# Alphonse de Lamartine

## Travels in the Near East (*Voyage en Orient, 1832-33*)

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# Part I: Departure from Marseille

## Translator's Introduction

Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) author, poet, and statesman was a major representative of the French Romantic movement in poetry, and a traveller and historian of note.

He was born in Mâcon, Burgundy, into a family of provincial nobility, spending his youth on the family estate. His father, Pierre de Lamartine, the Chevalier de Pratz, was imprisoned during the Reign of Terror, and was fortunate to escape the guillotine. Lamartine was educated at the college at Belley (*near Lac du Bourget*), which was maintained by the Jesuits though they were suppressed in France at that time.

Though he had aspirations to enter the diplomatic corps, he was unable to do so, due to family sentiment, until 1814 and the restoration of the monarchy; he then served in Louis XVIII's bodyguard. During the Hundred Days, he emigrated to Switzerland, and following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo and the second Bourbon Restoration, he abandoned the military profession.

In 1816, in ill-health, he visited the spa of Aix-les-Bains, where, beside Lake Bourget, he met the desperately ill Julie Charles, with whom he fell in love. Through her Paris connections, he was able to find a position in the capital. After her death in December 1817, Lamartine, wrote a number of poems in her memory. In 1820 Lamartine married Maria Ann Birch, a young Englishwoman connected to the Churchill family, and finally joined the diplomatic corps, as secretary to the French embassy at Naples. His first collection of poems, *Les Méditations Poétiques*, in which Romanticism, sincerity, sentiment, and religiosity mingled, published that year, brought him instant fame. Between late 1826 and mid-1828 he was attaché to the embassy, and then chargé d'affaires, in Florence. He abandoned his diplomatic career in 1830 and entered politics, being elected as a member of the Chamber of Deputies in 1833.

In 1835, Lamartine published the journal of his 1832-33 travels in the Near East, *Voyage en Orient*, during the course of which travels his ten-year old daughter Julia had died.

Initially a moderate royalist, he became a leading critic of the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe, aligning himself with the Republican Left and, as a religious and political idealist, with Social Catholicism. He was a leading figure in the Revolution of 1848, and instrumental in the foundation of the Second Republic. During that year he served as Foreign Minister, and was a candidate representing the moderates in the presidential election, which was however won by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. After his failed bid in the election, Lamartine retired from political life.

In his later years, he was burdened by debt, penning many works in order to make a living, particularly his histories of the Restoration (published 1851-2) of Russia (1855), and of Turkey (1854-55).

The following translation is of Books I to III of *Voyage en Orient*, covering Lamartine's travels. Book IV containing other material, of a literary, social and political nature, which he associated with his travel notes has been omitted, along with some other minor, extraneous content.

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.

You may view a map of all locations on Lamartine's route in *Travels in the Near East*, provided by uMap (open map).

## Author's Preface to the First Edition

This is neither a prose work nor a travelogue; I possessed no intention of writing either. A book, or rather the poem, of the Orient, was penned by Chateaubriand in his *Itinéraire* ('*Record of a Journey from Paris to Jerusalem and Back', his travels of 1806-7*). The great author and poet merely traversed that region of wonders, yet forever imprinted the mark of his genius on the dust stirred by so many centuries. He journeyed to Jerusalem as a pilgrim and a knight, with the Bible, the Gospel, and the History of the Crusades in hand. I did so merely as a poet, and philosopher, returning with profound impressions as regards the heart, and noble and dreadful lessons as regards the mind. The studies I undertook there concerning religion, history, custom, tradition, and the various phases of humanity, were not lost on me, however. Such studies, which broaden the narrow horizon of thought, pose religious and historical problems for the powers of reason, and force one to retrace one's steps, examine one's innate convictions, and formulate new ones; that great and intimate education of the mind by the mind itself, and by places, facts, and comparisons of one age, one set of customs and beliefs, with another — none of this could be lost on a traveller, poet, and philosopher; rather they provide the elements of one's future poetry and philosophy. When one has amassed, classified, ordered, illuminated, and summarised the multitude of impressions, images, and thoughts that the world and its people offer to those who interrogate them; when one's soul and convictions have matured, one may give utterance in turn; and for good or ill, rightly or wrongly, offer one's thoughts to one's contemporaries, either in the form of poetry or in philosophical form. Then one may have one's say, as every thinking person is entitled to do. Perhaps that time will arrive for me: it has not done so yet.

As for penning a travelogue — a complete and faithful account, that is, of the countries one visited, of the personal events that befell one, and the overall impressions of the places, people, and customs one found there — I have given even less thought to such an undertaking. For the Orient, this has already been achieved in England, and is being undertaken in France at this very moment, with a conscientiousness, talent, and success that I could not expect to surpass: Monsieur de Laborde (*Comte Alexandre de Laborde*) a traveller in Spain, writes with the skill and paints with the brush of our foremost writers and artists (see his '*Voyage Pittoresque et Historique de l'Espagne', published 1806-1820*); Monsieur Fontanier (*Victor Fontanier*), consul in Trebizond, has granted us, in succession, accurate and vivid portraits of the least explored parts of the Ottoman Empire (*see his 'Voyage en Orient, Entrepris par Ordre du Gouvernement Français de l'Année 1821 à l'Année 1829*); while the '*Correspondance d'Orient' (1830-31*) between Monsieur Michaud (*Joseph-François Michaud*) of the French Academy, and his young and brilliant collaborator, Monsieur Poujoulat (*Baptistin Poujoulat*), contains all the historical, moral, and picturesque details that curiosity could desire as regards the Orient. Michaud, an experienced writer, a man of substance, a classical historian, enriches his descriptions of the places he travels through with vivid accounts of the Crusades; he critiques

places through history, and history through places; his mature, analytical mind illuminates the past as well as the customs of the peoples he visits, and sheds light, with incisive wit and graceful wisdom, on the manners, customs, and civilisations he encounters; of the joint authors he is the traveller advanced in intellect and years, leading the younger man by the hand, and showing him, with a smile, born of reason and irony, scenes new to him. Poujoulat is rather a poet and a colourist; his style, imbued with the impressions and hues of places, reflects them with all the heat and vibrancy of their local light. One feels the Eastern sun shining upon and warming his young and fertile mind, as he writes to his friend; his pages are slices of those lands, which he conveys to us radiant with their native splendour. The diversity of these two talents, complementing each other, makes the '*Correspondance d'Orient*' the most complete collection of letters we could wish for regarding those admirable shores: it is also the most varied and engaging of reads.

In terms of geography, we have little as yet; but the work of Monsieur Callier (*Camille Antoine Callier, lieutenant in the engineer-geographer corps*), a young staff officer whom I met in Syria, will undoubtedly be published soon (*see his bulletin, 'Voyage en Asie Mineure, en Syrie, en Palestine et en Arabie-Pétrée' 1834*). and will complete our understanding of that part of the world. Monsieur Callier has spent three years exploring the island of Cyprus, Caramania (*the southern Coast of Anatolia*), and the various regions of Syria, with the zeal and intrepidity that characterise educated officers of the French army. Having recently returned to his homeland, he brings knowledge that would have been very useful to Bonaparte's expedition, and which will assist others.

The notes I offer the readers here possess none of these merits. I publish them with regret; they are only useful to me as a record of my memories; and were intended for myself alone. There is nothing of science, history, geography or local customs in them; the public was far from my thoughts as I penned them: and where and when did I pen them? Sometimes at midday, during the noon rest, in the shade of some palm tree, or beside the ruins of some monument in the desert; more often in the evening, in a tent battered by wind or rain, by the light of a resin torch; now, in the cell of a Maronite monastery in Lebanon; now, on an Arab boat as it rocked from side to side, or the deck of a brig, amidst the cries of sailors, the neighing of horses, the interruptions and distractions of every kind involved in a journey by land or sea; sometimes a week passing without a word being written; at other times, the author suffering the loss of scattered pages from an album torn by jackals, or drenched by sea foam.

Once I returned to Europe, I could doubtless have revisited these fragments of impressions, gathered, arranged and composed them, and produced a travelogue like many another. But, as I have said, to write about the journey was absent from my plans. That requires time, freedom of mind, and attentive labour; I had nothing to offer on that score. My heart was broken (*due to the death of his daughter Julia*), my mind was elsewhere, my attention was distracted, my leisure hours wasted; it was for me to either burn these notes or let them appear as they were. Circumstances, the details of which it is unnecessary to explain, led me to the latter course; I regret it, but too late.

Let the reader reject them, before even glancing at them, who seeks anything more than the most fleeting and superficial impressions of a traveller who journeys without rest. They can hold a modicum of interest only for artists: these notes being almost exclusively picturesque; they are the written gaze, the glance of a passenger seated on a camel, or on the deck of a ship, who sees the landscape slipping by, and who, to recall it the following day, creates a few colourless strokes with his pencil on the pages of his journal. Sometimes the traveller, forgetting the scene around

him, withdraws into himself, converses with himself. He listens to his thoughts, attends to his own pleasure or suffering, then engraves a word or two of his impressions, gathered afar, so that the wind blowing over the sea or across the desert may fail to bear away his days entire, and some trace of them may remain to him, in later times, on his return to his solitary home, and serve to revive the dead past, to warm chill memories, to reconnect the links of a life that events have severed in so many places. Here then, are those notes: they are of little interest; they will win little in the way of success; they have even less right to the reader's gracious indulgence.

