls?'

The untimely offer of a pastry, in the depths of a cemetery, at midnight, the Romantic hour, the hour of apparitions, seemed so formidably grotesque that it both frightened me and roused my laughter; was this the shade of some compatriot of mine, a baker who had died in Constantinople, and risen from the tomb to offer me a phantom brioche? It was hardly likely. So, I walked towards the place whence the voice came.

A most real and solid fellow, heavily moustachioed, and well-built, held before him a small counter loaded with croquettes (*fried rolls*), awaiting unlikely custom at this solitary crossroads. He spoke French because he had served for some years as a 'Turco' (*a nickname for the generally Algerian, not Turkish, soldiers who served in the French army's light infantry in Algeria*), and, disgusted with warfare, had devoted himself to this peaceful nocturnal pastry business.

I bought his stock for about thirty *paras*, reserving the right to pay tribute to any dogs I might meet out late, and continued on my way.

Next day, in order that I might continue my study of the Turkish Punchinello, my friend suggested I visit Tophane, where, uncensored performances of Karagöz were produced in the rear courtyard of a café, with all the lewd and ludicrous freedom they entailed.

The courtyard was full of folk. Children, especially little girls of eight or nine years old, abounded. There were some delightful ones, recalling, in their still uncertain gender, those pretty heads of Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps' painting *Leaving the Turkish School* (1841, *Louvre*), so gracefully bizarre and fantastically charming. Their lovely eyes, wide with astonishment and delight, blooming like black flowers, watched Karagöz giving himself over to a Saturnalia of impurities, soiling everything with his monstrous caprices. Each erotic feat of his wrung from these naively corrupt little angels bursts of silvery laughter and endless hand-clapping; modern prudishness would not tolerate an attempt on my part to describe this mad Atellan farce (*the Atellan plays were masked and improvised farces in ancient Rome*), in which

the lascivious scenes of Aristophanes merge with the droll dreams of Rabelais; Imagine the ancient god of fertility (*Priapus*) dressed as a Turk, and let loose amidst the harems, bazaars, slave-markets, and cafés, whirling, in a thousand imbroglios of oriental life, among his victims, impudently, cynically and with joyous ferocity. It is impossible to take ithyphallic extravagance, and the obscenities of a debauched imagination, further.



The Medak or Eastern Story-Teller

The Karagöz booth often visits seraglios, and performances are given there, which the women follow hidden behind screens with grilles. How can such an unrestrained spectacle be reconciled with such a severe moral code? Is it not because the steam from an over-heated boiler always needs an outlet, and the strictest morality must leave room for human

salaciousness? Besides, these unregulated fantasies are tame enough, and vanish like shadows when the stage-light is extinguished.

Viewing Karagöz, I connected him in my mind, via the line of *Polichinelle*, *Pulcinella*, *Punch*, *Pickelherring*, and *Old-Vice* (a character in Medieval English morality plays), to *Maccus*, the Oscan puppet (a stock character in Atellan farce), and even to the automatons of the neurospaste (puppeteer: 'neurospaste' from the ancient Greek 'puller of wires or threads') Potheinus (see *Athenaeus of Naucratis 'Deipnosophistae: Book I, 35'* where the puppeteer Potheinos is said to have performed on 'the very stage where Euripides and his contemporaries himself presented their inspired tragedies') but all this erudite scaffolding was rendered useless on my being told that Karagöz was quite simply the caricature of one of Saladin's viziers known for his deportment and lubricity, an origin for Karagöz that is contemporary with the Crusades, yet of sufficient antiquity for the noble lineage of a shadow-puppet.

Chapter 15: The Sultan at the Mosque - A Turkish Dinner.

It is customary for the Padishah to visit a mosque, every Friday, in great pomp, and perform his prayers publicly. Friday, as everyone knows, is to Muslims what Sunday is to Christians and Saturday to Jews: a day more especially devoted to religious practices, without however bringing with it the idea of obligatory rest.

Each week the 'Commander of the Faithful' visits a different mosque: Hagia Sophia, Suleymaniye, Nuruosmaniye, Sultan Bayezid II, Yeni-Cami, the Tulip (*Laleli*) Mosque, or some other, following a route known and marked in advance. Besides the fact that prayer in a religious building is required on that day according to the precepts of the Koran, which the Padisha, as head of the religion, cannot ignore, there is also, in this exercise of official piety, a political reason: which is to demonstrate to the eyes of the populace that the Sultan, who dwells all week deep in the mysterious solitude of the Seraglio or in one of the summer palaces scattered along the banks of the Bosphorus, is a living person. Crossing the city on horseback, visible to all, he certifies, in front of his people and the foreign embassies his very existence, no idle precaution, since palace intrigue might seek to conceal his natural or violent death. Even a serious illness fails to deter him from this parade, though Mahmud I, the son of Mustafa II, on returning from one of these Friday excursions, to which, barely able to support himself on his saddle, he had dragged himself, wearing make-up to hide his pallor, died on horseback (*in 1754*) betwixt the two gates of the Seraglio.

The hotel dragomans always know, on the day before, or on the day itself early in the morning, at which mosque the Sultan will offer his devotions, and I learned from the dragoman at the Byzantium Hotel that the Sultan would pass from the Çırağan Palace to the Küçük Mecidiye Mosque, situated close by. As the journey is quite long from Dervish-Sokak to Çırağan, and as Turkish timekeeping is somewhat difficult for foreigners to understand, when I arrived, in a sweat and half-baked by the torrid July sun, the procession had already filed by

and the Sultan was reciting his prayers inside the mosque; but I had the option of waiting till he had finished, and seeing his exit and return, which amounted to exactly the same thing, except for an hour spent in the company of the English, Americans, Germans, and Russians who had arrived for the same reason.

The Küçük Mecidiye is attached to the Çırağan Palace, whose façade overlooks the Bosphorus, and which, on the landward side, shows only large walls surmounted by kitchen chimneys painted green and disguised by a columnar surround. The mosque is entirely modern, and its architecture with volutes and chicory-leaves in the Genoese rococo style is nothing remarkable, though its sparkling whiteness shows well against the dark blue of the sky.

The door of the mosque was open, and one could glimpse the viziers, Pashas and high officers wearing *tarbouches*, all with gold breastplates and large wide epaulettes, performing, despite their obesity, the rather complicated pantomimes of Oriental prayer; they knelt and rose heavily with a piety that seemed sincere, for philosophical ideas have made much less progress in Constantinople than is generally reported; even Turks raised in the European manner, on their return from London or Paris, are no less attached to the Koran, and it is enough to lightly scratch the varnish of civilisation to find the faithful believer.

Black African slaves and *sais* held the bridles or walked the horses of the Sultan and his suite, mounts cloaked in magnificent caparisons; fine robust creatures, solid in form, lacking the nervous elegance of the Arab breeds, but said to be highly resistant to fatigue; the slender steeds of the desert would bow beneath the weight of the massive Turkish horsemen, the majority of an excessive plumpness, especially those of high rank; these horses are of the Barbary breed and of a particular line. That of the Sultan could be recognised by the jewels that studded his *shabraque* (*saddlecloth*), and by the imperial cipher whose complicated arabesque embroidered each corner of the velvet which almost vanished beneath the decorative work.

Lines of soldiers were ranked along the walls, awaiting the exit of His Highness; they wore the red *tarbouch* (*fez*), and their uniform, similar to that of our regular troops in undress, consisted of a rounded jacket of blue cloth and trousers of coarse white canvas; this costume, which is more or less that of the ordinary citizen, produced a rather singular contrast with their characteristic, swarthy heads which the turbans of the Janissaries would have far better suited.

On the forecourt of the mosque a strip of black cashmere was spread, narrow enough for the passage of the Sultan; it led from the door, and followed the steps of the staircase, to a marble mounting block, such as is found at the entrance to palaces and near the landing stages for caiques. It seems to me, without however being able to confirm the fact, that this black carpet is assigned to the Sultan as Great Khan of Tartary, a land of which that colour is the emblem.

The genuflections, prostrations, and psalmody continued within the sanctuary, and the midday sun, ever shortening the shadows, made the pebbles of the square gleam; the white walls returned blinding reflections, all the more inconvenient for the three or four ladies who were there, since etiquette forbids opening a parasol in the presence of the Sultan, or even in front of the palace which he occupies; in the Orient, the parasol has always been an emblem of supreme power. The master rests in the shade, while the slave roasts in the sun. The previous

rigour on this point has been relaxed as in all things, and one would not today, by breaking this custom, run the risk to which one would have exposed oneself formerly; but foreigners of good taste conform to the custom. What is the point of hurting the feelings of the citizens of a country one is merely visiting, rather than accommodating oneself to their habits, which have a reason for their existence and are often, no more ridiculous, in essence, than one's own?

There was movement inside the Mosque; the officers recovered their shoes at the door; the *sais* (*grooms*) led the Sultan's horse to the mounting block, and soon, between a hedge of viziers, Pashas, and beys saluting in the Oriental style, a salute which I much prefer, as a graceful show of respect, to the European salute, His Highness Sultan Abdülmecid I appeared, standing forth clearly against the dark background of the doorway, whose jamb formed a sort of frame for his person. His costume, which was very simple, consisted of a kind of paletot (*a sac-like overcoat*) in dark blue cloth, white moire trousers, patent-leather boots, and a fez to which the imperial aigrette of heron-feathers was pinned by a button of enormous diamonds; through the gap in his coat, one could see gilded metal shining on his chest; for my part, I greatly regret the loss of the old Asiatic magnificence; I love those impassive Sultans, much like the idols in jewelled shrines, peacocks of power blossoming amidst a halo of suns. In countries under absolute rule, a sovereign cannot separate himself sufficiently from common humanity, and employs imposing, solemn, hieratic forms, of a dazzling, chimerical and fabulous luxury; like God to Moses, he must appear to his people only amidst a burning-bush, in this case of phosphorescent diamonds. However, despite the austere simplicity of his clothes, Abdülmecid's character could prove mysterious to none. A supreme satiety could be read on his pale face; the consciousness of unassailable power gave to his features, though rather irregular, the tranquility of marble. His fixed, unchanging gaze, at once piercing and gloomy, observing everything and seeing nothing, bore no resemblance to that of a human being; while a short, thin brown beard bordered his sad, imperious, but gentle face.

In a few steps, performed with extreme slowness, rather by gliding than walking, the steps of a god or a phantom moving by non-human means, Abdülmecid crossed the space which separated the door of the mosque from the marble block, over the strip of black cloth on which no one but himself set foot, and slid onto rather than mounted his horse's back, the animal as motionless as if it were sculpted. The large officers hoisted themselves, with greater difficulty, onto their respective beasts, and the procession set itself in motion so as to regain the palace to the cry of 'Long live the Sultan!' shouted, in Turkish, by the soldiers with a real show of enthusiasm.

By hurrying my pace, a little, I was able to overhaul the procession, and take up position further on, so as to keep His Highness in sight. I gave my arm to a young Italian lady who had asked me to accompany her, and who leaned eagerly over the barrier to contemplate the Sultan's features, since a man who commands sixteen hundred concubines is a phenomenon that interests a women's curiosity to the highest degree; Abdülmecid, whose horse was advancing quietly, bowing its noble head with swan-neck undulations, and as if conscious of the burden it was carrying, noticed the foreigner and fixed his eagle eyes on her for a few seconds, imperceptibly turning his impassive face, which is the Sultan's manner of saluting, a thing he does most rarely.

During this parade, the music played a march, an arrangement of Turkish motifs by Gaetano Donizetti's brother (*Guiseppe*), Instructor-General of the Imperial music, interspersed with enough Basque drums and Dervish flutes to satisfy Mohammedan ears without, however, shocking those of Catholics; the march was spirited and not lacking in character.

Then all returned to the palace, whose open doors revealed a vast courtyard in a modern architectural style; the doors were closed, and there remained, in the street, only a few onlookers who dispersed in various directions; Bulgarian peasants in coarse sayons and fur caps; and a few old mummified beggars in rags squatting, on the flats of their thighs, beside the walls incandescent with heat.

A midday silence reigned all about this mysterious palace, which contains, behind its latticed windows, a deal of troubled languor, and I could not help but think of all those beauties lost to the human eye, of all those marvellous female faces and forms, from Greece, Circassia, Georgia, India and Africa, which vanish without having been captured in marble or on canvas, without art eternalising them, and bequeathing them to the loving admiration of the centuries: Venuses never to find their Praxiteles, Violantes lacking their Titian (*see the portrait 'Violante' 1515, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*), Fornarinas devoid of their Raphael (*see the portrait 'La Fornarina' 1518/19, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome*).

In the human lottery how fortunate that of the lot of this Padisha! What is Don Juan, with his *mille e tre* (*thousand and three*), compared to the Sultan? A minor adventurer, deceived more than deceiving, spending his wretched compliments on a few mistresses already three-quarters lost, seduced long ago, who have known husbands, and lovers, and whose faces, arms, and shoulders are known to everyone; whose hands have been clasped by rakes while dancing, and whose ears have heard the litany of mindless madrigals whispered a hundred times. What is he but a handsome lord, who strolls about in the moonlight beneath balconies, and loiters there, guitar slung at his back, in the company of a half-somnolent Leporello!

Tell me instead of the Sultan, who gathers only the purest of lilies, the most immaculate of roses from the garden of beauty, and whose eye rests only on the perfect forms that no mortal gaze has stained, of those who will pass unknown from cradle to grave, in magnificent solitude, guarded by sexless monsters, in a solitude no audacity would risk penetrating, a mystery that renders even the vaguest desire for a meeting impossible.

I changed lodgings, the one I occupied in the Dervish-Sokak being somewhat gloomy, the sole view being a narrow alley like all those to be found in Constantinople. I found rooms at the Hotel de France, where, from a large drawing room with eight windows, furnished with a long divan, one could gaze at the Little Field of the Dead, the roofs and minarets of the Şemsi Pasha Mosque, and the heights of Saint Dimitrios, a charming perspective which would seem somewhat melancholy in Paris, but justifiably cheerful in Constantinople; and, in this hotel, I made the acquaintance of a young man whose medical studies and the perfection with which he spoke the languages of the Orient had endowed him with the ability to penetrate the homes of the Turks, and learn their intimate customs: he was a subscriber to *La Presse*, a great admirer of the journalist and publisher Émile de Girardin, while my being known to him as a man of letters, made him take an interest in my excursions and my research as a traveller; to him I

owed the good fortune of an invitation to dine with a former Pasha of Kurdistan who was a friend of his.

We left about six in the evening so as to reach Beşiktaş, where the Pasha was staying, around sunset, since it was Ramadan, and the fast is not broken until the sun's disk has vanished behind the hills of Eyüp. At the harbour of Tophane, we chartered a four-oared caique, and after a vigorous half an hour rowing against a fairly rapid current, our *kayıkçı* (boatmen) disembarked us at the foot of the café, built on the water like a halcyon's nest or a fisherman's lookout post, of which I have already made a brief sketch, and which was full of Turks, waiting, timepieces in hand and chibouks filled, for the precise moment when they could bring the blessed amber mouthpieces to their lips and inhale the fragrant smoke.

After traversing a few streets lined with sellers of pipe-bowls, sweets, cucumbers, corn cobs, and other Oriental items, and filled with a dense crowd of people, we climbed a deserted alley, formed by the pink-plastered walls of large gardens, at the top of which was perched the house of the ex-Pasha of Kurdistan.

A door in the process of closing half-revealed an elegant coupé returning to its yard. The Pasha's wife had returned from a walk, for, contrary to the idea that one has of them, Turkish ladies, far from remaining enclosed in harems, go about wherever they please, on condition that they remain veiled, and unaccompanied by their husbands.

A low door, preceded by a flight of three steps, opened to reveal a servant, dressed in European style except for the obligatory red skullcap and, after replacing our shoes with the slippers we had taken care to bring with us, we were led to the first floor, and to the *selamlık* (men's apartment, where guests were received), always separate from the *haremlık* (family apartment) in the arrangement of Turkish houses, rich or poor, large or small.

We found the ex-Pasha in a very simple room with a wooden ceiling, painted grey and adorned with blue meshwork, with no furniture other than two rectangular cupboards, a Manila straw mat, and a sofa covered in purple fabric, at the end of which sat the master of the house, rolling the beads of a sandalwood rosary through his fingers.

The corner of the sofa is the place of honour which the master of the house never leaves, unless he is visited by a person of a higher rank than himself.

This air of simplicity was unsurprising. The *selamlık* is, an exterior apartment, so to speak, a sort of parlour, an antechamber that foreigners do not stray beyond, which is reserved for public affairs. All luxury is reserved for the harem. It is there that carpets from Isfahan and Smyrna (*Izmir*) are spread, brocaded cushions are heaped, soft silk-covered sofas extend, little tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl gleam, gold and silver filigreed incense-burners smoke, Venetian bevelled mirrors shimmer, rare flowers bloom in Chinese vases, and musical clocks chime capriciously; it is there that inextricably knotted arabesques hang from the ceilings; marble chimneys of Marmara rise like stalagmites, and streams of perfumed water tinkle into white basins. In that mysterious retreat, domestic life takes place, the life of pleasure and intimacy into which no relative or friend penetrates.

The ex-Pasha of Kurdistan wore a *fez*, the straight-buttoned frock-coat of the *Nizam* (the regular army), and broad white twill trousers. His head, thin, slender, and bowed somewhat

wearily, ending in a beard into which silvery tints were already creeping, gave him an air of great distinction, and if an English expression could be applied to a Turk, I would say the Pasha had the air of a perfect gentleman.

My friend translated the compliments I made him, to which he responded in a most gracious manner; then he motioned for me to sit down beside him. My ease in crossing my legs in the Oriental manner, often an effort for a Frenchman, made him smile, and allowed him to form a good opinion of me.

The day was declining; the last orange tints of the setting sun were fading on the horizon, and the welcome sound of the cannon-shot rang joyously in the air; the fast was over, and servants appeared bringing pipes, glasses of water, and some pieces of confectionery; the light collation serving to prove that the faithful were now allowed to eat and drink.

Then beside the sofa they placed a large yellow copper disk, highly polished and shining like a golden shield, on which were arranged various dishes in porcelain bowls. These disks, supported by a low foot, serve as a table in Turkey, and three or four guests can sit to them. Table linen, like bed linen, is a luxury unknown in the Orient. One eats at a table without a tablecloth, but to wipe your fingers you are given small squares of muslin, embroidered with gold thread, quite similar to the napkins employed when tea is served at our 'English' evenings, a precaution which is essential, since at these meals the only forks are those our ancestor Adam was born with. The master of the house, full of politeness and consideration, foreseeing my embarrassment, wished me to accept, as the musicologist 'Castil-Blaze' (*François-Henri-Joseph Blaze*) has it: 'the silver spoon used for eating'; but I thanked him, seeking to conform in every way to the rules of Turkish gastronomy.

From the point of view of those gourmands Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, Ferdinand de Cornot Baron de Cussy, Grimod de la Reynière, and Marie-Antoine Carême, Turkish culinary art cannot but seem quite barbaric and patriarchal; consisting, to Parisian palates, of wholly unusual combinations of substances, extravagant mixtures which nevertheless do not lack thought and are not contrived randomly. The dishes, of which one takes a few mouthfuls with one's fingers, are large in number and follow one another in swift succession. They consist of pieces of mutton, chicken pieces, fish in oil, and raw cucumbers, stuffed and arranged in every way; small viscous salsify roots, similar to mallow roots and highly esteemed for their stomachic qualities; rice balls wrapped in vine leaves; pumpkin puree with sugar; and pancakes with honey; all sprinkled with rose-water, seasoned with mint, and aromatic herbs, and crowned with the sacred *pilaf*, a national dish like the Spanish *puchero*, the Arab *couscous*, the German *sauerkraut* and the English *plum-pudding*, which is an obligatory part of every meal whether in the palace or the cottage. To drink, there was water, sherbet, and cherry-juice which they drew from their respective bowls with ivory-handled, tortoiseshell spoons.

The feast over, the copper tray was taken away to be cleansed, an indispensable ceremony when one has dined with no other silverware than one's fingers; coffee was served, and the *chiboukdji* (*pipe-keepers*) presented to each guest a fine pipe, with a large amber mouthpiece, a stem of cherry-wood smooth as satin, and a bowl capped with a beautiful straw-coloured mass of Macedonian tobacco, detached in a single piece, the pipe resting on a metal circle

placed on the ground to protect the mat from the coals and ashes which might fall from its fiery orifice.

The conversation began as animatedly as is possible when one talks mere gossip. The ex-Pasha, who seemed quite well-informed about European politics, asked me a host of questions about the coup d'état of December 2nd (*that of 1851, carried out by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, later Emperor Napoleon III of the French*) which he strongly approved of, the abstract idea of a republic entering with difficulty into a mind shaped by Oriental despotism; he asked me if the president (the Second Empire had not yet been proclaimed) possessed many cannons, and commanded a large number of troops; what uniform Louis wore; whether he rode a horse well; and if he was going to make war like his uncle *Bounaberdi* (*a corruption of 'Bonaparte'*); whether I knew him; whether I had spoken to him; and other questions of the sort, which I answered as best I could. The ex-Pasha's brother, seated near him, who knew a few words of French, seemed to be following the conversation with interest.

The servants removed the pipes; the ex-Pasha rose, and went to say his prayers on a corner of the carpet in a room next door, returning after a few minutes, with a calm and serious expression, having satisfied his religious duties as a good Muslim; we exchanged a few more sentences, and as I took my leave, the master of the house told me that I might visit again whenever I pleased and that I would always be welcome, words which, in a Turkish mouth, are no empty formula.

Before we departed, we chatted for a few moments with the secretary, who was seated in a room on the ground floor. He was a very gentle, polite young man, probably an Armenian, who spoke French very well. He asked me questions about Paris, which he very much wished to see, and while chatting, he saw on my finger an engraved cornelian, containing my name in flowery Persian, and because of the beauty of the characters cut by one of the most skilled artists in Teheran, he took an impression of them by rubbing them with black ink and applying them to a piece of paper, so as to obtain the letters in plain text.

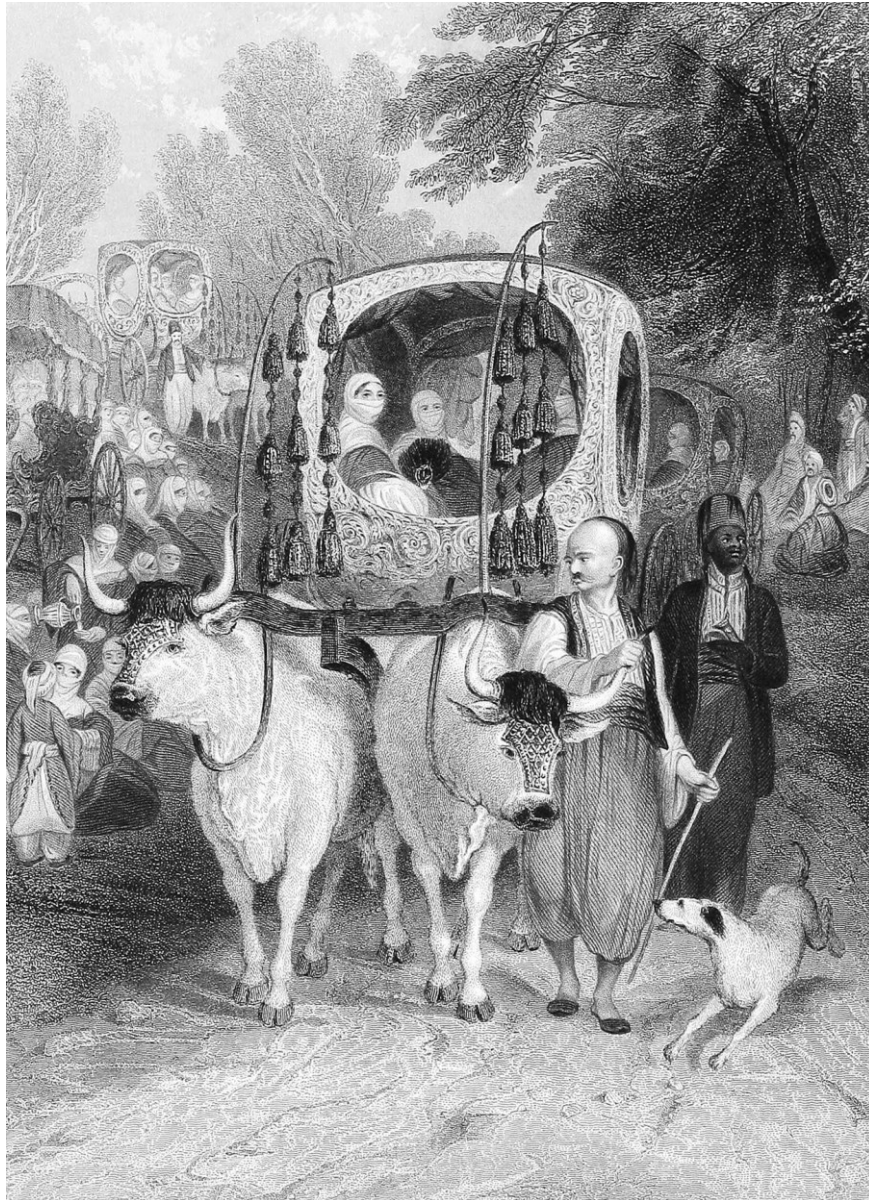
We found our *kayıkçı* waiting for us at Beşiktaş; they soon delivered us to Tophane, where we stopped by a small café frequented by Circassians, fierce political debaters who maintain a kind of *Krakow Tree* there. (*The Krakow Tree, in the chestnut avenue of the Palais-Royal, an avenue planted by Cardinal Richelieu, was where the news-writers of the time met to exchange information on current affairs. See the engraving by Antoine Humblot, of 1742*). My companion translated their speeches for me, and I was quite astonished to hear these men in fur-trimmed bonnets, their goatskin skirts fastened by a metal belt, their legs wrapped in linen held there by cords, talking of the affairs of Paris and London, and offering their critiques of the ministers and diplomats with perfect knowledge of the facts.

While they were thus politicking, a little Dervish arrived and began singing, in a nasal voice and no known key, a strange and melancholy cantilena, with the aim of obtaining alms, thereby recalling me to the Orient, which I had well-nigh forgotten while listening to these Circassians who talked like subscribers to the *Constitutionnel* or the *Journal des Débats*.

Part IV: The Women, The City Walls, Balat, Bayram

Chapter 16: The Women

The first question that is asked of every traveller returning from the East is this: ‘And what of the women?’ Each person answers with a smile, more or less mysteriously according to his degree of fatuity, thereby implying a respectable number of fortunate encounters. Whatever the cost to my self-esteem, I humbly confess I have not the least indiscretion of this kind to record, and am forced, to my great regret, to forego relating any tale of amorous and romantic adventure. It would have been most useful, though, as a means of varying my descriptions of cemeteries, tekkes, mosques, palaces and kiosks: nothing embellishes a description of the traveller’s visit to the Orient better than the appearance of an old crone who, at the corner of some deserted alley, beckons you to follow her, and introduces you, by means of a secret door, to an apartment adorned with all the refinements of Asian luxury, where a Sultana, dripping with gold and precious stones, and seated on brocaded cushions, awaits you; she, whose smile offers a voluptuous promise soon to be fulfilled. Usually, the intrigue is resolved by the sudden arrival of her lord, who barely leaves you time to flee by a secret exit, unless the affair ends, more tragically, in an armed struggle and the descent, to the bed of the Bosphorus, of a sack in which a human form vaguely struggles.



The Sultana in her State Arrhuba

This Oriental commonplace, suitably embroidered, always interests readers, especially female ones. Doubtless there are examples of some young, rich and handsome *giaour*, who knowing the language of the country thoroughly, and renting a small house conforming to Turkish custom, manages to conduct a love affair with a Muslim woman while running the greatest danger and risking her life; but they are few and far between, and for several reasons: firstly, whatever Molière may say (*see his play 'L'École des Maris' Act I, Scene 2, and Act III, Scene 6*), locks and grilles are materially quite effective obstacles; then there is the difference of religion, and the sincere contempt every believer holds for infidels, reasons to which should be added the difficulty or rather the impossibility of those preliminary meetings which lead to love. While, in France, there is a tacit conspiracy against the husband, all favour the amorous couple, at least by keeping silent, and none proclaim themselves arbiters of public morality, in

Turkey, things are otherwise: a *kavas*, a *hammal*, a man of the people, who sees a Muslim woman talking to a Frank in the street, or simply signalling her awareness of him, falls on the Frank with kicks, punches, blows from a stick, a show of brutality which meets with general approval, even among the women. Mockery aimed at marital fidelity is unheard of; an instinctive and physical Turkish jealousy almost certainly preserves them from matrimonial incidents, so frequent among us, though jokes about wearing horns are as present on the Karagöz stage as that of the Théâtre-Français, and the word *kerata* (*horned*) is inserted in comedic disputes at every opportunity.

It is true that Turkish women go about freely, take walks at the Fresh Waters of Asia and Europe; parade in carriages at Haydarpasha, or in Bayezit square; seat themselves on the edge of the lawns of the Fields of the Dead of Pera and Scutari; spend entire days bathing or visiting their friends; attend the comedies of Kadi-Keui, and watch the feats of strength performed by the acrobats of Psammathia (*Samatya*); converse beneath the arcades of the mosques; shop the Bezesten; and travel the Bosphorus in a caique or a steamboat; but they always have two or three companions beside them, or an African servant, or an old woman acting as duenna, or, if they are rich, a eunuch often jealous on the mistress's behalf. When they are alone, which is rare, a child serves to guarantee respect, and, in the absence of a child, public morality guards and protects them, though perhaps more than they would like, since the freedom of movement they enjoy is only apparent.

Foreigners grant credit to other's amorous good fortune through confusing Armenian with Turkish women, whose same costume they wear, except for the yellow boots, and who imitate Turkish manners well enough to deceive someone not of their country; all that is then required is an aged go-between who arranges a rendezvous, in some isolated house, between a pretty schemer and the credulous young man; vanity does the rest, and the adventure always ends with the extortion of a more or less substantial sum of money, a detail customarily omitted by the foolish *giaour*, who imagines every woman to be one of the Pasha's favourites, and dreams of following in the footsteps of the Grand-Seigneur. But, in reality, Turkish life is hermetically sealed, and it is difficult to know what goes on behind those densely-latticed windows, in which holes are pierced from the inside, to gaze out, as in theatre sets.

One must not think of obtaining information from the natives of the country. As Alfred de Musset says at the beginning of *Namouna*:

‘Un silence parfait règne dans cette histoire.’

‘Over this story, perfect silence reigns.’

(See de Musset's '*Namouna*': Canto I, verse 8, line 1)

To speak to a Turk of the women of his household is to commit the grossest impropriety; one should never make the slightest allusion, even indirectly, to this delicate subject. Thus, banal phrases are banished from conversation such as ‘How is madame?’ and others in a like style; the most fiercely bearded *Osmanli* would blush like a young girl on hearing such an enormity. The wife of the French ambassador, having wished to present some beautiful silks from Lyon to Mustafa Reshid Pasha, for his harem, gave them to him saying: ‘Here are some fabrics for which you, better than any, will know how to find a use.’ To express the intention behind the gift more clearly would have seemed an incongruity, even to Reshid, who was accustomed to French manners; it was the marquise’s exquisite tact that made her choose a vague and graceful phrase which could in no way offend Oriental sensitivity.

It is obvious, from this, that one would be ill-advised to ask a Turk for details regarding the private life of the harem, or the character and morals of Muslim women. Though he has been on familiar terms with you in Paris, and has drunk two hundred cups of coffee and smoked as many pipes on the same couch beside you, he will stammer, answer evasively, or be angered and avoid you thereafter; civilisation, in this respect, has made little progress here. One’s only means of seeking information is to ask some well-recommended European lady who has been admitted to a harem, to tell you, faithfully, what she has seen. A man, meanwhile, must renounce knowing more of Turkish beauty than the domino mask, or whatever he may have surprised beneath the cover of an *arabas* (*cart*), behind the window of a *talikas* (*carriage*), or in the shadows of the cypress trees in the cemetery, when heat and solitude cause the veil to be drawn back a little.

Again, if one approaches a woman too closely and there is a Turk close by, one attracts compliments like the following: ‘Christian dog! Infidel! *Giaour*! May the birds of the sky soil your head, may the plague fall upon your house! May your wife prove sterile!’ A Biblical, and Muslim, curse of the greatest gravity. However, his anger is rather feigned than real, and he is playing to the gallery, mostly. A woman, even a Turkish woman, is never angered by someone gazing at her, while hiding her beauty always weighs on her a little.

At the Fresh Waters of Asia, while leaning against a tree or beside the fountain like someone lost in vague reverie, I was able to view more than one charming profile barely blurred by a mist of gauze, and more than one throat pure and white as Parian marble rounding the folds of a partly-open *feredje*, while the eunuch strolled about a few steps away, or watched the steamboats pass by on the Bosphorus, reassured by my distant and melancholy air.

And then, the Turks see no more than we *giaours*; they never penetrate beyond the *selamlık* (*reception room*), to the inner rooms of their most intimate friends, and only know the women of their own household. When the ladies of one harem visit another, the slippers of foreigners, placed on the threshold, prohibit entry to the *haremlık* even to the master of the house, who thus finds himself barred from his own dwelling. The immense female population, anonymous and unknown to the male, circulates mysteriously in a city transformed into a perpetual Opéra ball, at which the dominoes are never allowed to unmask themselves. Fathers and brothers alone have the right to see the faces of their daughters and sisters uncovered; the veil is worn among less close relatives; thus, a Turk may see only five or six full faces of Muslim women in his lifetime. Large harems are the prerogative of viziers, pashas, beys, and other rich

personages, since they are excessively expensive, each woman who becomes a mother requiring her own separate house and slaves; Turks of ordinary rank rarely wed more than one legitimate wife, though they are allowed to wed four, along with one or two bought concubines. Sexual superfluity remains for them a phantom and a chimera; it is true that they can compensate for this by gazing at the female Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and Perotes, and the rare female travellers who visit Constantinople.

If their positive enjoyment seems more certain than ours, they lack the pleasures of imagination. How can one be inflamed by a beauty barely glimpsed, a woman with whom any sustained relationship is impossible, and from whom the very fabric of life rigidly separates us? All this does not prevent, no doubt, some young *Osmanli* from falling in love with a *khanum* (lady) or an *odalisque* (concubine) following a fortuitous chance encounter, nor her returning his advances, despite all obstacles; but the exception proves the rule.

A Turk, in order to find a partner, employs the services of some mature woman, plying the trade of matchmaker, an honourable profession in Constantinople. The old woman, frequenting the public baths, describes to him, in minute detail, some Asma, Ruken, Nourmahal, Pembe-Haré, Leila, Mihri-Mahr, or some other nubile virgin beauty, taking care to adorn with still more Oriental metaphors the portrait of the young girl she favours. The *effendi* becomes enamored by the description, scatters bouquets of hyacinths on the street where the veiled idol of his heart will pass, and after a few glances have been exchanged, asks her father's permission to wed her, assures him of a dowry proportionate to his passion and his fortune, and finally, for the first time, in the nuptial chamber, sees the importunate yashmak lowered, which previously robbed him of her otherwise pure and regular features. These proxy marriages give rise to no more misunderstandings and disappointments than our own.

I could repeat here, from the writings of travellers who have preceded me, a host of details on the *valide* (old lady; here, the go-between), the *hasekis* (consorts), sultanas, odalisques and the interior arrangement of the seraglio; the books from which I would draw these notions are available to all, and it is pointless to transcribe them. Let me pass on to something more precise, and give you a Turkish interior according to the account of a lady invited to dine with the wife of the ex-Pasha of Kurdistan of whom I have already spoken.

His wife had been a member of the Seraglio before marrying the Pasha. The Sultan freed some of his slaves, when they reached the age of thirty, who found it advantageous to marry given the connection they maintained with the palace, and the credit they were thus supposed to possess. Moreover they had received a sound education, and knew how to read, write, compose verse, dance, and play various instruments, and were distinguished by the fine manners seen only at court; they also possessed, to a high degree, an understanding of the complexities of intrigue and cabals, and often learned, from their friends still within the harem, political secrets of which their husbands might take advantage, either to obtain a favour or avoid disgrace. To marry a girl from the Seraglio was therefore a fine and calculated move on the part of an ambitious or prudent man.

The apartment in which the Pasha's wife received her guest was as elegant as it was richly adorned, and contrasted with the severe bareness of the *selamlik*, which I described in the preceding chapter. A row of windows occupied the three external walls, so as to admit as much

air and light as possible; a hothouse gives the most accurate idea of such rooms, in which rare flowers are also kept. A magnificent and soft Smyrna carpet covered the floor; arabesques and interlaced, painted and gilded patterns decorated the ceiling; a long divan of yellow and blue satin extended along two of the walls; another small very low divan had been placed in a gap between the windows, from which one could gain in full an admirable view of the Bosphorus; blue damask cushions were strewn here and there over the carpet.

In one corner, a large ewer of Bohemian glass, emerald-coloured, and patterned with designs in gold, sparkled on a tray of the same material; in another was placed a chest, covered with leather embossed, historiated, stitched and gilded in a charming style, and recalling, by the invention shown in its ornamentation, those chests from Morocco that Eugène Delacroix never fails to introduce into his paintings of North-African life. Unfortunately, this Oriental luxury was marred by a mahogany chest of drawers on the marble top of which stood a pyramidal clock complete with a glass globe, between two vases of artificial flowers also under glass, identical to those on the mantelpiece of any honest rentier in the Marais. These dissonances, afflicting the artistic sensibility, are found in all Turkish houses with pretensions to good taste. A room decorated more simply, adjoining the first, served as a dining room, and communicated with the staircase to the offices.

The *khanum* was sumptuously adorned, as Turkish ladies usually are at home, especially when expecting a visitor. Her black hair, divided into an infinity of small plaits, fell over her shoulders and across her cheeks. The crown of her head sparkled, as if topped with a diamond helm, with the quadruple links of a *rivière* (*a strand or strands of graduated gemstones*) and by stones of the finest water sewn to a small cap of sky-blue satin which they almost entirely covered. This splendid adornment suited her aspect of grave and noble beauty, her brilliant black eyes, her thin aquiline nose, her red mouth, her elongated face, the whole physiognomy of this great, haughty, but affable lady.

Her longish neck was circled by a necklace of large pearls, and her half-open silk chemise revealed a pretty and well-formed throat that required no aid from a corset, that embarrassing creation unknown to the Orient; she wore a dark garnet-coloured silk dress open at the front like a man's surcoat, slit at the sides to knee height, and at the back forming a tail like a court-dress. This dress was edged with a white ribbon curled into star-shapes at intervals; a Persian shawl clasped the top of her wide white taffeta trousers, the folds of which covered small yellow morocco slippers revealing only their curved tips like Chinese clogs.

With a show of grace, she had the foreigner sit beside her on the small sofa, though only after having offered her a chair so she might be seated in the European manner if the Turkish seemed inconvenient to her, and examined her dress curiously, without marked affectation however, as a well-bred person does when a new object presents itself to her. The conversation, between people who do not speak the same language, and are reduced to mime, cannot be very varied: the Turkish woman asked the European if she had children, and gave her to understand that she herself was deprived of that happiness, to her great regret.

When the time to dine arrived, they crossed into the next room, also surrounded by sofas, and a polished copper side-table was brought in, laden with dishes much like those I have already described, except that the meat dishes were presented in smaller portions, and the

sweets more numerous and varied. A favourite slave of the *khanum* took part in the meal beside her mistress.

She was a beautiful girl of seventeen or eighteen, robust, lively, in superb bloom, but far inferior in rank to the ex-odalisque of the seraglio; she had large black eyes beneath broad eyebrows, purplish lips, rounded cheeks, a somewhat rustic and healthy radiance facially, white and fleshy arms, a firm throat, and opulent contours that her loose costume allowed to be freely appreciated. She was wearing a small Greek bonnet from which her brown hair escaped in two large braids, and was dressed in a jacket, in that pistachio yellow that our dyers cannot capture, of a very light, soft tone. This jacket, slashed on the sides and at the rear so as to form a kind of tail like the surcoats of Parisian women, and possessing short sleeves from which others beneath in silk gauze escaped, accentuated, by emphasising her waist, a form which owed nothing to the lie of the crinoline; large baggy trousers in opaque muslin completed this outfit, as neat as it was graceful.

A mulatto woman, the colour of new bronze, with a piece of white drapery round her forehead, in a casually-rolled white *abbaya* (*surcoat*) which brought out the dark tone of her skin admirably, stood barefoot against the door, taking the dishes from the hands of a servant who brought them from the kitchen sited on the lower floor.

After dinner, the *cadine* (*lady*) rose, and crossed into the drawing-room, where she moved from sofa to sofa with graceful nonchalance. She then smoked a cigarette, instead of partaking of the traditional *narghile*; the cigarette now being fashionable in the East, with as many *papelitos* smoked in Constantinople as in Seville; idle Turkish women like to amuse themselves by rolling the straw-coloured threads of Latakia in thin tubes of *papel de hilo* (*thread-paper*).

The master of the house appeared, to visit his wife and meet the lady from Europe; and, on hearing him approach, the young slave fled with extreme haste, since, belonging to the *khanum*, and already affianced, she was not permitted to appear with her face uncovered before the ex-Pasha of Kurdistan, who, however, wished only the one wife, like many Turks.

After a few minutes the Pasha withdrew to pay his devotions in the next room, and the *khanum* recalled her slave.

The hour for leave-taking arrived; the stranger rose to depart; her hostess signalled her to stay a little longer and murmured a few words in the ear of the young slave, who began to search through the chest of drawers with great activity, until she found a small object in a case, which the Pasha's wife gave to the visitor as a gracious souvenir of a pleasant evening spent together.

This cardboard case in lilac, glazed with silver, contained a small glass bottle on which the following legend could be read: 'Extract of honey - for the handkerchief - Paris' And on the back: 'Double extract of guaranteed quality honey - L-T Piver, 103, Rue Saint-Martin, Paris.' (*Louis Toussaint Piver took over management of, and rebranded, in 1823, the perfume-house 'À la Reine des Fleurs' established in 1774 by Michael Adam. The manufactory at 111-113 Rue Saint-Martin, and the store at 103, which opened in 1833, were co-owned by his nephews from 1837. LT Piver is the oldest French perfume-house still currently in business.*)

Chapter 17: Breaking the Fast

I have often uttered the word '*caique*', and it would be difficult to do otherwise when speaking of Constantinople; but I perceive that I have given no description of the thing itself, which is worth doing, nonetheless; for the *caique* is assuredly the most graceful craft that has ever furrowed the blue waters of the sea. Compared to the Turkish *caique*, the Venetian *gondola*, however elegant, is only a crude coffer, and the *barcarolas* (*boatmen*, *gondoliers*) ignoble rogues compared to the *caïdjis*.

The *caique* is a boat fifteen to twenty feet long, and three feet or so wide, in the shape of an ice-skate, each end being terminated in such a manner as to allow it to move in either direction; the sides are made of two long planks carved inside with a frieze representing foliage, flowers, fruits, knotted ribbons, quivers in saltire, and other small ornaments; two or three upright planks, cut to form flying buttresses, divide the boat and support the sides against the pressure of the water; the prow is armed with an iron beak.

The entire vessel, made of waxed or varnished beech-wood, sometimes enhanced with a few lines of gilding, is extremely clean and elegant. The *caïdjis*, who each ply a pair of oars whose handles broaden to act as a counterweight, sit on a small transverse bench, covered with sheepskin to avoid them slipping when pulling on the oars, their feet resting against a wooden block.

The passengers crouch at the bottom of the boat, towards the stern, so as to raise the boat's nose a little at the prow, and enable it to travel more freely: the boatmen even take the precaution of greasing the outside of the boat, so that it slides through the water. A more or less costly piece of carpet covers the rear part of the *caique*, in which it is necessary to remain utterly still, since the slightest movement might suddenly capsize the boat, or strike the wrists of the *caïdjis*, at least, who row two-handedly. The *caique* is as sensitive as a pair of scales, and tilts to right or left at the slightest loss of equilibrium; the Turks sense of balance, they are rooted as statues, accommodates itself marvellously to the constraint imposed, a constraint which is painful initially for a restless *giaour*, but to which one soon grows accustomed.

There is space for four passengers in a two-oared *caique*, seated in pairs facing each other. Despite the sun's heat, these boats are free of awnings, which would slow their progress, and are contrary to Turkish etiquette, awnings being reserved to the Sultan's *caiques*; but they carry a parasol, which is closed when passing near to the imperial residences. Such a boat can match the speed of a horse moving at full trot along the shore, and sometimes even overtake it.

Each *caique* bears a stamp near the prow indicating the landing-stage where it is stationed: Tophane, Galata, Yeşil-Köşk, Yeni-Cami, Beşiktaş, etc.

The *caïdjis* are superb fellows, Albanians or Armatoles (*irregular recruits to the Ottoman army*) for the most part, possessed of masculine beauty and herculean vigour. The sun and air, which have browned their skin, render them the colour of beautiful bronze statues of which they already own the forms. Their costume consists of large linen trousers of dazzling

whiteness, and a striped gauze shirt with slit sleeves, which allows them to move freely; a red fez, whose tuft in blue or black hangs down six inches or so, topping a head with shaved temples; and a belt of yellow and red striped wool wound round several times above the loins and securing the waist.

They shave their chins, only retaining a moustache, so as to avoid the warmth generated by unnecessary hair; their feet and legs are bare, and their open shirts reveal powerful pectorals bronzed by a solid tan. With each stroke of the oar, their biceps of their athletic arms swell like cannonballs. The obligatory ablutions keep their fine bodies scrupulously clean, purified by exercise, the fresh air, and a sobriety unknown to the people of the North. The *caïdjis*, despite their hard work, eat little more than bread, cucumbers, corn-cobs, and fruit, and drink only fresh water or coffee, while, during the thirty days of fasting required by Ramadan, the Muslims among them row from morning to night without swallowing a mouthful of water or smoking a pipe.

It would be no exaggeration to suggest that three or four thousand *caïdjis* must serve the different landing-stages of Constantinople and the Bosphorus, as far as Therapia (*Tarabya*) or Büyükdere. The layout of the city, separated from its suburbs by the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara, necessitates perpetual aquatic journeys; one needs to take a caique to travel from Tophane to Seraï-Bournou, from Beschick-Tash (*Besiktas*) to Scutari (*Usküdar*), from Psammathia (*Samatya*) to Kadi-Keuï (*Kadikoy*), from Kassim-Pacha (*Kasimpasa*) to Phanar (*Fener*), and from one side of the Golden Horn to the other, whenever one finds oneself too far from one of the three boat-bridges which link Europe and Asia-Minor.

Nothing is more amusing, when you arrive at one of the landing stages, than to see the *caïdjis* hastening to fight over your person, as the drivers of *coucous* (*Parisian two-wheeled box carts*) used to tear travellers apart, insulting each other with deafening volubility, and each offering you their boat at a discount. The tumult is sometimes mingled with the barking of terrified dogs, trampled on in the midst of the heated debate. Finally, bumped, elbowed, pulled and pushed, you become the prey of one or two gigantic fellows who drag you triumphantly towards their boat through groups of their disgruntled and disappointed colleagues.

To descend into a caique, without overturning it keel in the air, is a rather delicate operation. Usually, a fine old Turk, with a white beard, his complexion browned by the sun, holds the boat with a stick armed with a nail, a *para* (*a small copper coin, there were forty 'paras' to the silver 'kuru', introduced in 1844, with a hundred kuruş to the gold Ottoman 'lira'*) being thrown to him for his trouble.

It is not always an easy thing to extricate the craft from the flotilla gathered around each landing stage, and it requires the *caïdjis'* incomparable skill to succeed without boarding and without accident. To disembark its passengers, each caique turns around, stern to shore, an evolution which might lead to dangerous collisions if the *caïdjis* had not their agreed calls, like those of the gondoliers of Venice, to warn one another. When one disembarks, one leaves the fare at the bottom of the boat, on the carpet, in piastres (*kurus*) or *beshliks* (*five-para coins*), according to the length of the journey and the sum agreed.

It would be a fine thing to be a *caïdji* in Constantinople, if it was not for competition from the steamboats which are beginning to circulate on the Bosphorus in as great a number as watermen's wherries on the Thames. From the Galata Bridge, beyond which they cannot ascend the estuary, a crowd of Turkish, English, and Austrian steamboats depart, at all hours of the day, their smoke mingling with the silvery mists of the Golden Horn, vessels which deposit travellers by the hundreds at Bebek, Arnaout-Keui (*Arnavutköy*), Anadolı-Hissar (*Anadoluhisari*), Therapia (*Tarabya*), and Buyuk-Déré (*Büyükdere*), on the European shore; or at Scutari (*Usküdar*), Kadi-Keui (*Kadıköy*), and the Princes' Islands, on the Asian side. Such crossings had to be made by caique previously, cost a deal of time and money given the length of the journey, and presented some danger because of the violence of the currents and the wind, which is liable to freshen, from one moment to the next, at the outlet from the Black Sea.

The *caïdjis* seek, in vain, to compete with the steamboats for speed. They flex their muscles; vying, uselessly, with the steel pistons of the steamboats. Soon only brief intermediate journeys will be left to them, and old backward-looking Turks who weep, at the Elbicei-Atika (*Museum of Costume*), on viewing the Janissaries' preserved clothing, will be alone in using them, out of hatred for the diabolical inventions of the *giaours*, when visiting their summer houses. There are also omnibus-caiques, heavy boats carrying up to thirty passengers or so, manoeuvred by four or six rowers who, at each stroke of the oars, step up onto a wooden board, then lean backwards and employ all their weight to shift their enormous oar. These automatic movements, repeated minute by minute, provide the strangest of sights to the eye; the soldiers, the *hammals*, the poor, the Jews, and the old women, use this economical but slow means of transport, which will be superseded by the steamboats whenever their owners wish, simply by creating a 'third class' at reduced prices.

I was therefore not at all surprised to hear news of a riot instigated by the *caïdjis*; it was easy to foresee, given, the numerous funnels of the *pyroscaphes*, near Galata, smoking, and the waters whitening beneath the blades of the paddle-wheels, waters which till then had only been struck by those crescent-shaped oars. During my stay, the boatmen, crouching melancholically on their deserted jetties, already watched, with gloomy eyes, steamboats crowded with passengers ascending the current like shoals of sea-bream.

The hour, patiently awaited, which ended the fast, had arrived, an event solemnised by public celebration. The Bosphorus, the Golden Horn and the basin of the Sea of Marmara presented a most lively and happy aspect: all the ships in the harbour were decked with multi-coloured banners; the flags, once hoisted, fluttered in the wind; the Turkish standard, ending in a swallowtail, showed three silver crescents on a sinople (*green*) shield within a field gules (*red*). France unfurled its tricolour; Austria displayed its banner striped with red and white and charged with a crowned escutcheon; Russia had its azure cross in saltire on a silver background; England, its cross of Saint George; the United States, the striped ensign adorned with stars (*the thirteen-starred 'boat-flag'*); Greece, its blue cross, on a white background, bearing at its centre the white and black diamond-chequering of Bavaria; Morocco displayed its red pennant; Tripoli its three half-moons on a field of the Prophet's favourite colour (*green*); Tunis its flag with two blue stripes, two red, and a single central green stripe like a silken belt, while the sun gaily played on, and flickered across, all these banners whose reflections extended and

meandered over the limpid water; artillery salvoes greeted the Sultan's caique, which passed, resplendent with gilding and purple, driven forward by the efforts of thirty vigorous oarsmen, while sailors, standing on the yards, shouted hurrahs, and albatrosses, scared by the noise, swirled amidst the cottony clouds of smoke.

I took a caique at Tophane, and was borne in it from one vessel to another, so I might examine the cross-sections of the various ships, my preference being for us to linger beside the boats coming from Trebizond (*Trabzon*), Moudania (*Mudanya*), Ismick (*Izmit*), and Lampsaki (*Lapseki, ancient Lampsacus*), whose castle-like sterns, swan-breasted prows, and masts with long spars, differ little, one supposes, from the vessels of which the Greek fleet was composed at the time of the Trojan War. The much-vaunted American clippers are far from possessing the former's elegant curves, and it takes scant imagination to picture the blond-haired Achilles, son of Peleus, seated on one of those high sterns bathed by the sea, where the Simois (*the Dümrek Cayi*) discharged its waters.

As we sped along, the boat skimmed the islet of rocks on which stands what the Franks call, for some reason or other, the Tower of Leander, and the Turks, Kiz-Kulesi, the Tower of the Maiden. Needless to say, Leander's name is attached to this white turret most improperly, since it was the Hellespont and not the Bosphorus that he swam to visit Hero, the beautiful priestess of Aphrodite. The following graceful legend explains the Turkish name.

The Sultan Mahmud I had a daughter of rare beauty, whom a gypsy claimed would die from the bite of a snake. Her alarmed father, to thwart the sinister prediction, built a kiosk for her on this islet, a reef to which not even a lizard clung; the son of the Shah of Persia having heard of the wondrous beauty of Mehar-Schegid (such was the name of the young girl) fell passionately in love with her, and arranged for one of those bouquets by means of which the Orient write its confessions of love in flowery symbols to reach her. Sadly, an asp lurked amidst the mass of hyacinths and roses, and bit the princess on the finger. She was on the verge of death, for lack of one devoted enough to suck the venom from her wound, when the young prince, the cause of all this evil, came to her side, and passionately and courageously took the poison in his own mouth, thus saving Mehar-Schegid, whom Mahmud then granted him as his wife.

In fact, the tower, or its predecessor at least, was built during the Late Empire (*in the twelfth century AD*) by Manuel I Comnenus, served to support a chain attached to a corresponding tower on the European shore and, with a defensive wall to the Asian shore, barred the entrance to the Golden Horn to enemy vessels out of the Black Sea. Even earlier in time, it is said that Damalis, wife of Chares, the general sent from Athens (*in 340 BC*) to the aid of Byzantium which had been attacked by Philip of Macedon's fleet, died at Chrysopolis, and that she was buried on this islet, in a tomb surmounted by the statue of a heifer (*the meaning of the name Damalis*).

A Greek epitaph, which has been preserved, was inscribed on the tomb's pillar, and from this comes, no doubt, the true origin of the name Kiz-Kulesi, the tower or tomb of the maiden. The epitaph reads: 'I am not the image of that heifer, the daughter (*Io*) of Inachus, who gave a name to the Bosphorus (*βοὸς πόρος, the cow-strait*) stretching before me. Juno's cruel resentment once drove her beyond the seas; I who occupy this tomb, am the daughter of

Cecrops. I wed Chares, and sailed with that hero when he came to fight Philip's fleet. Till then I was called *Boiidion*, the Little Heifer, now, wife of Chares, I enjoy two continents.'

Thus is explained the sculpture of a heifer on Damalis' funeral column. We know that, among the Greeks, the cow evoked more than one flattering comparison, and that Homer gives Juno the eyes of a heifer. *Boiidion* is therefore a graceful epithet according to ancient ideas, and one that we should not be surprised to see applied to a beautiful young woman. But enough of Greek, let us return to Turkish.

On breaking the fast, it is customary that, his *valide* (*mother*) gifts the Sultan a virgin girl of the most perfect beauty; to find this phoenix, the slave traders or *jellabs* search Georgia and Circassia for several months in advance, and she may well command an enormous price. If the girl conceives on the night which is considered blessed it is treated as a favourable omen for the empire's prosperity. Strangely, in contrast, during the seven days following the breaking of the fast, true believers abstain from any carnal contact with their wives, for fear of producing deformed, monstrous children, or children disfigured by birthmarks, thus His Highness, at that time, is the only Muslim in the empire to whom, to his good fortune, the pleasures of love are permitted!

The day is devoted to prayers and to visiting the mosques, and in the evening the city is illuminated. If the sight of the port, with all its flag-bedecked vessels and the perpetual movement of vessels, was already a marvellous spectacle beneath the splendid Eastern sky, what can be said of this nocturnal festival? It is then that one feels the impotence of the pen and the brush; a diorama alone could, with the help of its varied lighting, give a faint idea of those magical chiaroscuro effects.

Artillery discharges, following one another without respite, for the Turks are very fond of burning powder, burst forth on all sides, deafening the ears with their celebratory din; the minarets of the mosques were lit up like beacons; verses from the Koran were inscribed in fiery letters on the dark blue of the night, and a motley and compact crowd descended, in a human cascade, the sloping streets of Galata and Pera; around the fountain of Tophane, thousands of lights sparkled like glow-worms, and the mosque of Sultan Mahmud soared into the sky, outlined in points of fire, like those palaces pricked out on black paper and revealed by the lamp behind them, of François Dominique Séraphin's shadow-play sets.

A caique took me out to sea, one of my friends in Constantinople having kindly arranged a place for me aboard a Lloyd's registered ship. Tophane, lit by red and green Bengal lights, blazed amidst the clouds of an apotheosis, torn apart, moment to moment, by cannon-fire, the crackling of fireworks, the zigzags of serpentine, and the explosions and flowering of fiery bombs. The Mahmudiyah (*Mahmut Pasha*) Mosque appeared, amidst opal-coloured smoke, like one of those carbuncular edifices created by imaginative Arab storytellers to house the queen of the *peris*; it was dazzling.

The ships at anchor, their masts, yards and planking outlined by rows of green, blue, red and yellow lamps, looked like jewelled ships floating on an ocean of flame, so brightly were the waters of the Bosphorus lit by the reflection of this blaze of lanterns, fire-pots, starry suns, and illuminated forms.

Serai-Bournou extended like a promontory carved of topaz, above which, encircled by coronets of fire, sprang the silver minarets of Hagia Sophia, the Sultan-Ahmet Mosque, and the Nuruosmaniye Mosque; on the shore of Asia-Minor, Scutari (*Üskiüdar*) emitted myriads of luminous sparks, as both fiery shores of the Bosphorus as far as the eye could see framed a glittering spangled surface incessantly whipped to foam by the oars of the caiques.



Inner Court of the Mosque of Sultan Osman

Sometimes a distant ship, previously unnoticed, would burst into flame, wear a sudden purple and bluish halo, then vanish again in the shadows like a dream. These pyrotechnic surprises produced the most charming effect.

Steamboats, bright with panes of coloured glass, passed by, carrying orchestras whose fanfares were scattered joyfully in the breeze.

Above all this, the sky, as if it wished to join the celebrations, spread its lavish casket of stars over a field of lapis lazuli of the darkest and richest blue, the border of which the fiery earth below barely reddened.

I remained an hour or two aboard the Austrian vessel, intoxicated by that sublime spectacle, unrivalled anywhere in the world, attempting to engrave in my memory forever those glittering enchantments rendered double by the magic mirror of the Bosphorus. What are our poor festivities on the Place de la Concorde, where a few dozen lanterns smoke, next to that

firework-display of diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and rubies bursting and crackling over an area nine or ten miles in length, which, instead of being quenched in the water, is seemingly rekindled more phosphorescently and more vividly?

What a host of lamp-posts and yew-trees, of three-masted ships illuminated from deck to weather vane, of lances of flame, and minarets a hundred feet high, was alight in that immense amphitheatre that Nature seems to have created to surround her capital of the world, and in which the philosopher Charles Fourier placed, in anticipation, the throne of the global *Omniarch*!

Here and there the lights began to fade, breaches appeared in the lines of fire, the powder, almost exhausted, proved difficult to detonate; enormous banks of smoke, which the breeze could no longer disperse, crawled over the surface like monstrous sea-creatures; the cold dew of the night soaked even the thickest clothes; it was necessary to think of departing, an operation not without difficulty and peril. My caique awaited me at the foot of the ship's ladder; I hailed the *caïdjis*, and we made way.

The Bosphorus was covered by the most prodigious swarm of vessels of all kinds that one could imagine and, despite warning cries, oars were constantly entangled, boats brushed against one another, and the oarsmen were obliged to fold those same oars, like the legs of insects, against the sides of the boats, or risk them being shattered.

The points of prows passed within two inches of one's face, like javelins or the beaks of birds of prey; the reverberations from all these explosive fireworks, scattering in last glimmers, blinded the *caïdjis* and deceived them as to their true direction; a boat driven at full speed nearly passed over ours, and I would certainly have been cut in two, or drowned in the depths, if the boatmen had not, with incomparable skill, hauled us backwards with a superhuman show of strength.

At last, I arrived, safe and sound, at Tophane, amidst the lapping and shimmer of the waves, a tumult of boats, and cries enough to drive one mad, and returned to the Hotel de France, via the little Champ-des-Morts, through streets that were gradually more and more deserted, stepping carefully over the encampments of sleeping dogs.

Meanwhile, the happy Caliph, in the depths of the Seraglio, was lifting the veil of the beautiful slave gifted to him by the Sultana his mother, his gaze dwelling slowly upon those hidden charms that no human eye but his beheld.

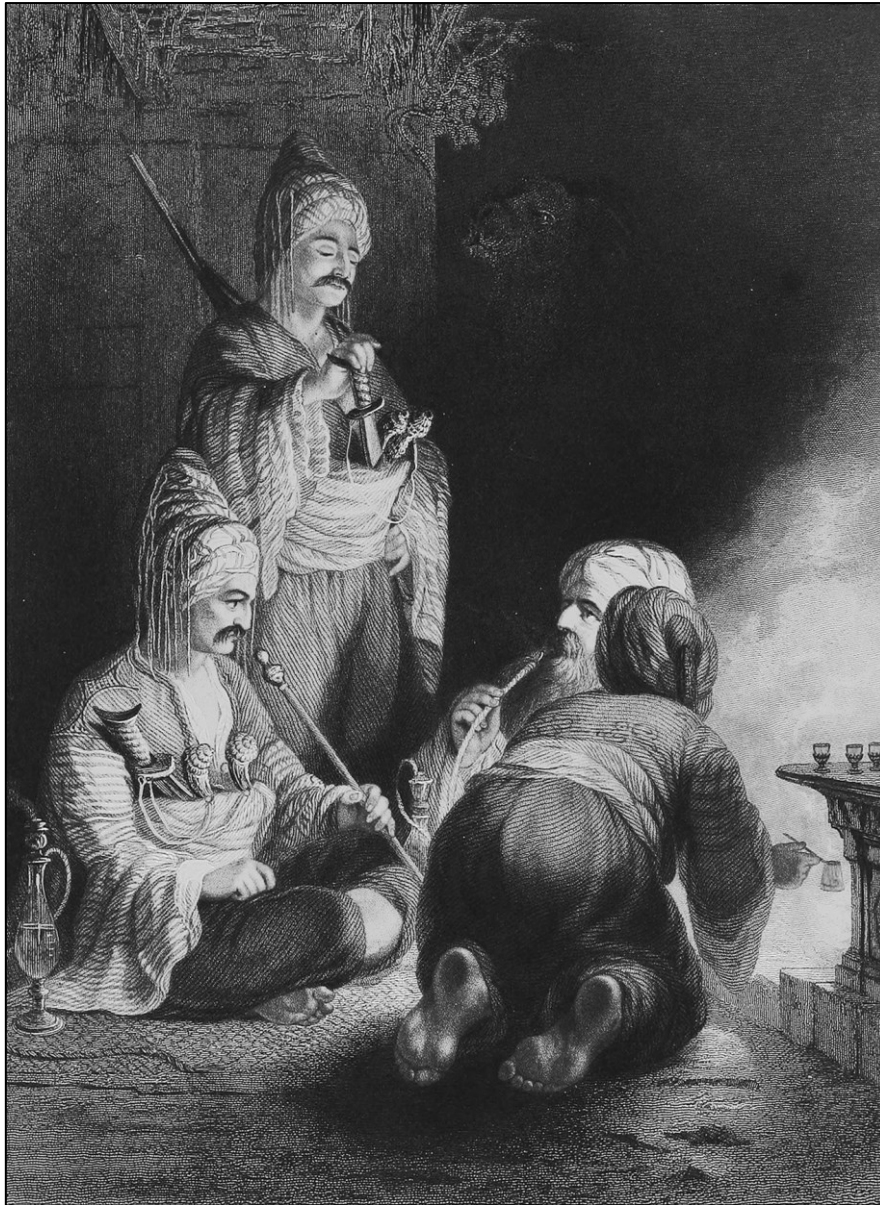
Chapter 18: The Walls of Constantinople

I decided to perform a grand tour of the remoter districts of Constantinople, which travellers rarely visit. Their curiosity hardly extends beyond the Bedesten, the Atmeidan (*Atmeydani*, *Sultanahmet Square*), Bayezit Square, the Old Seraglio, and the surroundings of Hagia Sophia, on which all the activity of the Muslim city is concentrated. I therefore set out early, in the

company of a young Frenchman who has lived in Turkey for some time; we quickly descended the slope of Galata, crossed the Golden Horn on the boat-bridge, threw four *paras* at the toll-keeper and, turning from Yeni-Cami, plunged into a maze of Turkish alley-ways.

As we advanced, the solitude increased; the dogs, wilder, gazed at us with haggard eye, and followed us, growling. The faded and tottering wooden houses, with plain latticework, their storeys out of true, had the appearance of collapsing chicken coops. The water of a ruined fountain, extravasated, filtered into a greening conch-shaped basin; a dismantled *turbe* (*tomb*), invaded by brambles, nettles, and asphodels, revealed, through grilles obstructed by cobwebs, a few funeral *cippi*, leaning left and right in the shadows, and offering only illegible inscriptions; a *marabout* (*a religious leader's mausoleum*) with a round dome roughly plastered with lime, was flanked by a minaret like a candlestick topped by its snuffer; above the long walls, black cypress tips sprang, while branches of sycamores and plane-trees bent down towards the street. No more mosques with marble columns, and Moorish arcades, no more Pasha's *konaks* (*mansions*) painted in bright colours with their gracefully projecting aerial rooms, but, here and there, were piled large heaps of ashes from the centre of which rose a few blackened brick chimneys, still standing tall, while over this scene of wretchedness and abandonment, gleamed the pure, white, implacable light of the Orient, which cruelly exposes every melancholy detail.

From alley to alley, via crossroad after crossroad, we arrived at a large, dreary and dilapidated *khan* (*caravanserai*), with tall arches and long stone walls, intended to house strings of camels: it was the hour of prayer, and, on the outer gallery of the minaret of the neighbouring mosque, two muezzins dressed in white walked, at a ghostlike pace, uttering, in voices full of strange tones, the sacramental formula of Islam towards those mute, blind and deaf houses, crumbling silently in solitude. This verse of the Koran, which seemed to descend from the sky, modulated by a sweetly guttural voice, awakened no other noise than the plaintive sigh of some dog troubled by dreams, or the beating of some frightened dove's wings. The muezzins nevertheless continued their impassive ritual, scattering the names of Allah and the Prophet to the four winds of the horizon, like sowers careless of where the seed falls, knowing full well that it will find the furrow. Even beneath those worm-eaten roofs, perhaps, in the depths of apparently abandoned shanties, the faithful spread their poor little worn carpets, turned towards Mecca, and repeated with deep faith: '*Ash-hadu alla ilaha illa-llah! Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar Rasulullah!*'



Halt of Caravaniers at a Serai

A black North-African on horseback passed by from time to time; an old mummy pressed against a wall extended a monkey's paw from a pile of rags, begging for alms, taking advantage of this unexpected opportunity; two or three urchins who had escaped from an Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps watercolour were trying to thrust pebbles into the neck of a dried-up fountain. A few lizards ran over the stones, in complete safety, and that was all.

I felt overwhelmed with sadness, despite myself, and would have forgotten the object of our walk, which was to go and see the acrobats near the Silivri-Kapi gate, if my companion had not reminded me of it several times. I was weary and famished, for we had travelled, without being aware of it, an enormous distance, and had strayed considerably from our route, which we had regained, but not without difficulty; we crossed the courtyard and the garden of a mosque whose name I forget, while the sound of shrill, barbarous music emerging from a

wooden enclosure indicated to us that we were on the right path. This indeed was the place. We seated ourselves on those stools four-inches in height, coffee and pipes were brought, and we watched the performance taking place in the centre of the courtyard, in a layer of fine dust: they were Moroccans carrying out the same tricks anyone can see executed at the Cirque des Champs-Élysées by the Arab troupe there.

I even thought I recognised the massive fellow who served as the base of the human pyramid, and who carried eight men, in tiers, on his tanned shoulders and on his bluish skull. Frames with taut ropes strung between them indicated that the show came complete with tightrope dancing; but we had arrived too late to see that part of the program; a mishap that I greatly regretted, since we were told the acrobats were little girls of nine or ten years old, very pretty, and of a rare lightness of foot; there were also buffoonish tightrope-walkers, Turks with large beards and large parrot noses, who gravely assumed all sorts of grotesque and comically bizarre poses. At the rear of the courtyard a latticed gallery, a seraglio as they say in Turkey, served as a platform or box for the women, and we were made to withdraw so that they could pass forth freely, the presence of *giaours* troubling their sense of modesty; an exaggerated sense, certainly, since we saw them from afar, wrapped to the eyebrows, and resembling those pieces of wicker basketwork round which linen is draped in the washhouse.

We looked around for something to eat, for, though we had sated our eyes, our stomachs had received no nourishment, and every minute increased our anguish. There were, in this half-deserted district, none of those appetising rotisseries where kebabs, sprinkled with pepper, turn in the flames on a perpendicular spit; none of those shop-window slabs on which large portions of *baklava* are spread, covered by the pastry chef's hand with a light snow of sugar; none of those triumphant eateries offering rice-balls wrapped in vine leaves, and bowls of cucumber wedges swimming in oil, with lumps of added meat. There was nothing to buy except white mulberries and black soap: a mediocre offering!

We wandered about, half-starved, rolling our eyes eagerly here and there, choosing those streets a little less deserted than the others, which seemed to promise some chance of finding food. A kindly old Greek lady, followed by a little servant carrying a large package, took pity on us and pointed out, not far from there, an inn where we would probably find something to eat. Her information was correct, but the inn had been closed for several years. The good matron's memory of it was that of her youth.

The district we were traversing presented a completely different physiognomy; it was no longer Turkish in appearance. The half-open doors of the houses allowed one's gaze to penetrate into the interior. At windows lacking grilles, appeared charming women's heads, coiffed with pink or blue crepe, and crowned with a large braid of hair forming a diadem; young girls sitting on the threshold glanced freely at the street, and we were able to, admire without scaring them away, their fine, pure features, large blue eyes, and blonde braids; in front of the cafés men in white *fustanellas*, red skullcaps, and jackets with long braided sleeves, swallowed large glasses of *raki* (*doubly-distilled grape pomace flavoured with aniseed*) and drank till inebriated like good Christians. We were in Psammathia (*Samatya*), a district inhabited by the *rayas*, the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Porte, a sort of Greek colony in the midst of

the Turkish city. Animation had replaced silence; joy had replaced sadness; one felt oneself in the midst of a living people once more.

A young rascal, seeing us searching for a tavern, came to offer himself as a guide, after showing us his passport like the true rogue that he was, and led us, with many a detour to grant importance to the service he was rendering, to a kind of *locanda* (inn) situated ten paces from the place where he had found us. We gave him a few *paras* for his trouble; but doubtless not finding himself sufficiently rewarded, he stole, with the expertise of a skilled and mean-spirited thief, my comrade's purse, containing about thirty francs in *besliks* and *piastres*.