## Memories, Impressions, Sights and Reflections During a Voyage to the Orient

*Marseille, May 20, 1832.*

My mother (*Alix de Lamartine, Françoise-Alix de Royes*) received from her mother (*Marie Marguerite des Roys, née Gavault*), on the latter's deathbed, a beautiful Royaumont Bible (*The Royaumont Bible, or 'Histoire du Vieux et du Nouveau Testament', published in 1670, was a popular, illustrated retelling of Biblical stories, written by Nicolas Fontaine whose pseudonym was the Sieur de Royaumont*) by means of which she taught me to read when I was a little child. This Bible had engravings of sacred subjects on every page. There was Sarah, there was Tobias and his Angel, there were Joseph, and Samuel and, above all, those beautiful patriarchal scenes where the solemn and primal nature of the Near East was interwoven with all the simple and wondrous acts in the life of an earlier people. When I had recited my lesson well, and read, almost flawlessly, the half-page of a sacred story, my mother would uncover the engraving and, holding the book open on her lap, would show it to me to contemplate while she explained the image by way of reward.

She was endowed by nature with a soul as pious as it was tender, and with the most sensitive and vivid imagination; all her thoughts were feelings, all her feelings were images; her beautiful, noble, and gentle face reflected, in its radiant countenance, all that burned in her heart, all that was painted in her mind; and the silvery, affectionate, solemn, and passionate tone of her voice added, to everything she said, an accent of strength, charm, and love, which still resounds in my ear at this moment, after years of silence (*she had died in 1829*). The sight of those engravings, and my mother's explanations and poetic commentaries, inspired in me, from my earliest childhood, a taste and inclination for biblical matters.

From the love of events, to a longing to see the places where those events had taken place, was but a step. From the age of eight, I burned with the desire to visit those mountains where God had descended; those deserts where Angels came to show Hagar the hidden spring, so she might revive her poor banished child, Ishmael, dying of thirst (*see Genesis: 21*); those rivers that flowed from the Garden of Eden (*see Genesis: 2*); that heaven to which and from which one saw angels ascend and descend on Jacob's ladder (*see Genesis: 28*). The longing never faded within me: ever since then, I had dreamt of a journey to the East, the great drama of my inner life. I constructed, endlessly, in my mind a vast, religious epic, for which those beautiful lands would provide the main stage. It also seemed to me that my mental doubts, and religious perplexities, would find their solution and appeasement there. Finally, I would draw inspiration for my poem from it; for life to my mind was always a great poem, just as love was to my heart. God, Love, and Poetry — those are the three words alone, that I would wish inscribed on my grave-stone, if ever I come to merit one.

That is the source of the idea that is now driving me towards the shores of Asia. This is why I am here in Marseille, taking great pains to leave a country I love, where I have friends, where a few sad fraternal thoughts will accompany my departure, and follow in my wake.

*Marseille, May 22.*

I have chartered a ship of two hundred and fifty tons, with a crew of nineteen. The captain is an excellent fellow. I was pleased, at once, by his appearance. His voice possesses the deep and sincere tone of firm probity and a clear conscience; his expression is serious, while his eyes have that direct, frank, lively gleam, which is a sure sign of prompt, energetic, and intelligent resolve. He is also a gentle, polite, and well-bred man. I examined him with the care one should naturally take in choosing one to whom one is entrusting not only one's fortune and life, but also the lives of his wife and only child, in whom the lives of all three are concentrated in one. May God protect us and return us safe and sound!

The ship is named the *Alceste*. The captain is Monsieur Blanc (*Jean-Baptiste-Esprit Blanc*), from La Ciotat. The shipowner is one of Marseille's most distinguished merchants, Monsieur Bruno-Xavier Rostand (*who was also a financier and shipowner*). He showers us with kindness and consideration. He himself resided for a long time in the Levant. A learned man, capable of the most eminent positions, his probity and talents have earned him, in his native city, an esteem equal to his wealth. He enjoys it without ostentation and, surrounded by a charming family, devotes himself solely to instilling in his children the traditions of loyalty and virtue. What a country it is where such families are found in every class of society! And what a fine institution the family is, protecting, preserving, and perpetuating the same sanctity of morals, the same nobility of sentiment, the same traditional qualities in the cottage, the trading post, or the château!

*May 25.*

Marseille welcomes us as if we were children of its beautiful sky; it is a land of generosity, heart, and soulful poetry; they receive poets here as brothers; they are poets themselves, and I have found among ordinary people in society, in the Academy, and among young people just entering life, a multitude of characters and talents destined to honour not only their homeland, but all of France. — In this respect, the south and north of France seem to me far superior to the central provinces. Imagination languishes in the intermediate regions, in overly temperate climates; it needs extremes of temperature. Poetry is the daughter of the sun or of eternal frost: Homer or Ossian, Tasso or Milton.

*May 30.*

I will carry in my heart an eternal memory of the kindness of the people of Marseille. Almost as if they would amplify in me those feelings of anguish which grip the heart when one is about to leave one's homeland without knowing if one will ever see it again. I also wish to bear with me the names of those men who welcomed me most warmly, and whose memory will remain with me as the last, sweet impression of my native soil: Jacques Fraissinet (*a banker*), Jean-Baptiste de Montgrand (*former mayor of Marseille*), the Messieurs de Villeneuve (*Benoît-Hippolyte de Villeneuve Flayosc, president of the Marseilles Academy, plus another member of the family*) Jules Van Gaver (*poet and*

*dramatist*), Joseph Autran (*poet and dramatist*), Antoine Dufeu (*literary translator*), Pierre Jauffret (*agriculturist*), etc., etc., all distinguished by an eminent quality of heart and mind, scholars, administrators, writers, poets. I hope to see them again, on my return, and repay them with all those tributes of gratitude and friendship that it is sweet to owe and sweeter to render! I wrote a poem this morning while at sea, between the Isle of Pomègues (*the largest of the Frioul islands, off the coast of Marseilles*) and the coast of Provence; a farewell to Marseille, which I leave with the feelings of a son. A few of its stanzas reached further and deeper into my heart.

'Si j'abandonne aux plis de la voile rapide

Ce que m'a fait le ciel de paix et de bonheur' etc.

'If I yield to the folds of the swift sail

All heaven has granted of peace and happiness' etc

*June 13.*

We have visited the vessel destined to be our home for so many months! It is divided into little cabins, each with room for a hammock and a trunk. The captain has had small windows installed, which let in light and air, and which we can open when the waves are not too high, and the brig is not listing. The master cabin is reserved for Madame de Lamartine (*Marianne Élisa de Lamartine, née Mary Anne Elisa Birch, English painter and sculptor*), and our daughter Julia. The chambermaids will sleep in the captain's cabin, which he has kindly agreed to give over to us. When the weather is fine, we shall eat on deck, beneath a tent pitched at the foot of the mainmast. The brig is laden with all sorts of provisions needed for a two-year voyage to impoverished lands. A library of five hundred volumes, all chosen from books of history, poetry, and travel, is the finest adornment of the master cabin. Bundles of weapons are gathered in the corners, and I have also purchased a special arsenal of rifles, pistols, and sabres to arm ourselves and our men. Greek pirates infest the seas of the Archipelago; we are determined to fight to the bitter end, and not let them aboard while we still live. I have two lives to defend dearer to me than my own. There are four cannons on deck; and the crew, who know the fate the Greeks reserve for the unfortunate sailors whom they attack are resolved to die rather than surrender.

*June 17, 1832.*

I am also taking three friends with me. The first is one of those men whom Providence places at our side when it foresees our needing the kind of support that wavers not an inch in the face of peril or misfortune: Amédée-Alexandre-Denis de Parseval. We have been bound since our earliest youth by an affection that no period of our lives has ever found lacking. My mother loved him like a son; I love him like a brother. Every time I have been struck by a blow of fate, I have found him there, or have seen him arrive, ready to accept his share, the principal share, the entire burden of it, if he could. His is a heart that lives only for the happiness, and suffers for the misfortunes, of others. When, fifteen years ago, I was in Paris, alone, ill, ruined, in despair, and dying, he spent the nights keeping vigil by what was like to be my death bed. When I lost a person

I loved, it was always he who came to deliver the blow and soften it. When my mother died, he arrived at my side as soon as the fatal news reached us, and led me five hundred miles to the tomb where I went to seek, in vain, the last farewell she had addressed to me, but which I had failed to receive! Later… but my misfortunes are not over, and I shall find him a friend to me once more, as long as there is despair to quench in my heart, and tears to mingle with my own.

Two other good, intelligent, and educated men — men of distinction — have also arrived to accompany us on this pilgrimage. One is Ferdinand de Capmas, a former sub-prefect (*mayor of Carnoules*, *Var*), whose career was cut short by the July Revolution, and who preferred the precarious chances of a difficult and uncertain future to preserving his position. The oath would have been repugnant to his sense of loyalty, for it would have seemed self-serving. He is one of those men unaffected by the implications of a scruple concerning honour, and one in whom political sympathies possess all the warmth and purity of genuine feeling.

The third of these companions is a doctor from Hondschoote (*in Flanders, of which he was mayor*), Jean-Vaast de Laroyère. I met him at my sister's house when I was contemplating undertaking this journey. The purity of his soul, the original and unassuming grace of his mind, and the nobility of his political and religious sentiments struck me. I wished to take him with me, more as a moral support than as a source of health. I have been glad I did so ever since. I value his character and his intellect far more than his talents, although he possesses very evident ones. We talk together about politics far more than about medicine. His views and ideas about the present and future of France are extensive, and in no way limited by personal affections or aversions. He knows that Providence shows no partiality in its work, and he sees, as I do, ideas and not proper names in human politics. His thoughts go straight to the goal, without worrying about whatever persons or places must be considered: and his mind reveals no prejudices, no biases, not even those of his religious faith, which is sincere and fervent.

Six servants, almost all of them long-time residents of, or born in, our family home, complete our entourage. They all set out in a joyful mood, and take a personal interest in this journey. Each of them believes they are travelling on their own account, and will cheerfully brave the hardships and dangers I have not concealed from them.

*July 10, 1832. At anchor in the roadstead, before the little gulf of Montredon (off Marseilles).*

I have departed: the waves will now dictate our entire fate. I am no longer attached to my native land except by thoughts of the dear ones I leave behind, especially of my father and sisters.