We entered a large room where, behind a counter laden with food and bottles, stood a truculent *Palforio* (the innkeeper in Alfred de Musset's play '*Les Marrons du Feu*'), apparently more suited to cutting the necks of travellers than of chickens. This dread cook, with an olive face, a blue beard forming green tones against the yellow tones of his skin, and the eyes and beak of a bearded vulture, nevertheless condescended to serve us shrimps, fried red mullet in frilled paper wraps as one serves lamb cutlets, peaches, grapes, cheese, and a flask of white wine *resinato* (resinated), resembling Turin vermouth in taste, its bitter flavour not too unpleasant once one is used to it. He was unable, despite our wishes, to produce any meat, since they were celebrating some Greek festival or other that day, which made abstinence from meat obligatory. But we were so hungry, that the simple collation he did provide seem to us a dish from Belshazzar's feast, and we fully expected to see a fiery script appear on the wall. However, Psammathia failed to collapse on its foundations, and we were able to finish our meal without Biblical catastrophe.

Duly comforted, we set out with fresh vigour, and soon reached the nearest gate of the 'Fortress of the Seven Towers', in Greek 'Heptapyrgion', or in Turkish 'Yedikule Hisari', names with an identical meaning. There we met one of those renters of horses, so numerous at Tophane, near the Harbour of the Dead (*L'Échelle des Morts*), at the Green Kiosk (*Yeşil-Köşk*), at the Large Field of the Dead of Pera, and in all the much-frequented places of Constantinople, but a phenomenal rarity here. We mounted his two beasts, which were harnessed in a proper manner, and certainly equal to the so-called English nags our victors ride on the Champs-Élysées. These gentle Kurdish horses, one white, the other a bay, set off, fraternally, at a brisk pace, followed by their owner on foot, and we headed to the right, leaving the scarred towers of the fortress, the ancient state prison, behind, on our left. We wished to skirt the exterior of Byzantium's ancient walls, along the shore, and then inland as far as Edirne-Kapissi (*Edirnakapi*) or even further if we were not too wearied.

Nowhere in the world, I believe, is there a walk more austere or gloomier than this path which runs for nearly three miles between a cemetery and the ruins.

The ramparts, composed of two lines of wall flanked by square towers, overlook, at their feet, a wide moat now sown with crops, and covered by a stone parapet, which made three enclosures to cross. These are the Emperor Constantine's ancient walls, such as time, and various sieges and earthquakes, have rendered them; in their courses of brick and stone, one can still see the breaches made by the catapults, the ballistae, the battering rams and the gigantic culverin, the mastodon of artillery, which was served by seven hundred gunners, and which launched marble cannonballs weighing six hundred pounds. Here and there an immense crack

splits a tower from top to bottom; further on, a whole section of wall has fallen into the depths of the moat; and where the stone has been lost, the wind accumulates dust and seeds; a shrub grows in place of the missing crenellations, and becomes a tree; a thousand claws of parasitic plants restrain the crumbling brick; the roots of strawberry-trees, at first pincers gripping the joints of the stones, become crampons to hold them, and the wall continues without interruption, its eroded silhouette highlighted against the sky, its spreading curtains draped with ivy, and gilded by time in rich yet severe tones. From near to far rise the old gates in the Byzantine style, plastered with Turkish masonry but nevertheless still recognisable.

It is hard to imagine a living city behind these dead ramparts, which nonetheless hide Constantinople. One might well think oneself on the outskirts of one of those cities in the Arabian tales whose entire population has been petrified by some curse; a few minarets alone raise their heads above the immense line of ruins, proclaiming Islam's capital. The conqueror of Constantine XI, if he returned to the world, could utter still, and most aptly, his melancholy Persian quotation: 'Now the spider is chamberlain in Caesar's palace, and the owl hoots the watch on the towers of Afrasiab.' (*Sultan Mehmed II, took Constantinople in 1453 AD, quoting those words, as legend has it, on his entry to the city. Afrasiab was a mythical king of Turan, and the main protagonist of Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh'.*)

These reddish walls, cluttered with the vegetation that clothes such ruins, walls which are crumbling slowly and in solitude, and over which a few lizards scamper, witnessed the hordes of Asia, led by the fearsome Mehmed II, gathered at their feet. The bodies of the Janissaries (*elite infantry*) and Timariots (*cavalrymen*) fell, riddled with wounds, into the ditch where peaceful vegetables now flourish; cascades of blood streamed down where the filaments of saxifrages and wall-plants now hang. One of the most dreadful of human contests, a struggle of one people against another, of religion against religion, took place in this solitude where a deathly silence now reigns. As always, youthful barbarism prevailed over a decrepit civilisation, and, while some Greek priest fried his fish, unable to conceive of the capture of Constantinople, Mehmed II, rode his horse, in triumph, into Hagia Sophia, and set his blood-stained handprint on the wall of the sanctuary, as the crosses were toppled from the summit of the domes to make way for the crescent, and the body of Emperor Constantine was retrieved from beneath a heap of dead, bloody and mutilated, and recognisable only by the golden eagles which clasped his purple knee-high boots.

I spoke of the *caloyer* (*Greek Orthodox monk*) busy frying fish during the final assault on Constantinople, who is said to have responded incredulously to the announcement of the Turkish triumph: 'Bah! I'd rather believe that these fish will be resurrected, emerge from the boiling oil, and swim across the floor.' A miracle which, it seems, actually took place, and must surely have convinced the obstinate monk.

The descendants of those miraculous fish wriggle in the cistern of the ruined Greek church of Balikli, which can be seen some distance from the city walls, a little before arriving at Silivri-Kapi. They are red on one side and brown on the other, in memory of the frying that their half-cooked ancestors endured; a poor devil of a priest still shows them to strangers, saying: *Idos psari, effendi*. ('Look at the fish, sir.') Though I profess to no Voltairean opinion regarding miracles, I thought it inappropriate to seek to verify this one for myself, especially since it was

a schismatic miracle in which I was not obliged to believe; I therefore contented myself with the legend and continued on my way.

What a pity that my friend, the fine landscape painter, Jean-Joseph Bellel, has not travelled to Constantinople! What advantage he could take of these superb ruins, these great cypress trees, these sections of tottering wall supported by vigorous vegetation! How his firm and masterly charcoal would delineate the leaves of the plane-trees, strawberry-trees, and mastic-trees that have conquered this moat filled with human detritus!

Winter rains, summer winds, and the work of time have carried away the earth at the sides of the road, which has probably not been repaired since Constantine, and have eroded the path which in places seems rather the crest of a large half-buried rampart than a passable way; two *arabas* were nevertheless navigating this improbable route, one gilded and painted, jolting along, with five or six well-dressed and carefully-veiled women, within, holding beautiful children on their knees; the other fashioned simply of planks held together by wooden pegs, shaking a clan of male and female Gypsies about, who were brown as Indians, gaunt and ragged, and were squawking out a strident Bohemian song, behind which buzzed the dull murmur of Basque drums.

I am still trying to understand how those heavy carriages twenty-times avoided being overturned and shattered at the bottom of those three-or-four feet deep ruts; but the oxen are sure-footed, and their drivers hang onto the beasts' horns. As for me, I quit that tumultuous stone quarry, and walked my horse beneath the cypresses of the immense Champ-des-Morts which faces the ramparts from the Seven Towers to the foothills of Eyüp.

I was walking slowly along a narrow path distinguishable between the tombs, when I saw, lingering beside a funeral *cippus*, a young woman, masked by a somewhat transparent *yashmak*, and draped in a soft green *feredje*; in her hand she held a bunch of roses, and her large eyes, brightened with antimony, floated, lost in indefinable reverie. Was she bringing the flowers to lay on some beloved tomb, or was she simply taking a walk in the gloomy shade? I cannot say; but, at the sound of my horse's hooves, she raised her head, and, behind the clear muslin, I could discern a charming face. Doubtless, my eyes expressed my naive and honest admiration, since she approached the edge of the road, and, with a movement full of timid grace, held towards me a rose taken from her bouquet.

My comrade, who was following, joined me, and she offered him one also, with a shade of delicate modesty which corrected what might have appeared too free a first impulse. I greeted her as best I could in the Oriental manner. Two or three companions joined her, and she disappeared among the dense cypress trees. So ended my only Turkish 'affair'; but I have not forgotten those large black eyes, the eyelids tinted with kohl (*surmeh*), and the rose, a precious relic, yellowing in Paris in a white satin sachet.

Chapter 19: Balata (*Balat*) – Phanar (*Fener*) – The Turkish Baths

If I were on an antiquarian's journey instead of an artist's tour, I could, with the help of a great many books, have discoursed at length on the probable locations of the ancient edifices of Byzantium, reconstructed them from a few doubtful fragments lost under aggregations of Turkish buildings, and reported a certain number of Greek inscriptions relevant to the subject, which would grant me the air of a very learned man; but I prefer a sketch made from nature, a true impression, sincerely rendered. So, I will not detail each ancient door, or seek the precise place where the unfortunate Constantine XI Dragases Palaiologos fell, a place marked, it is said, by a gigantic tree, growing from the rampart. The portals open beneath tall and massive towers, decorated with a few columns of a composite order indicating Byzantine decadence, whose shafts are often borrowed from some ancient temple, while an arch filled with solid masonry designates the Golden Gate, since, according to an old tradition, any future conqueror of Constantinople must enter the city by that portal, which saw Alexis Strategopoulos, lieutenant to Michael VIII Palaiologus, pass through triumphantly (*in 1261AD*) when he reconquered Byzantium, in a night, from the forces of Baldwin II, and thus put an end to the Latin empire in the East. Is this wall about to fall, as the Greeks anticipate, to allow entry to their Russian co-religionists after the four-hundred years interval, fixed by prophecy as extending from the capture of Constantinople, which date fell precisely on the twenty-ninth of May? And will Mass be celebrated at Santa Sophia in the presence of the Tsar? That is a matter I will not enter into; but the presence of Prince Alexander Menshikov, should one credit Russia with hostile intentions, could not chime more exactly with popular prejudice and belief.

Near the Adrianople Gate (*Edirnekapi*), we dismounted to drink a cup of coffee and smoke a chibouk in a café populated by a motley clientele, then continued our route, always flanked by the never-ending cemetery; though we found the end of the wall at last, and were able to re-enter the city, guiding our faltering mounts with caution as they stumbled amidst the marble turbans, and the tombs whose slippery slopes bristled with fragments.

We thus arrived in a strange district with a very particular physiognomy: the hovels were more and more dilapidated, low and soiled. Their facades, shabby, bleared and scarred, were cracking, warping, disintegrating, ready to turn to rot. The roofs appeared to suffer from ringworm, and the walls from leprosy; bits of their greyish coating had flaked away, like dandruff from a scaly skin. A few blood-stained dogs, reduced to skeletons, eaten away by vermin and insect-bites, lay asleep in the black and fetid mud; vile rags hung from the windows, behind which we could see, since we were high on our mounts, strange heads, of a sickly livid hue between that of wax and lemons, surmounted by enormous rolls of white linen, attached to small, slender bodies with flat chests, on which a shimmering fabric, like that of a damp umbrella gleamed. Dull, lifeless eyes, with vanquished gazes, like embers set in the omelettes of these yellow faces, rose to view us, and fell back again to some task or other; while furtive ghosts passed amongst the huts, their foreheads girded with a white rag speckled with black as if wear and tear had wiped its pen there day after day, their bodies lost in smocks varnished with filth.

We were in Balata, the Jewish quarter, the ghetto of Constantinople. Here dwell the remnants of four centuries of oppression and humiliation, a midden in which these people, proscribed everywhere, huddle as certain insects do to escape their persecutors; they are protected by the disgust they inspire, living amidst filth, and acquiring its hue. It would be difficult to imagine anything more soiled, infected or purulent: plague, scrofula, scabies, leprosy, all the biblical impurities, of which they have not been cured since Moses, devour them without their opposition. Their need to earn a living of sorts, prevents their recoiling even from those dead of the plague, if they can gain something from the corpses' clothes. In this hideous quarter the people of Aaron, Isaac, Abraham and Jacob are crowded pell-mell; these unfortunate folk, some of whom nonetheless acquire a little wealth, feed on fish-heads rejected as poisonous, and which cause certain specific diseases. This tainted food has the advantage of costing almost nothing.

Opposite Balata, on the far side of the Golden Horn, on an arid, bare, dusty slope, lies the cemetery that absorbs their sickly generations. The sun burns the shapeless stones of their tombs where not a blade of grass grows, not a single sheltering tree. The Turks sought to deny sweetness to the corpses of the proscribed, and insist on the Jewish Field of the Dead continuing to look like a bare stretch of road: they grudgingly allow the engraving of some mysterious Hebrew character or other on the cubes of stone roughly scattered over that desolate and accursed hillside.

What a contrast between these unhealthy-looking women, whose age one cannot discern, and the splendid Jewish women of Constantine (*the city in Algeria*), who are as stately in their progress as the Queen of Sheba, adorned like her with their dalmatics of half-parted damask, their belts with metal plates, their gold chains, and their headbands embroidered with spangles! They are of the same descent, though one would hardly think so. The latter might have posed for a Raphael *Madonna*; Rembrandt alone would have been capable of allowing the former a place in some magical scene of his, by gilding them, on a bitumen background, with those marvellous herring-red tones of which Amsterdam granted him the secret.

This same debasement is also noticeable among the men: none have the purity of type common among the Jews of North-Africa, who appear to have preserved the original stamp of the Orient.

The Turks, who accept Isa (Jesus) as a prophet, have made the Jews pay cruelly for procuring, as the former believe, his death; however it must be said that the latter are no longer mistreated as before, and that their lives and possessions are more or less safe from insult and extortion; but, plunged immutably in the mud, they are not yet reassured, and force themselves to continue the wretched commedia; still stinking, sordid and abased, they hide their treasure beneath rags. They take revenge on the Christians, Greeks and Turks by means of loans and interest. In the depths of these soiled huts, more than one *Shylock*, biding his time, runs his knife over the leather of his shoe, ready to remove his pound of flesh from *Bassanio* (see *Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'*); more than one rabbi pours ashes on his head, and utters cabbalistic conjurations, in order to obtain, from the deity, the chastisement of enemies long purged from the face of the world.

We finally left this sad and ignoble quarter, and entered the Phanar (*Fener*), where the distinguished Greeks live, a sort of West End neighbouring on that Court of Miracles; the stone houses constitute a fine architectural statement. Several have balconies supported by stepped consoles, or voluted modillions; others, older, recall the narrow facades of those small 'hotels' of the Middle Ages, half-fortress, half civil-residence; the walls are thick enough to support a siege, the iron shutters are bullet-proof, enormous grilles defend the narrow barbican-like windows, the cornices are denticulated, by choice, like battlements, and project as *moucharabiehs* (*ornate latticed balconies*), an innocent luxury of defence that serves only against fire, whose powerless tongues lick this stone quarter in vain.

Here, ancient Byzantium has taken refuge, here in obscurity live the descendants of the Comneni, the Doukas, the Paleologi, princes now lacking principalities, whose ancestors wore the purple, and who have imperial blood in their veins; their slaves treat them as kings, and they console themselves for their downfall by these simulacra of respect. Considerable wealth is piled up in these solid houses, ornately decorated within, though very simple without; for in the Orient luxury is timid, and hidden from sight. The Phanariots have long been famous for their diplomatic skill: they once directed all the international affairs of the Ottoman Porte; but their credit seems to have declined greatly since the Greek War of Independence.

At the end of the Phanar, one enters the Turkish streets which border the Golden Horn, in which an active commercial population swarms. At every step, one meets *hammals* carrying loads suspended from twin poles: while donkeys each supporting their respective ends of the two long planks attached to them, obstruct the traffic and mow down everything in their path whenever they are obliged to turn into a side street. The poor animals sometimes remain trapped against the walls of an over-narrow alley, unable to move forward or backward, which quickly generates an agglomeration of horsemen, pedestrians, porters, women, children, and dogs, who grumble, curse, squeal, and bark in all tones, until the donkey-driver grasps his beast by the tail, and raises the lock-gate, so to speak. Then the gathered crowd disperses and calm is restored, though not without a few prior blows being distributed, of which the donkeys, the innocent cause of the problem, receive the major part, as is their lot.

The ground rises in an amphitheatre, from the sea to the ramparts we had just skirted externally, and, above the tumultuous roofs of the Turkish houses, the eye catches here and there some fragment of crenellated wall, the arches of an ancient aqueduct which straddles the puny modern buildings, that are like pyres ready for firing which a match would suffice to ignite. How many Constantinoples have already seen the old blackened stones fall to ashes at their base! A hundred-years old Turkish house is a rarity in Istanbul.

My *sais*, who was walking with his hand resting on the rump of my horse, guided my friend and myself through the maze of crowded streets, and we soon arrived at the second bridge which crosses the Golden Horn; we regained, via Kassim-Pacha (*Kasimpasa*), the slopes of the Petit-Champ-des-Morts, and he deposited us at the door of the Hôtel de France, without appearing tired from our lengthy journey.

As for myself, seated on my sofa, I leaned on the window-sill, and indulged in the sweetness of *kief*, a little dizzy from fatigue, and the opiate tobacco, with which I had loaded the bowl of my pipe. That evening, after supper, which was of brief duration, I was in no way tempted to

go for a walk, as was my habit, along the front of the cafés of the Petit-Champ where Perote society meets.

Next day, being a little sore, I decided to go and enjoy a Turkish bath, for nothing is as relaxing, and I chose the Baths of Mahmud (*the Mahmut Pasha Hamam, completed in 1466*), near the Bazaar. They are the most beautiful and the largest in Constantinople.

The ancient tradition of public baths, lost among us, has been preserved in the Orient. Christianity, though preaching contempt for the material world, has gradually caused care for the perishable body to fall into disuse as overly-suggesting paganism. Some Spanish monk, I no longer know which, living after the conquest of Granada, preached against the use of the Moorish bathhouses, and declared those who would not renounce them guilty of sensualism and heresy.

In the Orient, where physical cleanliness is a religious obligation, the baths have retained all the features of their ancient Greek and Roman predecessors: they are large buildings of architectural appearance, with cupolas, domes, and columns; marble, alabaster, and coloured breccias having been employed in their construction; and are served by an army of scrapers, masseurs, and *tellaks* (*bath-attendants*), recalling the strigilists, malaxators and *iatrialipites* of Rome and Byzantium.

The client is received in a large room, its entrance opening onto the street and hung with a piece of tapestry. Near this door, squats the bath-keeper, between a box containing his takings, and a chest in which he keeps money, jewels, and other precious objects deposited by customers on entering, and for which he is responsible. Around this room, its temperature almost equal to that of the street, reign two superimposed galleries of a sort furnished with camp beds; a fountain darts a trickle of hot water into a double basin set in the centre of the marble floor which is shimmering wet. Around the fountain, a few pots of basil, mint, and other fragrant plants of whose perfume the Turks are very fond, are arranged.

Blue, white and pink-striped towels hang drying from ropes, or from the vault above as do the flags and banners in Westminster Abbey, and in the Saint-Louis Cathedral of the Invalides.

On the beds, bathers in swimsuits smoke, drink coffee, take sherbets, or sleep, wrapped to the chin like infants, until they are no longer sweating and can don their clothes again.

I ascended to the second gallery by a small wooden staircase, and was shown to a bed; and, when I had doffed my clothes, two *tellaks* wrapped a white towel in the shape of a turban round my head, and covered me from waist to ankles with a piece of Guinea cloth, fastened like the loincloths carved on Egyptian statues. At the bottom of the stairs, I found a pair of wooden slippers into which I placed my feet; and, my *tellaks* supporting me by the armpits, I passed from the first room into the second, which was at a higher temperature; I was left there for a few minutes to prepare my lungs for the heated air of the third room which was kept at about thirty-five to forty degrees.

The Ottoman baths differ from ours: a continuous fire burns beneath the marble slabs, and the water is poured onto them, evaporating as steam, rather than spurting from a boiler in strident jets. They are, in a sense, dry baths, and the extreme heat alone causes one to perspire.

Under a dome, lit by large greenish glass ‘portholes’ that let in only a vague light, seven or eight tomb-shaped slabs are arranged which receive the bodies of the bathers, who, stretched out like corpses on the dissection table, undergo a preliminary massage: the muscles are lightly pinched, and kneaded like soft dough until they are covered in a pearly sweat like that which forms round the ice-bucket in which a bottle of Champagne sits, which result is soon achieved.

Once the sweat from your open pores is trickling down your limbs, now more supple, you are lifted up, made to put your slippers back on to spare the soles of your feet from torrid contact with the paving, and are led to one of the niches set around the rotunda.

A white marble fountain, and basin, equipped with hot and cold taps, occupies the rear of each niche. Your *tellak* makes you sit beside the basin, arms his hands with camel-hair gauntlets, and crushes first your arms, then your legs, then your torso, so as to raise the blood to your skin, without scratching you or doing you the slightest harm, despite the apparent severity with which he performs this exercise.

Then he draws several bowlfuls of warm water from the basin, into a yellow copper bowl, and pours the liquid over your body. When you have dried a little, he recommences, rubbing you with the palm of his bare hand, and causing long greyish rolls of dirt to slide from your arms, which greatly surprises Europeans convinced of their cleanliness; with a sharp blow, the tellak removes them, and shows them to you with an air of satisfaction.

A fresh deluge of water carries away these offerings, and the tellak gently whips you with lengths of tow soaked in a soapy foam; he parts your hair, and cleans the skin of your head, an operation followed by another cataract of fresh water to avoid cerebral congestion which the rise in temperature could cause.

My bath-attendant was a young Macedonian boy of fifteen or sixteen years, whose skin, macerated by continual immersion, had acquired a uniform brown tone, and an incredible smoothness; he was all muscle, his plump flesh had simply evaporated, which did not prevent his being vigorous and in good health.

These various ceremonies complete, I was wrapped in dry towels, and led back to the bed, where two little lads massaged me one last time. I rested there for about an hour, in a drowsy reverie, drinking coffee and iced lemonade; and, when I emerged from the baths, I was so light, so energised, so supple, so free of fatigue, that it seemed to me that ‘the angels of heaven were walking beside me’! (*See, perhaps, Genesis 19: 15-16*)

Chapter 20: Bayram (*the Festival of Eid-al-Fitre, or Breaking the Fast*)

Ramadan was over: and, without wishing to tarnish anyone’s view of Muslim zeal, it may be said that the cessation of the fast is welcomed with general satisfaction; for, despite its dual nocturnal carnivals this Lent of theirs is no less painful than ours. At this time, every Turk renews their wardrobe, and nothing is prettier than to see the streets dappled with fresh

costumes, in bright, cheerful colours, embellished with brilliant embroidery, instead of being marred by picturesquely sordid rags which are more pleasing in a painting by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps than in reality; every Muslim now puts on what is richest and most cheerful: blue, pink, pistachio-green, cinnamon-yellow, and scarlet shine on all sides; the muslins of their turbans are clean, their slippers free of mud and dust; the metropolis of Islam has renewed its toilette from top to bottom. If a traveller arriving by steamer were to land at this moment, and depart the following day, he would leave Constantinople with a very different idea of it, than after a prolonged stay. The city of the Sultans would seem to him much more Turkish than it usually is.

In the streets, musicians with flutes and drums, who during Ramadan have played serenades beneath the windows of the most important houses, promenade about. When the din they make has lasted long enough to attract the attention of the inhabitants of the dwelling, a grating is moved aside, and a hand appears which lets fall a shawl, a piece of cloth, a belt, or some similar object, which is immediately hung on the end of a pole loaded with gifts of the same kind: it is a form of *baksheesh* which recognises the trouble taken by the instrumentalists, usually Dervish novices. They are a kind of Muslim *pifferari* (*strolling musicians*), paid thus, instead of being thrown a sou or a para each time they have performed.

The Bayram involves a ceremony similar to the official hand-kissing in Spain, when all the great dignitaries of the empire come to pay their court to the Padisha. Turkish magnificence bursts forth in all its splendour, and it is one of the most favourable opportunities a foreigner can seize upon to study and admire a scene ordinarily hidden behind the mysterious walls of the Seraglio. Yet, it is not easy to gain attendance to this solemnity, unless one is included, surreptitiously, in the staff of some hospitable embassy. The Sardinian legation was kind enough to do me this service, and at three in the morning one of its kavasses knocked with the pommel of his sabre on the door of my inn. I was already up, dressed, and ready to follow; I descended quickly, and we began to pace the hilly streets of Pera, waking hordes of sleeping dogs who raised their muzzles at the sound of our steps, while each gave a feeble bark to satisfy its conscience; we met, too, with files of camels whose laden flanks brushed the walls of the houses and barely left us room to pass.

A pink glow tinged the upper part of the painted wooden houses lining the streets, with their overhanging floors and projecting rooms whose extent no law constrains, while the lower portions were still bathed in transparent and bluish shadow: nothing is more charming than the dawn light playing on all the roofs, domes, and minarets with hues of a freshness that I have seen nowhere else; one feels that one is only two steps from the lands where the sun rises; the sky of Constantinople lacks the hard blue of more southerly skies; it is highly reminiscent of that of Venice, but brighter, more vaporous, and lighter; the rising sun here parts curtains of pink muslin and silver gauze; It is only later that the atmosphere is washed with tints of azure, while a walk taken at three in the morning makes one appreciate the local truth of the epithet *rododactulos* (*rosy-fingered*) that Homer invariably applies to the dawn.

We were required to collect a few people on the way. Unusually, everyone was ready, and, with the small group gathered, we descended to the landing stage of Tophane, where the embassy's *caïque* was awaiting us.

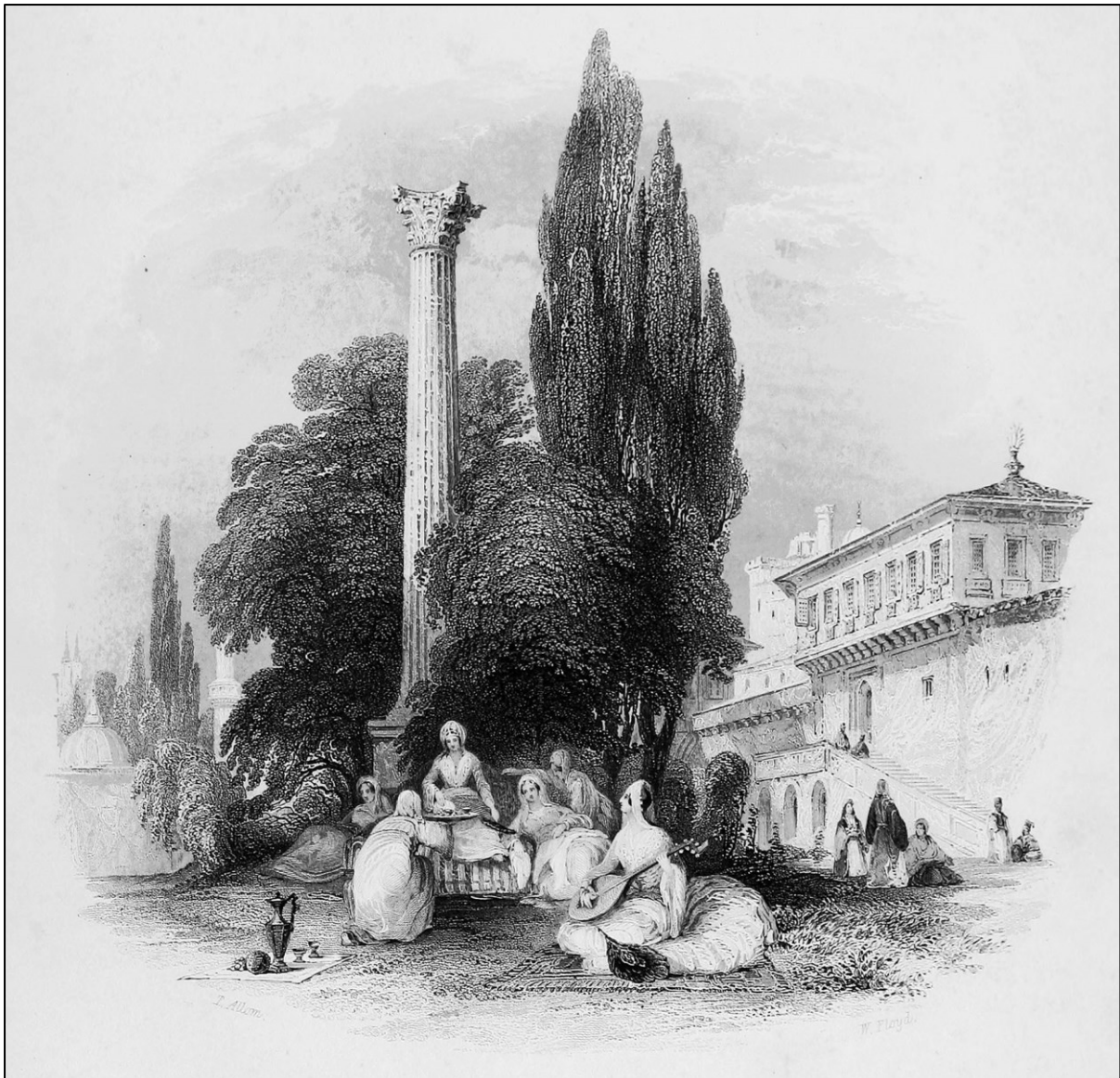
In spite of the early hour, the Golden Horn and the widening basin at its entrance presented the most animated appearance. All the ships were decked with pennants and multicoloured flags, from their shallow sides to the weathervanes at their mastheads. An infinite number of boats, with gilded prows and trimmed with magnificent carpets, manoeuvred by vigorous oarsmen, sliced the pearly and pink waters; this flotilla, loaded with pashas, viziers, and beys, arriving from their summer palaces on the banks of the Bosphorus, was heading towards Serai-Bournou. The albatrosses and gulls, a little startled by this premature tumult, circled and uttered little cries above the boats, seeming to chase away with their wings the last flakes of nocturnal mist borne on the breeze like swan's down.

A large crowd of *caiques* had gathered at the Green Kiosk landing-stage, by the Seraglio quay, and we experienced some difficulty in reaching the shore, where *sais* led superb horses about as they awaited their masters.

As we were early, we went for a coffee, and to smoke a pipe at the Green Kiosk, which is a pretty pavilion in the old Turkish style, fallen from its former splendour and serving today as a guardhouse and waiting room. It is covered on the outside with canvas and awnings whose colour prompted the name it bears; inside, applications of glazed tiling, small columns, marble panels, and remnants of painting and gilding, testify to its original and more elevated role.

The kiosk that day presented a curious gathering of various national types, European, Asiatic and Turkish; of richly costumed embassy *kavasses*; and of soldiers dressed in the uniform of the Nizam (*the Turkish regular army*), whose tanned complexion alone marked them as Muslims.

At last, the gates of the Seraglio were opened, and we passed through courtyards planted with cypress trees, sycamores, and plane-trees of monstrous dimensions, bordered by kiosks of Chinese style and buildings with crenellated walls and raised turrets, somewhat reminiscent of English feudal architecture, a combination of walled garden, palace, and fortress, and arrived in a courtyard at the corner of which stands the old church of Saint Irene, today transformed into an arsenal (*lately, a museum and concert hall*), which contains a small dilapidated house pierced with a multitude of windows, reserved for embassy staff, from which one has a front-row view of the passing procession.



Gardens of the Seraglio

The ceremony begins with a religious service. The Sultan, accompanied by the great dignitaries of the empire, goes to pray at Hagia Sophia, the metropolis of the mosques of Constantinople: at around six o'clock. The wait made everyone feverish; people leant from the windows to see if anything was visible in the distance; a prodigious din broke out, suddenly; the sound of a Turkish march arranged by Guiseppe Donizetti, the Sultan's music director and brother to Gaetano Donizetti the opera-composer. The soldiers ran to their arms and formed a line; these men, forming part of the imperial guard, wore white trousers and red jackets, like English grenadiers in undress uniform, with which the fez harmonised quite well; the marshals and officers mounted the beautiful horses the *sais* held.

The Sultan, having arrived from his summer palace, headed towards Hagia Sophia. Next came the Grand Vizier, the Seraskier, the Capitan Pasha and various ministers in the straight frock-coats of the Reform Movement, but so adorned with gold that it took a deal of goodwill

to recognise a European costume therein, even if the tarbouch had not proved sufficient to orientalise them; they were surrounded by groups of officers, secretaries and servants splendidly embroidered, and mounted like their masters on magnificent horses; then came the pashas, the provincial beys, *aghas* (*leaders*), *selictars* (*sword-bearers*) and officers composing the four *odas* (*chambers*) of the *selamlik*, whose titles, strange to French ears, would arouse scant ideas in the reader's head, but whose functions were: to remove the Sultan's boots, hold his stirrup, present him with his writing desk or briefcase, etc.; then, the *cuhadar* or head of the footmen and other attendants, the *icoglans* (*page boys*) and a crowd of employees forming the household of the Padisha.

Next, came a detachment of bodyguards, whose strange and splendid uniforms corresponded to the idea one has in France of Oriental luxury. These guards, chosen from among the most handsome soldiers, wear a tunic of pearl-velvet trimmed with extremely rich gold braid, white trousers of Brousse (*Bursa*) silk, and a kind of ribbed cap, somewhat similar to a presidential mortar-board, surmounted by an immense crest of peacock feathers two or three feet high, recalling those bird wings set on *Fingal's* helmet in the Ossianic compositions of painters of the time of the Empire. For defence, the soldiers carry a curved sabre, attached to an embroidered belt, and a large damascened and gilded halberd, the head of which presents fierce barbs like those of older Asiatic weapons.

There followed another half a dozen superb horses, Arab or Barbary steeds, led by hand, and caparisoned with magnificent carapaces and headstalls. The carapaces, embroidered with gold, and studded with precious stones, were decorated with the imperial cipher, the complicated calligraphic interlacing of which form arabesques of extreme elegance. The ornamentation was so crowded that the red or blue background of fabric almost vanished. The luxurious appointments of their saddles match, among Orientals, those of our carriages, though many pashas have begun to import coupés from Vienna and Paris.

These noble beasts seemed to be aware of their beauty; the light played in silken moiré patterns over their polished rumps; they scattered bright locks of their manes about with each movement of their heads; their broad steely hocks were muscular and powerful; and they possessed the proud yet gentle air, the almost human-look, and the elasticity of movement, coquettish pawing, and bearing full of aristocracy, of thoroughbred horses, which make one comprehend the idolatry and passion of the Orientals for these superb creatures whose qualities the Koran praises, and recommends the care of, in several places, adding religious sanction to a natural predilection.

These horses preceded the Sultan, who rode an admirable beast, its carapace sparking with rubies, topazes, pearls, emeralds and other precious stones, like flowers amidst golden foliage.

Behind the Sultan walked the Kislär Agassi and the Kapu Agassi, the chiefs of the black and white eunuchs respectively; then a stocky, obese dwarf with a fierce face, dressed as a pasha, who fulfils a like office to the fools at royal courts in the Middle Ages. This dwarf, whom Paolo Veronese would have posed dressed in a half-open surcoat, with a parrot on his fist, or toying with a greyhound, in one of his banquet scenes, was mounted, doubtless by contrast, on the back of a large horse that his knock-kneed legs barely embraced. I believe he is the only existing 'fool' of this kind in Europe today: the office performed by Caillette

(mentioned by Rabelais), Triboulet (see Victor Hugo's *'Le Roi S'Amuse'*) and Angeli ('fool' to Louis XIV), has only been preserved in Turkey.

Eunuchs no longer don the high white cap they are shown wearing in comic operas; the fez and the frock-coat make up their costume, but they nonetheless have a particular appearance that makes them easily recognisable: the Kislär Agassi is quite hideous with his black, hairless face, the skin of which is glazed with greyish tones; but the Kapu Agassi is the uglier, not being masked by a dark complexion. His face, dense with unhealthy fat, furrowed with small folds, and of a pale lividness, wherein two dead-looking eyes blink below flaccid eyelids, and his lips, pendulant and scowling, grant him the air of an old crone in a foul mood. However, these two monsters are powerful characters: the revenues of Mecca and Medina are assigned to them; they are immensely rich, and are the overseers of the Seraglio, though their empire is much diminished these days. They are the ones who have absolute governance of that nest of *houri*s, women whom the male gaze never desecrates, and who are, as you can imagine, the centre of a thousand intrigues.

A platoon of bodyguards brought up the rear. The whole dazzling procession, though less varied than it used to be when Asiatic luxury adorned the fanciful costumes of the pashas, with the Kapidji-Bashi (*Chief of the Gatekeepers*), the Bostandji-Bashi (*Chief of the Gardeners*), the *mabeynjes* (*chamberlains*), and the Janissaries, with their turbans, *kalpaks* (*high-crowned hats*), Circassian helmets, wheel-lock arquebuses, maces, bows and quivers, disappeared through the arcade of the passage leading from the Seraglio to Hagia Sophia; then, after an hour or so, returned, and paraded in the opposite direction, though in exactly the same order.

Meanwhile, my companions and I had taken up station on a well, covered with planks, which formed a kind of tribune, within an immense courtyard planted with large trees, close to the kiosk before the door of which the ceremony of 'kissing the foot' was to take place. In front of us was a large building surmounted by a multitude of columns, painted yellow but for their bases and capitals which were edged in white. These columns were chimneys, and the vast buildings, kitchens; for, every day, fifteen hundred mouths, 'eat the Grand Seigneur's bread.' as the Turkish expression has it.

We had great difficulty in maintaining our perch, which was attacked from moment to moment by new onlookers whom we warded off with our elbows; but, in the end, we remained masters of the place.

While waiting for the return of the procession, let me describe the place where the 'foot-kissing' takes place. It is a large kiosk whose roof, supported by columns, projects like an awning all around the building. The columns, whose bases and capitals are sculpted in the ornamental style seen in the Alhambra, support arches and beams which buttress the edge of the roof, the undersides of which are curiously-worked with lozenges, panels and interlacing; the door, flanked by two niches, opens onto a mass of fretwork, foliage, fleurons and arabesques, among which chicory-leaf and rocaille decorations twine, doubtless added after the fact, as is often the case with Turkish palaces. On the walls, on each side of the door, are painted two Chinese views, such as one sees in children's toy theatres, depicting arcades in perspective whose squared black and white paving extends to infinity. These strange frescoes must have

been the work of some Genoese craftsman taken captive by the Barbary Corsairs, and they produce a singular effect adorning this jewel of Muslim architecture.

The Sultan, followed by some high dignitaries, entered the kiosk, in which he partook of light refreshments; the interval was employed in making final preparations for the reception. A black cashmere carpet was spread over the ground in front of the kiosk between the two columns of the arch corresponding to the door; on this carpet a throne was placed, or rather a divan in the form of a sofa, covered all over with gold or silver-gilt plaques of Byzantine work. A footstool, in a similar style, was placed at the foot of the throne, and musicians arranged themselves in a semicircle, faces turned towards the kiosk.

When Abdülmecid I reappeared, the music burst into fanfares; the troops uttered the usual cry: 'Long live, the glorious Sultan, may he live forever!' A tremor of enthusiasm ran through the crowd. Everyone was moved, even the non-Muslim spectators.

Abdülmecid stood for a few moments on the footstool: a diamond clasp pinned an aigrette of heron feathers, as a sign of supreme power, to his fez. A sort of broad surcoat in dark blue cloth, fastened by a buckle studded with brilliants, under which the gold ornamentation of his uniform sparkled, white satin trousers, patent-leather boots which gleamed in the light, and very tight straw-coloured gloves, composed his costume, beside the simplicity of which, all the adornments of the subordinate dignitaries, nonetheless, paled. Then he seated himself, and the prostrations began.

I have already given a portrait of the Sultan, but one quickly sketched as if caught on the fly; I am able to complete it here, because the Bayram ceremony lasted no less than two hours, and I had plenty of time to observe him. Sultan Abdülmecid I was born on the 14th day of the month of Sha'ban, in the year 1238 of the Hegira (*Hijra*), that is, April 25th, 1823; he was, therefore, when I saw him, in 1852, twenty-nine years and a few months old, and having ascended the throne at the age of sixteen, on succeeding Mahmud II, had already reigned for thirteen years. His motionless face seemed to me deeply imprinted with the supreme satiety of power; the fixed and intense calm of ennui, a commanding self-composure eternal as the snow on high peaks, rendered his visage akin to a marble mask and solidified his rather irregular features. His nose lacked that aquiline curve of the Turkish people; his cheeks were pale, framed by a thin brown beard, their planes betraying weariness; the forehead, inasmuch as the fez allowed it to be seen, seemed to me broad and full; as for the eyes, I can only compare them to black suns set in a diamantine sky; no external object seemed to be reflected in them; like the eyes of ecstasies, one might easily have believed them absorbed by some vision invisible to the common eye.

His physiognomy was, however, neither dark, terrible, nor cruel; it was 'beyond the human': I can find no better a phrase. One felt that this young man, seated like a deity on a golden throne, could have nothing more to desire in the world; that all the most delightful dreams were for him insipid realities, and that he was slowly freezing in that chilly solitude inhabited by unique beings. Indeed, from the summit of his grandeur, he doubtless views the earth only through a vague mist, and the highest heads barely reach the level of his boots.

None but the highest dignitaries have the right to kiss the feet of the glorious Sultan. This signal favour is reserved for the vizier, ministers and privileged pashas.

The vizier started out from the corner of the kiosk corresponding to the right of the Sultan, described a semicircle following the inner curve of the line of bodyguards and musicians, and, arriving in front of the throne, advanced to the footstool after performing an Oriental salute, and bending over the feet of the master kissed his sacred boot as reverently as a fervent Catholic might kiss the Papal slipper; the ceremony accomplished, he withdrew, backwards, and made way for another.

The same greeting, the same genuflection, the same prostration, the same retreat was performed by the seven or eight first personages of the empire. During this exercise in adoration, the Sultan's face remained impassive: his fixed gaze looked on without seeing, like the marble pupils of statues; not a muscle quivered, no new facial expression was evident, nothing that might make one believe that he perceived what was taking place; could the magnificent Padishah even distinguish, given the prodigious distance that separates him from human beings, the humble worms that wriggled in the dust at his feet? And yet no tension or over-emphasis was evident during this show of indifferent immobility. It was the distracted, aristocratic negligence of a great lord, receiving the honour due to him without noticing it further; the disdainful drowsiness of a deity tired of his devotees, only too gracious in showing himself willing to suffer them.

A strange observation that this parade of Pashas prompted was the enormous obesity of the persons invested with high rank; they were of truly monstrous proportions, with the rotundity of a hippopotamus or a tumbler-toy, rendering the etiquette required a laborious task for them. You would scarcely believe the contortions indulged in by these gigantic beings, obliged to bend low to the ground then rise again; some, broader than they were tall, resembling a stack of rubber rings, managed to stub their noses in the dust, remaining stretched out at the feet of the master.

Next to these prodigious Turks, Luigi Lablache, the opera singer, would appear neat and slender. The Turks often acquire this abnormal plumpness at a very early age. I encountered at The Sweet Waters of Asia and Europe many a pasha's young son, already bloated with fat at ten or twelve years old, who must assuredly have weighed two hundred pounds; they already bent the backs of the Barbary mounts that bore them, near which a *sais* walked with his hand resting on the horse's rump. In contrast, as though the result of some philosophical jest, all their servants were mere skin and bones: that pair of caricatures, by Pieter Breughel the Elder, depicting the *Fat and the Thin Kitchens*, (see Pieter van der Heyden's engravings of 1563, after Breughel, in the Metropolitan Museum, New York) would be perfectly appropriate. The decrease in obesity followed a well-nigh mathematical rule when measured by rank. One might say that their functions were distributed according to weight.

After the pashas came the Shaykh al-Islam (*seyhulislam*) in a white caftan, with a turban of the same colour held by a gold band crossing the forehead; the Shaykh al-Islam is in some way the Mohammedan pope, a very powerful and much venerated personage. When, after having made the customary salute, he feigned to bend down like the others, Abdülmecid

emerged from his marmoreal calm, and, satisfied with this mark of deference, raised him graciously.

The *ulama* (*body of Muslim scholars*) then filed past; but, instead of kissing the Sultan's boot, they were content to touch the edge of his surcoat with their lips, not being sufficiently great personages to merit the former favour. At this point, a minor incident disturbed the ceremony: the former Sharif of Mecca, a little old man with a complexion like Cordoba leather, and sporting a grizzled beard, who had been dismissed from his post due to his fanaticism, rushed to the feet of the Sultan, who pushed him away quickly enough to evade his homage, while making an imperious gesture of refusal; two tall young men, almost mulattos, so swarthy were they, dressed in long green pelisses and wearing turbans with gold bands, who appeared to be the old man's sons, also tried to throw themselves at the Sultan's feet; but they were no better received, and all three were led from the enclosure.

The *ulama* were succeeded by other military or civil employees of a lower rank, who could claim neither the honour of the boot or that of the surcoat: a section of the Sultan's belt with a golden fringe, supported by a Pasha, was offered to their lips from the end of the divan. It was enough for them to touch whatever had been in contact with the master; they arrived one after another, described the entire semi-circle, raised their hands to their hearts and their foreheads, after having bowed the latter to the ground, brushed the fabric with their lips, and passed on. The dwarf, standing behind the throne, looked at them mockingly, grimacing like a mischievous gnome.

Meanwhile the music was playing airs from Gaetano Donizetti's operas *L'Elisire d'Amore*, and *Lucrezia Borgia*, the celebratory cannon was thundering away in the distance, and the frightened pigeons of the Bayezid II Mosque were flying up in wild bursts, before circling over the gardens of the Seraglio. When the last official had paid his respects, the Sultan returned to his kiosk, to the sound of frantic cheers, and we returned to Pera for our breakfast, which we sorely needed.

Part V: Part V: Hagia Sophia, The Seraglio, The Atmeidan

Chapter 21: The *Charlemagne* – The Fires

The arrival of the *Charlemagne* had long been talked about, and was so awaited an event, that she had become something of a chimerical vessel, an *Argo* (*Jason's ship in the Greek myth*) or a *Flying Dutchman* (*the legendary ghost ship*), when, one fine morning, all unheralded, a superb three-decker flying a tricolour flag was seen hovering before the Tophane harbour, at the entrance to the Golden Horn, bearing on her prow an imperial bust, and on her stern, writ in gold letters, her name: *Charlemagne*. How had she come there? By what magic had she found herself in the midst of the roads? On her sides marked by a triple line of cannon embrasures, there was no sign of paddle-wheel drums; on her deck, no appearance of a funnel, and yet her yards revealed no furled and tied sails; at her mastheads, not a flag floated on the breeze: it was incomprehensible. Among the folk on shore, the rumour spread that she was an enchanted vessel manned by the demonic *Djinns* and *Afrits*.

Diplomatic difficulties, raised, it is said, by the Austrians and Russians had opposed the entry of the *Charlemagne* into the strait, which no ship of the line can enter without a *firman* (*Imperial decree*). The firman was finally granted, and, to further legitimise the presence of such a ship in the waters of the Golden Horn, the Marquis de Lavalette (*Charles Jean Marie Félix*), the French ambassador, boarded the *Charlemagne*; which action smoothed things over. The *Charlemagne* was French; and thus, the curiosity of Mahmud, the Kapudan-Pasha (*Ottoman Admiral-of-the-Fleet*), was satisfied, he wishing to view a mixed propulsion vessel (*steam and sail*).

The caiques prowled timidly around this marine colossus like herrings round a whale, fearing a blow from tail or fin; finally, some decided to accost its black sides, and emboldened visitors hoisted themselves up via the rudder-lines. I was one of them. As I set foot on deck, the first face I saw was that of an acquaintance of mine. Giraud (*Pierre François Eugène Giraud, the artist*) smiled at me, friendly behind his red moustache, and shook his thick curly mane in my honour; I answered him with a '*salam alaikum*' in the style of *Covielle* in the special ceremony in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (*the play by Molière; Covielle, a variant on Coviello, the commedia dell'arte character, is a servant in the play*), and thus in a satisfyingly Oriental manner. I had previously experienced the good fortune of meeting Giraud, in my travels, an amiable and witty companion if ever there was one; I had already had that happiness in Spain; I had hastened to show him all the wretched districts, all the abominable alleys, that are the despair of admirers of the Rue de Rivoli, and the eternal joy of painters. I then went to pay my respects to the ambassador, whom I had the honour of knowing a little, and who received me with kindness; then Giraud introduced me to his friends the officers, and I was taken to see all three decks of the ship, a peregrination which always surprises, even when it is not new to you; for a warship is one of the most prodigious achievements of human ingenuity:

a swarm of twelve to thirteen hundred men, eat, sleep, and manoeuvre, without the least disorder, in a narrow space filled by eighty cannons, a powerful steam-engine as tall as a two-story house, a powder-hold, a coal-hold, a galley, and provisions for several months. It is at once a city, a fortress, and an engine-house. Dutch housewives who think themselves mistresses of cleanliness are but infamous scullery-maids compared with sailors, whom no one can match in the arts of sweeping, washing, sanding, varnishing, and granting a lustre to every object. Not a stain on the planking, not a spot of rust or verdigris on the iron or copper; everything shines, everything gleams: the whole sparkles with an ever-fresh glow, the mahogany of an English table prepared for morning tea is certainly less clean than the deck of a ship. 'One could eat soup from it,' as the vulgar but lively expression says; and amidst the rigging, all those ropes, which each have their name, stretch immaculately, like a spider's web, without a single knot, or tangle: they move and slide on their pulleys, whenever needed, with admirable order and precision.

I returned to shore, where discussion continued regarding the *Charlemagne*. Its propeller, which was completely submerged, its funnel, the sections of whose cylinder retracted like the tubes of a spyglass, granted it all the appearance of a sailing ship, and it was only later, when it made an excursion to Therapia, that the amazed *caïdjis* were forced to accept, on seeing smoke gushing forth from the piping below decks as if by magic, and a foaming wake forming behind the stern that made their frail boats wobble, that it was indeed a steamboat.

Next day, the ambassador came ashore with official ceremony, and was received on land by the two commercial representatives, and what, when abroad, is termed the 'nation', that is to say all the French nationals present in Constantinople. I took my place amidst the ranks of the procession, and we accompanied the ambassador, the Marquis de la Valette, to the embassy palace, situated in the main street of Pera. The ceremony was quite moving: a handful of men lost amidst an immense city, in which a different religion to our own reigns, where a language is spoken whose roots are unknown to us, where everything is alien to our customs, laws, morals, and modes of dress, gathering together and forming a little homeland around the ambassador, by whom France is personified, had a poetic feel about it, even to those least susceptible to that sort of impression. There were individuals there, walking bareheaded beneath a burning sun, who, certainly, professed opinions opposed to those of the government represented by the Marquis; Republicans, exiles even; but at that distance from France all political hostility disappeared; one no longer remembered anything but the *alma mater*, the sacred motherland all shared. The arrival of the *Charlemagne* had caused some agitation among the Turkish population and, in the event of an affront or insult, everyone around the ambassador would have certainly been slaughtered; but the French caravan, fortunately, attained the palace, in spite of sidelong glances from those aged fanatics who still regret the days of the Janissaries, and cannot see a Frank pass without grumbling at him, from beneath their white moustaches, that sacramental insult: '*Dog of a Christian!*'

The presence of the *Charlemagne* in Constantinople coincided with numerous fires; there were no less than fourteen in one week, and the majority quite considerable in nature. To what were they to be attributed? To the extreme drought which made these houses, fashioned of beams and boards now half rotten with dilapidation, so many pieces of tinder ready to burst

into flame at the slightest spark; to the spell cast by that mysterious steamboat without paddle-wheels or funnel, as the populace firmly believed; to the guilds of carpenters eager to create work for themselves; or, as people well acquainted with oriental customs were convinced, to a political cause?

Following Ramadan, which, with its fasts and exercises of piety, exalts the imagination, there is usually a recrudescence of fanaticism, and this change of mood was not favourable to Mustafa Reshid Pasha, then in office (*as Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire*), who was accused of leaning toward European ideas, and regarded almost as a *giaour* by the old Turks in green kaftans and large turbans, like those dressed mannequins that are kept behind the windows of the Elbicei Atika (*Museum of Costume*), that Lacus Curtius (*see the Roman legend*) of the past Ottoman nation. Though there is in Constantinople a French newspaper (*the Journal de Constantinople*) ably run by Francois Noguès, since it is subsidised by the State, the opposition, instead of writing articles, sets fire to a neighborhood, a significant way of displaying its ill humour, or so it is said, at least. I have difficulty believing it to be so, though this very means was formerly employed by the discontented Janissaries. Others saw in these fires which when barely extinguished were rekindled at another point in the city, the brand or at least the chemical mark of Russia, attempting to rouse the population against France; but the courage with which the crew of the *Charlemagne* tackled the flames, her captain, Charles Rigaut de Genouilly, at the head, climbing, axe in hand, onto the roofs of burning houses, and disputing their possession with the flames, engendered general goodwill. Reshid Pasha was replaced by Fuad Pasha (*Keçecizade Mehmed Fuad Pasha*), the continuator of his ideas. This slight concession restored calm, and the fires ceased, perhaps naturally, perhaps for that reason.

Given a city almost entirely built of wood, and the neglect which is a consequence of Turkish fatalism, fire is considered a normal thing in Constantinople. A sixty years old house is a rarity. Except for the mosques, aqueducts, walls and fountains, a few Greek houses in the Phanar, and a few Genoese buildings in Galata, everything is made of planks; the past ages have left no testimony on this soil perpetually swept by flames; the face of the city is wholly renewed each half-century, without however varying greatly. I am not speaking of Pera, the Marseilles of the Orient, in which, on the site of each burnt wooden hut, a solid stone house is immediately raised, and which will soon be an entirely European city.

At the top of the Seraskier Tower, a white lighthouse of prodigious height, rising into the azure, not far from the domes and minarets of the Beyazit Mosque, a lookout constantly prowls, waiting to detect, in the immense view unfolded in a panorama at his feet, black smoke, or a crimson tongue gushing from the gap in some roof. When the lookout sees that a fire has started, he hangs a basket from the top of the lighthouse if in daylight, or a lantern at night, attended by a certain combination of signals indicating the city district affected; the cannon thunders, and the lugubrious cry: '*Stamboul, yangin var!*' (*Stamboul's on fire!*) resounds sinisterly through the streets, all are roused, and the water-bearers (*saccas*), who are also the city's firemen, hurtle off at a run in the direction indicated by the lookout.

A similar watch is kept from the Galata Tower, which is on the other side of the Golden Horn and almost facing the Seraskier Tower.

The Sultan, the Viziers, and the Pashas are required to attend fires in person. If the Sultan has withdrawn to the depths of the harem with a woman, an odalisque dressed in red, her head covered with a scarlet turban, lifts the door-curtain, enters the room, and stands there, silent and sinister. The appearance of this fierily-clad phantom announces to him that there is a fire ablaze in Constantinople, and that he must perform his duties as sovereign.



Circassian Slaves in the Interior of a Harem

I was seated on a tomb, one day, in the Little Field of the Dead, of Pera, and busy scribbling some verses, when I saw a cloud of bluish smoke rising through the cypresses, a cloud which turned yellow, then black, and emitted sundry jets of flame, which were lessened in their effect on the eye by the bright sunlight; I rose, looked for a gap from which to gain a view, and saw,

that Kassim-Pasha (*Kasimpasa*) at the foot of the funereal hill, was ablaze. Kassim-Pasha is a rather miserable district, populated by the poor, by Jews and Armenians, squeezed between the cemetery and the arsenal. I descended its main street, lined with shops and huts, the middle of which consists of a muddy stream, a sort of open sewer, crossed by culverts; the fire was, as yet, concentrated in the vicinity of a mosque whose minaret I could best compare to a candle topped with a metal snuffer. I was fearful of seeing this minaret melt in the flames, which a change in the wind was driving in another direction, such that those who had thought they had nothing to fear suddenly found themselves threatened.

The street was crowded with black African women carrying rolled-up mattresses, *hammals* bearing chests, men saving their precious pipe-bowls and stems, frightened women dragging a child in one hand and a bundle of clothes in the other, *kavasses* and soldiers armed with long hooks, *saccas* running through the crowd their hoses on their shoulders, and men on horseback galloping off to seek reinforcements, without the slightest concern for the pedestrians; all were bumping into one another, jostling, knocking one another over, and shouting insults at one another in all sorts of languages. The tumult was at its height. Meanwhile the flames marched on, widening the circle of their ravages. Fearing to be thrown to the ground and trampled underfoot, I returned to the heights of Pera, and, hoisting myself onto a *cippus* of Marmara marble, I watched, in the company of some Turks, Greeks and Franks, the sad spectacle taking place at the foot of the hill.

The burning rays of the southern sun fell vertically onto the brown tiled or tarred plank roofs of Kassim Pasha, whose houses flared up one after the other like the items in a fireworks display. First a little jet of white smoke was seen to emerge from some gap, then a thin scarlet tongue of flame followed the white smoke, the house blackened, the windows glowed red and, in a little while, everything collapsed in a cloud of ash.

Against this background of fiery steam, the black silhouettes of men were outlined at the edge of various roofs, pouring water on the boards to prevent them from catching fire; others, with axes and hooks, were demolishing sections of walls to contain the blaze. The *saccas*, standing on those crossbeams that had remained intact, aimed the nozzles of their hoses at the flames; from a distance, their flexible leather hoses with shiny copper fittings looked like angry serpents fighting fire-eating dragons, and darting a silvery lightning at them. Sometimes the dragon spat a whirlwind of sparks from its dark flanks forcing a serpent to retreat; but the latter returned to the attack, hissing and furious, a quivering lance of water sparkling like a diamond. After dying down and then rekindling, the fire extinguished itself for lack of fuel; there remained only a few clouds of smoke rising slowly from the rubble and embers.

The following day, I visited the scene of the disaster. Two or three hundred houses had burned down. This was understandable if one considers the extreme combustibility of the materials; the mosque, protected by its walls and stone cloisters, alone had remained intact. On the sites of shacks reduced to ashes, only the brick chimneys remained standing, whose construction had resisted the action of the flames. Nothing was odder than these reddish obelisks isolated from all that had surrounded them the day before. One would have said a set of enormous skittles had been planted there for the amusement of giants, say Typhon or Briareus.

In the hot and, as yet, still smoking ruins of their houses, the former owners had already built temporary shelters for themselves using rush-mats, old carpet, and pieces of sailcloth supported on stakes, and were smoking their pipes with the resignation Oriental fatalism ever displays; horses were tied to stakes where their stables had been; sections of partitions, and stretches of nailed planks, had reconstituted the harems; a *kahwedj* was boiling his *mocha* on a stove, the only remains of his shop, around which, in the ashes, crouched his loyal customers; further on, bakers were skimming ash from piles of wheat in wooden bowls, of which the flames had only scorched the top layer; various poor wretches were searching the half-extinguished embers for nails and pieces of iron, the sole remains of their wealth, but without otherwise appearing desolate. I failed to see in Kassim-Pacha the distraught, desperate howling groups, that a similar event would see writhing, in France, over the ruins of a village or a burnt-out district; to be burned out, in Constantinople, is a quite commonplace matter.

I followed the path traced by the fire, as far as the Golden Horn, very close to the Arsenal. The heat was dreadful, made even worse by the fumes from the charred ground, which was still warm from the barely extinguished flames; I walked over embers covered with treacherous ash, amidst half-burnt debris: planks, beams, joists, fragments of sofas and sideboards; sometimes on grey earth, sometimes on blackened ground, amidst reddish smoke and throbbing sunlit air, hot enough to cook an egg; then I returned via a rather picturesque alley, beside a stream full of cast-off slippers, and fragments of pottery, which might have provided, with its two rickety bridges, a pretty motif for Williams Wyld's or Louis Tesson's watercolours.

I had seen the smoke by day; all I needed was the fire by night. That spectacle was not long in appearing; one evening, a purple glow, which I might best compare to the redness of the aurora borealis, tinged the sky, on the far side of the Golden Horn; I was eating an ice-cream, on the promenade of the Petit-Champ, and immediately left to charter a caique and be transported to the scene of the disaster, when, on passing close to the Galata Tower, one of my friends from Constantinople, who was accompanying me, had the idea of ascending the tower from which one can indeed view the opposite side of the port; a little *baksheesh* soon lessened any scruples the guard harboured, and we began to climb in the darkness, feeling the walls with our hands, trying each step with our feet, by a rather awkward staircase, whose spirals were interrupted by landings and doorways. We arrived, thus, at the lantern, and, walking on the copper sheets which covered the floor, went to lean on the edge of masonry with which the tower is crowned.

The oil and tallow stores were alight. These buildings are situated at the water's edge, which, by reflecting the flames, produced a mirror-image of the dual blaze, amidst which the houses were silhouetted in black, and pierced with luminous holes as if by a drill. Trails of fire, scattered by the oscillation of the waves, stretched over the surface of the Golden Horn, similar at that moment to a vast bowl of fiery punch; the flames rose to a prodigious height, red, blue, yellow, or green, according to the material they devoured; sometimes a more vivid phosphorescence, a more incandescent glow, burst forth from the general blaze; thousands of sparks flew in the air like showers of gold and silver from a firework, and, despite the distance, one could hear the crackling of the fire. Above the flames, enormous masses of smoke swirled, bluish on one side, pink on the other, like sunset clouds. The Seraskier Tower (*the Beyazit*

Tower), Yeni-Cami (*the New Mosque*), the Suleymaniye Mosque, the Mosque of Ahmed (*the Blue Mosque*), that of Selim (*Yavuz Selim*), and higher up, on the crest of the hill, the arches of the Aqueduct of Valens shone, illuminated by reddish reflections; the boats and vessels of the port were highlighted like Chinese shadows on a crimson background; two or three barges, too violently heated, caught fire, and for a moment a general conflagration was feared given the congested anchorage, but the flames were soon extinguished.

Despite the cold wind that chilled us at this height, for we were rather lightly dressed, my companion and I could not tear ourselves away from the magnificence of this disastrous spectacle, which enabled me to comprehend, and almost excuse through the beauty of it, Nero, watching on, as Rome burned, from his palace on the Palatine. It was a splendid blaze, a firework display raised to the hundredth power, with effects that pyrotechnics will never be able to achieve; and, as we had taken no part in the lighting of it, we could enjoy it from an artistic viewpoint, while deploring the misfortune.

Two or three days later, Pera caught fire in turn. The *tekke* of the Whirling Dervishes was swiftly invaded by flames, and I beheld a fine example there of Oriental phlegmatism. The leader of the Dervishes was smoking his pipe on a carpet, that was moved further back from time to time as the fire gained ground. The small portion of cemetery that stretched before the *tekke* soon became cluttered with all the objects, utensils, furniture and goods from threatened houses, that were often dropped from the windows for speed: the most grotesque earthenware was spread out over the tombs in a dreadful and comical jumble. The population, almost all Christian, of the district failed to show a like resignation to that of the Turks in similar circumstances; the women screamed or wept, while seated on their piled-up furniture.

Cries rose on all sides; the disorder and tumult were at their height. Finally, the fire was extinguished, and, from the *tekke* to the foot of the hill, only the chimneys remained standing. In the most serious disasters, there are always a few bizarre details: I saw a man who nearly perished trying to save some stove-pipes; further on, a poor old man and woman, who were watching over their dead son in a burning house, refused to abandon the corpse of their loved one, and had to be carried off by force. This was a most touching aspect of the event. As regards the picturesque, I noticed the cypresses of the Dervish's Garden, dehydrated and yellowed, light up like seven-branched candlesticks.

Three or four nights later, Pera kindled once more at the other end, towards the Grand Champ-des-Morts; about twenty wooden houses burned like matchsticks, hurling sheaves of sparks, and tongues of flame, into the blue night sky, in spite of the water with which they were doused. The main street of Pera presented a most sinister aspect; the companies of *saccas*, hoses over their shoulders, traversed it at a full trot, overturning everything in their path, as is their privilege, since they are ordered to turn aside for no one; *mouchirs* (*officers*) on horseback, followed by a fierce squad of men, running on foot behind them, as in Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps' painting *The Turkish Patrol* (1831, Wallace Collection, London) cast, in the light of the torches, strange silhouettes on the walls; dogs, trampled underfoot, fled in packs, uttering plaintive howls; Men and women passed by, bent beneath bundles; *sais* dragged frightened horses by their halters: it was both terrible and beautiful. Fortunately, a few stone houses obstructed the fire's progress.

In the same week, Psammathia (*Samatya*), a Greek quarter of Constantinople, fell prey to the flames; two thousand five hundred houses burned. Then Scutari was ablaze, in turn. Every hour some corner of the sky reddened, and the Seraskier Tower was forever hoisting its basket or its lantern; one might have said the fire-demon was shaking his torch over the city. Finally, all the flames were extinguished, and these disasters were forgotten with that happy indifference without which the human species would not survive.

Chapter 22: Santa Sophia – The Mosques

It is dangerous for a *giaour* to enter a mosque during Ramadan, even with a firman (*permit*) and under the protection of the *kavas* (*guard*); the preaching of the imams excites a redoubling of fervour and fanaticism amongst the faithful; the exaltation of fasting heats idle minds, and the usual tolerance, brought about by the progress of civilisation, might easily be forgotten at such times. I therefore waited until after the Bayram to make this obligatory visit.

The tour usually begins with Hagia Sophia, the oldest and most important monument in Constantinople, which, before being a mosque, was a Christian church dedicated, not to a saint as its name might lead one to believe, but to the divine wisdom ‘Agia Sophia’, personified by the Greeks as the mother of the three theological virtues (*faith, hope, and charity*).

When viewed from the square in front of Bab-I Humayun (*the Imperial Gate*), with one’s back to the delicate carvings and sculpted inscriptions of the Fountain of Sultan Ahmed III, Hagia Sophia presents an incoherent mass, of misshapen construction. The original plan has vanished beneath a later aggregation of buildings, which obliterate the general lines and prevent them being easily discerned. Between the buttresses raised by Murad III to support the walls shaken by earthquakes, hang, like fungi on the veined bark of an oak-tree, tombs, schools, baths, shops, and stalls.

Above this tumult, between four rather heavy minarets, rises the great dome, supported on walls whose foundations are alternately pink and white, and surrounded like a tiara by a circle of openwork lattice windows; the minarets lack the elegant slenderness of Arab minarets; the dome sits heavily above the pile of disordered hovels, and the traveller, whose imagination has involuntarily conjured with the magic name of Santa Sophia, which makes one think of the Temple of Ephesus, and that of Solomon, experiences a sense of disappointment which fortunately fades when one has penetrated within. It must be said, by way of excusing the Turks, that most Christian monuments are also miserably obstructed, and that the sides of many a famed and marvellous cathedral are roughened by excrescences of plaster and pieces of planking, while its lacework spires most often soar from a chaos of vile huts.

To reach the door of the mosque, one follows a sort of alley, lined with sycamores, and with tombs whose painted and gilded stonework shines vaguely through the grilles, and soon finds oneself, after a few detours, in front of a bronze door, one of the leaves of which still bears the imprint of a Greek cross. This side-door gives access to a vestibule pierced by a

further nine doors. One exchanges one's shoes for slippers, which one must take care to have one's dragoman bring with him, since entering a mosque in one's boots would be as serious an impropriety as keeping one's hat on in a Catholic church, and one which might produce far more unfortunate consequences.

As I entered, a singular mirage filled my sight; it was as if I was in Venice, emerging from the piazza into the nave of St. Mark's, only the dimensions were disproportionately large; everything seemed colossal in size; pillars of immense height rose from the mat-covered paving; the curve of the dome flared like the sphere of the heavens: the pendentives, whereon the four sacred rivers (*the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates, see Genesis 2:10-14*) were depicted, pouring out their mosaic floods, described giant arcs, the galleries were wider so as to contain the crowd: St. Mark's is Hagia Sophia in miniature, a scaling down, at the rate of an inch per foot, of Justinian's basilica. That is scarcely surprising, however: Venice, separated from Greece by only a narrow sea, has always lived in close familiarity with the Orient, and its architects clearly sought to reproduce the structure of this church which was considered the richest and most beautiful in Christendom. The existing St. Mark's was built in the eleventh century, and its builders had been able to see Santa Sophia in all its integrity and splendour, long before it was profaned by Mehmed II, in 1453.

The first church on the site was built on the ashes of a temple consecrated to divine wisdom, and on the orders of Constantine the Great, according to tradition (*though it was consecrated in 360AD, under Constantius II*), and was consumed in a fire (*c404*) following the troubles between the factions of the Greens and the Blues; its foundations were therefore rooted in an even deeper antiquity. A second basilica was inaugurated by Theodosius II in 415, and destroyed, again by fire, in 532. Justinian immediately commissioned Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus to draw up the plans for the third edifice, and direct its construction. To enrich the new church, numerous ancient pagan temples were despoiled, and the columns from the Temple of Diana, at Ephesus, still black from the torch of Herostratus, and the pillars from the temple of the Sun, at Palmyra, all gilded with the rays of that star, were used to support Christ's dome; two enormous urns of porphyry were brought from the ruins of Pergamum, the lustral waters of which became the waters of baptism, and later those of ablution; The walls were covered with mosaics of gold and precious stones and, when all was complete, Justinian was able to cry in delight: 'Glory be to God, who has judged me worthy of completing so great a work; I have surpassed even you, O Solomon!'

Although Islam, inimical to the plastic arts, stripped it of a large part of its ornamentation, Hagia Sophia is still a magnificent temple. The mosaics with a gold background, representing biblical subjects, like those in Saint Mark's, have disappeared beneath a layer of whitewash. Only the four gigantic six-winged seraphs on the pendentives have been preserved, whose six multicoloured wings palpitate with scintillating golden crystal mosaic cubes; even then the heads which form the centre of these whirlwinds of feathers have each been hidden under a large gold star, the reproduction of the human face being abhorrent to Muslims. At the rear of the sanctuary, beneath the quarter-sphere vault which terminates it, one can vaguely see the outlines of a colossal figure which the layer of lime could not completely hide: it is that of the patron saint of the church, the image of divine Wisdom, or more exactly of holy Wisdom, *Agia*

Sophia, and who, beneath this half-transparent veil, impassively attends on the ceremonies of an alien creed.

The statues have been removed. The altar, made of an unknown metal, produced like Corinthian brass from gold, silver, bronze, iron and precious stones in fusion, has been replaced by a slab of red marble, indicating the direction of Mecca. Above it hangs an old, worn carpet, a dusty rag which has for the Turks the merit of being one of the four carpets on which Muhammad knelt to pray.

Huge green disks, gifted by different Sultans, hang on the walls, and thereon gleam suras of the Koran or pious maxims written in enormous gold letters. A porphyry cartouche contains the names of Allah, Muhammad, and the first four Rashidun Caliphs, Abu-Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali. The pulpit (*minbar*) where the *khatib* (*the person who delivers the sermon*) places himself to recite from the Koran, is backed by one of the pillars which support the apse. It is reached by a rather steep staircase flanked by two openwork balustrades of a workmanship as rich and delicate as that of the finest guipure lace. The *khatib* ascends it, with the book of the law in one hand, and a sabre in the other, as if in a mosque taken by conquest.