To explain, to myself, why, when already nearing the end of my youth, at that time in life when a man withdraws from the ideal world to enter the world of material interests, I choose to leave my beautiful and peaceful existence at Saint-Point (*Lamartine had been gifted, at the time of his marriage, the dilapidated château, near Mâcon, in Burgundy, which became his family home, and which he restored in the neo-Gothic style*), and all the innocent delights of a domestic home rendered charming by my wife, and more beautiful still by a child; to explain, I say, to myself, why I am now sailing over a vast sea towards unknown shores and an unknown future, I am obliged to return to the source of all my thoughts, and to seek there the causes of my sympathies, and my taste for travel — for imagination also has its needs, and its passions!

I was born a poet, that is to say, more or less receptive to that beautiful language with which God speaks to all men, but more clearly to some, through the means of his works. As a young man, I had heard that speech of Nature, those words formed of images and not sounds, in the mountains, in the forests, on the lakes, at the edges of the abysses and torrents of my country, and those of the Alps; I had even translated into written language some of those accents which had moved me, and which in turn moved other souls: but I had found these accents were no longer enough; I had exhausted the few divine words that our European land utters to humankind; I thirsted to hear those of shores more resonant and more radiant. My imagination was enamoured of the sea, the deserts, the mountains, the customs, and the traces of God to be found in the East. All my life, the Orient had been the dream of my dark days, amidst the autumn and winter mists of my native valley. My body, like my soul, is a child of the sun; it needs light; it needs the rays of life that star darts forth, not from the torn breast of our western clouds, but from the depths of that crimson sky that resembles the mouth of a furnace; those rays that are not merely a glimmer, but drench with burning heat; rays that calcine, as they fall, the white rocks, the sparkling teeth of the mountain peaks, and stain the ocean red, like a fire floating on its waves! I needed to stir things up, to knead with my hands a little of that earth that was trodden by our first family, the earth of the land of wonders; to see, to walk through that Gospel scene, where the great drama of divine wisdom grappling with human error and perversity unfolded; where moral truth was martyred to fertilise with its blood a more perfect civilisation!

And then I am, and have been, forever, a Christian at heart and in my imagination; my mother had influenced me thus: I had, it is true, sometimes ceased to be one, in the less good, less pure days of my early youth; equally, misfortune and love, the complete love that purifies all it burns, had later driven me again to that first refuge of my thoughts, to those consolations of the heart that one seeks again in one's memories and one's hopes, when the clamour of the heart fades within, when life appears empty all passion extinguished, or death leaves us nothing to love! This Christianity born of sentiment had once again become a comforting habit of thought; I often said to myself: 'Where is there perfect, undeniable, self-evident truth? If it is anywhere, it is in the heart, in the evidence of the feelings, against which reason alone cannot prevail. But the truth of the mind is nowhere whole; it lies with God, not with us; our powers of vision are too curtailed to absorb a single ray; all truth, for us, is only relative; what is most helpful to humankind will therefore also prove the truest; the doctrine most fruitful of divine virtue will therefore be the one that contains the most divine truths, for what is good is true.' All my religious logic lay there; my philosophy ascended no higher; it forbade doubt, the endless dialogues of reason with itself; I was left with this religion of the heart, which accords so well with all those infinite feelings that are the life of the soul; which resolves nothing, but which soothes everything.

*July 10, 7 pm.*

I thought to myself: 'This pilgrimage which, if not exactly a Christian one, is at least a human and poetic one, would have pleased my mother! Her soul was so ardent, and so quickly and completely coloured by the impression of places and things! It is she whose soul would have been exalted before the empty, sacred stage of the great drama of the Gospel, that complete drama, in which the human and divine parts of humanity each played their part, one crucifying, the other crucified! This journey, made by a son she loved so much, must cause her to smile in the heavenly

abode where I envision her: she will watch over us; she will stand like a second providence between ourselves and the storms, ourselves and the simoom, ourselves and the Arabs of the desert! She will protect from all perils her son, her adopted daughter, and her granddaughter, the visible angel of our destiny, whom we take with us everywhere, whom she loved so much! She rested her gaze with such ineffable tenderness, with such penetrating delight, on the charming face of this child, the last and most beautiful hope of many generations! And if there is imprudence in this undertaking, which we had often dreamed of together, she will forgive it on high, for the sake of its motives, which are born of Love, Poetry, and Religion.'

*Same day, July 10, in the evening.*

Politics assails us again, even here: France will be a fine country in the near future; a generation is maturing, which, by virtue of its youth, will be completely detached from the grudges and recriminations of the past forty years. It matters little to youth that one has belonged to this or that hateful faction of the old parties; it has nothing to do with their quarrels; it harbours neither prejudice nor vengeance. It presents itself, pure and full of strength, at the gate of a new age, filled with the enthusiasm of an ideal; yet we continue to plague the age with our hatreds, our passions, our interminable disputes. Let us make way. How I would have loved to enter its cause; to join my voice to its own, on this stage which still resounds only with repetition, which will fail to yield a future echo, where we battle each other, employing, as weapons, mere names!

The time has come to shine the beacon of reason and morality on our political turmoil, to formulate the new social ideals that the world is beginning to sense and understand: the ideals of love and charity among humankind, an evangelical politics! I do not, at least, accuse myself of selfishness in this matter; I would have sacrificed my very journey, this dream of a sixteen-year-old's imagination, to this duty! May heaven raise up humankind! For our politics shames humanity, and makes the angels weep. Destiny grants humanity one single hour per century to regenerate itself; that hour is the hour of revolution, and we squander it tearing each other apart; we give over to vengeance this hour God has allotted to regeneration and progress!

*The same day, July 10, still at anchor.*

The July Revolution (*of 1830, which overthrew Charles X, and ended the Bourbon Restoration*) grieved me deeply because I am a descendant of an old and venerable Bourbon family, and because those Bourbons attracted to themselves the love and sacrifice of my father, my grandfather, all my relatives, and would have won mine had they so desired, did not, however, embitter me, nor did it surprise me. I saw it heralded from afar. Nine months before the fatal day, the fall of the restored monarchy was foretold for me in the names of the men it entrusted with leading its government. They were devoted and loyal, but belonged to another century, another manner of thought. While the spirit of the age marched in one direction, they were set to march in another; the contrast was complete in mind, it could not long delay revealing itself in action; it was a matter of mere days and hours. I wept for a royal family which had seemed to condemn itself to the fate and blindness of Oedipus! Above all, I deplored that unnecessary rift between the past and the future! One might have been beneficial indeed to the other! Liberty and social progress could have drawn strength from embracing the ancient royal houses, the ancestral families, the old virtues! It would have been politically astute, and a kindness, not to have divided France into two camps, two factions; but

rather to march together, some quickening their pace, others slowing it so as not to become disunited along the way! All that is now nothing but a dream! We should regret it, but not waste the day dwelling on it uselessly. We must act and move forward; it is the law of things; it is the law of God!

I regret that what is called the royalist party, which possesses much capacity, influence, and virtue, wishes to rest content with the outcome of the July Revolution. It was not implicated in the affair — a matter of palace intrigue and cliquish politics — in which the vast majority of royalists took no part. It is always permissible, always honourable, to share in the misfortune of others; but one must not gratuitously take responsibility for a fault one did not oneself commit. The blame for the coup d'état and the installation of a backward-looking leadership, should have been placed on those who deserved it; the august victims of a fatal error should have been mourned and grieved for; yet affection for them, though honourable, should have been denied; their various hopes, however distant, should have been rejected; and, for the rest, its partisans should have returned to the ranks of citizens, and have thought, spoken, acted, and fought on the side of the family of families, that of the country! But let us leave the subject! We shall view France again in two years' time. May God protect her, and all that we leave there that is dear and excellent in every party!

*July 11, 1832, under sail.*

Today, at half past five in the morning, we set sail. A few friends, known for only a brief time but held in great affection, had risen ahead of the sun, so as to accompany us a few miles out to sea and bear their farewells further. Our brig glided on a calm, clear, blue sea, like the waters of a spring pooled in the shade of a rocky hollow. The weight of the yards, those long arms of the ship burdened with sails, barely caused us to heel slightly, now on one side, now the other. A young man from Marseille, Joseph Autran, recited admirable verses to us, in which he entrusted his good wishes for our safe journey to the winds and the waves: we were moved by our separation from land, while our thoughts flew back to shore, traversing Provençe, to reach my father, my sisters, and my friends; moved also by those farewells, those verses, the beautiful shadow of Marseille, which receded, diminishing before our eyes; and by this boundless sea destined to become, and remain for a long time, our only homeland.

O Marseille! O France! You deserved better: the times, the land, those young men, were worthy of contemplating a true poet, one of those who etch a world, and an era, harmoniously, in the memory of the species! But I, and I feel it deeply, am only one of those formless men, from a transient and vanished era, whose few sighs have found an echo, because the echo is more poetic than the poet. Yet I once belonged to another time as far as my longings were concerned; I often felt another spirit within me; while immense, infinite, horizons, luminous with philosophical, epic, religious, and above all new poetry, unfolded before me: but, as punishment for a foolish and wasted youth, those horizons closed upon me all too quickly. I felt them as too vast for my physical strength; I shut my eyes, so as not to be tempted to plunge therein. Farewell then to those dreams of genius, of intellectual delight! Too late. Perhaps I may sketch a few scenes, murmur a few songs, and all I have to say will have been said. To others, the future! And, I see, with pleasure, others arriving. Nature was never more fertile in the promise of genius than at this moment. How many artists there will be in twenty years, if all who promise genius display it!

Nonetheless, if God were to grant me a wish, this is what I would ask of Him: a poem after my own heart, and after His! A visible, living, animated, colourful image of His visible and invisible creation; what a beautiful legacy to leave to this world of darkness, sorrow, and doubt! Food that might nourish it, rejuvenate it, for a century! Oh, that I could achieve that in praise of Him; or at least grant it to myself, even if none but myself ever read a single line!