Cords, from which hang silk tassels, and ostrich-egg shapes, descend from the vaults to within ten or twelve feet of the ground, supporting rings of iron wire, decorated with night-lights, so as to form chandeliers. Desks in the form of an X, similar to those at which one leafs through collections of engravings, are scattered here and there, supporting manuscripts of the Koran; several are decorated with elegant niello-work and delicate inlays of mother-of-pearl, shell, and copper. Rush mats in summer, carpets in winter, cover the pavement formed of marble slabs, the artfully-arranged veins of which seem to flow, like three rivers with frozen waves, across the nave. The mats have a singular peculiarity: they are laid obliquely, against the architectural line, so that the floor itself seems askew and not in accord with the bordering walls. This oddity is explained by the fact that Hagia Sophia was not intended as a mosque, and in consequence is not oriented, as is normal, towards Mecca.

Mosques are, visibly, quite similar within to Protestant churches. Art cannot display itself in pomp and magnificence there. Pious inscriptions, a pulpit, desks, mats for kneeling - this is all the ornamentation permitted. The idea of Allah must alone fill his temple, and it seems large enough indeed for that role. However, I confess, that to me the artistic luxury accompanying Catholicism seems preferable, and the alleged risk of idolatry is only to be feared among barbarous people incapable of separating form from content, and imagery from thought.

The principal dome, somewhat elliptical in its curvature, is surrounded by several half-domes as in St Mark's in Venice; it is of immense height and must have gleamed like a gold and mosaic heaven before the Muslim limewash extinguished its splendours. As it is, it produced a more vivid impression on me than that of the dome of St. Peter's in Rome; Byzantine architecture is certainly the essential form required by Catholicism. Even Gothic architecture, however great its religious value, does not suit it so exactly. In spite of every kind of despoliation, Santa Sophia still surpasses all the Christian churches I have seen, and I have visited many. Nothing equals the majesty of its domes, its tribunes supported by columns of jasper, porphyry, and *verde antico*, with capitals of a strange Corinthian order, on which animals, chimeras, and crosses intertwine with the carved foliage. The transcendent art of

Greece, though in a somewhat degenerate form it is true, can still be felt here; it seems that when Christ entered this temple, Jupiter had only just departed.

A few years ago, Santa Sophia was in danger of collapse; the walls were bowed, the domes were cracked and splitting, the pavement undulated, the columns, weary of standing for so long, were tottering like drunken men; nothing was vertical, the whole building was visibly leaning to the right; in spite of the buttresses added during the sultanhip of Amurath (*Murad III*), this church-mosque, compressed by the centuries, shaken by earthquakes, seemed ready to collapse upon itself. A highly-skilled architect from Ticino, Gaspare Fossati, accepted the difficult task of straightening and strengthening the ancient monument, underpinning the edifice, section by section, with untiring energy and prudence. Brass rings encircled the split columns, iron frames supported the collapsing arches, substructures solidified crumbling lengths of wall; the cracks through which rainwater infiltrated were blocked, all the worn stones were replaced; masses of masonry, cleverly concealed, relieved the pressure of the dome on pillars incapable of supporting it, and, thanks to this happy and complete restoration, Hagia Sophia has been granted a few more centuries of life.

During the work (*begun in 1847*), Gaspare Fossati (*with his brother Giuseppe*) was permitted to clean the layers of limewash, which had impregnated them, from the primitive mosaics, and before covering them again he copied them with pious care. That unique opportunity having been granted him, whereby he could contemplate the mosaics, he ought to have his drawings, which are of great artistic interest, engraved and published.

The mosaics I refer to are those of the dome and the half-domes. The others, which adorned the lower walls, are dilapidated and can be considered lost. Day after day, the *mullahs*, using their knives, extract the small cubes of crystal covered with gold leaf, and sell them to foreigners. I myself possess half a dozen pieces which were detached in my presence; though I am not one of those tourists who break the noses of statues so as to carry off a souvenir of the monuments they visit, I thought it wrong to disappoint the hopes of a little *baksheesh*, cherished by the honest *osmanli*.

From the summits of the tribunes, which are reached by gently sloping ramps like those which wind about the interior of the Giralda (*the bell-tower of Seville Cathedral*) and the Campanile (*the bell-tower of St. Mark's in Venice*), one has an admirable view of the whole mosque. So placed, I saw that a number of the faithful, squatting on the mats, were performing their prostrations, most devoutly. Two or three women wrapped in their *feredjes* were standing near a door, and, with his head resting on the base of a column, a *hammal* was slumbering profoundly; a soft and gentle light fell from the high windows, and I saw in the hemicycle, opposite the *minbar*, the gleaming golden grille of the tribune reserved for the Sultan.

Platforms, of a kind, supported by columns of rare marble, and furnished with openwork railings projecting outwards from the general architectural line, advance, at each point of intersection of the naves. In the chapels of the side aisles, which are superfluous to the requirements of Muslim worship, trunks, chests and packages of all shapes are heaped; for mosques, in the Orient, serve as depositories; those who travel extensively, or who fear being robbed at home, place their riches there, under the guardianship of Allah, and there is not one example of a single *asper* (*akçe, a silver coin*) or *para* having gone astray; the theft would be

deemed sacrilege; and the dust sifts across masses of gold, and precious effects, scantily wrapped in coarse cloth or scraps of old leather. The spider, so dear to Muslims through having woven its web at the entrance to the cave where Muhammad took refuge during the Hijrah, peacefully weaves its web over locked chests that no one touches.

Around the mosque are grouped *imarets* (*hospices*), *medresses* (*'madrasas', schools*), baths, and kitchens for the poor, because all Muslim life gravitates around the house of Allah; the homeless sleep there under the arches, where the police never disturb them, since they are Allah's guests; the faithful pray there, the women dream there, the sick are carried there, to be healed or to die. In the Orient, daily life is not separate from the religious life.

I have searched in vain in Hagia Sophia for a trace of the blood-stained handprint that Mahomet II, on entering the sanctuary on horseback, left on the wall as a sign of his taking possession, when the distraught women and virgins took refuge near the altar, counting on a miracle that failed to occur to save them. Is that crimson imprint a historical fact or simply part of a legend?

Since I have just employed the word 'legend', I will relate one, current in Constantinople, to which the events of the day will grant the merit of relevance. When the gates of Santa Sophia opened beneath the pressure of the barbarian hordes besieging Constantine's city, a priest was saying mass at the altar. Hearing the noise the hooves of the Tartar horses made on Justinian's flagstones, the howls of the soldiery, and the cries of terror emitted by the faithful, the priest interrupted the holy sacrifice, took the sacred vessels with him, and headed towards one of the side aisles at a calm and solemn pace. The soldiers brandishing their scimitars were about to reach him, when he vanished into the wall which opened then closed behind him; at first there was thought to be some secret exit, a hidden doorway; but no: the wall was probed and found to be solid, compact, impenetrable. The priest had somehow passed through a mass of masonry.

Sometimes, it is said, one hears vague psalmody emerging from the thickness of the wall. It is the priest, still living, like the emperor Barbarossa who murmurs, in his sleep, the interrupted liturgy, from the depths of his cavern in the Kyffhäuser hills. It is said that when Santa Sophia is restored to Christian worship, the wall will open of its own accord, and the priest, emerging from his retreat, will complete, at the altar, the mass begun four centuries ago.

Given the current state of the Eastern Question (*as to the fate of the countries of the Ottoman Empire*), the legend, however improbable it may be, may very well come true. Might 1853 see the priest of 1453 cross the nave of Hagia Sophia, and climb the stair to Justinian's altar with ghostly step?

On leaving Hagia Sophia, I visited a number of mosques. That of Sultan Ahmed I (*the Blue Mosque*), situated near the Atmeidan (*At-Meydani Square, Sultanahmet Square*), is one of the most remarkable, in possessing six minarets, hence its Turkish name of *Alti-Minareli-Cami* (*the Six-Minarets-Mosque*). I mention this circumstance, because it gave rise, during the construction of the building, to a debate between the Sultan and the Imam of Mecca.

The Imam, crying out against impiety, and sacrilegious pride, protested that no other Islamic shrine should equal in splendour the holy Kaaba (*'cube' in Arabic*) at Mecca, which was then flanked by the same number of minarets. The work was interrupted, and the mosque

was in danger of remaining unfinished, when Sultan Ahmed, an intelligent individual, found an ingenious subterfuge to satisfy the fanatical imam: he had a seventh minaret erected at the Kaaba.

The construction of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque involved insane sums, and it was calculated that, if apportioned out, each sixteenth of an ounce of stone cost three *aspers*. Whatever the total, it was worth that amount. Its high dome, surrounded by four semi-domes, rises majestically amidst six glorious minarets, each encircled by tiered balconies like bracelets. Before it, is a courtyard surrounded by columns with bronze bases and black and white capitals, supporting arches forming a quadruple portico or cloister, if the latter word does not sound too odd in describing a mosque. In the centre of the courtyard stands a highly-ornate fountain, flowery, and adorned with arabesques, foliage, interlaced carvings, and covered with a cage of gilded latticework, doubtless to protect the purity of its water, intended for ablutions.

The architectural style is, throughout, noble and pure, and recalls the finest periods of Arab art, though the construction dates to no earlier than the beginning of the seventeenth century. A bronze door, which one reaches by a flight of a few steps, gives access to the interior of the mosque.

What strikes one at first are the four enormous pillars, or rather the four fluted towers which bear the weight of the main dome. These pillars, their capitals carved in a frieze resembling a row of stalactites, are circled halfway up by a flat band covered with inscriptions in Turkish lettering; their character of robust majesty and indestructible power produces a striking effect.

Verses from the Koran also encircle the cupolas and domes, the whole length of their cornices; an ornamental motif imitated from the interior of the Alhambra, and one to which Arabic writing lends itself admirably with its characters resembling the designs on Kashmir shawls. Alternate black and white keystones border the arches; the *mihrab*, the niche which designates the direction of Mecca, and in which the holy book is placed, is encrusted with lapis-lazuli, agate, and jasper: it is even said that there is embedded therein a fragment of the black stone of the Kaaba, a relic as precious to Muslims as a piece of the True Cross to Christians; it is in this mosque that the standard of the Prophet is preserved, which is only unfurled, as the oriflamme (*royal banner*) was under the old French monarchy, on solemn and supreme occasions. Mahmud II had it deployed when, surrounded by imams, he announced to the prostrate people the forced disbandment of the Janissaries (*in 1826*).

The *minbar* (*pulpit*) topped by its tall conical soundboard; the *muezzin mahfili* or platform supported by small columns from which the *muezzins* call the believers to prayer; and the chandeliers decorated with crystal orbs and ostrich egg shapes, complete the decoration, which is the same in all the mosques; as in Hagia Sophia, chests, trunks, packages, and other deposits, placed there under divine protection in a show of Muslim piety, are piled beneath the vaulting of the side aisles.

Near the mosque is the *turbe* or tomb of Sultan Ahmed I, the glorious Padisha who sleeps in his funeral chapel, in a coffin with a sloping roof, covered with precious fabrics from Persia and India, at his head his turban with a crest of jewels, at his feet two enormous candlesticks as broad as ship's masts. Some thirty coffins or so, of smaller dimensions, surround him,

including those of his wife and four of his sons, who accompany him in death as in life. At the bottom of a chest sparkle his sabres, *kandjars* (*knives*), and other weapons studded with diamonds, sapphires and rubies.

The description I have given, absolves me from having to provide details of the mosque of Sultan Bayezid II, which differs only in a few slight architectural peculiarities easier to convey with a brush than a pen. Inside, one notices beautiful columns of jasper and Egyptian porphyry; above the cloister which accompanies it, swarms of pigeons as familiar as those of St. Mark's Square fly endlessly. A fine old Turk stands beneath the arcade with sacks of vetch or millet. One buys a measure from him, which one scatters by the handful; then, from the minarets, domes, cornices, and capitals, fall thousands of doves, forming variegated whirlwinds, which rush around your feet, descend on your shoulders, your face whipped by the breeze they raise with their wings; one suddenly finds oneself the centre of a feathered tornado. After a few minutes, not a single grain of millet remains on the flagstones, and the sated swarm return to their aerial roosts, to await another beneficial windfall. These pigeons are descended from two wood-pigeons that Sultan Bayezid once bought from a poor woman who implored his charity, and which he donated to the mosque. They have bred prodigiously.

According to the custom of the founders of mosques, Bayezid's *turbe* is close to the mosque to which he gave his name. He lies there, covered with a carpet of gold and silver, with beneath his head, in an act worthy of Christian humility, a brick kneaded from the dust collected on his clothes and shoes, for there is a saying attributed to the Prophet, conceived thus: 'It will not happen that feet soiled with dust, while on the path of Allah, will be touched by the fires of Hell.' (See Book 11, Hadith 19, of the '*Riyad as-Salihin*')

I shall not pursue this review of the Mosques any further, they being all alike, with only minor variations. I will mention only the Suleymaniye, one of the most perfect architectural examples, near which is a *turbe* where lie, next to those of Suleiman the Magnificent, the remains of the famous Roxelane, beneath a coffin covered with cashmere. Not far from the mosque is a porphyry sarcophagus, which is said to be that of the emperor Constantine.

Chapter 23: The Seraglio (*The Topkapi Palace*)

When the Sultan is occupying one of his summer palaces, it is permissible, by means of a *firman*, to visit the interior of the Seraglio. As regards the word 'seraglio', banish your dreams of Muhammad's paradise. Seraglio is the generic word for a palace (*Italian 'serraglio' from the Latin serraculum, 'enclosed'*), as distinct from the *harem*, the women's dwelling, a mysterious retreat which no profane person is permitted to enter, even when the *houris* are absent.

Usually, ten or so people gather to undertake the tour, which requires numerous donations of *baksheesh* whose total can scarcely be less than one hundred and fifty to two hundred francs; a dragoman precedes you, who settles all these annoying details with the guards at the doors;

he certainly robs you; but, as one knows no Turkish, one must suffer it. One must take care to bring slippers for oneself; for if, in France, one takes off one's hat when entering a formal building, in Turkey one takes off one's shoes, which is perhaps more rational, since one leaves the dust of one's feet at the threshold.

The irregular buildings of the Seraglio, or the *Serai*, as the Turks say, occupy a triangular area washed on one side by the waves of the Sea of Marmara, and on the other by those of the Golden Horn. A crenellated wall circumscribes the enclosure, which covers a vast area. A paved bank, a few feet wide, borders the two sides that face the sea. The flow beyond rushes by with extraordinary impetuosity; the blue waters boil like the surface of a cauldron, and cause millions of crazy spangles to dance in the sun; they are, moreover, of a singular transparency, and allow a glimpse of the sea-bed, composed of greenish rocks or white sand, amidst a tumult of fractured rays. Boats can only ascend these rapids when hauled by ropes.

Above the walls, generally in ruins and with blocks of stone from ancient now-demolished buildings mingled among them, one can see other buildings with small barred windows, kiosks in a Chinese or rococo style, the tips of cypresses, and clumps of plane trees. Over all there weighs an air of solitude and abandonment; one would scarcely believe that within this gloomy enclosure lives the glorious Caliph, the all-powerful sovereign of Islam.

We entered the Seraglio through a door of quite simple design, guarded by a few soldiers. Beneath this portal, rifles, arranged in perfect order, are deposited in magnificent mahogany cupboards furnished with racks. Once beyond the door, our little band, preceded by a palace official, a *kawas* and the dragoman, crossed a sort of vague hilly garden, planted with enormous cypress trees - a cemetery minus the tombs - and soon arrived at the entrance to the apartments.

At the invitation of the dragoman, we each donned our slippers, and began the ascent of a wooden staircase with nothing monumental about it. In northern countries, where one forms an exaggerated idea of Oriental magnificence derived from Arab tales, the calmest minds cannot help but imagine a fairy-tale architecture with columns of lapis lazuli, capitals of gold, foliage wrought of emeralds and rubies, and fountains of rock-crystal where jets of quicksilver tinkle. The Turkish style is thus confused with the Arab style, although the two of them have not the slightest connection, and one dreams of Alhambras where, in reality, there are only well-ventilated kiosks and rooms decorated in a quite simple manner.

The first room we entered is circular in shape; it is pierced with numerous latticed windows; all around it is a divan, the walls and ceiling are decorated with gilding and black snake-like arabesques; black curtains, and a lambrequin (*decorative drape*) cut to follow the line of the cornice, complete the decoration. A very fine esparto mat, which, no doubt, is replaced in winter by soft Smyrna carpeting, covers the floor. The second room is painted with grisailles in distemper, in the Italian manner. The third is decorated with landscapes, mirrors, blue draperies and a clock with a radial dial. On the walls of the fourth run sentences written by Mahmud's own hand, he being a skilled calligrapher who, like all Orientals, took pride in his talent, an understandable vanity as this form of writing, complicated by curves, knots, and interlacing lines, is very close to drawing. After traversing these rooms, we arrived at a smaller room.

Two pastel works by Michel Bouquet were the only two art objects that attracted the eye in these rooms in which a severe Islamic bareness reigns: one represented the *Port of Bucharest*, the other, a *View of Constantinople* from the Tower of the Maiden, both free of human images, of course. A clock with a mechanical panel, representing the Seraglio Point, with caiques and ships, that roll and pitch moved by cogs beneath, excited the admiration of the good-natured Turks, and smiles from the *giaours* as such a clock would be more at home in the dining room of a wealthy grocer than in the mysterious rooms of the Padisha. The same room, as if in compensation, contained a cupboard whose curtains when drawn back allowed the true luxury of the Orient to gleam forth in a phosphorescence of gold and precious stones.

Here are treasures that the Tower of London might envy: it being customary for each Sultan to bequeath to the collection an object that has particularly pleased him. Most have given weapons: there are *kandjars*, their handles studded with diamonds and rubies; scabbards, adorned with damask and embossed with silver; bluish blades foliated with Arabic inscriptions in gold lettering; maces richly-nielloed; and pistols whose butts disappear beneath layers of pearls, coral, and precious stones; Sultan Mahmud, in his capacity as poet and calligrapher, donated his writing-desk, a heap of gold covered with diamonds. Through a sort of civilised coquetry, he wished to mix the products of thought with all those instruments of brute force, and show that the brain has its powers, like the arms. In this room, we noticed a curious Turkish fireplace decorated with features in the ‘honeycomb’ style, like to those ‘stalactites’ that hang from the ceilings of the Alhambra.

Beyond reigns a gallery where the odalisques amuse themselves, and exercise, under the eye of the eunuchs, who perform there almost the same function as the supervisors in school playgrounds. But such a sacred place is forbidden to the profane, even when the birds have flown the cage. A little further on are the rounded domes, studded with large crystalline warts, which cover the bathhouses decorated with alabaster columns and marble features, which we had to be content to admire from the outside.



The Favourite Odalisque

We recovered our shoes at the door by which we had first entered, and continued our visit. We first skirted a garden filled with flowers, the beds framed with wood, in the old French fashion; then we crossed courtyards surrounded by cloisters of a sort, with Moorish arcades, where the *icoglans*, or pages, of the Seraglio, have their lodgings and schoolrooms, and arrived at a kiosk or pavilion containing the library; we ascended to it by a flight of steps, and a marble ramp pierced with delicate windows.

The door of this library is a marvel. Never has Arab genius traced on bronze a more prodigious network of lines, angles, and stars, mingling, knotting, and intertwining in a mathematically-ordered maze. Only a daguerreotype could capture its magical ornamentation. Any designer who set out to copy, conscientiously, with his pencil, those inextricable meanders would go mad after an effort the completion of which would take a lifetime.

Inside the library, Arabic manuscripts are stored in cedar lockers, their fore-edges not their spines facing the viewer, a particular arrangement that I had already noticed in the library of the Escorial, and which the Spaniards undoubtedly borrowed from the Moors.

There we were shown a large roll of parchment depicting a kind of genealogical tree, with miniature portraits of all the sultans, in oval medallions, and executed in gouache. The portraits are, it is said, authentic, a thing hard to believe. All are of pale heads with black beards, and of a fairly uniform type, and the costume is that of the Turks in Molière's and Racine's plays, which are more exact in their details than one might think.

The library once visited, we entered a kiosk in the Arab style, preceded by a staircase with marble banisters in which the ancient Oriental magnificence shone in all its splendour, a splendour of which, as I have said, the apartments we had already visited offered not a trace.

The greater part of the room is occupied by a throne in the form of a divan or bed, with a canopy supported by hexagonal columns of gilded copper sown with garnets, turquoises, amethysts, topazes, emeralds and other stones in the state of cabochons, for formerly the Turks did not cut precious stones; horse-tails hang from the four corners of large gold balls surmounted by crescents. Nothing is richer, more elegant and more royal than this throne truly made to seat caliphs.

Barbarous peoples alone possess the secret of these marvellous pieces in gold; the feel for such ornamentation seems to be lost, one knows not why, as civilisation perfects itself. Without displaying an antiquarian's mania regarding the past, it must be admitted that the older the date, the remoter the era, of an architectural style, a piece of jewellery, or a weapon, the more perfect the taste exhibited and more exquisite the work: preoccupied with ideas, the modern world lacks a true notion of form.

A few rays of light falling from a half-open window made the carvings glitter and cast fire on the gems. Arab earthenware tiles formed shimmering symmetrical patterns, on the lower parts of the walls, as in the rooms of the Alhambra in Granada; while, on the ceiling, curiously carved silver-gilt rods intersected, forming coffers and rosettes. In a corner, amidst the shadows, shone a strange Turkish fireplace in the form of a niche, and intended to receive a brazier; a sort of small conical dome with seven sides, in copper, pierced and fenestrated like a fish-slice, and nielloed with the most elegant designs of Arab art, served as its mantle. Certain Gothic reliquaries alone give an idea of this charming work.

Opposite the divan was a window, or rather a skylight, furnished with a thick grille with gilded bars. It was outside this kind of wicket-window that ambassadors formerly stood, their sentences being transmitted by intermediaries to the Padisha, crouching, with the immobility of an idol, beneath his canopy of silver-gilt and precious stones, and between two symbolic turbans. They could see, though barely, through the golden mesh, the fixed pupils of the magnificent Sultan shining like twin stars from the depth of darkness; but that was considered quite sufficient for *giaours*: the shadow of Allah might reveal no more of itself to 'Christian dogs'.

The exterior is no less remarkable. A large roof with a strongly projecting overhang, crowns the building; marble columns support ribbed arcades and rosettes; a slab of *verde antico*,

decorated with an Arabic inscription, forms the threshold of the door, the lintel of which is quite low: an architectural arrangement devised, it is said, to force recalcitrant vassals and tributaries, when admitted to the presence of the Grand Seigneur, to bow their heads, a rather Jesuitical piece of etiquette, which was evaded, in a comical manner, by a Persia envoy, who entered backwards, as one enters a gondola in Venice.

In describing the Bayram ceremony, I spoke at some length of the portico beneath which it takes place, so I will not repeat the description, but continue my somewhat random perambulation, mentioning things as they present themselves. It would be hard to give a more coherent account of these buildings of various periods and in various styles, erected to no preconceived plan, but rather according to the whims and necessities of the moment, separated moreover by ill-defined spaces, shaded here and there by cypresses, sycamores, and old plane trees of monstrous dimensions.

From the middle of a clump of trees rose a fluted column with a Corinthian capital, which produced a charming effect, and which is attributed to Theodosius, an attribution whose value I am not knowledgeable enough to dispute. I cite it because Byzantine ruins are scarce in Constantinople. The ancient city has disappeared almost without trace; the ornate palaces of the Greek dynasty, of the Palaiologi and the Comneni, have vanished; their marble and porphyry columns were re-used when constructing the mosques, and their foundations, covered by frail Muslim buildings, have been obliterated little by little beneath the ashes of fires; sometimes one finds, amalgamated with a wall, a capital, or a fragment of broken torso, but nothing that has retained its original form; one must excavate in order to bring to the surface what remains of ancient Byzantium.

A notable feature, which marks a degree of progress, is that in the courtyard, in front of the ancient church of Hagia Irene which has been transformed into an arsenal and is part of the dependent areas of the Seraglio, various antique objects have been gathered together: heads, torsos, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, and tombs, forming the rudiments of a Byzantine Museum, which could be rendered even more interesting by the addition of daily finds.

Near the church, two or three porphyry sarcophagi, strewn with Greek crosses, which must have contained the bodies of emperors and empresses, and which are now deprived of their broken lids, are filled with rainwater, and birds come to drink there, uttering little joyful cries.

The interior of Hagia Irene contains a display of rifles, sabres, and pistols of modern design, arranged with a military symmetry that our Artillery Museum would not disavow; but the glittering collection, which charms the Turks greatly, and of which they are very proud, holds nothing to astonish a European traveller. A display that offers a quite different level of interest is one of historical weapons, preserved in an arcaded platform transformed into a gallery, at the back of the apse.

There we were shown the sabre of Mehmed II, with an almost straight blade, along which runs, on a background of bluish damascene steel, an Arabic inscription in gold letters; also, an armband nielloed with gold, and studded with two circles of precious stones, which belonged to Tamerlane; and a chipped iron sword, with a cross-shaped hilt, a sword said to be that of

Skanderbeg (*Gjergj Kastrioti*), the energetic Albanian hero. Glass cases contain the keys to conquered cities, symbolic keys worked like jewels and damascened with gold and silver.

In the vestibule are piled the kettledrums and cooking pots of the Janissaries, those cooking pots (*kazans*) which, when overturned, made the Sultan tremble and turn pale in the depths of his harem (*being a sign of mutiny*); also, bundles of old halberds, chests full of weapons, ancient cannons, and culverins of singular shape, recall the Turkish military prior to Mahmud II's reforms (*in 1826*), which were necessary, no doubt, but regrettable from the point of view of the picturesque.

The stables, which I glanced at in passing, revealed nothing special, and contained, at the time, only ordinary breeds, the Sultan being followed by his favourite mounts. The Turks, moreover lack the Arab mania for horses, though they like them, and possess some which are remarkable.

This is about all a stranger can see of the Seraglio. No profane glance defiles its mysterious sanctuaries, secret kiosks, and intimate retreats. The Seraglio, like every Muslim house, has its *selamlık*, but it is for the harem that all the refinements of voluptuous luxury, the cashmere divans, Persian carpets, Chinese vases, gold cassolettes, lacquer cabinets, mother-of-pearl tables, cedar ceilings with painted and gilded coffer, fountains with marble basins and jasper columns, are reserved; the men's residence is, in a way, only the vestibule of the women's; a guardhouse interposed between the exterior life and the interior life.

I greatly regretted not being able to enter the marvellous bathhouse, a true Oriental dream come true, of which my friend Maxime Du Camp has given a splendid description (*see his 'Souvenirs et Paysages d'Orient', Chapter IX, of 1848*); but, this time, the guard was surlier, or perhaps fresh orders had been given. If the *houris* take steam baths in Paradise, it must be in a bath like that one, a jewel of Muslim architecture.

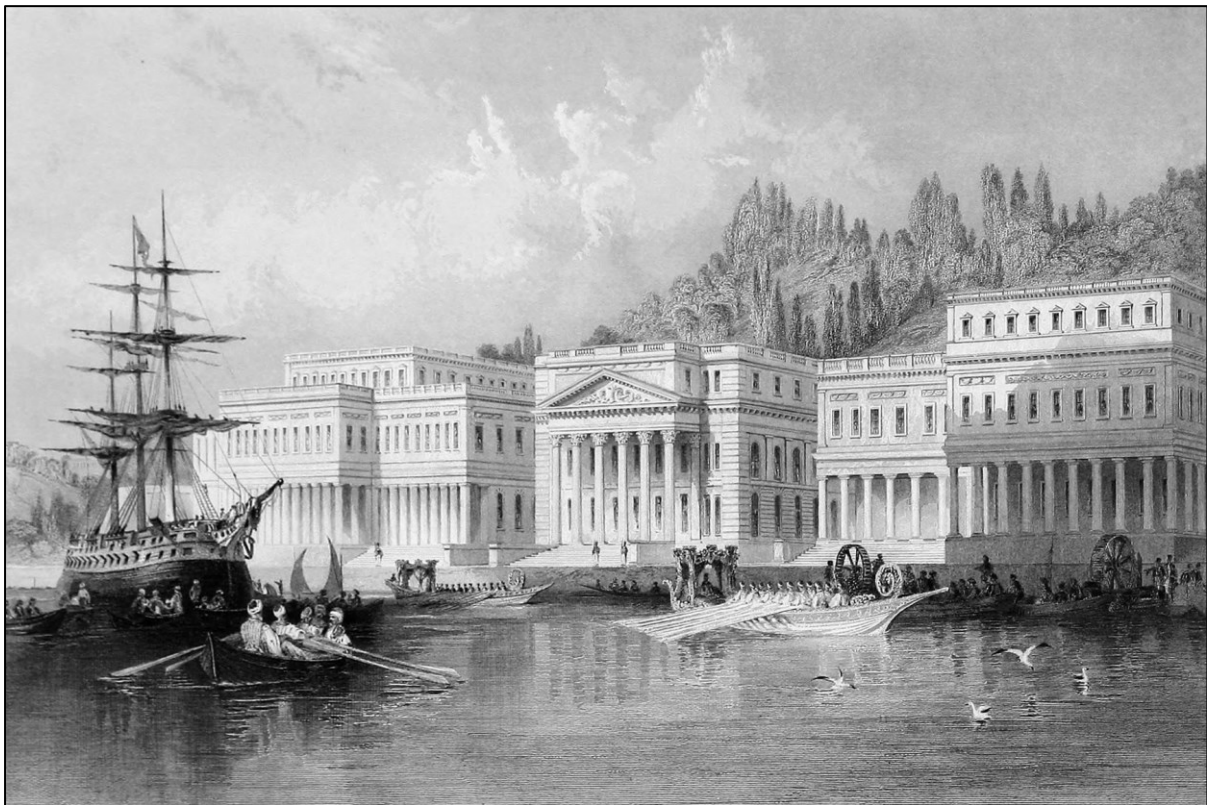
Quite weary from walking, having had to doff and replace my shoes six or eight times, I left the Seraglio by the Imperial gate (*Bab-i Humayun*) and leaving my companions behind, went and seated myself on the bench outside a little café, from where, while eating Scutari grapes, I could contemplate the monumental gate, in the centre of its main edifice, with a high Moorish arch, four columns, a marble cartouche bearing an inscription in gold letters, and twin niches where severed heads were displayed. Among others, that of Ali Tepelena, Pasha of Janina, appeared there on a silver plate (*after his assassination in 1822*).

I also examined, in detail, the delightful fountain of Sultan Ahmed III, which I had glanced at on my way to Hagia Sophia. It is, with the fountain of Tophane, the most remarkable in Constantinople, which contains so many and such pretty ones. Nothing can compare, for elegance, to its spreading roof turned up at an angle like the tip of a Turkish shoe, with openwork panels beneath decorated with filigree work, and topped with capricious pinnacles; or to those four niches; to the stalactite-like surround above; to the framed arabesques of pieces of verse composed by the sultan-poet; to those small columns with fanciful capitals, the gracefully starred rosettes, the wilting flowery cornices, to that charming tangle of ornamentation, a happy mixture of Arab and Turkish art. There, I will stop, because, despite Boileau's precept, I fear being carried away by the *festons* (*flowery festoons*) and *astragales*

(ornamental mouldings: for festons and astragales, see Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux's poem 'Chant I', which criticises exhaustively detailed description, specifically line 56).

Chapter 24: The Bosphorus Palace (*Dolmabahçe Palace*) – The Sultan Mahmud Mosque – The Dervish

When one is sailing, in a caique, on the Bosphorus, and has passed the Tower of Leander, one sees, opposite Scutari (*Üsküdar*), an immense palace, currently still under construction, its white feet bathed by the rapid blue waters. There is a superstition in the Orient, assiduously maintained by its architects, that one cannot die until the residence one is in the process of building is complete, so the Sultans are always careful to have the erection of some palace or other under way.



The Sultans' new palace on the Bosphorus

A rare thing among the Turks, who devote solid and precious materials to the house of Allah, and erect, for their temporary habitation, mere wooden kiosks as little durable as themselves, this palace is of marble throughout, and built to last for all eternity. It is composed

of a large central section and two wings. To say to what order of architecture it belongs would be difficult; it is neither Greek, nor Roman, nor Gothic, nor Renaissance, nor Saracen, nor Arab, nor Turkish, but approaches that genre the Spaniards call *Plateresco*, whereby a building's facade resembles a large piece of silverwork, in its complex richness of ornamentation, and obsessive refinement of detail.

The windows, with their open balconies, ribboned columns, ribbed trefoils, and festooned frames, the interspaces occupied by detailed sculptures and arabesques, recall the Lombard style and bring to mind the ancient palaces of Venice – except that between the Palazzo Dario, or the Ca'd'Oro, and the Sultan's Palace there is the same difference in scale as between the Grand Canal and the Bosphorus.

This enormous construction in Marmara marble, of a bluish-white colour that the garish brilliance of its newness renders a little cold, produces a most majestic effect, rising between the azure of the sky and the azure of the sea; it will produce a finer one still, once the hot sun of Asia has gilded it with its rays, which it receives directly and from which it is unshaded. Vignola (*Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, the Mannerist architect*) would doubtless not recognise this hybrid facade in which the styles of all times and all countries form a composite architectural order that he himself did not foresee. But one cannot deny that this multitude of flowers, foliage, rosettes, chiselled like jewels from precious material, has a dense, complicated, sumptuous and pleasing appearance to the eye. It is the palace an ornamentalist not an architect might build, sparing neither labour, time, nor expense. As it is, I prefer it to sullen classical reproductions, unintelligent, flat, cold, and tedious, such as mere scholars and pedants create, and I prefer lively ornamental foliage, intertwining in whimsical elegance, to a triangular pediment or a horizontal attic resting on six or eight slender columns. This display of naive unsophistication, on a gigantic scale, has its charm; probably the bold masons of our cathedrals knew no more, but their works are no less admirable for that.

A central reservation runs the length of the palace, bordered, on the Bosphorus side, by monumental pillars linked together by grilles of ornate and charming ironwork, in which the metal is curved in a thousand flowery arabesques, as delicate as the lines that a bold pen would trace freehand on vellum. These gilded grilles form a balustrade of extreme richness.

The two wings, built at another time, are far too low for the main building, with which they have no relation in style or form. Imagine a double row of miniature Odéons, and Chambers of Deputies, following one another in tedious alternation, and presenting to the eye a row of small, slender columns that seem made of wood though they are of marble.

On many occasions, as I passed, and repassed this palace, I felt the desire to pay it a visit. In Italy, nothing would have been simpler; but to have one's caique land at an Imperial landing stage would be in Turkey an action of consequence, which might well have unfortunate repercussions. Fortunately, a friendly intermediary put me in touch with one of the architects, Nigoğayos Balyan (*who worked with his father Galabert on the building*), a young Armenian of great intellect, who spoke French.

Monsieur Balyan was kind enough to take me in his boat, equipped with three pairs of oars, and first made me enter an old kiosk, a remnant of the previous palace, to which were brought

pipes, coffee and rose-sherbets; then he himself led me through the apartments, in a perfectly obliging and polite manner, for which I thank him here, hoping that perhaps one day these lines will pass before his eyes (*sadly, he died of typhoid in 1858, aged 32*).

The interior was not quite finished, but one could already judge the future splendour of the whole. The religious reservations held by the Turks robbed the ornamentation of a host of happy motifs, and considerably restricted the artist's imagination, who had to carefully abstain from representing any animated being amidst his arabesques: thus there were no statues, bas-reliefs, grotesque heads, chimeras, griffins, dolphins, birds, sphinxes, wyverns, butterflies, figurines half-woman half-flower, no heraldic monsters, none of those bizarre creations which form the fabulous zoology of ornamentation, and of which Raphael made such marvellous use in the galleries of the Vatican.

The Arab style, with its broken lines and decompositions, its incised guipure-lace stucco, its stalactite-like ceilings, its honeycomb niches, its marble features pierced like the lid of a cassolette, its legends in flowery Kufic script, and its use of green, white, and red, discreetly enhanced with gold, would have offered its traditional resources in decorating this Oriental palace; but the Sultan, as a result of the sort of whim which might prompt us to build Alhambras in Paris, wished it to be designed to suit the modern taste. One may be astonished, at first, by this whim of his, but, on reflection, nothing is more natural. It would have required a rare fertility of imagination on Monsieur Balyan's part to decorate each of more than three hundred rooms or halls in unique ways, with such a limited range of motifs at his disposal.

The general arrangement is very simple: the rooms follow one another in sequence, or open onto a wide corridor; the *harem*, among others, is thus arranged. Each female's apartment opens through a single door onto a vast arcade, like the cells of nuns in a cloister. Each end of the arcade offers a post for the eunuchs or the *bostanjis* (*guards*). I glanced from the threshold at this sanctuary of secret pleasures, which is more like a convent or a girl's boarding school than one might imagine. There, without having ever shone beyond its walls, unknown beauteous stars are doomed to be extinguished; yet the eye of the master will have been fixed on them, even if for only a minute or so, and that suffices.

The apartment of the Sultana Valide (*the Sultan's mother*), composed of tall rooms overlooking the Bosphorus, is remarkable for its ceilings, painted in fresco with an incomparable elegance and freshness of execution. I know not who the workers were who created these marvels, but Narcisse Diaz would find, on his palette, no finer tones, none more vaporous, kinder, yet at the same time richer. Sometimes they represent turquoise skies with patches of light cloud that flee to incredible depths, sometimes immense veils of lace with marvellous designs, then the eye sees a large mother-of-pearl conch, iridescent, glittering with all the colours of the prism, or idealised flowers their corollas and foliage hanging from golden trellises; other rooms are decorated in similar fashion. Sometimes a casket whose jewels spread in shimmering disorder, or a necklace whose pearls unravel and scatter like raindrops, or a stream of diamonds, sapphires and rubies, forms the motif of the decoration; golden cassettes painted on the cornices appear to release bluish perfumed vapours, to create a ceiling of transparent mist. Here, Phingari (*the moon: see Byron's 'The Giaour', line 468*) shows, amidst the clouds, that silvery arc so dear to the Muslims, there, modest Aurora colours, with a pink

hue like that of virgin cheeks, a whole morning sky; further on a piece of brocade grainy with light, shimmering with orphrey (*dense embroidery*), embedded with garnets, shows a corner of blue; an azure cave throws out sapphire reflections. The infinitely intertwined arabesques, the sculpted coffers, the gilded rosettes, the bouquets of imaginary or realistic flowers, blue lilies from Iran, or roses from Shiraz, vary the motifs, the main ones of which I have cited, without choosing to enter into an impossible level of detail which the reader's imagination will surely supply.

The Sultan's apartments are in an Orientalised Louis XIV style, the intention of which, one feels, is to imitate the splendour of Versailles: the doors, the windows, and their frames, are made of cedar, mahogany, or solid rosewood, delicately carved, and clad with rich ironwork gilded with fine gold. From the windows one has the most marvellous view in the world: an unrivalled panorama such as never fronted a royal palace. The Asian shore, where, Scutari rises, against an immense curtain of black cypresses, displaying its picturesque landing-stage cluttered with boats, its pink houses, and its white mosques, among which Buyuk-Cami (*the Ortaköy Mosque*) and Yavuz Sultan Selim stand forth; the Bosphorus with its swift, transparent waters is furrowed by the perpetual to-ing and fro-ing of sailing vessels, steamboats, feluccas, flat-bottomed craft, boats from Izmit and Trebizond of ancient shape and with strange sails, canoes, and caiques, above which flutter familiar swarms of herring gulls and others. If one leans forward a little, one discovers a series of summer dwellings, on both banks, with kiosks, painted in fresh colours, forming a double quay of palaces for this marvellous marine estuary. Add to these a thousand accidents of lighting, the effects of sun and moon, and you have a spectacle the imagination cannot surpass.

One of the singularities of the palace is a large room covered by a red glass dome. When the sun penetrates this ruby dome, all takes on a strange flamboyance: the air itself seems to ignite; one feels one is breathing fire; the columns are illuminated like those of street-lamps, the marble floor reddens like a pavement of lava; a fiery pink glow devours the walls; one would think one was in the reception room of a salamandrine palace formed of molten metal; your eyes shine like red sparks, your clothes become purple garments. An operatic version of Hell, lit by Bengal lights, could alone give an idea of this strange effect, of an equivocal tastefulness perhaps, but striking, indeed.

A small marvel that would not look out of place amidst the enchanted architecture of the *Thousand and One Nights* is the Sultan's bathroom. It is in the Moorish style, in ribboned Egyptian alabaster, and seems to have been carved from a single precious stone, with its low columns, flared capitals, heart-shaped arcades, and vaulting studded with crystal portholes that gleam like diamonds. What a pleasure it must be to abandon one's limbs, mollified by the skilful manipulations of a *tellak*, to these slabs, as translucent as agate, amidst a cloud of perfumed vapour, and beneath a rain of rose water and benzoin!

It is in one of the rooms of this palace that the Louis XIV style salon constructed and painted, in Paris, by Charles Séchan, that illustrious creator of Opéra sets, a salon of which I wrote when he displayed it in his workshop on Rue Turgot, should be placed.

Tired of wonders, weary of admiring them, I thanked Monsieur Balyan, who led me out of the palace through the courtyard of honour, whose door is a kind of triumphal arch in white

marble with very rich and ornate ornamentation, and which forms on the landward side an entrance quite worthy of this sumptuous building. Then, as I was famished, I entered a fruiterer's shop, and there I purchased two skewers of kebabs, the ends wrapped in greasy crepe paper, washing the meal down with a glass of sherbet; a sober meal, and entirely local in nature.

Leaving the shop, I began to wander, at random, through the city, counting on a short stroll to reveal to me those thousand familiar details which elude one if one seeks them out. While amusing myself by gazing at the confectioners' shops, and the pipe-makers surrounded by thousands of bowls in varying stages of completion, all arranged symmetrically, I arrived at the Mosque of Sultan Mahmud II (*the Nusretiye Mosque*) in Tophane, one of those focal places to which your feet carry you of their own accord, while your thoughts are occupied elsewhere. I set my watch at the kiosk, filled with pendulum clocks and others, which are often sited beside the mosques - it was a small elegant pavilion with openwork windows, through which the hour can be read from various dials which rarely agree with one another, so you may choose the time which pleases you best, and seems the most probable. These dials give both the Turkish and European local time, which in no way correspond, as the Orientals count from sunrise, a natural starting point, but one which varies according to the season.

These horological kiosks are usually adjoined by a fountain on which tin cups and spatulas hang from chains: a guard fills the cups from the basin within, and hands them to whoever wishes to drink. These fountains are almost all the work of pious foundations.

The mosque of Mahmud II is in the modern style and differs in its layout from buildings of this kind, of which Hagia Sophia is the prototype. A single dome encircled at its base by windows and scrolled consoles rises between four high facades rounded at their summit, flanked at their corners by pillars or buttresses with swollen pyramidions, and surmounted by crescents like the central dome. The twin minarets have a deserved reputation for elegance. Imagine two large fluted columns, each with a festooned balcony as capital, a capital from the centre of which springs another shorter column, also crowned with a balcony and supporting in turn a further column topped with a conical spire. - The design is graceful, bold and original. - Ordinarily, the *turbe* or funeral chapel of the founder is located near the mosque he has built; contrary to this usual arrangement, the tomb of Sultan Mahmud is in a special building, in a modern architecture style, slightly orientalist, in another part of Constantinople (*Divanyolu Street, in Fatih*). The coffin of this Sultan of the Reform Movement (*the Tanzimat*), displays, instead of the classic and traditional stone turban, an innovative fez of the Nizam, starred with a superb clasp of jewels; visitors are shown a transcription of the Koran made by this calligrapher prince during his captivity in the Seraglio before his accession to the throne.



Entrance to the Divan

Around the mosque the cannon foundries and artillery parks are sited, and there is a platform bathed by the sea, which is delimited by two pretty pavilions.

A few steps away, and one is again amidst the joyous tumult of the Tophane square, with its renters of horses, its sellers of sweets and sorbets, its stalls displaying cucumbers, squashes, Scutari grapes, and Smyrna melons; its sellers of *kaymak* (clotted cream) and *baklava* (layered pastry with nuts and syrup); its packs of stray dogs stretched out in the sun; its charming fountain and mosque, their surroundings crowded with public letter-writers and sellers of rosaries and perfumes. Within the cloister of this mosque, I saw a figure I shall never forget: a Dervish lying on the ground, near the tank of water designated for ablutions. His only clothing was a scrap of camel's hair cloth, as rough as a hair-shirt and soiled with desert dust. This flap of material was tied carelessly around his loins, and revealed his well-nigh naked, tanned and swarthy body, bronzed and re-bronzed by the fiery sun and the torrid breath of the *khamsin* (the hot, dry south-easterly wind); to depict him in a painting, two colours only would have been needed, mummy-brown, and burnt-sienna. His brick-red legs, were clad, to above the ankles, in dust-grey boots.



Turkish Letter-Writer

His vigorous leanness accentuated every muscle and bone; his wild frizzy black hair bristled on his head in tufts like brushwood; at the edge of his brown cheeks a few sparse wisps of beard showed, for he was quite young. A kind of mad placidity reigned in his fixed gaze. Alone amidst the crowd, as if amidst the Sahara, he seemed lulled by some apocalyptic vision. He made me think, involuntarily, of Saint John the Baptist in the desert, though no artist has ever dreamed such a version of that saint: Leonardo da Vinci's Saint John, with his ironic faun's smile, has the air of a mythological God in disguise, Raphael's resembles a young shepherd from the Roman countryside. It would be impossible to dream of a wilder figure, one more bristling and haggard, more ferociously ascetic, scorched more by fanaticism, or more devastated by fasting and maceration. Such a penitent could pass without fear through solitary places; lions and panthers must have retreated before that body nourished by locusts.

He was a *hadji*, returning from Mecca; he had seen the Black Stone, accomplished the seven sacred evolutions, and drunk water from the Zamzam Well which washes away all sin, and, naked as he was, cared no more for a vizier than a grain of mud attached to his feet.

Chapter 25: The Atmeïdan

The Atmeïdan (*Atmeydani, Sultanahmet Square*), which lies behind the walls of the Seraglio, is the ancient Hippodrome. The Turkish word has precisely the same meaning as the Greek word, and means: an arena for horses. It is a vast square, bordered on one side by the outer wall of the mosque of Sultan Ahmed, which is pierced by bays with grilles, and on the other sides by ruins, and an incoherent series of buildings; along the axis of the square rise the obelisk of Theodosius, the Serpent Column, and the Walled Obelisk, weak vestiges of the magnificence which this splendid enclosure once displayed.

These ruins are almost all that remains, on the surface, of the wonders of ancient Byzantium. The Augustaion (*a ceremonial square*), the Sigma (*a c-shaped section of the walls*), the Octagon (*the emperor's bedchamber*), the Baths of Zeuxippus, of Achilles, and of Honorius, the Golden Mile, the Porticos of the Forum, all are buried under that mantle of dust and oblivion which envelopes dead cities; the work of time has been augmented by the depredations of the barbarians, Latins, French, Turks, and even Greeks. Each successive invasion added to the damage. It is a strange thing, this blind fury of destruction, this stupid hatred directed against stone! It must be an aspect of human nature, since the same trait is present in all ages. It seems that architectural masterpieces offend the eyes of barbarians, as an owl's eyes are offended by the light. The radiance of intellect bothers them without their knowing why, and they extinguish it. Religion also willingly destroys with one hand what it builds with the other, and there have been many religions in Constantinople: Christianity shattered the pagan monuments there, Islam the Christian ones; perhaps the mosques will disappear in their turn before some new creed.

The Hippodrome must have presented a fine spectacle when a dazzling crowd, dressed in gold, purple, and adorned with precious stones, glittered beneath the porticos which surrounded it; spectators passionate about the Greens or the Blues, those charioteer factions whose rivalries agitated the empire and caused sedition. The golden *quadrigae* (*four-horse chariots*), drawn by thoroughbreds, made the azure and vermillion powder, with which the Hippodrome in a show of luxurious refinement was sanded, fly beneath their glittering wheels; while the emperor leaned from the terrace of his palace to applaud his favourite colour. If one can use such an expression about the Byzantine charioteers, the Blues were Tories, the Greens were Whigs, for politics was mixed up in these cabals of the Circus. The Greens even tried to dethrone Justinian, and raise up an emperor of their own, and it took nothing short of Belisarius and an army corps to suppress the uprising.

In the Hippodrome, as in an open-air museum, the spoils of antiquity were gathered together. A population of statues numerous enough to fill a city topped the attics and pedestals. All was marble and bronze. The Horses of Lysippos, the statues of the Emperor Augustus and other emperors, and those of Diana, Juno, Pallas Athene, Helen, Paris, Hercules, of supreme majesty and superhuman beauty, all the finest art of Greece and Rome, seems to have sought a last refuge there. Those bronze steeds from Corinth, carried off by the Venetians, now paw the loggia of St. Mark's (*currently in the interior, and replaced by replicas*); the images of the gods and goddesses, barbarously melted down, were scattered as coinage.

The obelisk of Theodosius is the best preserved of the three monuments still standing in the Hippodrome. It consists of a monolith of pink granite from Syene, about sixty feet high and six feet wide, which tapers to the pyramidion. A single perpendicular line of clearly incised hieroglyphs adorns each of its four faces. As I am not Jean-François Champollion, I cannot tell you what these mysterious emblems mean - probably a dedication to some pharaoh (*Thutmose III*). Where does this enormous block come from? From Heliopolis, say the scholars. But it does not seem to me to date back to the most ancient Egyptian times. Perhaps it is only three thousand years old, which is very young for an obelisk. Also, barely a few grey tints darken its vermillion granite.

The monolith does not rest directly on its pedestal, but is separated from it by four bronze cubes. This marble base is covered with somewhat crude and barbaric bas-reliefs, which prevent one grasping the subjects they represent, triumphs or divinizations of Theodosius and his family. The stiffness of the attitudes, the poor execution and lack of expression of the figures, the piling up of characters without plan or perspective, characterise an era of decadence. The memory of neighbouring Greece is already lost in these shapeless forms. Other bas-reliefs half hidden by the rising ground, but which we know of from the descriptions of earlier writers, reproduce the methods employed in the erection of the obelisk. Here is a singular comparison! Bas-reliefs of the same nature are carved into the base of the Obelisk of Luxor erected on the Place de la Concorde by the engineer Jean-Baptiste Lebas. Inscriptions in Latin and Greek indicate that the obelisk lying on the ground was raised (*in thirty or in thirty-two days respectively*) by Proculus, Prefect of the Praetorium, on the orders of Theodosius, and they celebrate that magnanimous emperor. The Egyptian obelisk, and its Late-Empire base harmonise happily, and produce a fine effect, though the edges of the obelisk are as fresh and clean as if the granite has just been cut, while the base, fifteen hundred years younger, is badly worn.

Not far from the obelisk is the twisted Serpent Column, formed of three coiled and braided serpents spiralling upwards like the fluting of a Solomonic column. The three silver-crested heads of the serpents that formed the capital have disappeared. One tradition has it that Mehmed II, riding across the Hippodrome, struck them down with a blow from a mace or battleaxe, in one of those feats of vigour commonly attributed to sultans; according to others, he cut off only one of the three heads, the second and third were simply broken off for the value of the bronze, which is not surprising when one thinks of the trouble the barbarians took to remove the iron crampons from the blocks of the Coliseum. To destroy a palace to obtain a nail is ever the behaviour of savages.

This column, raised about nine feet above the ground, but with its base buried, seems somewhat slender in appearance amidst the vast space. To it is attributed a noble origin. According to antiquarians, those intertwined serpents once supported, in the temple at Delphi, the golden tripod dedicated by a grateful Greece to Phoebus-Apollo, its divine saviour, after the victory at Plataea, against Xerxes army. Constantine is said to have had the Serpent Column transported from Delphi to his new city. A tradition less in favour, but more probable, in my opinion, if we consider the limited artistic value of the monument, sees in it merely a talisman made by Apollonius of Tyana to ward off serpents. - I leave the reader free to choose between these two origins (*the former tradition was confirmed by the excavation of 1855*).

As for the Walled Obelisk, repaired by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, which was compared with the seven wonders of the world, though at a time, it is true, when the most hyperbolic of exaggerations cost little or nothing, it is now nothing more than a core of masonry, a shapeless pile of stones eroded by the rain, devoured by the sun, cracked with fissures full of dust and cobwebs, and threatening ruin on all sides, with no remaining significance from the point of view of art.

This masonry framework was formerly covered with large plates of embossed gilded bronze with bas-reliefs and ornamentation which, given the weight and value of the metal, must have excited the greed of predators. Thus, the obelisk was soon stripped of its splendid cladding and there remained only a blackened column eighty feet high. This previously golden pyramid, which the paroxysms of that time compared to the Colossus of Rhodes, must indeed have shone magnificently beneath the blue sky of Constantinople, among the splendid monuments of ancient art, above the colonnades of the Circus, crowded with spectators in sumptuous clothes. But, to imagine it, the mind must perform, and complete, the work of restoration.

Formerly the Turks raced their horses here, and practiced throwing the *djerid* (*javelin*) on turf ready prepared for equestrian entertainment; the Reforms, and the introduction of European ways of waging war, have caused this exercise to be abandoned, which is more suited to the irregular riders of the desert, and the steppes of Asia, than regular cavalry regiments trained according to the methods of our Saumur cavalry-school.

At the end of the Atmeïdan is the Et-Meïdan (meat market). It is a fearsome and sinister place, despite the sun flooding it with its cheerful rays. If you examine the half-collapsed building, its walls having preserved traces of fire, you may readily find the marks of cannonballs. The ground, today white and powdery, was once reddened to its depths with blood. It was in the Et-Meïdan that the Massacre of the Janissaries took place, a fiercely romantic painting of which Charles-Émile-Callande de Champmartin sent to the Salon of 1827 (*currently in the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Rochefort*); the great slaughter's setting was worthy of it.

Sultan Mahmud II, feeling, with the instinct of genius, that the Ottoman empire was heading towards ruin, believed he could save it by equipping his army to match those of the Christian kingdoms, and wished to see his troops instructed by Egyptian officers trained in European tactics. This reform, so simple and sensible, aroused insurmountable repugnance among the

Janissaries; their grey moustaches bristled with indignation; the fanatics among them cried profanation, invoking Allah and Muhammad, and the Commander of the Faithful was almost regarded as a *giaour* because of his stubbornness in introducing these diabolical manoeuvres which neither Mehmed II, nor Suleiman I, the Magnificent, had needed in order to achieve their conquests and defend them.

Fortunately, Mahmud, a decisive individual and not easily intimidated, had resolved to conquer or perish in the fight; the insolence of the Janissaries, equal to that of the Roman Praetorian Guard or the Russian Streltsy, could no longer be endured, and their perpetual sedition threatened the throne which they claimed to support. The opportunity was not long in arising. An Egyptian instructor struck a recalcitrant or deliberately clumsy Turkish soldier. Immediately the indignant Janissaries took up the cause of their comrade, overturned their regimental cauldrons (*kazans*) in a sign of revolt, and threatened to set fire to the four corners of the city.

This was, as is known, their way of protesting and showing discontent. They gathered before the palace of Kosru Pasha, their *agha* (*commander*), and loudly demanded the heads of the Grand Vizier and the Mufti, who had approved the 'impious' reforms of Mahmud; but they were not dealing, here, with an angry Sultan only too happy to appease a howling mob by throwing a few heads to it as bait.

On hearing of the insurrection, Sultan Mahmud hastened from Beschick-Tash (*Beşiktaş*), gathered the troops that had remained faithful, summoned the *ulama* and, from the Mosque of Ahmet near the Hippodrome, took the standard of the Prophet, which is only unfurled when the empire is in danger; every good Muslim then owes his assistance to the Commander of the Faithful, for it is a holy war. The abolition of the Janissaries was pronounced.

The Janissaries themselves had taken refuge in the Et-Meïdan, near their barracks; Mahmud's regular troops occupied the adjacent streets, with cannons aimed at the square; the intrepid Sultan rode past the insurgent bands, facing death a thousand times, and ordered them to disperse. This state of things continued; a moment's hesitation might have ruined all. A devoted officer, Kara Dyehennem, fired his pistol at the primer of a cannon which then fired its charge, and grapeshot opened a blood-stained path through the front ranks of the rebels; action was engaged, the artillery thundered from all sides, a well-fed fusillade crackled like hail into the confused masses of the distraught Janissaries, and the battle quickly degenerated into a massacre. It was veritable butchery; no quarter was given, the barracks where the fugitives had taken refuge were set on fire, and those who had escaped the sword perished in the flames. Accounts of the number of dead vary greatly; some put it at six thousand, others at twenty thousand, a few even higher. The corpses were thrown into the sea, and for several months any fish caught, poisoned by human flesh, were inedible.

Sultan Mahmud's resentment did not end there. When one walks in the Field of the Dead at Pera or Scutari, one comes across many a decapitated *cippus* with its marble turban at its foot, like a headless man: these are the tombs of former Janissaries whom death did not shelter from the imperial wrath.

Was this dreadful act of extermination a beneficial or detrimental thing from a political point of view? Did not Mahmud, in killing this great body of men, extinguish one of the living forces of the State, one of the principles of Turkish nationality? Will material progress, if accomplished effectively, replace ancient barbarian energy? Amidst the twilight that falls on declining empires, is the torch of reason worth more than the torch of fanaticism? None can say as yet. But events that all are able to foresee will soon decide the question, and Mahmud's work can then be judged definitively. I have strayed far from the humble work of a literary daguerreotypist. Let me return to my task.

Some distance from the Hippodrome, in the centre of a field strewn with scorched rubble, there opens, at the rear of a kind of mound, the entrance, like a dark mouth, to a dried-up Byzantine cistern. One descends by means of a wooden staircase. The Turks call it Binbirdirek or the Thousand and One Columns, although in reality it only has two hundred and twenty-four. These columns, in white marble, are finished with crude capitals of a barbarous Corinthian order, unworked or rough-hewn, supporting semicircular arches, the rows of which mark out several naves. They have, at a height of three or four feet, a bulge to which the water once rose, and which served as their apparent base when the reservoir was full. The rest of the column then represented a sort of submerged pile. The bed beneath has risen due to the dust of centuries, the rubble of the vault, and all sorts of detritus; for the cistern must once have been deeper: on the capitals one can vaguely distinguish mysterious signs, Byzantine hieroglyphs whose meaning is lost. An *epsilon* and a *phi*, oft repeated, are deemed to mean: 'Euge, Philoxena'. This Cistern of Philoxenos, in fact, served foreigners. It was built by a Roman senator during the reign of Constantine, whose monogram is imprinted on the large Roman bricks of which the vault is composed and on several column shafts. Now, Jews and Armenians have established their silk factories there.

Spinning-wheels and bobbins creak beneath the arches of Constantine's day, and the sound of the looms imitates the murmur of the vanished water; in this underworld, lit by a pale half-light contesting the space with deep shadow, there reigns an icy freshness that grips you, and it was with a keen feeling of pleasure that I rose from the depths of this abyss to the warm light of the sun, pitying with all my heart the poor workers working underground, patiently, like gnomes or kobolds.

A short distance from this cistern, behind Hagia Sophia, there is another called Yerebatan-Sarayi (*the Sunken Palace, also called the Basilica Cistern*). This lacks the silk-mills of Binbirdirek. As soon as you enter, a humid and penetrating vapour, likely to foster coryza, inflammation, and pains in one's side, envelops you in its wet mantle; pitch-black water touched by a few patches of light, and stirred in livid swirls, bathes the greening columns and extends, beneath the shadowy arcades, to a distance the eye cannot fathom, and which the light of torches fails to reach.

Nothing is more sinister or more frightening; the Turks claim that *Djinns*, ghouls and *Afrits* hold their sabbath in this gloomy place, joyfully shaking their bat-like wings, wet with the moisture that drips from the vault. Formerly, people travelled by boat over this subterranean sea. The voyage must have resembled a crossing of the infernal river aboard Charon's ferry. Various boats, doubtless borne on internal currents towards some abyss, never returned from

that dark expedition, forbidden today; one which I would have had no desire to attempt, had it been permitted.

Part VI: Elbicei Atika, Kadi-Keui, Bulgurlu, Büyükdere

Chapter 26: The Elbicei Atika

On the Atmeidan, opposite the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, near the Mecter Hané tent-depot (formerly assigned to the *'mehterhâne,'* or music corps of the Janissaries), stands a Turkish house of rather fine appearance: it is the Elbicei Atika, or Museum of Ancient Ottoman Costume; this Museum, recently opened to the public, is fronted by a courtyard in which fresh vegetation flourishes and water, from a fountain, gurgles into a marble basin. Were there not an employee at the door, charged with collecting the price of the admission tickets, one could believe oneself in the *konak* (mansion) of some *bey*. Nothing is more pleasantly retrospective than this tranquil dressing-room of the old Turkish empire: soft nuances of shadow and the silence of a bygone age bathe its calm sanctuary; by setting foot in the Elbicei-Atika, one retreats from the present into the past.

On the landing, as an ensign or sentry, one first encounters a *yeniçeri-kulluk-neferi* that is to say a soldier of the new corps. In the actual days of the Janissaries, one could not pass by a post of that undisciplined militia without being ransomed more or less; one had to 'cough up', as they say, or be beaten, covered in mud, and heaped with insults. Here, a mannequin, whose head and hands are made of carved and painted wood, displays the old Janissary costume; this violation of the Muslim rule forbidding any reproduction of the human figure, is remarkable, and reveals a weakening of religious prejudice, no doubt brought about by contact with Christian countries; such a museum, in which nearly a hundred and forty figures may be viewed, would not have been possible in the past; now it shocks no one, and often some old Janissary who escaped the massacre (of 1826) dreams there, before these garmented replicas of his comrades-in-arms, and sighs over the good times that are no more.

This *yeniçeri-kulluk-neferi* possesses the air of a jovial scoundrel: a kind of fierce bonhomie breathes in his characterful features, which are accentuated by a long moustache; he seems capable of treating even murder humorously, and there reigns in his pose all the disdainful nonchalance of a privileged corps that thinks itself free to act as it wishes: legs crossed, he plays the *louta* (the *latva*, the Turkish version of the *oud*), a sort of three-stringed guitar, to entertain the corps in its moments of leisure. He wears a red tarbouch, around which is wrapped, like a turban, a piece of plain cloth; a brown jacket whose ends are tucked into a belt; and wide, blue, cloth breeches. Into the belt, at once his arsenal and a convenient pocket, are stuffed his handkerchief, napkin, tobacco-pouch, daggers, yataghans, and pistols. This custom of employing the belt as a hold-all is common to Spain and the Orient, and I remember watching a knife-fight, in Seville, in which the only thing slain was a melon in the *faja* (waistband) of one of the adversaries.

Before the *yeniçeri*, sits a small table covered with old Turkish small change - *aspers*, *paras*, and *piastres*, which are becoming rarer - representing the alms once extorted from the citizens of Constantinople - near it, roasting on a grill, are golden grains grated from corn-cobs, a meal with which Oriental frugality is content. I passed by fearlessly, since he was made of wood, and I had already paid ten piastres at the entrance.

Opposite this alms-seeking Janissary stand a few soldiers of the same corps, in almost similar costume. Once across the threshold, one finds oneself in an oblong room, dimly-lit and furnished with large display cases containing mannequins dressed with perfect care and scrupulous exactitude. This is the Philippe Curtius salon, the Marie Tussaud exhibition, of a vanished world. Here are gathered, like the antediluvian creatures in the Museum of Natural History, the individuals eliminated by Mahmud's coup d'état. Here, lives again, in a kind of motionless afterlife, the whimsical and chimerical Turkey of turbans shaped like pastry-moulds, dolmans edged with catskin, high conical headdresses, jackets with suns on the back, and barbarously extravagant weapons, the Turkey of *mamamouchis* à la Moliere, of melodramas, and of fairy-tales. Only twenty-seven years have passed since the massacre of the Janissaries, yet it seems as if it were a century ago, so radical is the change. Through a violent exercise of will on the part of the great reformer, the old national forms have been annihilated, and costumes which were, so to speak, contemporary have become historical antiquities.

Looking behind the windows at these moustachioed or bearded heads, with fixed gaze, in life-like colours, grimacing away, illuminated by oblique and feeble shafts of light, one experiences a strange impression, a sort of indefinable unease. This crude reality, different from the conjurations of art, disquiets one, through the very illusion it produces; in seeking a transition from statue to living being, one encounters a corpse; these twilight faces, where no muscle quivers, end by frightening one, like the uncovered faces, plastered with make-up, of corpses borne past on their biers. And one comprehends, thus, the terror that masks inspire in children. These long lines of bizarre characters, maintaining the stiff and constrained poses granted them, resemble those folk, petrified through the vengeance of some magician, of whom the Oriental tale speaks. All that is lacking is the tall old fellow with a white beard, the only living being in that realm of the dead, seated on a stone bench at the entrance to the city reading the Koran. He may be represented, if you wish, though in a prosaic manner indeed, by the man who collects the price of the tickets at the door.

I cannot describe, one by one, the hundred and forty figures enclosed in the display cases on the two floors, several of which differ only in the imperceptible details of their costume's cut or colour, and to do so would leave my text bristling with a crowd of Turkish words difficult to read due to their forbidding spelling. The task, moreover, has already been completed, in a manner as precise as it was brilliant, by Georges Noguès, son of the editor-in-chief (*François Noguès*) of the French *Journal de Constantinople*, and with a degree of care that a traveller forced to view the items briefly cannot rival. His catalogue allowed me to put names to the characters I remembered by sight alone, and I hereby do him due justice. This act of homage allows me to borrow with less scruple a few forgotten details.

The Elbicei-Atika consists mainly of costumes from the old house of the Grand Seigneur and various uniforms of the Janissaries. There are also mannequins of artisans, less in number, dressed in the old fashion.

The most senior official of a seraglio is naturally the chief of the eunuchs (*the kizlar agha*). The one imprisoned behind the windows of the Elbicei-Atika, as a specimen of the species, is very splendidly dressed in a pelisse of honour, of flowery ramage brocade, over a fine tunic of red silk, and large trousers held at the waist by a cashmere belt. He wears a red turban with a muslin twist, and yellow morocco-leather boots.

The grand vizier (*the sadrazam*) has a turban of singular shape; conical at the top, edged beneath with four ribs, it is surrounded at its base with rolled muslin which is crossed diagonally and compressed by a narrow band of gold; he wears, like the chief of the eunuchs, a *kürklü* (*fur-trimmed*) kaftan (*coat of honour*) of brocade, adorned with red and green flowers; from his cashmere belt emerges the handle, carved and studded with jewels, of his *khanjar* (*dagger*). The *shaykh al-Islam* (*chief scholar*) and the *kapudan-pasha* (*grand admiral*) are dressed in almost the same manner, with the exception of the turban, composed of a fez of a rich piece of twisted fabric.

There is a thoroughly sacerdotal and Byzantine air about the splendidly strange garments of the *seliktar-agaci*, or chief of the sword-bearers; his turban, of a strange construction, grants him a vague resemblance to a pharaoh wearing the *pschent* (*the double-crown of Upper and Lower Egypt*), and its model seems to have been some hieroglyphic panel brought from ancient Egypt; his robe of gold brocade with silver motifs, cut in the shape of a dalmatic, recalls the priestly chasuble; the sultan's sabre, respectfully enclosed in a purple satin case, rests on his shoulder. After him, there appears a figure dressed in a black robe (*jubba*) with the sleeves slit, and embroidered with gold, and wearing a fez; this is the *bach tchokadar*, a kind of officer charged with carrying the Grand Seigneur's pelisses on his arm during his walks; then comes the *tchaouch aghaci* (*chief usher*), with his robe of gold cloth, his cashmere belt clasped with metal plates and from which springs a whole arsenal; his gold cap terminates sharply in a crescent, one horn in front, one horn behind, a fanciful style that brings to mind the lunar Isis; this chief usher, who would not be out of place at the palace gates of Thebes or Memphis, holds in his hand a steel rod with a bifurcated pommel, similar to a nilometer, another Egyptian resemblance; this rod is the badge of his function. An *agha* of the *serai* appears next, clad in a white silk robe tightened by a belt with gold clasps and surmounted by a cylindrical cap. And the mannequin over there, dressed in a similar manner, except for his gold headdress which flares out at the top in four curves, like a Polish lancer's *czapka*, is a *dilsiz* (*mute*), one of those sinister executors of justice or of private vengeance who passed the fatal silk cord around the necks of rebellious Pashas, and whose silent appearance made the most intrepid pale.

After these are grouped the *serikdji-bachi*, to whom is entrusted the turbans of the Grand Seigneur; the cooks; the gardeners with their red caps, similar to those of Catalans, the crest forming a kind of pocket; the doorkeepers; the *baltadjis* (*axe-bearers*), with curly hair, and Persian caps; the *soulak* (*guard*) in apricot dolman and red trousers, like the tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini when he plays the role of the *Moor of Venice* (see Gioachino Rossini's opera '*Otello*'); and the *peyik* (*halberdier*) in a violet robe, and a rounded cap surmounted by an

aigrette of feathers opened in a fan. The *baltadjis*, the *soulak* and the *peyik* form the special guard of the Sultan and surround him on solemn occasions, at Bayram (*Eid al-Fitr*), at Kurban-Bayrami (*the Feast of the Sacrifice*), and when he attends ceremonies at the mosques.

The series is closed by two fancifully dressed dwarves. These little monsters with the faces of gnomes or kobolds are barely two and a half feet tall, and could take their place honourably alongside Perkeo of Heidelberg, the dwarf of the Elector Palatine Charles III Philip; Stańczyk, the dwarf to three kings of Poland; Maria Bárbola and Nicolasito Pertusato, the dwarves of Philip IV; and Tom Thumb, the gentleman dwarf. They are grotesquely hideous, and madness is revealed by their thick sneering lips, for the role of fool and dwarf readily merge; thought seems hampered in these ill-made heads. Supreme power has always loved its antithesis of supreme abjection. A deformed fool jingling the bells of his *marotte* (*the fool's sceptre with carved head*) on the steps of the throne, provided a contrast which the kings of the Middle Ages could not do without: such is not quite the case in Turkey, where fools are venerated as saints, but it is always pleasant, when one is a radiant sultan, to have near oneself a kind of human ape to accentuate your splendour.

The first of the two wears a yellow robe, fastened with a gold belt, and on his head a kind of cap in the shape of a derisory crown; the second is dressed more simply, his little legs engulfed by wide Mameluke trousers, falling over his microscopic slippers, and bundled in a *biniş* (*gown*) with trailing sleeves; he looks like a child who has dressed, for fun, in his grandfather's clothes. His turban, dark in colour, offers nothing of note. The post of royal dwarf has not fallen into disuse at the court of Turkey: it is still occupied there with honour. In my description of Bayram, I provided a sketch of Sultan Abdülmecid's dwarf, a broadly-built but diminutive monster, dressed as a pasha of the Reform.

Below the same window, one sees an *agha* afflicted by illness, being drawn along by his servants in a sort of wheelbarrow, somewhat reminiscent of Charles V's sedan chair which is preserved in the Armeria in Madrid. Healthy *aghas* now ride in coupés manufactured by Georges Ehrler, or carriages made by Alexandre-François Clochez. Paris and Vienna send their masterpieces of coachwork to Constantinople, from which the *talikas* with their painted and gilded bodies, and the characteristic *arabas* drawn by large grey oxen, will soon vanish completely. Local colour is indeed disappearing from the world.