*Same day, July 11, at three o'clock, at sea.*

The east wind, which has been vying with us for control of our course, blows with greater force; the sea has risen and the waves have whitened; the captain declares we must return to the coast, and anchor in a bay two hours from Marseille. We are there; the waves rock us gently; the sea 'speaks', as the sailors say; we hear, arriving from afar, a continuous murmur, like the noise that rises from large cities: this threatening voice of the sea, the first to make itself heard, resounds solemnly in the ears and hearts of those who are about to cleave to it so closely, and for so long.

To port, we see the Isle of Pomègues and the Château d'If, an old fort with round, grey towers crowning a bare, slate-covered rock; opposite, on the high coast broken by whitish rocks, are numerous country houses whose walled gardens reveal only the tops of shrubs, or the green arches of vines; about a mile inland, on an isolated, barren knoll, stand the fort and chapel of Notre-Dame de la Garde, a pilgrimage site for Provençal sailors before, and upon return from, all their voyages. This morning, unbeknownst to us, at the very hour when the wind filled our sails, a woman from Marseille, accompanied by her children, had risen before dawn, and gone to pray for us, on the summit of that mount, whence her friendly gaze probably rested upon our ship, a white dot on the sea.

What a world the world of prayer is! What an invisible yet all-powerful bond, that of beings known or unknown to one another, praying, whether together or apart, for one another! It has always seemed to me that prayer, an instinct so true to our powerless nature, is the only real force, or at least the greatest force, amidst humankind! We do not comprehend its effect; but what do we comprehend? The need that compels us to breathe alone proves that air is necessary for life! The instinct of prayer also proves to the soul its efficacy: let us therefore pray! And you who have inspired in us this marvellous communication with you, with all beings, with the invisible worlds; you, my God, hear us, abundantly! Hear us, beyond our own desires!

*Same day, July 11, at 11 pm.*

A splendid moon sways, seemingly, between the masts, yards, and rigging of two warships anchored not far from our brig, between our anchorage and the dark mountains of Var; the elements of rigging of those vessels are highlighted, against the blue and purple background of the night sky, like the fibres of two gigantic, gaunt skeletons, seen from afar in the pale, still glow of the lamps of Westminster, or Saint-Denis. Tomorrow, those skeletons must return to life, spread wings that are folded like ours, and fly, like sea-going birds, to reach other shores. From the deck where I stand, one hears the high-pitched, rhythmic whistle of the boatswain directing the manoeuvre, the drum-rolls, and the voice of the officer of the watch. The flags slide down from the mast; the boats and launches are raised on board, as if moved by swift, vivid gestures of a living being. All falls silent again, on their side, and on ours.

In former times, none fell asleep on this deep and treacherous bed which is the sea without raising their soul and voice to God, without, amidst all these stars, waves, mountain peaks, all these charms and perils of the night, giving praise to the sublime Creator; prayers were said in the evening, aboard every French ship! Since the July Revolution, no such prayers are offered. Prayer died on the lips of eighteenth-century liberalism, which in itself felt nothing but a cold hatred towards matters of the soul. That sacred breath of mankind, which the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve passed down to us, along with their joys and sorrows, has failed in France during our days of strife and pride; we have dragged God into our quarrels. The shadow of God frightens some. Those new-born creatures, destined to die tomorrow, whose sterile dust the wind will carry away in but a few days, whose bleached bones these eternal waves will cast upon some reef, fear to acknowledge, by a word, a gesture, the infinite Being to whom the heavens and the seas bear witness; they disdain to name Him who did not disdain to create them, and why? Because they wear a uniform, they can measure and calculate, and call themselves nineteenth-century Frenchmen! Fortunately, the nineteenth century is already passing, and I hope to see a better one approaching, a truly religious century, where, if human beings do not acknowledge God in the same language, or employ the same symbols and emblems, they will at least do so under all banners, and in all languages!

*Same night, July 11.*

I walked for an hour on deck, alone, amidst these sad or comforting thoughts; I murmured from my heart and lips all the prayers I learned from my mother when I was a child; the verses, the fragments of psalms that I had so often heard her murmur in a low voice as she strolled in the evening along the path in the garden at Milly (*Milly-Lamartine, near Mâcon*), rose up in my memory, and I felt a deep and intimate pleasure in scattering them in turn to the waves, to the wind, to that ear, ever-open, wherein no sound of the heart or lips is ever lost! The prayer that one has heard uttered by a person one has loved, and whose death one has witnessed, is doubly sacred. Who among us does not prefer the few words taught to them by their mother to the most beautiful hymns they could compose themselves? That is why, whatever religion our reason may lead us to adopt at the age of reason, Christian prayer will always be the prayer of humankind. Alone, I dedicated this evening prayer, and this prayer of the sea, to the woman who regardless of peril has united herself to my fate, and to our lovely child who was playing, meanwhile, on the deck of the longboat, with the goat that will yield our milk, and the beautiful and gentle greyhounds that licked her white hands, and nibbled at her long, blond hair.

*July 12, in the morning, under sail.*

During the night the wind changed and freshened; from my cabin between the decks, I could hear the sailors' footsteps, voices, and plaintive song echoing for a long time above my head, along with the blows of the anchor chain being secured to the bow. We were setting sail once more; we were departing. I fell asleep again. When I awoke and opened the porthole to look at the French coast we had viewed the day before, I could see nothing but an immense, bare stretch of lapping waves, and but two sails, two tall sails rising like twin milestones, twin pyramids of the desert, in that featureless space, which extended to the far horizon.

The sea caressed the thick, curved sides of the brig, gently, and babbled winningly beneath my narrow window, to which the foam sometimes rose in white weightless garlands: it sounded like the varied, confused twittering of swallows on high, when the sun rises over a wheat field. There are harmonies between all the elements, just as there is a general harmony between things of a material and intellectual nature. Every thought finds its image in a visible object which repeats it like an echo, reflects it like a mirror, and renders it perceptible in a double manner: to the senses through the image, to the mind through thought; this is the infinite poetry of the dual creation! Human beings call this process comparison: comparison is genius. Creation is but a thought in a thousand forms. To compare is the art of, or an instinct for, revealing more words of this divine language, these universal analogies, that God alone possesses, but something of which He allows certain individuals to discover. That is why prophets as sacred poets, and poets as profane prophets, were once regarded everywhere as divine beings. Today they are regarded as foolish or at least useless creatures; which is logical. If one considers the tangible world of matter as all that exists, that aspect of Nature which can be reduced to numbers, space, material gain, and physical pleasure, one is right to despise those who worship only moral beauty, the idea of a deity, and the language of images, of mysterious connections between the invisible and the visible. What does that language bear witness to? God and immortality, which mean nothing at all to such people.

*July 15th, anchored in the small gulf of La Ciotat.*

The favourable wind, rising briefly, was soon lost to our sails. They fell against the masts, swaying at the slightest swell. A fitting image of the characters of those lacking will-power, that forceful wind blowing from the human soul; fleeting characters that weary those who possess them: such a character exhausts a person more through its weakness than a rigorous will instils courageous effort in those who display energy and action, just as ships, on a calm, windless sea, labour more than when driven by the impetus of a fresh wind that pushes them forward, and sustains their course amidst the foaming waves.

Whether by chance, or by a hidden manoeuvre made by our officers, at three o'clock the wind obliged us to enter the charming gulf off La Ciotat, a little town on the Provençal coast, which contains the homes, wives, and children of our captain, and almost all the sailors. Sheltered by a small jetty, jutting from a graceful hill entirely covered with vines, fig-trees, and olive-trees, like a friendly hand offered to voyagers nearing shore, we dropped anchor. The water is calm, and so transparent that, at a depth of twenty feet, one can see pebbles and shells gleaming, long sea grasses swaying, and thousands of shimmering fish darting about, hidden treasures of the sea, which is as rich and inexhaustible as the land in its vegetation and inhabitants. Life is everywhere, like intelligence: all of Nature is animated, all of Nature thinks and feels! Those who fail to see this have never reflected on the inexhaustible fecundity of creative thought. It cannot not, should not, be absent anywhere; infinity is populated; and wherever there is life, there is feeling; and though doubtless thought exists to unequal degrees, there is no void. Do you desire a physical demonstration? Look at a drop of water under a microscope, and you will see thousands of worlds gravitating within it! Worlds in an insect's teardrop; and if you were to manage to decompose each of these thousands of worlds further, millions more universes would appear before you! If, from those boundless and infinitely small worlds, one suddenly ascends to the great celestial vault with its countless points of light, if one's gaze plunges into the Milky Way, that galactic dust formed of

an incalculable number of suns, each of which may govern a system of planets vaster than that which contains the Earth and the Moon, the mind is crushed by the burden of immensity; but the soul bears it, and glories in possessing its place in Creation, the strength to understand it, and the powers of feeling which enable one to bless it, and to adore its author! Lord, how worthy of prayer is Nature for one who seeks you there, who discovers you in all its forms, and who understands a few syllables of its muted tongue, which yet speaks all!

*Gulf of La Ciotat, 2 pm.*

The wind has died, and shows no sign of returning. The surface of the gulf is perfectly level; the sea is so calm that, here and there, one can make out the impression of the transparent wings of flying insects floating on its mirror, the only thing that mars it at this hour. Such is the degree of calm and gentleness to which the watery element can descend, this element that lifts triple-decked vessels without consideration of their weight, that erodes miles of shoreline, wears down hills, cleaves rocks, and shatters mountains under the impact of its roaring waves! Nothing is so gentle, often, as that which is strong.

We go ashore at the urging of our captain, who wishes to introduce us to his wife and show us his home. The town resembles the pretty towns of the Kingdom of Naples, on the coast near Gaeta. Everything is radiant, cheerful, and serene; life is a continuous celebration given the southern climate. Happy the person who is born and dies in the sunlight! Happy above all whoever has their home, the house and garden of their ancestors, on the shore of this sea, each wave of which is a spark of light adding a greater brilliance to the land! Except for the high mountains, which borrow the brightness of their peaks and horizons from the snow that covers them, from the sky into which they ascend, no inland site, however charming and graceful its hills, trees, and rivers may be, can compete in beauty with places bathed by the seas of the South. The sea is to the scenes of Nature what the eyes are to a beautiful face; it illuminates those scenes, it grants them that radiance, that physiognomy which makes them live, speak, fascinate, and enchant the gaze that contemplates them.

*Same day. July 15.*

It is night, that is to say, what is called night in these climes. How many days less bright than this have I counted on the velvety slopes of Richmond Hill in England, or amidst the mists of the Thames, the Seine, the Saône, or Lake Geneva! A full moon rises in the firmament; our black brig is plunged in shadow, resting motionless some distance from the quay. As the moon advances, it leaves behind a trail, as of reddish dust, with which it seems to have sown half the sky; the rest is blue, and whitens as it approaches. About two miles distant, between a pair of small islands, one with high cliffs, yellow like the Colosseum in Rome, the other violet in hue like lilac blossom, one can see on the surface of the sea the mirage of a large city; the eye is deceived: one sees glittering domes, palaces with dazzling facades, long quays flooded with soft and serene light; to the right and left, the waves whiten and seem to envelop this city: it looks like Venice, or the island of Malta sleeping amidst the waves. It is neither an isle nor a city, it is the moon's reflection at the point where its light falls vertically upon the sea; closer to us, this reflection spreads and lengthens, and rolls like a river of gold and silver between two azure shores. To our left, the gulf extends, to a high cape, in a long, dark chain of uneven and jagged hills; to the right, there is a narrow, enclosed

valley, where a beautiful stream flows beneath the shade of a few trees; beyond, there is a taller hill, clothed to its summit in olive trees which the night renders black; from the top of this hill to the sea, grey towers and white cottages pierce here and there the monotonous darkness of the trees, and draw the eye and the mind to the dwelling places of mankind. Further on, at the end of the gulf, three enormous rocks rise sharply above the waves; of bizarre shape, rounded and polished by the waves and the storms like pebbles, they are in fact mountains; the gigantic sport of a primitive ocean, of which these waters doubtless grant only a faint image.

*July 15.*

We visited the house of the captain of our brig. A pretty, modest, though ornate dwelling. We were received by the young wife, who was unwell, and saddened by her husband's sudden departure. I offered to take her on board so that she might accompany us on this voyage, which was expected to be longer than the usual journeys of a merchant ship. Her health prevented it. She would remain alone, childless, and ill, counting the long days, and perhaps long years, of her husband's absence. Her gentle, sensitive face bore the marks of her melancholy regarding the future, and the loneliness in her heart. The house resembled a Flemish one; its walls were covered with portraits of ships that the captain had commanded. He took us to see a house in the countryside not far from there, where, though still young, he was preparing a retreat, far from the wind and waves. I was very glad to have seen the rural refuge in which he planned to seek rest and happiness in his old age. I always like to understand the home life, the domestic circumstances, of those with whom I have to deal in this world. It is a part of them, a second outward appearance that grants one a key to their character and destiny.

Most of the sailors also come from these villages. Gentle, pious, cheerful, hard-working men, skilled in managing the winds, storms, and waves, with the calm and silent orderliness of our ploughmen at Saint-Point wielding the harrow or the share; ploughmen of the sea, peaceful, singing as they labour, like the men of our valleys who forge long steaming furrows over the hill slopes, in the rays of the morning sun.

*July 16.*

Awakening early this morning, I heard, from the motionless deck, the sailors' voices mingling with the rooster's crow and the bleating of our sheep and the goat. A few women's and children's voices completed the illusion; I could have believed myself lying in the room of a wooden cabin on the shores of Lake Zurich or Lake Lucerne. I went on deck: they were some of our sailors' children, brought to see their fathers by the wives. The fathers sat them on the cannons, held them upright on the ship's railings, laid them in the longboat, and rocked them in a hammock with the tenderness, in their voices, and the tears, in their eyes, that mothers or nurses show; brave men with hearts of bronze when faced with danger, yet with hearts of almost womanly feeling for what they love, as rough and gentle as the element they voyage over! Whether he is a shepherd or a sailor, the man who has family has a heart imbued with human and honest sentiment. The spirit of family is the second soul of humanity; modern legislators have too often forgotten the fact; they think only of nations or individuals; they neglect the family, the sole source of strong and sound populations, the sanctuary for tradition and custom, in which all the social virtues are renewed.

Legislation, even that in accord with Christianity, has proved barbaric in this respect; it divorces human beings from the family, instead of inviting them to join it. It denies half of humanity — wives and children — the possession of home and land: these should be due to all, as soon as they reach adulthood; they should be forbidden only to those guilty of crimes. The family is a society in miniature; but a society where laws are natural, because they are based on sentiment. Excommunicating someone from the family should be the greatest means of censure, the ultimate punishment, within the legal system; It should be the only 'death penalty' acceptable to a Christian and humane form of government; the actual death penalty should have been abolished centuries ago.

*Additional notes, from July 14 to 16, the air still wet due to the headwind.*

*July 14.*

A mile from the coast to the west, the mountains seem as if shattered by blows from a club; enormous fragments have fallen here and there at the foot of the mountains, or lie beneath the blue and greenish waves of the sea that bathes them. The waves break there, ceaselessly; and from the crashing, alternating, muffled sound against the rocks, tongues of white foam spring forth that lick the briny shore. These heaped fragments of mountains (for they are too large to be called mere cliffs) have been thrown with such confusion upon one another, and pounded there, that they form countless narrow coves, pierced by deep, echoing arched caves, with dark cavities, whose entrances, twisting and turning paths, and exits, are known only to the children of the few fishermen's huts nearby. One of these caverns, entered through the low arch of a natural bridge roofed by an enormous block of granite, gives access to the sea, then opens on a dark and narrow cove, which the sea fills entirely with waves limpid and calm as the firmament on a beautiful night. It is a place known to fishermen, where, when the waves roar and foam outside, shaking the coast with their crashing, the smallest boats can shelter; within it one can barely see the slight bubbling of a spring falling into a pool of water. The sea there retains that beautiful, shimmering, greenish-yellow colour, so distinctive to the eye of marine painters, but which they can never render exactly, since the eye sees more than the hand can imitate.

On both sides of this marine valley rise two walls of well-nigh sheer rock, dark and uniformly coloured like clinker shortly after it has tumbled into a furnace. No plant, no moss, finds even a crevice in which to take root, and hang or float its garland of vines and flowers such as are often seen swaying on the rock faces of Savoy, at heights where only birds can breathe the fragrance: bare, upright, black, repelling the eye, they seem placed there only to defend, from the sea air, the slopes of vines and olive-trees that languish beneath their shelter; true images of those people who dominate an era or a nation, exposed to all the ravages of time and storm, who serve to protect those weaker and happier.

At the rear of the cove, the water widens a little, meanders, and takes on a lighter hue as it reveals a greater extent of sky, and finally ends in a beautiful sheet of still water on a bed of small purple shells, crushed and densely packed like sand. If you step out of the skiff that brought you here, you will find on the left, in the hollow of a ravine, a spring of fresh, cool, pure water; then, turning to the right, a steep, stony and uneven goat track, shaded by wild fig-trees and azaroles (*crataegus azarolus, a species of hawthorn, the 'Mediterranean medlar'*), descends from the cultivated lands

towards the solitude of the waves. Few places have so struck me, or so enticed me in my travels. It is just such a perfect blend of grace and strength that forms perfect beauty from a harmony of its elements, as in a living or thinking being. It is, in this place, a mysterious marriage of earth and sea, caught, so to speak, in their most intimate and veiled union. It is an image of the most inaccessible calm and solitude, beside the stormy and tumultuous theatre in which tempests play, so close to the sounding waves. It is one of those many masterpieces of creation, which the deity has scattered everywhere as if delighting in contrasts, but which He most often takes pleasure in hiding among the impassable peaks of steep mountains, in the depths of ravines without access, on the most inaccessible reefs of the ocean, like jewels of Nature revealed, but rarely, to simple folk, shepherds, fishermen, travellers, or poets, or to pious contemplation by solitary individuals.

At ten o'clock, on the 14th of July a westerly breeze rises; we weigh anchor at three; soon we have nothing but sky and waves for our horizon — a sparkling sea — the gentle and rhythmic movement of the brig — the murmur of the waves, as regular as breathing. This regular alternation of the swell, of the wind in a sail, is found in all the movements, in all the sounds of Nature: does it not also breathe? Yes, without a doubt, it breathes, it lives, it thinks, it suffers and rejoices, it feels, it adores its divine Creator. He did not create dead forms; life is the sign of all his works.

On July 15th, under sail, at 8pm, we saw the last grey mountain peaks of the coasts of France and Italy sink below the waves, then the dark blue line of the sea on the horizon drowned everything: the eye, at this moment when the known horizon vanishes, travels through the space, the floating void, that surrounds it, like some unfortunate who has successively lost all the objects of their affections, and their habits, and seeks in vain where to rest the heart.

The sky becomes the great and unique scene of contemplation; until the gaze returns to this imperceptible point drowned in space, this narrow ship which has become the entire universe for those it bears.

The boatswain is at the helm, with impassive and masculine face; his firm and vigilant gaze, fixed sometimes on the cabin to check the compass needle, sometimes on the bow to read, amidst the ropes of the foremast, his course through the waves; his right arm, placed on the helm, with a movement imprinting his will on the immense mass of the ship; everything about him reveals the serious nature of his work, the fate of the vessel and the lives of thirty people furrowing at this moment his broad brow, and weighing on his robust hand.