The rest of the Museum is furnished with the Janissary Corps, who are there in their entirety, as if Sultan Mahmud had not turned cannons on them in the Et-Meïdan Square. There are examples of every rank. But perhaps, before describing the costumes of the Janissaries, it would not be out of place to give an idea of their organisation.

The *yeniçeri* (*new corps*) was instituted by Murad IV, with the aim of providing himself with an elite guard, a special corps, on whose devotion he could count; the nucleus was initially formed from his slaves, and, later, was swelled with prisoners of war and recruits. This epithet of *yeniçeri*, we Europeans, not too familiar with the intonation of Oriental languages, corrupted to Janissaries, which has the defect of implying a different origin, seeming to mean guardians of the door.

The *orta* (corps) of the *yeniçeri* was divided into *odas* (barracks), and its various officers adopted culinary titles that are laughable at first sight, but nevertheless explicable. The soup-maker (*çorbaçı*), the cook (*aşçı*), the kitchen boy (*karaculluçu*), the water carrier (*sakka*), seem singular as military ranks. To match this culinary hierarchy, each *oda*, in addition to its standard, had as its ensign a cauldron marked with the number of the regiment. In days of revolt, these cooking-pots were overturned, and the Sultan turned pale in the depths of his Seraglio; for the *yeniçeri* were not always satisfied with a few heads, and revolt sometimes became revolution. Enjoying high pay, better fed, and strengthened by privileges granted or extorted, the Janissaries had ended by forming a nation within a nation, and their *agha* was one of the most important figures in the empire.

The example of an *agha* exhibited at the Elbicei-Atika, is superbly dressed: the most precious furs adorn his stiff gold pelisse, a fine Indian muslin encircles his turban; his cashmere belt supports a panoply of expensive weapons: damascene blades with jewelled pommels, and pistols with silver or gold butts inlaid with garnets, turquoises and rubies. Elegant slippers of artistically quilted yellow morocco leather complete this noble and rich costume, equal to that of the highest dignitaries.

Next to the *agha*, stands the *santon* (*saint*) Emin Baba Bektashi, patron of the corps; this *santon* blessed the *orta* of *yeniçeri* at its formation, and his memory remained highly venerated. His name was invoked in battles, in times of danger, and at supreme moments. Emin Baba Bektashi, being a holy personage, does not seek to impress one, like the *agha*, by the magnificence of his clothes. His costume, of the simplest, announces a renunciation of earthly vanities: it consists of a kind of white woollen frock tightened with a brown belt, and a fez of whitish felt somewhat similar to the caps of the Whirling Dervishes; this fez lacks a silk tuft, and is bordered with a small band of dark-coloured plush. His trousers, cut short at the knee, reveal the bony and tanned legs of a holy man. A small copper book-horn hangs from his hand. I am not aware of the meaning of that attribute.

Uniforms, as we understand them, were not a part of Ottoman military custom; moreover, fancy was generally given a free rein as regards the costumes of the *yeniçeri*; the ranks were distinguished by some odd sign or other, but the basis of the garment was derived from that worn by the Turks of their day. It would take the pencil of a lithographer, and the brush of an illuminator, rather than the pen of a writer, to render the various cuts and nuances of fabric, all those details which, amidst an overloaded and laborious description, are never very clear to the eye of the reader, however great the effort one makes; I am surprised that not one of the numerous artists who visit Constantinople, has been sufficiently curious as to depict, in an album of watercolours, this precious collection; one could obtain, and with little difficulty, the *firman* necessary to undertake the work in the costume gallery, and the attendant sales would be assured, especially now that minds are turned towards the Orient.

While awaiting the production of such drawings, let me note in passing a few oddities; among others, a *baç karaculluçu*, or head-sculion, whose rank corresponds to that of lieutenant of a company, and who bears on his shoulder, as a badge of his dignity, a gigantic ladle, which one might think borrowed from the dresser of *Gargantua* (see Rabelais' '*Gargantua and Pantagruel*') or *Camacho* (see Cervantes' '*Don Quixote: Camacho's Wedding*'). This strange

weapon ends in a spearhead, doubtless to associate the idea of war with that of cooking; next a *chatir* (*runner*), whose head a braid-maker seems to have used to twine a long piece of white ribbon: the innumerable knots that the fabric makes forming a rim similar to the wings of a rounded hat; and a *yeniçeri-üstaçi* (*senior officer*), flanked by two acolytes and decked out in the most bizarre costume imaginable.

This officer is covered in enormous round metal plates, as large as saucepan lids, attached to his belt, against which other square plates, nielloed, chiselled and of curious work, clank and ring; from the hilt of his sabre hangs a large bronze bell like the one hung around the neck of a leading donkey in Spain; his headdress, rounded into a cap like the upper part of a helm, is adorned with a copper rod similar to that seen on certain morions (*open-faced helmets*) to protect the nose against sabre blows, and from the nape of his neck a stream of grey cloth escapes, which spreads out behind; broad red trousers complete this outfit which looks as uncomfortable as it is baroque. The heralds at ancient tournaments cannot have been more hampered in their massive armour than this unfortunate *yeniçeri-üstaçi* in his parade-dress; The *orta sakaçi* (*chief of the water-carriers*) is no less originally dressed: his round, wide, waistless jacket, cut like a tabard, is clad with interlocking scales of copper; on his shoulders, two protruding bars, covered with metal scales, frame his head in a bizarre manner; a leather water-skin is attached to his back by straps; on his belt is a *martinet* - a cat o' nine tails. Further on, two officers carry the *orta*'s cauldron on a long stick passed through its handle. On this cooking-pot, characters in relief mark the number of the regiment. A detailed description of the candle-lighter, the begging-bowl carrier, the baklava-carriers and the *gracioso* (*entertainer*), with his bearskin and his *tarabouk* (*goblet-drum*), would take too long; Let me simply mention the various figures of *kombaradji* (*bombardiers*) forming part of the corps founded by Humbaraci Ahmet Pasha (*Claude Alexandre, Count of Bonneval*), a famous renegade from the French army, whose tomb still exists at the *tekke* of the Whirling Dervishes of Pera, and who served as a soldier of the Nizam-i Cedid (*New Order; the reformed military corps*), instituted by Sultan Selim III to counterbalance the influence of the Janissaries. It is from the time of the corps' formation, from the remains of the militia of Saint-Jean-d'Acre, that the introduction of this uniform into the Ottoman army dates. The dress of the Nizam-I Cedid closely resembles that of the zouaves and spahis of our army in North-Africa; a few samples of Greek, Armenian, and Arnaut (*Albanian*) costume complete the collection.

Traversing the rooms of the Elbicei-Atika, gazing at those cabinets populated by the ghosts of bygone times, one cannot help feeling somewhat melancholy, and one is led to wonder if it is not an involuntary prescience that has encouraged the Turks to create a museum celebrating this ancient national identity of theirs, which is so seriously threatened today. Current events seem to grant a prophetic meaning to the studious attempt to record, in Europe, the physiognomy of the old Ottoman empire, almost lost to Asia-Minor.

Chapter 27: Kadi-Keui

A walk in Kadi-Keui is a pleasure that the inhabitants of Pera rarely deny themselves on feast-days, especially those folk who are not yet rich enough to own a country house on the Bosphorus amidst the summer palaces of the beys and pashas.

Kadi-Keui ('*village of the judges*') is a small town on the Asian shore facing the Seraglio, at the point where the Sea of Marmara narrows to form the mouth of the Bosphorus. On the site of what is now Kadi-Keui, Chalcedon once stood, the city built by the Megarians under the quasi-legendary Archias, a little after the twenty-third Olympiad (688BC), some six hundred and eighty-five years before Jesus Christ; which is already a respectable degree of antiquity. However, some authors attribute the foundation of Chalcedon to a son of the soothsayer Calchas, on his return from the Trojan War; others to colonists from Chalcis, in Euboea, who earned their new city the epithet of the 'City of the Blind', for having chosen to build there, when they could have occupied the site over which Byzantium later spread. This reproach seems hardly deserved these days, for from Kadi-Keui one has the most admirable view in the world, Constantinople unfolding, on the other shore and through the silvery gauze of a light mist, its magnificent domes, its cupolas and minarets, its mass of colourful houses, interspersed with clumps of trees. If one wishes to enjoy a panoramic view of Cologne, one must visit Deutz, on the opposite bank of the Rhine; to contemplate a fine prospect of Stamboul, there is no better way than to drink a cup of coffee in the port of Kadi-Keui.

There are two modes of transport for making the short crossing, a caique, or the steamboat, which moors near the wooden bridge at Galata. As the journey takes a while, and the current is swift, the latter, the pyroscaphe, is generally preferred. I have used both means, the steamboat being more amusing for the traveller, in that it presents, crowded in a narrow space, a gathering of interesting types who seem as if posed before one. The separation of the sexes has entered so much into the Turkish way of life, that the deck of the steamboat is reserved for female passengers and forms a kind of harem where the Turkish women gather. The Armenian and Greek ladies, when they are alone, also take their places there. The whole deck is covered with low stools, on which one sits, knees to chin; waiters circulate carrying glasses of water or *raki*, *chibouks* and cups of coffee, sweets and little pastries; for in Constantinople there must always be something to nibble on, and sober officials will stop at a street corner to consume a slice of baklava or watermelon if they are hungry.

At the stern, stood a half-dozen Muslim women, led by an old crone and a black North African woman; their fairly-transparent muslin yashmaks revealed pure and regular features, and through the gap large wild black eyes shone, surmounted by thick eyebrows linked by *sürmeh* (*kohl*): their noses, beneath their veils, described a quite aquiline curve, and their chins, perpetually under pressure, receded a little: it is a fault in Turkish beauties; when they are unveiled, the skin surrounding their eyes, which is the only portion of the face exposed to the air, is of a much browner tint than the rest of the skin, and looks like a small tan mask whose effect is to singularly enhance the mother-of-pearl of the sclera (*the whites of the eyes*).

‘But how did you discover this detail?’ the reader will doubtless ask, scenting some affair. In the least Don Juanesque way in the world: wandering through the cemeteries, I occasionally surprised, unwittingly, a woman who was adjusting her yashmak, or had left it open because of the heat, trusting in the solitude of the place; that is all.

These Turkish ladies, who appeared to belong to the middle class, had light-coloured and spotlessly clean *feredjes*, and their legs, smoothed by the preparations employed in the Oriental baths, gleamed like marble between their taffeta leggings and their yellow morocco-leather boots. The legs were generally strong; one should not seek in Turkey that slenderness of the extremities displayed by Arab peoples. One of these women was nursing a child, taking more care to cover her face than her breast, swollen with milk and marbled with blue veins, which the infant’s pink mouth was sucking at, with the nonchalant caprice of sated appetite.

Near the Muslim group sat three beautiful Greek women, their hair charmingly coiffed according to the fashion of their nation; a scrap of blue gauze, dotted with a few metal spangles, covered the back of their heads; their hair, divided in wavy bands like that of antique statues, flowed down the sides of their temples, encircled at the point of departure, by an enormous braid of hair, forming a diadem like a *feroniere* (*a headband, often set with a central gem*). The braid is not always genuine, and some old matrons are casual in this regard, to the extent of it being of a colour other than that of their natural hair. A lady, seated not far from these beauties, displayed a spread of black tresses in which threads of white were visible, and a large reddish-blond braid which had not the least pretension of being rooted to her skull.

Traditional costume is gradually disappearing; and the three young Greeks were dressed in the French style, though their hairstyles and embroidered silk jackets, similar to the *caracos* (*thigh-length jackets with tight sleeves*) of our elegant ladies, endowed them with a sufficiently picturesque air. Their pure, clearly-defined features showed that the Greek types that informed Classical art were simply copies from nature. The human imagination is incapable of originating a single thing, even the monstrous. One could find, without having to search hard, living models akin to those of Phidias, Praxiteles and Lysippos, among the daughters of Eleusis and Megara. Those three lovely girls on the steamboat’s deck were like a triad of virginal Graces.

During the crossing, everyone was smoking furiously, and a thousand bluish spirals joined the black steam from the funnel; the boat, heavily burdened on deck and lightly ballasted in the hold, pitched horribly, and if the voyage had lasted a quarter of an hour longer, there would have been many cases of seasickness, though the water was as smooth as ice.

At last, the *Bangor*, as this dreadful vessel was named, drew up against the stone jetty, displacing a flotilla of caiques, and we disembarked. What one might call the ‘port’ of Kadi-Keui, if the word were not perhaps over-ambitious, is lined with Turkish, Armenian and Greek cafés, always filled by a motley crowd. The Perotes and the Greeks drink large glasses of water whitened with *raki*, the local absinthe; the Muslims swallow small sips of cloudy coffee; the Perotes, Greeks and Turks, without dissent, snort the rose-water from the crystal carafes of their narghiles, as polyglot cries of ‘A light!’ rise above the dull hum of conversation.

Nothing is more pleasant than to inhale the steam from the *tömbeki* (*tobacco*), while seated on the outdoor sofa of one of these cafés and gazing at the crenellated walls of the Seraglio, the houses of Psammathia (*Samatya*), and the massive form of the Castle of the Seven Towers, rendered bluish by distance, on the opposite, European shore; but it was not to enjoy that spectacle that I chose to visit Kadi-Keuî.

I had been invited to lunch by Ludovic, an Armenian from whom I had bought Persian slippers, Lebanese tobacco pouches, scarves of Brousse (*Bursa*) silk woven with gold and silver, and some of those Oriental trinkets without which a traveller arriving from Constantinople is not welcome in Paris. Ludovic owns one of the finest antique shops in the bazaar, of which I have spoken at length in the appropriate place, and he has made a charming home for himself in Kadi-Keuî. Like the merchants of the City of London, those of Constantinople spend the day in their shops, and return each evening to their villa or cottage where they live a family life, leaving all thoughts of business behind, on the threshold.

I followed the main street of Kadi-Keuî to the end, according to the directions I had been given; it is fairly picturesque with its painted houses, its projecting chambers, its overhanging floors, its *moucharabias* with dense grilles and its more modern dwellings where one can witness the results of a leaning towards English or Italian taste. A few white facades, here and there, interrupt the motley array of Armenian and Turkish buildings, and produce not too bad an effect. On the steps of the open doorways beautiful young women were grouped, or seated, who did not flee one's gaze; *talikas*, containing family parties from the countryside, rolled joltingly over the stony paving; Turkish horsemen passed on their Barbary horses, followed by a servant on foot, one hand placed on the rump of his master's mount; Priests, dressed in purple robes similar to those of our college professors, and wearing a judge's mortarboard from which hung a long veil of black gauze, walked with serious steps, stroking their curly beards; animation reigned everywhere.

Once you have crossed the main street, the houses become sparser, and are surrounded by larger gardens. You follow long white walls or plank fences above which the thick leaves of fig trees project in masses, or the wild twigs of garlanded vines.

After walking a while, I saw a white door with a blue frame: it was Ludovic's residence; I entered, and was received by a charming woman with large black eyes, and a youthful, elongated oval face, displaying the typical features of the Armenian people, one of the finest types in the world, and one which I might prefer to the Greek, if the curve of the nose did not become rather too aquiline with age.

Madame Ludovic spoke only her mother tongue, and the conversation between us naturally faltered after the first greetings; I know of nothing more annoying than such a situation, however natural it might be. I thought myself the greatest fool in the world in not knowing Armenian; and yet one can, without a neglected education, be ignorant of that idiom. I reproached myself for not having undertaken, like Lord Byron, a preliminary study of the language at the Mekhitarist (*Armenian Catholic*) Monastery of Saint Lazarus in the Venetian lagoon; but, in conscience, I could not foresee that I would lunch one morning at Kadi-Keuî with a pretty Armenian woman who confessed to neither French, Italian, nor Spanish, the only languages I understood. With a delicate, feminine gesture, Madame Ludovic, cutting short our

mutual embarrassment, led me to a low-ceilinged room where her two beautiful children were playing on a mat. Surely, now that contact between the most diverse peoples is so easy to achieve and so rapid, we should adopt a common, universal, *catholic*, language, French or English, for example, in which to understand one another, because it is shameful for two human beings to find themselves, vis-à-vis one another, reduced to the state of appearing both deaf and dumb. The ancient curse of Babel should be revoked in a civilised world.

The arrival of Ludovic, who speaks French most fluently, restored my use of language, and before lunch he showed me round his house: one could not imagine anything fresher and more attractively simple; the walls and ceilings of the rooms, with their panels and woodwork, were painted in light colours, lilac, sky-blue, straw-yellow, and chamois, bordered by white frames; fine esparto mats from India, replaced in winter by soft carpets from Isfahan and Smyrna, covered the floors; sofas covered with old Turkish fabrics, with unusual and original designs, highlighted here and there with gold and silver threads, and tiles of Morocco leather, set at every corner, tempted one to laziness. A pipe-rack, the pipes with stems of cherry and jasmine, enormous amber mouthpieces, and pink enamelled and gilded clay bowls, and Chinese porcelain pots filled with blond and silky tobacco, promised the smoker the delights of *kief* (*pleasant rest, with or without the partaking of cannabis*); some of those small tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl, like low stools, on which are placed trays bearing pots of jam and sorbets, completed the furnishings.

As it was very hot, we lunched in the open air under a sort of portico facing the garden planted with vines, fig-trees, and pumpkins. Our meal consisted of fish, fried in oil of a particular kind called scorpion-oil in Constantinople, mutton-chops, cucumbers stuffed with minced meat, little honey-cakes, grapes, and other fruit, all washed down with two sorts of Greek wine, one sweet with a slight muscat-grape taste, the other rendered bitter by an infusion from pine cones - a recipe from antiquity - and not unlike Turin vermouth.

The food was brought by an eager little serving-girl of thirteen or fourteen years old, whose bare legs made her wooden soles click on the pebbled mosaic with which the courtyard was paved. She carried the dishes from the stove on which they were ministered to by a large, pot-bellied Armenian with a ruddy face and a parrot's beak of a nose, who was most talented, in a way; for I have eaten nothing better than the stuffed cucumbers prepared by this Asiatic Carême, to whom I express here the satisfaction of a grateful stomach. As culinary pleasures are rare in Turkey, it is well to take note of them.

The meal over, we retired, to take coffee and smoke a pipe, under the large trees which picturesquely border the steep coast of the bay; musicians screeched out some kind of plaint with those guttural intonations, bizarre cadences, and melancholy nasalizations which at first make you feel like laughing, and which end by placing you under a spell after listening to them for a while; the orchestra consisted of a *rebab* (*stringed instrument*), a Dervish flute, and a *tarabouk* (*drum*). The *rebab* player, a big Turk with a bull's neck, nodded his head with an air of inexpressible satisfaction, as if intoxicated by his own music; between his two thin acolytes, he looked like a tumble-toy between two slender Japanese figures.

When we had listened sufficiently to the song of the Janissaries, and the legend of Skanderbeg, we were seized by the idea of attending a performance that the Armenian and

Turkish comedy troupe were giving at Moda-Bournou (now Kadikoy-Moda), very close to Kadi-Keui.

On my return from the Orient, I penned, in a theatrical review, an analysis of the farce of *Franç et Hammal*, which I expect the readers of *La Presse* have forgotten. The matter in hand was a tale of a mysterious beauty, a princess, Boudroulboudour, whose veiled charms, betrayed by the indiscretion of her followers, cause great havoc among the population. Primitive theatre does without sets, quite readily, the naive imaginings of the spectators providing them. Thespis (*the ancient Greek poet and actor*) played his role on a cart, with wine-lees for make-up, and Shakespeare's great historical dramas required no other staging than a post bearing in progression the inscriptions: Castle - Forest - Chamber- Battlefield, according to the scene. At Moda-Bournou, the theatre was an area of beaten earth, shaded by trees, and encircled by the carpets of spectators seated in the Oriental style, and a latticed hut in which the women stood. No wings, no backdrop, no ramp was needed for the present performance '*Sub Jove crudo*' (*under the open sky*).

A canvas tent, similar to the one in which the puppet Guignol makes Polichinelle struggle with the cat and the gendarme, represented the harem for easily-satisfied minds. A young rogue, in a yashmak and a tangle of veils like a Turkish lady, entered it, affecting languid poses, a lascivious waddle and the goose-like gait that obese Muslim women possess when entangled in their large yellow boots, or tottering on their pattens. His entrance caused much laughter, and rightly so, for his imitation was comically exact.

Once this beauty had taken 'her' place in the tent the suitors arrived in crowds to strum their *guzlas* (*single-stringed instruments*) beneath the window through which her head sometimes leaned, revealing two large, heavily blackened eyebrows, and two violent patches of red beneath the eyes: the slaves of the house, armed with clubs, made frequent sorties, and thrashed her adorers, to the great jubilation of the assembly.

It was not the woman whose voice replied to the suitors, but a little old man, all mummified, furrowed and wrinkled, his face framed by a short white beard, whom I might best compare to those coloured terracotta figures, representing yogis or fakirs, that one often sees in the windows of the curio shops on the Quai Voltaire. This grotesque sixty-year-old, lurking at the back of the tent, sang in falsetto, in an impossibly high pitch, quavering airs intended to imitate the woman's voice.

At these shrill yelps, the suitors swooned with delight, believing they heard the music of paradise; they made, through the intermediary of the young 'woman', who laughed beneath her veil, the most passionate declarations and the most extravagant offers to this atrocious old man; the public, in full awareness of their error, squirmed with laughter at the contrast between the words and the person to whom they were addressed. Turkish, according to those who know it well, lends itself, more than any other language, to punning and equivocation; a slight difference of emphasis is enough to change the meaning of a word, and render it comical or obscene, and it is a resource which the actors never fail to employ, no less than do the puppeteers who perform the Karagöz plays.

A trio of rejected lovers forgo what little brains they have and are each afflicted by a tic particular to them: one perpetually moves his head backwards and forwards like those wooden birds set moving by a ball hanging at the end of a thread; the other, to all the questions he is asked, answers with a somersault and an imperturbable *bim bom, bim bom, paf*; the third bears a lantern, hung from the end of an iron rod attached to his turban, and inserts this lantern into every situation where it is not needed, which leads to squabbles, volleys of blows from a stick, hair-tugging, and tumbles with all four limbs in the air, of which the Théâtre des Funambules would be jealous.

Finally the Çelebi (*gentleman*), the Count Almaviva (see Gioachino Rossini's 'The Barber of Seville'), the tenor, the victor, he who has only to show himself to triumph over every beauty, appears; he gives the suitors a general thrashing; Kuchuk-Hanem, Nourmahal, or Mihrimah (or the name, which I forget, of some other beauty who was locked in a tower), blushes, is troubled, opens her veil a little and answers, this time as herself, with a good strong boy's voice, hoarse with the change due to puberty; the instruments rage; young Greeks dressed as women come forward and imitate the lascivious movements of *ghawazis* and *bayadères*, to indicate the wedding feast. At least that is what I thought I understood, from the gestures of the actors, and their outward actions. Perhaps I was as completely mistaken as the listener who on hearing a few bars of a pastoral symphony and mistaking them for those of an oratorio of the Passion, thought the composer's rendering of the call of a quail in the wheat the sighs of the dying Jesus.

Chapter 28: Mount Bulgurlu (*Küçük Çamlıca Hill*) - The Princes' Islands

The theatrical farce over, I hired a *talika* in order to visit Mount Bulgurlu (*Küçük Çamlıca Hill*) which rises some distance from Kadi-Keui, a little behind Scutari (*Üsküdar*), and from the top of which one enjoys an admirable panoramic view of the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara.

The Turks, though properly speaking they have no art, since the Koran prohibits, as idolatry, the representation of living beings, have nonetheless, and to a high degree, a feeling for the picturesque. Wherever there is in a place a beautiful retreat, or a smiling perspective, one is sure to find there a kiosk, a fountain and a group of *osmanlis* enjoying *kief* on their unfurled carpets; they remain there for hours in perfect immobility, fixing their dreamy eyes on the distance, and chasing from time to time, at the corner of their lip, a wisp of bluish smoke. Mount Bulgurlu is frequented mainly by women, who spend days there beneath the trees, in small groups or harems, watching their children play, chatting among themselves, drinking sherbet, or listening to the strange music of itinerant singers.

My *talika*, drawn by a good horse, its driver, on foot, leading it by the bridle, first followed the edge of the sea, the water often brushing its wheels, skirted the houses of Kadi-Keui, scattered along the coast, cut across the large parade ground of Haidar-Pasha, from which the pilgrims bound for Mecca set out each year, crossed the immense cypress grove of the Field of

the Dead, behind Scutari, and began to climb the rather steep slopes of Mount Bulgurlu by a path furrowed by ruts, bristling with pieces of rock, often blocked by tree-roots, and strangled by houses projecting on to the public highway; for, it must be admitted, the Turks are, as regards the construction of viable roads, profoundly careless. Two hundred carriages a day will by-pass a stone in the middle of their path, or crash against it, without a single driver thinking of disturbing the obstacle; but despite the jolts and the enforced slowness of the journey, the road was extremely pleasant, and very lively, to view.

Carriages followed or overtook each other: the *arabas*, travelling at the measured pace of their oxen, pulled along groups of seven or eight women; the *talikas* held four, seated facing each other, their legs crossed on the boards, all extremely well-dressed, their heads adorned with diamonds and other gems, which could be seen shining through the muslin of their veils; sometimes, a favourite of a pasha would spin by in a modern brougham. Although it is perfectly natural, it is always strange to see, at the window of a low coupé, a woman from the harem, wrapped in her oriental draperies, instead of the familiar marble visage of some girl observing the Champs-Élysées; the contrast is so abrupt it shocks like a dissonance in music. There were many horsemen and pedestrians, too, who climbed, more or less cheerfully, the steep slopes of the mountain, performing numerous zigzags on the way.

On a kind of plateau halfway up the hill, beyond which the horses could no longer go, stood a considerable number of carriages, examples of Turkish coachwork, which is always most delightful, waiting for their masters, and forming a most picturesque mix which an artist might have made the subject of a fine painting. I had my *talika* left in a place where I could find it again, and continued the climb. At intervals, on a kind of embankment forming a terrace, in the shade of a clump of trees, stood an Armenian or Turkish family, recognisable by their black or yellow boots and their more or less veiled faces; when I say family, it is understood that I am speaking only of the women. They are never accompanied by the men who congregate separately.

Kahwedjis, with their portable stoves, had installed themselves on the summit of the hill, also sellers of water and sherbet, and traders in sweets and pastries, the obligatory accompaniment to all Turkish pleasures. Nothing could be more pleasant to the eye than the women dressed in pink, green, blue, and lilac, like flowers enamelling the grass as they breathed the cool air in the shade of the plane trees and sycamores; for, though it was very hot, the elevation of the site, and the sea breeze, maintained there a delightful temperature.

Young Greek women, hair crowned with a diadem, had taken one another by the hand and were turning to and fro to a vague and gentle tune like to Félicien David's *Ronde des Astres*. Against the clear background of sky, they resembled the *Procession of the Hours* in the fresco ('*Aurora*') by Guido Reni, in the Rospigliosi Palace in Rome.

The Turkish women regarded them rather disdainfully, not comprehending why people would dance for pleasure, let alone thinking of dancing themselves.

I continued to ascend and reached the clump of seven trees which crowns the mountain like a plume; from there, one's eye commands the entire course of the Bosphorus and looks over the Sea of Marmara speckled by the Princes' Islands, a radiant and marvellous spectacle. Seen

from the heights, the Bosphorus, shining in places between its dusky banks, presents the appearance of a succession of lakes; the curves of the shoreline, and the promontories which advance into the waters, seem to strangle and enclose it from near to far; the undulations of the hills which border this marine flow are of an incomparable elegance; the serpentine line which follows the torso of a beautiful reclining woman, and accentuates her hips, possesses no smoother or more voluptuous a grace.

A silvery transparent light, tender and clear as a ceiling by Paolo Veronese, bathes this immense landscape. To the west, on the European shore, lies Constantinople with its lacework of minarets; to the east, stretches a vast plain marked by a track that leads to the mysterious depths of Asia; to the north, is the mouth of the Black Sea and the Cimmerian regions; to the south, Mount Olympus (*Uludağ, in Bursa province*), Bithynia, the Troad and, to the inward eye that pierces all horizons, Greece and its archipelagos. But what most attracted my gaze was that great, bare, deserted countryside, over which my imagination raced, pursuing the caravans, dreaming of strange adventures and moving encounters.

I descended, after half an hour of silent contemplation, to the plateau occupied by the groups of smokers, women and children. A large circle had formed around a band of Gypsies who were playing the violin and singing ballads in the *Caló* language (*of the Iberian Romani*); their faces the colour of boot-flaps, their long bluish-black hair, their exotic and crazed air, their wildly disordered grimaces, and their picturesquely extravagant rags made me think of Nikolaus Lenau's poem: 'The Three Gypsies,' seven stanzas to rouse a longing for the unknown, and the fiercest of desires for the wandering life. Whence came this ineradicable people, of which identical examples are found in all corners of the world, amidst the various populations through which they pass without mixing with them? From India, no doubt; a pariah tribe that could not accept their hereditary and fatal subjection. I have rarely seen a gypsy encampment without having the desire to join them, and share in their vagabond existence; the savage man exists forever beneath the surface of the civilised, and it only takes a minor circumstance to awaken that secret wish to escape from laws and social convention; it is true that after a week spent sleeping under the stars next to a cart and a fire in the open air, one would miss one's slippers, upholstered armchair, bed with damask curtains, and especially those Chateaubriand fillets washed down with a fine Bordeaux 'returned from India' (*having travelled there and back, supposedly enhancing the wine*), or even quite simply the evening edition of *La Presse* ; but the feeling I express is no less real.

Extreme civilisation weighs on individualism and robs one, as it were, of oneself, in return for the general advantages it procures; thus, I have heard many travellers say that there is no more delightful a sensation than to gallop alone through the desert, at sunrise, with pistols in your saddle-belts and a carbine on your saddle-bow; no one watches over you, but no one hinders you either; freedom reigns in such silence and solitude, and there are only the heavens above you. I myself experienced something similar when crossing certain deserted parts of Spain and Algeria.

I found my *talika* and its driver where I had left them, and the descent began, a rather unpleasant operation, given the steepness of the slope and the state of the road, which I can only compare to a staircase in ruins, half- demolished in places. The *sais* held the head of his

horse, which, at every moment, fell back on its hocks, and whose rump was forever nudged by the body of the carriage; my situation, seated in this box, was like that of a mouse being knocked against the walls of a trap to stun it; jolts that would have unhinged the most firmly-anchored heart sent me flying me forwards when I least expected it; so, although I was rather tired, I decided to descend and follow the carriage on foot.

Arabas and *talikas* full of women and children also made their descent from the Bulgurlu hill: there were bursts of laughter and voices at each new slope, and with every unexpected jolt a whole row of women fell against the opposite row, and rivals thus embraced each other quite involuntarily; the oxen, knees bent, braced themselves as best they could against the roughness of the ground, and the horses descended with the caution of animals accustomed to poor roads; the horsemen galloped freely, as if they were on the plain, sure of their Kurdish or Barbary mounts: it was a charming scene, joyful to the eye, and of a truly Turkish character; though a space of only a few miles separates the Asian from the European shore, the local colour is much better preserved, and one encounters far fewer Franks.

The road having become more or less smooth again, I climbed back into my carriage, to gaze out of the window at the painted houses and cypresses, and the *turbes* which lined the road and sometimes formed an island in the midst of the way, as St.-Mary-le-Strand does in London. My driver took me through Scutari, which we had skirted on the way, and the Haider Pasha training ground, then drove back along the shore to the landing stage of Kadi-Keui, where the *Bangor*, preparing to sail, was belching clouds of black smoke into the blue of the sky.

The passengers' embarkation involved a certain degree of tumult, accompanied by bursts of laughter; an almost perpendicular board serving as the bridge between jetty and boat. The ascent was quite tricky, and it was necessary, as well, to step over the gunwale, which produced a host of little modest, virtuous but rather comical antics; during this perilous passage, more than one European garter gave up its secret; more than one Asian calf betrayed its incognito, despite Turkish jealousy. I only mention this little incident à la Paul de Kock as an example of morality at play; by extending the board three or four feet further, this challenge to feminine modesty would have been avoided; but no one thought of doing so.

Night was falling when the *Bangor* unloaded its human cargo at the Galata landing-stage, after having swayed to and fro like a swing.

As I was beginning to exhaust the curious sights of Constantinople, I resolved to go and pass a few days among the Princes' Islands, a pretty archipelago scattered over the Sea of Marmara, at the entrance to the Bosphorus, which offers a healthy and pleasant trip. The islands are nine in number: Büyükada (*Prinkēpos*), Heybeliada (*Chalke*), Burgazada (*Antigone*), Kinaliada (*Prote*), Sedef (*Terebinthos*), Yassiada (*Plate*), Taysan (*Neandros*), Kasik (*Pita*), and Sivriada (*Oxeia*) plus two or three other islets. Büyükada is the largest and most frequented of these flowers of the sea, which are illuminated by the cheerful Anatolian sun, and fanned by the fresh morning and evening breezes. One reaches them by means of an English or Turkish steamboat in about an hour and a half. The Turkish boat I had chosen had a singular mechanism, the like of which I have never seen anywhere else: the piston, projecting from the deck, rose and fell like a saw operated by two tall sawyers. In spite of this, the English boat outdistanced

us, and well justified the name *Swan* inscribed on its stern in gold letters. Its white hull sped through the water as the real bird does.

The coast of Büyükada presents itself, when one arrives from Constantinople, in the form of a high bank with reddish escarpments, surmounted by a line of houses; wooden ramps or steep paths, tracing acute angles, descend from the cliff to the shore, which is bordered by wooden bathing huts. The firing of a gun announces that the steamer is in sight, and immediately a fleet of caiques and canoes detaches itself from the land to meet the passengers, since the shallowness of the water does not allow boats with a keel of more than a few feet to approach.

A place had been reserved for me in advance in the only inn on the island: a cool, clean wooden house, shaded by tall trees; from its windows the view extended across the sea into an infinite depth of horizon.

Opposite, I could see the island of Heybeliada, its Turkish village reflected in the sea, its mountain capped by a Greek monastery. The water lapped at the escarpment, at whose foot the inn was perched, and one could descend to it in slippers and a dressing gown, and take a delicious bathe, the sandy bed extending quite far out.

At the table d'hôte, which was very well done, a lady was seated, majestically, behind whom stood a superb Greek servant in a Palikar costume embroidered all over in gold and silver, who served his mistress with a seriousness worthy of an English servant. This characterful fellow, more suited to loading blunderbusses and carbines behind a rock than waiting, produced a rather strange effect: I cannot believe wine has ever been poured into a glass in so grandiose a manner. Malicious tongues went so far as to claim that his functions were not limited to this alone, but one should never believe more than half of what is said.

In the evening, the Armenian and Greek women adorned themselves, and promenaded in the narrow space between the houses and the shore: the heaviest and thickest of silk dresses spread in wide folds; diamonds sparkled in the moonlight, and bared arms were laden with those enormous gold bracelets with multiple chains particular to Constantinople, which adornment our jewellers would do well to imitate, since they make the wrist appear slender and flatter the hand.

Armenian families are as fertile as English ones, and it is no rare thing to see a large matron preceded by four or five girls, each one prettier than the next, and as many very lively boys; the hairstyles, and low-cut bodices, give this promenade the appearance of an open-air ballroom; a few Parisian hats are visible, as on the Prado in Madrid, but in small numbers.