At the front of the bridge, the sailors are standing, or seated in groups, or lying on the gleaming fir planks or on top of the cables wound in vast spirals; some are mending old sails with large iron needles, like young girls embroidering their wedding veils, or the curtains of their virginal bed; others leaning over the balustrades, gazing, at the foaming waves without seeing them, as we gaze at the cobblestones of a frequently-trodden road, while casually emitting puffs of smoke to the wind from their red-clay pipes. Some are feeding the hens, filling the long troughs; one, holding a handful of hay in his hand, allows the goat to tug at it, holding its horns in the other; those, over there, are handling two fine sheep, perched in the boat suspended above deck between the masts: the poor creatures raise anxious heads above the gunwales, and, seeing only the undulating plain whitened with foam, bleat for the rock and arid moss of their native hills.

At the ship's extremity, on the horizon of this floating world, is the sharp prow, preceded by its bowsprit slanted over the water; this mast rises from the front of the vessel like the horn of a

sea monster. The undulations of the sea, almost imperceptible at the centre of gravity amidships, cause the prow to describe gigantic, slow oscillations. Sometimes the movement seems to point the ship towards a star in the firmament, sometimes towards some deep valley of the ocean; for the level of the sea appears to rise and fall ceaselessly, when one is at the extremity of a vessel which, by its mass and length, multiplies the effect of the undulating waves.

Separated by the mainmast from this scene of maritime life, we seat ourselves on the watch benches, or stroll with the officers on the deck, watching the sun descend and the waves rise.

In the midst of all these severe, pensive male figures, the child, her hair loose and flowing over her white dress, her beautiful pink face, happy and cheerful, bordered by a straw sailor's hat tied beneath her chin, plays with the captain's white cat, or feeds seabirds, caught the day before, caged beneath the gun carriage, to whom she offers bread crumbs from her little store.

However, the ship's captain, his marine chronometer in hand, silently watching the west for the precise second when the sun's disk, refracted, seems to touch the wave and float there for a moment before being completely submerged, raises his voice and says: '*Sailors, to prayer!*' All conversations cease and games end, as the crew throw their still-burning smokes into the sea, remove their red woollen Greek caps which they clasp in their hands, and gather to kneel between the two masts. The youngest among them opens the prayer book and sings the *Ave, Maris Stella*, and the litanies, in a tender, plaintive, and solemn manner, which seems to have been inspired, amidst the waves, by the restless melancholy of these last hours of daylight, when memories of land, of their cottages, of their hearths, rise in the minds of these simple men. Darkness will descend upon the waves once more, and engulf, until morning, in dangerous obscurity, the path of these sailors, and the lives of so many beings who have no beacon but Providence, no refuge but the invisible hand that sustains them on the waves.

If prayer had not been born with Mankind, it would have been invented by human beings, alone with their thoughts and weaknesses in the presence of the abyss of the sky where their gaze is lost, and the abyss of the sea from which a fragile plank separates them; amidst the roar of the ocean that rumbles, hisses, howls, and bellows like the voices of a thousand ferocious beasts; amidst the gusts of wind that make every rope twang; amidst the approach of night that magnifies all perils and multiplies all terrors. But prayer was not invented; it was born from the first sigh, the first joy, the first sorrow of the human heart, or rather, humankind was born only for prayer: to glorify God or to implore Him, that was its sole mission here below; all else perishes before or with it; But the cry of glory, admiration, or love that we raise to our creator, does not perish as it passes through the world; it rises once more, it resounds, from age to age, in the ear of God, like the echo of His own voice, like a reflection of His magnificence; it is the only thing that is completely divine in humankind, and that we can exhale with joy and pride, for this pride is a tribute to the only one who possesses it of right, to the Infinite Being.

No sooner had we entertained these thoughts, or others like them, each in our own silence than Julia on the side of the deck facing east, called out. 'A fire! A ship on fire!' We rushed to see this distant light on the waves. Indeed, a large, burning mass was afloat in the east, at the edge of the horizon; then, after a few minutes, we realised that it was the full moon, rising slowly from the sea, rounding to form an orb, ablaze amidst the vapours borne by the westerly wind, lifting like a red-hot iron disc a blacksmith might extract from the furnace with his tongs, and suspend above the trough of water in which he will extinguish it. On the opposite side of the sky, the sun's disc,

which had just set, had seemingly left a bank of golden sand in the western sky, like the shore of some unknown land. Our gaze flickered from one side to the other between these two celestial marvels. Little by little, the light of this dual twilight faded; thousands of stars were born above our heads, as if to guide our masts, which swung from one cluster to another; the first watch of the night was ordered, everything that could hinder the manoeuvre was removed from deck, and the sailors approached the captain, one after another, to say: 'God be with us!'

I continued to walk, silently, on the bridge, for some time; then I descended below, giving thanks to God in my heart for allowing me to see once more this hidden aspect of His nature. Lord, to see your work in all its aspects, to admire your magnificence amidst the mountains or the sea, to adore and bless your name, which no letters can inscribe — that is life itself! Enhance ours, so that love and wonder may increase in our hearts! Then turn the page, and let us read, in another world, the endlessly wondrous book of your greatness and your goodness!

*July 16, 1832, on the open sea.*

All night, and then all day, we had a fine but rough sea. In the evening, the wind freshened, the waves rose, and began to roll heavily against the sides of the brig. A brilliant moon cast torrents of shimmering white light into the broad, liquid valleys carved between the tall waves. These floating streams of moonlight resembled springs of running water, cascades born of snowmelt, tracing the green valley floors of Switzerland or the Jura. The ship lumbered up and down each of the deep ravines. For the first time on this voyage, we heard the creaking and groaning of wood; the sides of the brig, under the blows delivered by each wave, made a noise comparable only to the last bellows of a bull struck by an axe, and lying on its side in convulsions of agony. This noise, mingled in the night with the roar of a hundred thousand waves, the vessel's gigantic leaps, the creaking of the masts, the whistling of the wind, the hissing of the spray and foam hurled high as it swept the deck, the heavy, hurried steps of the watchmen running to bolster the helm, the odd brief yet firm words of the commanding officer; all this formed a significant and terrible mass of sound, enough to shake the human soul far more profoundly than a cannon shot on the battlefield. Such scenes one must have witnessed, in order to know the painful side of the mariner's life, and to measure one's own moral and physical sensibility!

An entire sleepless night was passed in this way. At daybreak, the wind dropped a little, the waves no longer broke fiercely, that is to say, they were no longer crowned with foam; everything promised a beautiful day; through the coloured haze on the horizon, we could see the long flanks of the tall mountain ranges of Sardinia. The captain promised us a sea calm and flat as a lake between that island and Sicily. We were sailing at a speed of eight knots, sometimes nine; every quarter of an hour, the dazzling coast toward which the wind was carrying us became clearer; the gulfs deepened, the headlands jutted out further, white rocks rose from the waves; houses and cultivated fields began to be apparent on the island's slopes. At noon, we reached the entrance to the Gulf of San Pietro; but, just as we were about to round the reefs that bordered it, a sudden gust of northerly wind filled our sails; The massive waves that had built during the night caught the wind, and piled up in veritable shifting hills; the entire horizon was nothing but a sheet of foam; the ship staggered to the crest of each wave before plunging almost vertically into the depths between: in vain we sought shelter in the gulf. The moment we rounded a cape to enter the roads, a furious wind, whistling like a volley of arrows, burst from every valley, every cove along the coast,

and threw the brig onto its side; there was barely time to reef the sails; only the lowermost were retained aloft, so as to steer close to the wind: the captain himself grasped the helm. The ship, like a horse held fast on a short rein by a strong hand, seemed to paw the foam of the gulf; the waves skimmed the edge of the deck as the ship heeled over, while the entire port side, down to the keel, rose from the water.

We ploughed on like this for some twenty minutes, hoping to reach the small harbour of San-Pietro Island (*Carloforte*); we could already see the vineyards and the white cottages of the township within cannon range; but the storm intensified, the wind struck us like a flight of cannonballs; we were forced to give way and tack, precariously, even amidst the most violent blows of the tempest. We succeeded, and left the gulf by means of the same manoeuvre that had gained us entry; we found ourselves far out on a dreadful sea. Fatigued by the previous night and the efforts so far that day, we sought shelter desperately before a second night which we feared would prove even more storm-filled. The captain resolved to brave everything, even at the risk of losing his masts, so as to find an anchorage on the Sardinian coast.

The Gulf of Palmas, a few miles from our position, promised us one. To enter it, we battled the same fury of the winds that had driven us from the Gulf of San Pietro. After two hours of struggle, we prevailed and entered, like a seabird poised on its wings, the very heart of the beautiful Gulf of Palmas. The storm had not yet subsided; we could hear the incessant roar of the open sea behind us; the wind continued to whistle through our rigging; but, in that basin surrounded by high mountains, it could only raise bursts of foam, which splashed over and cleansed the deck, and at last we anchored three cable-lengths from the Sardinian beach, on a seagrass bed, in peaceful and barely wrinkled waters.

It is a delightful feeling, that of the sailor who, having escaped the storm through sheer hard work and effort, finally hears the iron chain of the anchor rattle, the anchor that will tie him to a hospitable shore. As soon as it has taken hold, the tense faces of the sailors relax; their thoughts are at rest as well: they descend between-decks, and change their wet clothes; they soon return in their Sunday best, and resume all the peaceful habits of their life on land. Idle, cheerful, and talkative, they sit, arms crossed on the rail, or smoke their pipes, gazing calmly and indifferently at the landscape and houses along the shore.

*July 17, 1832.*

Anchored in this peaceful harbour, after a blissful night's sleep, we lunch on deck, sheltered by a sail that serves as our tent; the sun-baked but picturesque coast of Sardinia stretches out before us. A boat armed with two cannons detaches itself from the island of Sant'Antioco, a few miles away, and appears to be approaching. We soon have a clearer view; it carries sailors and soldiers; it is quickly within earshot; we are interrogated, and ordered to go ashore: we deliberate; I decide to accompany the brig's captain. We arm ourselves with several rifles and pistols to resist, should they try to use force to detain us. We set sail in the small dinghy. Reaching shore near the little Sardinian boat which preceded us, we land on the beach at the rear of the gulf. This beach borders an uncultivated and marshy plain. White sand, large thistles, a few clumps of aloe and, here and there, some bushy shrubs with pale, grey bark whose foliage resembles that of cedar-trees; herds of wild horses, grazing freely amidst this heathland, which come galloping to inspect and sniff at us, and, neighing, depart like flocks of crows; a mile away, bare, grey mountains, with

only a few patches of stunted vegetation on their slopes; an African sky over those scorched peaks; a vast silent countryside; the desolate and solitary aspect that characterises all the fever-inducing beaches of Romagna, Calabria, and the borders of the Pontine Marshes — such was the scene. Seven or eight handsome men, with high foreheads and wild bold eyes, half-naked, half-dressed in tattered uniforms, armed with long rifles, and holding reed poles in their other hands to take our letters or present us with whatever they had to offer (*so as to avoid potential infection*) — such were the actors. I answered their questions in broken Neapolitan dialect; I named some of their compatriots with whom I had been friends in Italy during my youth: the men became polite and obliging, after having showed themselves insolent and imperious. I bought a sheep from them, which they butchered on the beach. We wrote letters: they received our letters on the forked ends of their long reeds, struck a flint and steel, tore a few green branches from the shrubs covering the shore, lit a fire, and passed our letters, soaked in seawater, through the smoke of this fire before touching them. They promised to fire a shot this evening to tell us to return to shore as soon as our other supplies of vegetables and fresh water were ready. Then, dragging from their boat an immense basket of shellfish, '*frutti di mare*', they offered the contents to us, refusing to accept payment.

We return on board. — Hours of leisure and delightful contemplation, spent on the stern of the ship at anchor, while the storm still resounds beyond the ends of the twin capes that protect us, and we watch the foaming tide rise, another thirty or forty feet, against the golden flanks of these capes.

*July 18, 1832.*

We left the Gulf of Palmas, sailing over a mirrored and level sea — a light westerly breeze, barely enough to dry the night dew that shines on the cut branches of the mastic trees (*lentisks*), the only greenery on these well-nigh African coasts — on the open sea, a silent day, and a gentle wind that allows us to run at six to seven knots an hour — a fine evening — a sparkling night — the sea sleeps too.

*July 19, 1832.*

We wake sixty miles or so from the coast of Africa. I reread the story of Saint Louis (*Louis IX*), to remind myself of the circumstances of his death on the beach at Tunis, near the cape of Carthage, which we should see this evening or tomorrow.

In my youth, I knew not why, certain nations inspired in me an almost innate antipathy, while others constantly drew me to their history through an unthinking attraction. I felt for those shadows of the past, those inhabitants of dead ages, exactly what I feel, with irresistible force, for or against the faces of those with whom I live, or those who pass by. I love or abhor, in the physical sense of the word, at first sight. In the blink of an eye, I have judged a man or a woman forever. Reason, reflection, even resistance, offered, often, on my part against these first impressions, prove powerless. When bronze has received its imprint from the mould, you may turn it over and over in your fingers, it retains the contours; so, it is with my soul, with my mind. — This is characteristic of beings in whom instinct is swift, strong, instantaneous, and inflexible. We ask ourselves: 'What is instinct?' and we recognise that it is supreme reason; but innate reason, unreasoning reason,

reason such as God wrought it, not as man finds it. — It strikes like lightning, without the eye having to seek it out. — It illuminates everything at once. — Inspiration in all the arts, as on the battlefield, is also this same instinct, this divinely-inspired reason. Genius, too, is instinct, not simply logic and labour. The more one reflects, the more one recognises that human beings possess nothing that is great and beautiful that belongs to them, that derives from their strength or will; rather, all that is supremely beautiful comes directly from Nature and from God. — Christianity, aware of all, understood this from its inception. — The first apostles felt within themselves this immediate action of the divinity, and exclaimed from the very first hour: '*Every perfect gift comes from God*' (*see the Bible: James 1.17*).

Let us return to the nations of the past. — I have never found it in me to love the Romans; I have never been able to take the slightest heart-felt interest in Carthage, despite its misfortunes and its glory. — Hannibal seems to me no more than a general of the East India Company, conducting an industrial campaign, a brilliant and heroic commercial operation on the plains of Lake Trasimene (*at the Battle of Lake Trasimene, in 217BC, Hannibal defeated the armies of Rome*). — His people, ungrateful like all selfish nations, rewarded him with exile and death! — As for his death, it was beautiful, it was pathetic, it reconciles me to his triumphs; I was moved by it from my childhood. — For me, as for all humanity, there is always a sublime and heroic harmony between supreme glory, supreme genius, and supreme misfortune. — Here was one of those keynotes of human destiny that never fails of effect, a sad and voluptuous modulation within the human heart! Indeed, there is no glory, no virtue, eliciting sympathy, that is complete without ingratitude, persecution, and death. — Christ was the divine example of this, and his life as well as his doctrine explains the mysterious enigma of the destiny of great men, through the destiny of the divine man!

I discovered, later, that the secret of my sympathy or antipathy for the memory of certain nations lies in the very nature of their institutions and actions. People like the Phoenicians, those of Tyre, Sidon, Carthage — trading societies exploiting the land for their own profit, and measuring the grandeur of their enterprises only by the immediate and material utility of the result — I am to them like Dante: I observe and I pass by 'Non ragionar di lor, ma guarda e passa!' (*see Dante's 'Inferno', Canto III, line 15*).

Let us not talk of them. — They were rich and prosperous, that is all. — They only worked for their present day; the future has no business concerning itself with them. — *Receperunt mercedem ('They have received their reward', Vulgate, Matthew, VI.2*).

But those, little concerned with the present they felt slipping from them, who, through a sublime instinct for immortality, through an insatiable thirst for the future, engendered national ideals beyond the present, and elevated human feeling above mere comfort, wealth, and material utility — those who consumed generations and centuries, yet left in their wake a beautiful and eternal trace of their passage; those selfless and generous nations who roused all the great and weighty powers of the human mind, in order to establish knowledge, law, theogonies, arts, and systems — those who have carved masses of marble or granite, raised obelisks and pyramids, as a sublime challenge to Time itself, mute symbols which yet forever speak to great and generous souls — those poetic nations, the ancient Egyptians, the Jews, the Hindus, the Greeks, who idealised politics and made the divine principle, the soul, predominate, in the life of their nation, above the merely human principle, that of the utilitarian — those, I love and venerate. I seek, and delight in, their traces, their memorials, their built, sculpted, or written works; I live their lives, I attend as a

moved and partial spectator the touching or heroic drama of their destinies, and I cross the seas gladly to go and dream for a few days amidst their dust and ruins, and grant their memory a memento from the future; they have deserved well of humankind, for having raised their thoughts above this muddy globe, and beyond this fleeting day. They felt themselves to have been wrought for a higher and broader destiny and, though unable to grant themselves the immortal life of which every noble and great heart dreams, said to their works: 'Immortalise us, endure for us, speak of us to those who will cross the desert, or who, on the waves of the Ionian Sea, will pass Cape Sigeum (*Sigeion*, *near ancient Troy*) or Sunium's promontory (*Sounion, at the southern tip of Attica*), where Plato sang of a wisdom that will be the wisdom of the future still. (*Compare the sentiments of Lamartine's poem 'Faith', of 1818, from his 'Méditations Poétiques'.*)

Such my thoughts, as I listened to the sounds of the prow, on which I was seated, cutting the waves of the African waters, and looked minute by minute, to see if I could spot, beneath the pink mist on the horizon, the cape near Carthage.

The breeze died, the sea calmed, the day passed, as I gazed in vain, from afar, at the misty coast of Africa: in the evening, a strong gust of wind arose; the ship, tossed from side to side, crushed beneath its sails like the broken wings of a seabird, shook us against the rails amidst a terrible roar like that of a collapsing building. I spent the night on deck, my arm around a cable; from the whitish clouds that pressed together like a tall mountain in the deep Gulf of Tunis, flashes of lightning erupted, and distant thunderclaps sounded. Africa appeared to me as I had always imagined, its flanks scoured by the sun's heat, and its scorched peaks hidden beneath the clouds. As we draw nearer, as Cape Bizerte, then Cape Carthage, emerged from the darkness and seemed to advance toward us, all the grand images, all the fabulous or heroic names that have resounded on these shores, also sprang to mind, reminding me of the poetic or historical dramas for which these places were successively the stage. Virgil, like all poets who wish to outdo truth, history, and Nature, rather spoiled than embellished the image of Dido. — The historical Dido, widow of Sychaeus, faithful to the spirit of her first husband, had her pyre erected on Cape Carthage, and ascended it, a sublime and willing victim of true love, and of fidelity even unto death. That is somewhat more beautiful, more holy, more filled with pathos, than the cold gallantries that the Roman poet grants his ridiculous, pious Aeneas, and the amorous despair, on Dido's part, with which the reader cannot sympathise.

But his '*Anna*, *soror*' (*see Virgil's 'Aeneid' Book IV, line 8*), and his magnificent farewell followed by her immortal silence that follow (*in Book VI*), will always render Virgil forgiven.