In the cafés, which all have terraces overlooking the sea, people drink ices made with snow from the Bithynian Olympus (*Mount Uludağ*), sip small cups of coffee accompanied by glasses of water, and burn tobacco in every way imaginable: chibouks, hookahs, cigars, cigarettes, nothing is missing; the colourful silhouette-puppet Karagöz struggles behind his transparent screen, and delivers his *lazzi* (*jest*s) to the sound of the Basque drum.

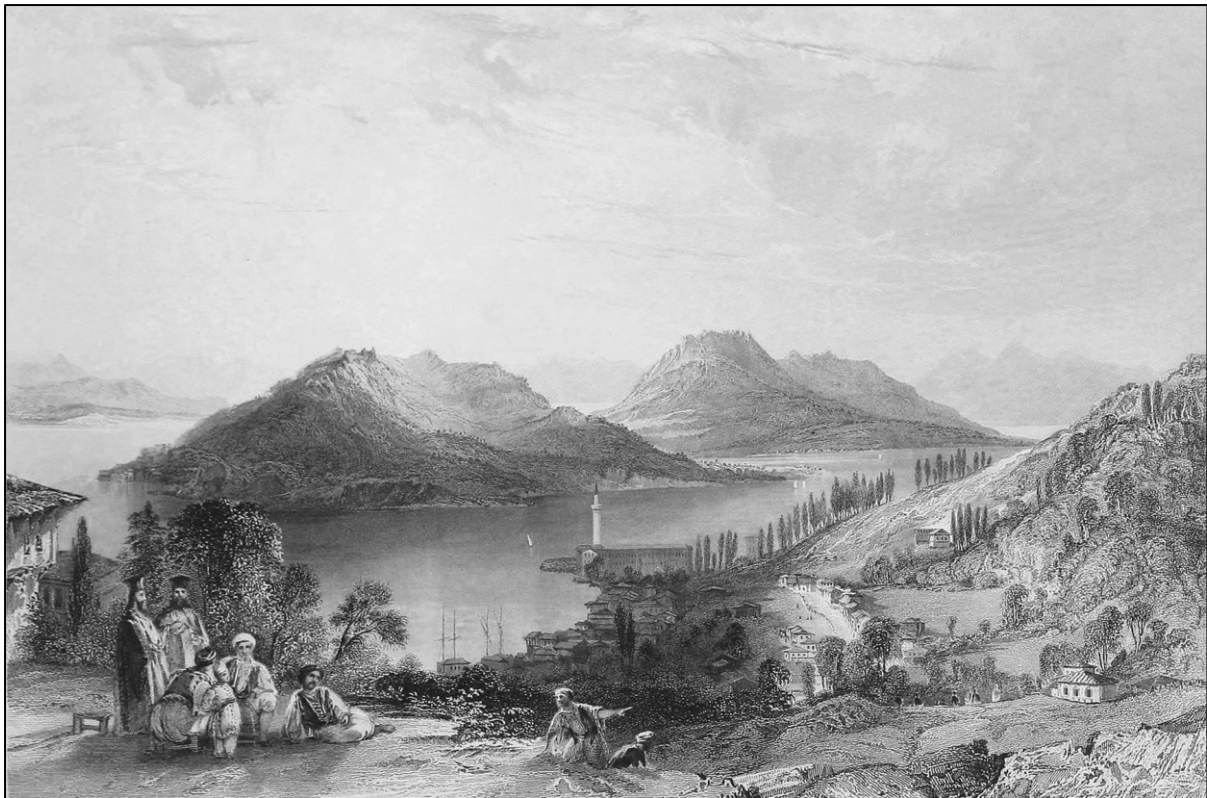
From time to time, a blue glow like that from an electric light strangely illuminates a house facade, a clump of trees, or a group of promenaders; one walker turns and smiles: it is some lover lighting a Bengal fire in honour of his mistress or his fiancée. There must be many lovers

in Büyükada, because no sooner had one light died down than another was rekindled. I employ the word 'mistress', be it understood, as it was used in the age of gallantry, that is, a woman to whom one pays attention, in order to make her love one with the intention of marriage, and nothing else, because the moral law is very rigid here.

Little by little, all return home, and towards midnight the whole island sleeps a peaceful and virtuous sleep; this promenading plus the sea-bathing constitute the pleasures of Büyükada; to vary them, I made a long excursion by donkey into the island's interior, accompanied by an amiable young man of whom I had made the acquaintance at the table d'hôte; we first traversed the village, its market proving very pleasing to the eye with displays of strangely-shaped cucumbers, watermelons, Smyrna melons, tomatoes, peppers, grapes, and unfamiliar produce; then we followed the shore, sometimes closely, sometimes from afar, through plantations of trees, and cultivated fields, to the house of a priest, a very good-natured fellow, who had *raki* and glasses of iced-water served to us by a beautiful girl; then, rounding the island, we came to an old Greek monastery, quite dilapidated, now serving as a hospital for the insane.

Three or four unfortunates in rags, with haggard complexions and a morose air, dragged themselves, accompanied by the clatter of their irons, along the walls of a courtyard flooded with sunlight. At the back of the chapel, for a baksheesh of a few piastres, we were shown inferior-looking icons, with a gold background and brown figures, such as are created on Mount Athos, according to the Byzantine model, for the use of Greek worshippers; inside, the Panagia showed her head and swarthy hands, according to custom, on cutouts of silver or silver-gilt plate, while the infant Jesus appeared as a little black babe, in a tri-lobed halo. Saint George, patron saint of the isle, vanquished the dragon in his long-consecrated pose.

The monastery's situation is admirable: it occupies the platform of a rocky cliff, and from the summit of its terraces, one can plunge in reverie into the twin limitless blues of sky and sea. Next to the monastery, vaulted excavations, half-collapsed, show that it once covered a larger site, and displayed an earlier form of architecture.



The Princes Islands, from the Monastery of the Trinity

We returned by another, wilder route, amidst clumps of myrtles, and clusters of terebinths and pines, which grow naturally and which the inhabitants cut for firewood, and arrived at the inn, to the great satisfaction of our donkeys, who needed to be vigorously spurred and beaten so as not to fall asleep on the way, since we had made the mistake of not employing a donkey-driver, an indispensable person in a caravan of this kind, the Oriental donkey being very contemptuous of the bourgeoisie, and not at all impressed by their blows.

After four or five days, sufficiently edified by the delights of Büyükada, I set off for a trip on the Bosphorus, from the tip of Serai, as far as the entrance to the Black Sea.

Chapter 29: The Bosphorus

The Bosphorus, from Serai Bournou to the entrance to the Black Sea, is furrowed by a perpetual to-ing and fro-ing of steamboats, comparable to that of watermen's boats on the Thames; the *caïdjis*, who formerly reigned as despots over its green and rapid waters, view the steamboats passing by with the same eye as postilions do railway locomotives, and regard Robert Fulton's invention as wholly diabolical. However, there are obstinate Turks still, and cowardly *giaours*, who take caiques to ascend the Bosphorus, just as there are people among

us who, in spite of the rail-tracks on both the left and right banks of the Seine, travel to Versailles in gondolas, and Saint-Cloud in *coucou*-carriages; yet, they are becoming rarer every day, and the Muslims are quite happy to travel by steamboat. The vessels even occupy their thoughts, and there is not a café or barber's shop whose walls are not decorated with several drawings in which some naive artist has depicted, as best they could, a plume of smoke escaping from a funnel and paddle-wheels beating the frothing water.

I embarked at the Galata Bridge over the Golden Horn, the point of departure for the boats stationed there in great numbers, spitting out their black and white smoke which condensed to a permanent cloud covering the light azure of the sky. Neither London Bridge, nor the Hungerford suspension bridge (*Isambard Kingdom Brunel's footbridge of 1845*), over the Thames, present a more animated scene, a more congested tumult, than this, the approach to which is very inconvenient, because, to reach the boats, it is necessary to cross the railing of the boat-bridge, step over planks, and traverse rotten or broken beams.

It is scarcely an easy task to sail from there; yet success is achieved, though not without bumping a little into neighbouring boats, and one sets off; a few strokes of the piston and the open sea is reached, then one glides freely, between a dual line of hills, villages, palaces, kiosks, and gardens, over lively water, mingling emerald and sapphire, in which your wake creates millions of pearls, beneath the loveliest sky in the world and through the bright sunlight which forms rainbows amidst the silvery mist of the paddle-wheels.

There is nothing comparable, in my experience, to this two-hour trip across a strip of azure which marks the boundary between two of the world's continents, Europe and Asia, both visible at the same moment.

The Maiden's Tower soon emerges, its white silhouette so charming in effect against the blue background of the waters: Scutari (*Üsküdar*), and Tophane appear in turn. Above Tophane, the conical verdigris roof of the Galata Tower rises, and on the slopes of the hill are the stone-built houses of the Europeans, and the colourful wooden huts of the Turks. Here and there the spire of a white minaret rises like a ship's mast; surrounded by a few tufts of dark green; the massive buildings housing the various legations reveal their facades, and the Large Field of the Dead unfurls its curtain of cypress trees, against which the artillery barracks and the military college are clearly highlighted. Scutari the 'golden city' (*ancient Chrysopolis*), presents a somewhat similar spectacle; the black trees of a cemetery also serve as a background for the pink houses, and whitewashed mosques; on both shores, death looms darkly behind life, and each city is surrounded by a suburb of tombs; but that thought, which would sadden folk elsewhere, in no way disturbs the fatalistic serenity of the Orient.



Scutari — and the Maiden's Tower

On the European shore, the Ciragan Palace was now visible - a palace initiated by Mahmud II, and built in the European style (*on the site of a former mansion*), with a classical pediment, like that of the Chamber of Deputies in Paris, in the centre of which the Sultan's cypher is intertwined in letters of gold, and two wings supported by Doric columns in Greek marble. I confess I prefer the Arab or Turkish architecture of the Orient; yet this grandiose construction, whose broad white staircase descends to the shore, creates a rather beautiful effect. In front of the palace, a splendid caique with a purple awning, gilded and painted throughout, and bearing a silver bird at the stern, awaited His Highness.

Opposite, beyond Scutari, extends a line of summer palaces, coloured apple green, and shaded by plane-trees, strawberry-trees, and ash-trees, the buildings cheerful despite their latticed windows, and recalling aviaries rather than prisons. These palaces, ranged along the shore, their feet in the water, have rather the appearance of the Vigier Baths or the Deligny swimming-school, on the Seine. The Turkish villas on the Bosphorus often evoke this comparison.

Between Dolma-Baktché (*Dolmabahce*) and Beschick-Tash (*Besiktas*) rises the Venetian façade of the new palace built by Sultan Abdülmecid, of which I have given a particular description. Though its architectural style is not very pure, it is at least curiously and richly capricious, and its white silhouette, sculpted, carved, chiselled, and burdened with infinite ornaments, stands forth elegantly on the shore; it is indeed the palace of a caliph tired of Arab and Persian architecture, who, seeking an alternative to the five orders of architecture (*as*

defined in Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola's text '*Regola delli Cinque Ordini d'Architettura*', 1562), is housed in an immense jewel of marble worked in filigree. Dolma-Baktché was formerly called Jasonion. It is there that Jason landed with his Argonauts, during his expedition in search of the Golden Fleece.

The steamboat hugs the European coast, where the landing-stations are more frequent; one can, on passing the Beschick-Tash café, see the smokers squatting in latticed rooms suspended over the water.

We soon left behind Orta-Kieuï (*Ortakoy*), and Kourou-Tchesmé (*Kurucesme*), which border the sea, and behind which rise, in undulating waves, hills dotted with trees, gardens, houses and villages of the most cheerful appearance.

From one village to another, palaces and summer residences stretch in an uninterrupted quay. The Valide Sultana (*the Sultan's mother*), the Sultan's sisters, the viziers, ministers, pashas, and noble personages, have all built charming dwellings there, in a perfect harmony of Oriental comfort, which bears no resemblance to the English version, but serves them well.

The palaces are of wood, with the exception of the columns, which are usually cut from a single block of Marmara marble, or pillaged from the remains of ancient buildings. But they are no less elegant in their transient grace, with their overhanging floors, projections and retreats, kiosks with Chinese roofs, trellised pavilions, terraces decorated with vases, and their fresh colour constantly renewed. Amidst the cedar-wood grilles, which cover the windows of the apartments reserved for women, round holes gape, akin to those made in theatre curtains through which the cast can inspect the auditorium and audience; it is through these that the nonchalant beauties seated on carpets, can watch the ships, steamboats and caiques sail by, without themselves being seen, while chewing mastic from Chios to keep their teeth white.

A narrow granite quay, forming a towpath, separates these pretty dwellings from the sea. Passing by, one feels, in spite of oneself, a vague desire to do as *Hassan*, Alfred de Musset's hero, did (*see his poem 'Namouna' of 1832, Canto I, verse XLII*), and throw his cap over the windmills in order to take the fez.

Near Arnaout-Keuï (*Arnavutköy*), the water of the Bosphorus boils like a cauldron because of its rapid flow, called the *mega reuma* (*the great current*): the blue water flies like an arrow beside the stones of the quay; however robust their sun-tanned arms may be, the *caïdjis* feel the oar bend in their hands like the blade of a fan, and were they to fight against that imperious flow, the oar would shatter like glass. The Bosphorus is full of these currents, whose directions vary, that give it the appearance of a river rather than an arm of the sea.

In those reaches, a piece of rope is thrown from the boat to the shore; three or four men harness themselves to it like horses, and, bending their strong shoulders, tow the boat, whose prow carves out ribbons of white foam.

Once the rapids are passed, the oars are taken up again and the calmer water provides easy passage. At the foot of the houses, one frequently sees groups of three or four Turkish women, crouched beside their children at play; on the quay, young Greek ladies hold hands as they walk, and cast curious glances at the European traveller; men pass by on horseback, sailors drag a caique back into its vaulted boathouse; figures to view are rarely lacking.

My readers are now sufficiently familiar with the local architecture that there is no need of a further description of the houses of Arnaout-Keui. I will, however, note as of interest some old Armenian dwellings painted black, formerly the obligatory colour, lighter hues belonging by right to the Turks, ox-blood red or antique red to the Greeks; today everyone can paint their house as they please, other than in green, the colour of Islam, of the *hadjis* and the descendants of the Prophet.

On the coast of Asia, more densely-wooded and shady than the European shore, villages, palaces and kiosks follow one another, a little less closely-packed perhaps, but still quite near to one another. These are Kous-Goundjouk (*Kuzguncuk*), Stavros (*Istavroz*)-Beylerbeyi, where Mahmud II had a summer residence built, Tchengel-Keui (*Cengelkoy*), Vani-Keui (*Vanikoy*) and, opposite Bebek, the Sweet-Waters of Asia (*Goksu*).

A charming fountain in white marble, embroidered with arabesques, and decorated with inscriptions in gold letters, and topped by a large roof with a pronounced overhang, and small domes surmounted by crescents, can be seen from the sea, highlighted against a background of opulent verdure, indicating to the traveller that favourite Ottoman promenade. A vast lawn, velvety with fresh grass, framed by ash-trees, plane-trees and sycamores, is encumbered, on Friday, by *arabas* and *talikas*, and there one can see the idle beauties of the harems stretched out on Smyrna carpets.

Black eunuchs, tapping their white trousers with the ends of their whips, walk between the crouching groups, watching for some furtive glance, some gesture of communication, especially if there is a *giaour* there trying to penetrate, from afar, the mysteries of the *yashmak* or the *feredje*; sometimes the women tie shawls to tree branches and rock their children in these improvised hammocks; others eat rose-jam or drink snow-water; some employ a narghile, or smoke cigarettes; all babble or gossip about the Frankish ladies, who are so brazen, who show themselves with their faces uncovered, and walk beside men, in the streets.

Further along the coast, Bulgarian peasants in their antique *sayons*, their bonnets surrounded by enormous fur crowns, perform their national dances in hopes of baksheesh. The *kahwedjis* prepare their coffee in the open air; Jewish tradesmen, their robes split at the sides, their turbans speckled with black like penwipers, offer various small items to the passers-by, with that humble air of the Jews of the Orient, always bowing from fear of being insulted; and the *caïdjis* seated on the edge of the quay, legs dangling, watch their boats from the corner of an eye.

It would take too long to describe, one by one, all those villages that follow one another, and resemble one another with nigh-imperceptible variations. A row of colourful wooden houses, like some unboxed toy-village from Nuremberg, is forever extending itself along a quay, or dipping its feet, at a stroke, in the water wherever a towpath is lacking, highlighted against a curtain of rich greenery from which rises the chalky minaret of a shrine, or a small mosque; beyond, the hills, their slopes gentle, and managed, rise harmoniously, washed with azure beneath the bright sky; sometimes one might wish for a steeper escarpment, an arid cliff, a bone of rock piercing the epidermis of the earth; for all is really too graceful, too cheerful, too coquettish, too well-combed; it would benefit, here and there, from a few bold, accentuated touches to serve as a foil.

At certain points along the shore, chicken-coops of a kind, of strange and picturesque construction are perched, each on a scaffolding of poles, in which fishermen stand, watching for the passage of shoals of fish, so as to announce the right moment to cast, and haul in, their nets; sometimes they happen to fall asleep and tumble head-first from their aerial perches into the water, where they drown without waking. Their sentry-boxes, similar to the nests of aquatic birds, seem to have been built expressly to provide foregrounds for artists.

At one point, the two shores are considerably closer together. Here is the place where Darius I led his army, during his expedition against the Scythians, over a bridge constructed by Mandrocles of Samos. Seven hundred thousand men marched across, vast regiments of the hordes of Asia, with their exotic faces, curious weapons, and fabulous accoutrements, cavalry-troops mingling with elephants and camels. On two stone columns, erected at the head of the bridge, were engraved lists of all the peoples marching in Darius' wake. These columns rose on the very spot occupied by the fortress of Guzeldjé-Hissar (*Guzelce Hisar, or Anadoluhisari*) built by Bajezid I, Bayezid-Yilderim the Thunderbolt. Mandrocles, as Herodotus relates (*in 'The Histories' Book IV, chapter 88*) depicted this crossing on a board which he hung in the temple of Hera, on Samos, his native isle, with this inscription: 'Mandrocles, having built a bridge over the fish-filled Bosphorus, dedicated the drawing to Hera; by carrying out this work of King Darius, Mandrocles procured glory for the Samians, and for himself a crown.' The Bosphorus, at this place, is eight hundred metres wide, and it is this way that the Persians, Goths, Latins and Turks passed: the invasions, whether they came from Asia or from Europe, followed the same route, all those great overflows of peoples coursed along the same channel, marching in the wheel-ruts left by Darius.

The fortress of Europe, Rumelihisari, also called Boğazkesen (*Cutter of the Strait*), is a fine sight on the slopes of the hill with its white towers of unequal height and its crenellated walls. The three large towers, and the smaller one near the shore outline, in reverse, according to Turkish script, the four letters, MHMD, an abbreviation of the name of their founder, Mehmed II. This architectural rebus, not readily noticed, brings to mind the plan of the Escorial Palace, north of Madrid which, in turn, represents the gridiron of Saint Lawrence, in whose honour the monastery was built. One is only aware of this curiosity if informed of it beforehand. The Fortress of Europe faces the Castle of Asia (*Anadoluhisari*), which I mentioned before.

Near Rumeli-Hisar there is a cemetery whose tall black cypresses and white *cippi* are reflected gaily in the azure waters of the sea, at the sight of which one might wish to be buried there, so cheerful, flowery and perfumed is the place. The dead can surely feel no ennui, lying as they do in this fresh garden brightened by the sun, and animated by birdsong.

The steamboat, after passing Balta-Liman (*Baltalimani*), Steneh, Yeni-Keui (*Yenikoy*), and Kalender, stops at Therapia (*Tarabya*), a town whose name means *healing* in Greek, and which justifies its medicinal appellation by the healthiness of its air; it is there that the French embassy has its summer palace. In the graceful little gulf which adjoins it, a golden cup filled with sapphires, Medea, returning from Colchis with Jason, went ashore, and there unpacked the box containing her philtres and magical drugs, hence the name of *Pharmakia* which Therapia formerly bore.

Therapia is a delightful place in which to stay; its quay is lined with cafés decorated with a certain degree of luxury, a rare thing in Turkey, as regards inns, pleasure-houses and gardens. In a passage leading to the landing stage, I noticed in the stones of the wall two marble torsos, one of a man dressed in an antique cuirass, the other of a woman, veiled in rather crude draperies, the barbarian builders having embedded them in the middle of the rubble like any common material to hand.

In the harbour the corvette *Chaptal* was anchored, commanded by Monsieur Poultier, whom I went to visit, and who received me with the affectionate good nature which is characteristic of him, and the exquisite politeness common to all naval officers.

The palace housing the French Embassy, which Pierre-Louis Renaud (*architect of the Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris*) ought to rebuild with more solidity, richness, and taste, is a large Turkish-style construction, all in wood and rammed earth, devoid of any architectural merit, but vast, airy, comfortable, cool, sheltered from the most violent heat of summer, and in the most admirable situation in the world.

Behind the palace are terraced gardens, planted with centuries-old trees of prodigious height, endlessly agitated by the breezes of the Black Sea. From the upper embankment, one enjoys a marvellous perspective. The shore of Asia-Minor displays before your eyes the cool shades of the 'Waters of the Sultana', further away are the bluish heights of the Giant's Mountain (*Yuşa Tepesi*), where tradition places the Bed of Hercules. On the shore of Europe, Buyuk-Déré (*Büyükdere*) reveals its graceful curve, and the Bosphorus, past Roumeli-Kavak (*Rumelikavagi, on the European shore*), and Anadoli-Kavak (*Anadolu Kavagi, on the Asian shore*), widens out beyond the Cyanean Islands (*the Symplegades*) of myth, identified with two small rocky islets, and is lost in the Black Sea. White sails come and go like seabirds, and the mind wanders in an infinite dream.

Chapter 30: Buyuk-Déré (*Büyükdere*)

Buyuk-Déré (*Büyükdere*), which can be seen from the terrace of Therapia (*Tarabaya*), is one of the most charming villages in which to enjoy oneself, in all the world. The coast is cut away at this point, and describes an arc against which the waves die in gentle undulations. Elegant dwellings, among which one notes the summer-palace of the Russian Embassy, rise on the shore, against a backdrop of green gardens, at the foot of the last ridges of hills which plunge to form the bed of the Bosphorus; the rich merchants of Constantinople own country-houses there to which, every evening, the steamboat brings them, their business affairs over, and from which they depart again each morning.

On the beach of Buyuk-Déré, after sunset, beautiful ladies, Armenian and Greek, dressed in their finest clothes, promenade. The lights of the cafés and houses mingle in the water with a silver trail of moonlight and the reflections of the stars; a breeze saturated with fresh perfume gently blows, rendering the air like the breeze from a fan in the invisible hand of night;

orchestras of Hungarian musicians play echoing Strauss waltzes, and the *bulbul* (a Persian name for the nightingale, which is not of the similarly-named bulbul species) hidden amidst the tufts of myrtle, sings the poem of his love for the rose. After a hot summer day, the body, revived by this balsamic atmosphere, feels a delicious well-being, and it is only with regret that one retires to bed.

The newly-established hotel at Buyuk-Déré, made necessary by the influx of travellers seeking somewhere to stay for a night, or wishing not to abuse the hospitality of their friends in Constantinople, is very well managed; it has a large garden attached, in which a superb plane-tree flourishes, beneath the branches of which a hut has been erected wherein I lunched, sheltered by a parasol of silky, serrated leaves. As I waxed ecstatic about the size of this tree, I was informed that in a meadow, at the end of the main street of Buyuk-Déré, there was a yet more enormous one, known as the Plane-Tree of Godefroy de Bouillon (*a leader of the First Crusade, and King of Jerusalem 1099-1100*).

I went to visit it, and thought at first it was a grove of trees rather than a single specimen: the trunk, composed of an agglomeration of seven or eight boles locked together, resembled a tower collapsed in places; enormous roots, like boa-constrictors half-vanished to their lairs, attached it to the ground; its extended branches looked more like horizontal trees than simple outgrowths; and black caverns, formed by decay, gaped in its flanks, the wood having turned to dust beneath the bark. Shepherds sheltered there as in a cave, and lit a fire inside, without the giant plant paying any more attention to it than to the ants that moved over its rough surface raised in blades. Nothing is more picturesquely majestic than this monstrous mass of foliage over which the centuries have coursed like drops of rain, and which has seen the tents of those warriors sung by Tasso in his *Jerusalem Delivered* rise in its shade. But let me not abandon myself to poetry; here is the history which, as usual, contradicts tradition; scholars claim that Godfrey of Bouillon never camped beneath this plane tree, and they offer as proof a passage from Anna Comnena (*see the 'Alexiad', Book X, Chapter IX*), contemporary with the facts, which contradicts the legend: 'Then Count Godfrey of Bouillon, having made the crossing with other Counts and an army, composed of ten thousand cavalry and seventy thousand infantrymen, arrived at the great city, and ranged his troops in the vicinity of the Propontis, from the Cosmidium bridge to Saint-Phocas.' This is clear, and authoritative; but, since the legend, despite the texts of scholars, must be maintained as correct, it is said that a certain Count Raoul established his camp at Buyuk-Déré with the other Latin crusaders, while waiting to pass into Asia-Minor; and, the precise memory of the event having been lost, the centuries-old plane tree was baptised with the better-known name of Godefroy de Bouillon, which, as far as the people here were concerned, evoked thoughts of the crusades more forcefully.

Whatever the facts, the thousand-year-old tree is still standing there, full of bird's nests, and rays of sunlight, the years falling at its feet like leaves, growing vaster and more robust with the centuries, while the desert wind has long since scattered the bones of the crusaders, reduced to powder amidst the sands of Palestine.

When I visited the plane-tree of Godefroy or Raoul, an unharnessed *araba* was standing beneath its branches. The oxen, freed from the yoke, knelt in the grass, ruminating gravely with

an air of serene beatitude, shaking filaments of silvery saliva, from time to time, from their black muzzles.

The drivers were cooking their frugal meal inside one of the cracks in the tree, a kind of natural chimney with a hearth made of two stones: it was a charmingly grouped and composed picture. I longed to go and fetch Théodore Frère from his studio in Buyuk-Déré so that he might do a watercolour sketch of it; but the *araba* would have left, or the shaft of light that illuminated the scene so picturesquely would have vanished, before the artist arrived. Besides, Frère has thousands of similar scenes in his portfolio, scenes frequently reproduced in Oriental life.

The *Charlemagne* was anchored at Therapia, opposite the French Embassy, which was holding a party for the sailors. Boats were constantly passing from ship to shore, disembarking the crew, composed of around twelve hundred men, of whom only the essential guards had been kept on board; immense tables had been placed beneath the large trees, in the embassy gardens; and, on the terrace, carpenters from the *Charlemagne* had built a theatre with pavilions and sailcloth, on the pediment of which an eagle, executed very finely in tempera, fluttered its wings above warlike naval emblems. The sailors were expert at everything: they had built the theatre, and now performed a vaudeville like professional actors; Étienne Arnal is no funnier in *Past Midnight* (*'Passe Minuit, L'Homme Blast, 1843'*) than the topman, at Therapia, entrusted with the role. In the other vaudeville turn, whose name escapes me, young beardless cabin-boys or very clean-shaven sailors took the roles of women, as on the ancient stage: their false braids of blonde hair, the complementary charms which were not lacking and which would have aroused the gallantry of *Sganarelle* (see Molière's play of that name), the masculine air which they reverted to without thinking, amidst their affectations, of their supposed allure, their abrupt steps embarrassed by long skirts, their alternations of falsetto and bass, and their faces, burnt by the suns of every land, framed in pretentious bonnets with tulle ruffles, produced the most extravagantly comic effect imaginable. The audience almost died of laughter. It was composed of the embassy staff, attachés from other legations, bankers, wealthy merchants, and other important personages of Pera; the women were dressed as if for a performance at the Théâtre-Italien, and their beautiful dresses produced a charming effect in the bright sunlight.

After the comedy, the meal took place, a gigantic banquet, a prodigious Gargantuan feast, a colossal *Camacho's Wedding* (see Cervantes' *'Don Quixote', Chapters 20-21*), a combined effort by the embassy chef and the cook from the *Charlemagne*, helped by an army of Turkish, Armenian, Greek, Jewish, Italian, and Marseille kitchen-boys. In the evening, the guests strolled gaily on the quayside, in small groups of a dozen or so, dancing new *cachuchas* more high-stepping than those of the ballet and flamenco dancer Petra-Camara, while singing songs which will doubtless not be admitted to the album of French popular songs, but are none the less of singular poetry and most unexpected originality.

The weather was wonderfully fine, and I resolved to return to Constantinople that same evening, in a two-oared caique, manned by a pair of sturdy Arnauts (*Albanians*), with shaved temples and cheeks, and long blond moustaches; although it was past ten o'clock when I left, the sky was perfectly clear, and certainly brighter than in London at midday; it was not night, but rather a bluish day of infinite softness and transparency. I settled myself in the stern,

carefully-balanced, my overcoat buttoned to the collar, for the dew was falling in a fine silvery mist, like a shower of nocturnal tears from the stars, and the floor of the boat was all wet. My Arnauts had thrown jackets over their striped gauze shirts, and we began the downward passage.

The caique, aided by the current and driven by four vigorous arms, sped almost as quickly as a steamboat amidst the luminous trembling of the water dotted with millions of sparks; the hills and capes of the shore cast great violet shadows which contrasted with the quicksilver of the waves, against which the silhouettes of the ships at anchor, with their furled yards and delicate rigging, were outlined like black paper cut-outs. A few lights shone here and there, on board the vessels, or from the windows of the riverside villages. No other noise could be heard than the rhythmic breathing of the *caïdjis*, the regular rhythm of the oars, the lapping of the water, and the distant barking of a few alert dogs.

From time to time a meteor would cross the sky, and flare like a rocket in some firework display. The Milky Way unrolled its whitish ribbon, with a brilliance and clarity unknown to our foggy northern nights; the stars shone even within the moon's halo. It was wondrous in its quiet magnificence, and its serene splendour. As I contemplated this lapis lazuli vault veined with gold, I asked myself: 'Why is the sky so splendid while the earth sleeps, and why do the stars only wake as one's eyes close? This fairy-tale illumination no one sees; it lights up only for the scotopic pupils of owls, bats, and cats. Do the heavens despise humanity to such an extent that they only unfurl their most beautiful canvases after the spectators have retired to bed? It might seem unflattering to human pride; but the earth is only an imperceptible speck, a grain of mustard-seed lost in the immensity, and, as Victor Hugo says (*see 'Le Rhin', Letter IV*): 'the default state of the heavens is night'.

One o'clock was striking when my boat landed at Tophane. My lantern lit, I climbed the deserted streets, taking care not to tread on the tribes of sleeping dogs who whined feebly as I passed, and returned to my lodgings in the 'Field of the Dead' of Pera, exhausted, but delighted.

The next day, continuing my perambulations, I visited the Fresh Waters of Europe, at the inner end of the Golden Horn. Crossing three boat-bridges, the last of which, completed quite recently, was paid for by a rich Armenian, I skirted the holds of the maritime arsenal, where beneath the roofs of the sheds are outlined ships' carcasses, like to the skeletons of sperm and baleen whales, then passed between Eyüp and Pim-Pacha (*Sütlüce*), and soon entered the archipelago of small, low, flat islands that divide the mouths of the Cydaris and Barbysus, which meet for a brief stretch before flowing into the sea. The Turkish names substituted for these harmonious appellations are the Ali-Bey-Keui (*Ali Bey Suyu*) and the Sou-Kiat-Hana (*Kâğıthane Suyu*), respectively.

Hérons and storks, their beaks resting on their crops, one leg folded beneath their belly, watch you pass by with a friendly air; gulls brush you with their wings, while a kite describes circles above your head. As one advances, the sounds of Constantinople die away, solitude reigns, and the countryside succeeds the city in imperceptible stages. No one crosses the elegant Chinese bridges spanning the Barbysus, which one might take for one of those artificial streams in English landscaped gardens.

The Fresh Waters of Europe are frequented more in winter. The Sultan has a kiosk there with artificial waters and waterfalls, flanked by pavilions in a charming Turkish style. This residence was built by Mahmud; but, as it is almost never inhabited, or repaired, it is deteriorating through neglect, and has already fallen almost to ruins. The canal is silted, the disjointed stones allow water to escape, and parasitic plants are mingling with the sculpted arabesques. It is said that Mahmud, who had arranged this charming nest for an adored odalisque, no longer wished to return there after an untimely death had overtaken the young woman. Since that time, a veil of melancholy seems to hang over this deserted palace buried in masses of elms, ash-trees, walnut-trees, sycamores and plane-trees, which seem anxious to conceal it from the traveller's eyes, like that dense forest surrounding Sleeping Beauty's castle, and the vast weeping willows shake their foliate tears sadly over the water.

The day I walked there, no one was about, though the walk was no less pleasant for that; and, after wandering for some time in the solitary shade, I stopped at a little café for some yoghurt with a piece of bread, a frugal meal which my appetite, whetted by the brisk sea air, greatly needed.

Instead of returning by caique, I took one of those hired horses which are stationed at every corner of the square, and went back up through Pim-Pacha, Haas-Keuï and Cassim-Pacha (*Kasimpaşa*), to San-Dimitri, the Greek village (*around the church of Aya Dimitri Kilisesi, Hagios Demetrios*), near the Large Field of the Dead of Pera, and, passing vast extents of bare ground, arrived at the Ock-Meidani (*Okmeydani*), which from a distance one would take for a cemetery, given the multitude of small marble columns with which it bristles.



Constantinople, from Cassim Pasha

This is the place where the Sultans used to practice with the *djerid* (*throwing-spear*) and these little monuments are intended to perpetuate the memory of extraordinary throws, and mark the distances achieved. They are very simple indeed, their only decoration being an inscription in Turkish lettering, and sometimes, at the top, a star in gilded copper. The *djerid* has fallen into disuse, and the most modern of these columns already date back to a previous age. The old customs are disappearing and will soon be nothing more than memories.

I had been wandering about Constantinople for seventy-two whole days, and knew every nook and cranny. It is doubtless not a long enough time to study the character and customs of a people, but it is enough to grasp the picturesque physiognomy of a city, and such was the sole aim of my journey. Life takes place behind walls in the Orient, religious prejudice and habit prevent one from penetrating there. To gain command of the language is difficult, and one must be prepared to study it for seven or eight years; I was therefore forced to be content with the external panorama. Prolonging my stay by a few weeks would have taught me no more, and besides I was beginning to thirst for paintings, statues, and works of art. The eternal masked-ball in the streets had ended by rendering me impatient. I had seen enough veils; I longed to view faces.

The air of mystery, which at first stirs the imagination, becomes wearisome in the long run, once one has realised that there is no hope of its being dispelled. One soon yields, and only casts distracted glances at the phantoms that parade nearby, and, boredom overcomes one all the more swiftly, since the Frankish society of Pera, composed of doubtless very respectable merchants, provides scant amusement for a poet. So, I departed to my cabin aboard an Austrian vessel, the *Imperatore*, so as to travel to Athens, via the connecting route from Syros, and visit Corinth, the Gulf of Lepanto (*the Gulf of Corinth*), Patras, Corfu and the mountains of Chimaira (*Himarë on the coast of Albania, below the Ceraunian Mountains*), eventually reaching Trieste, by skirting the shores of the Adriatic.



Pass and Waterfall in the Balkan Mountains

I could already see, in dream, the white colonnade, with its azure interstices, of the Parthenon, shining from the rock of the Acropolis, while the minarets of Hagia Sophia no longer gave me pleasure. My mind, set on a different goal, was no longer impressed by its current surroundings. I departed and, though happy to do so, gazed one last time towards Constantinople, fading on the horizon, with that indefinable melancholy which grips the heart when one leaves a city one will likely never see again.

The End of Gautier's 'Constantinople'