The historical role of Carthage is more poetic than any poetry. The celestial death and funeral of Saint Louis — the blind Belisarius — Marius expiating the crimes of Rome, among ferocious beasts, amidst the ruins of Carthage, itself a ferocious beast — that lamentable day when, like a scorpion surrounded by fire piercing itself with its own poisonous sting, Carthage, besieged by Scipio (*Scipio Aemilianus, the younger*), and Massinissa (*King of Numidia*), sets its own buildings and property alight — Hasdrubal's wife, enclosed with her children in the temple of Jupiter, reproaching her husband for not knowing how to die, and lighting the torch herself that will consume her and her children, and all that remains of her homeland, leaving only ashes for the Romans! (*In 146BC, at the end of the Third Punic War*) — Cato of Utica, the two Scipios (*Aemilianus, and Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus victor in the Second Punic War*), Hannibal himself, all those great names still rise to mind, above the deserted cape, like standing columns before a ruined temple —

the eye sees nothing but a bare promontory rising from an empty sea, a few cisterns intact, or filled with their own debris, a few shattered aqueducts, a handful of breakwaters ravaged by the waves, covered by the surf; a city nearby, in which even those few names are unknown to its barbarous inhabitants, like the names of those who live too long and become strangers in their own land. But the past suffices when it shines with such splendour in one's memory — I might even say that I prefer a Carthage alone and isolated amidst its ruins than desecrated and troubled by the noise and throng of new generations? Ruins are like tombs — amidst the tumult of a great city, amidst filthy streets, they afflict and sadden the eye, they are anomalous surrounded by all that noisy, agitated life — but in solitude, on the shores of the sea, on an abandoned cape, on a savage beach, a few stones, yellowed by the centuries and scarred by lightning, make one reflect, think, and dream or weep.

Solitude and death, solitude and the past, which involves the death of things, are necessarily allied in human thought. Their accord is a mysterious harmony. I prefer the bare promontory of Carthage, the melancholy cape of Sunium, the bare and infested beach of Paestum, in their evocation of scenes from bygone times, to the temples, arches, and coliseums of a dead Rome, trampled underfoot by the living Rome through habitual indifference, and condemned to profane oblivion.

*July 20, 1832.*

At ten o'clock the wind dropped; we were able to go up on deck, and, sailing at seven knots an hour, soon found ourselves off the isolated island of Pantelleria (*in the Strait of Sicily*), the former island of Calypso (*see Homer's 'Odyssey'*), still delightful for its African vegetation, and the coolness of its valleys and waters. It was here that successive Roman emperors exiled their political prisoners.

It appeared to us only as a black cone emerging from the sea, and clothed up to two-thirds of its summit by a white mist lodged there by the night wind. No ship is allowed to approach; it harbours only small boats that bear exiles from Naples and Sicily to the island, many of whom have been languishing there for the last ten years or more, expiating their premature dreams of freedom (*a reference to the failed Neapolitan Revolution of 1820, an attempt to end the autocratic rule of Francis I, King of the Two Sicilies, and the influence of Austria*).

Woe to those who in every way are ahead of their age! The age will crush them. — Such is our fate also, we impartial, political, rational men of France. — France is still a century and a half behind our ideas. — She, looks to people and ideas born of sect and party: what do patriotism and reason matter to her? Hatred, resentment, and alternating bouts of persecution are all that her ignorance requires! She will clothe herself in them, until, wounded by the deadly weapons she so desperately wishes to employ, she falls, or casts them far from her in order to turn to our only hope for political improvement: God, the ultimate law; and reason, the innate law.

*July 21, 1832.*

The sea, when I awoke after a stormy night, seemed to be toying with the remnants of yesterday's wind — foam still covered it like the streaks that stain the sides of a horse weary after a long race, or the froth shaken from its bit as it raises and lowers its head, impatient for a new course.

The waves run swiftly and irregularly, though they are light, shallow, and translucent: the surface resembles a field of fine oats undulating in the breeze of a spring morning, after a rainy night — we can see the islands of Gozo and Malta, a dozen or more miles away on the horizon, emerging from the mist.

**The End of Part I of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part II: Malta and Athens

## Memories, Impressions, Thoughts, and Places Visited During a Voyage to the Orient - Continued

### Arrival in Malta

*July 22, 1832.*

As we approach Malta, the low coast rises and becomes more rugged; but the aspect is bleak and barren. Soon we see the fortifications, and the bays formed by the harbours; a swarm of small boats, each manned by two oarsmen, emerge from these bays and rush towards the bow of our ship; the sea is rough, and the waves sometimes plunge them into the deep furrow we are ploughing in the sea; they seem about to be swallowed up; the tide lifts them, they race in our wake, they dance at the sides of the brig, they throw us light cables to tow us into port.

Their pilots inform us of the ten-day quarantine in force, and lead us, beneath the high fortifications of the city of Valletta, to the anchorage reserved for this. — The French consul, Dominique Miége, informs the governor, Sir Frederick Cavendish Ponsonby, of our arrival; he convenes the Council for Public Health, and reduces our quarantine to three days.

We are granted permission to take to a boat to shore, so as to stroll, in the evening, along the canals that extend from the quarantine quay. It is a Sunday. The day's scorching sun has set in a peaceful, narrow cove in the gulf behind our ship's bow; the sea there is flat and gleaming, slightly leaden, absolutely the colour of freshly coated pewter. The sky above is an orange hue, slightly pinkish. The tint fades as it rises above our heads and vanishes to the west; to the east, the sky is a pale grey-blue, no longer the brilliant azure of the Gulf of Naples — though neither is it the deep black of the heavens seen above the Savoy Alps. The colour of the African sky partakes of the scorching atmosphere and the harsh severity of that continent; the reflected light from these bare mountains strikes the firmament with its dry heat, and the fiery dust of the arid desert sands seems to mingle with the air that envelops it, dulling the vault of Earth. Our oarsmen are slowly bringing us within a few fathoms of land.

The low, level shore that ends a few inches above the sea is covered, for half a mile, with a row of houses that touch one another and seem to have drawn as close as possible to the water's edge, so as to breathe its coolness and listen to its murmur. Take any one of these houses, its appearance repeated in every other facade, terrace, and balcony — by multiplying one's view of it, and recreating a scene containing five or six hundred similar houses, one will forge an exact memory of this landscape, unique in the eyes of a European who knows neither Seville, nor Cordoba, nor Granada: it is a memory that should be etched there in its entirety, with its customary details, so as to be rediscovered amidst the sombre, dreary uniformity of our Western cities. Such memories, recovered during our days and months of snow, fog, and rain, are like the glimpse of a serene sky during a long storm — a little sunlight in the eye, a little love in the heart, a ray of faith or truth in the soul, it is all one. I cannot live without those three consolations of our earthly exile. My eyes are born of the East, my soul of love itself, and my spirit is one of those that carry within

them an instinct for light, an immediate inner certainty incapable of proof, but one that does not deceive, and that consoles. Here follows a description of the scene, and of such a house:

The light is golden, soft and serene, like that which emanates from the eyes and features of a young girl before passion has etched a line on her brow, or cast a shadow beneath her eyes. This light, spread evenly over the water, earth, and sky, clothes the yellow and white stone of the houses, highlights every detail of the cornices, the corner-edges, the terrace balustrades, and the carved balconies, clearly and sharply against the blue horizon, below the airy, quivering, uncertain and misty haze for which our Western world has claimed beauty in the arts, being unable to correct that flaw in its climate. This quality of the air, the white, yellow, golden colours of the stone-work, the vigour of the highlighted contours, grants even the smallest building in the South a firmness and clarity that reassure the eye, and strike it pleasingly. Every house looks not as if it were built stone by stone, and with cement and sand, but as if it were sculpted and alive, standing upright from the living rock, seated on the earth like a block emerging from its very heart, and as durable as the soil itself.

Two broad, elegant pilasters rise at the two corners of the façade; they reach only to a height of one and a half stories; there, an elegant cornice, sculpted from gleaming stone, crowns them and serves as the base for a rich and massive balustrade that extends along the entire ridge, replacing the flat, irregular, pointed, bizarre roofs that dishonour architecture and break every harmonious line of the horizon, which crown our strange assemblages of buildings that we call cities in Germany, England, and France. Between these two broad pilasters, which project a few inches from the facade, the architect has placed only three openings: a door and two windows. The door, tall, wide, and arched, does not present its threshold to the street immediately; it opens within an exterior porch that encroaches on the quay by seven or eight feet. This porch, surrounded by a sculpted stone balustrade, serves as both an outdoor sitting room, and the entrance to the house. Let me describe one of these platforms, and I will have described them all.

A couple of men, in white jackets, with dark faces and African eyes, each holding a long pipe, are reclining, nonchalantly, on a sofa made of rushes beside the door; before them, leaning gracefully on the balustrade, three young women, in various poses, silently watch our boat pass by, or smile at our foreign appearance. The dark-haired women are clad in a black dress that reaches only to mid-calf, and a white bodice with wide, flowing, pleated sleeves, while over the shoulders and head rises a black silk half-cloak similar to the dress, covering half the face, the shoulder, and the arm which holds the cloak in place; this cloak (*the ghonnella or faldetta*), of light fabric billowing in the breeze, is shaped like a sail billowing on a skiff, and, in its capricious folds, sometimes concealed, sometimes revealed is the mysterious figure it envelops, which seems to delight in escaping it. Sometimes these women raise their heads gracefully as they speak with other young women who lean from the upper balcony, and throw them pomegranates or oranges; others converse with young men with long moustaches, and thick black hair, wearing short, pinched-in jackets, white trousers, and red sashes.

Seated on the parapet of the steps, two young priests, in black robes and silver-buckled shoes, converse familiarly and toy with large green fans, while at the foot of the last step, a handsome mendicant friar, barefoot, and with a bald, white forehead, his body enveloped in the heavy folds of his brown robe, stands like a statue of Mendicancy beside the threshold of a rich and happy man, and watches, with detachment and indifference, this spectacle of happiness, ease, and joy.

On the upper floor, on a wide balcony supported by beautiful caryatids and covered with an Indian awning adorned with curtains and fringes, sits an English family, the fortunate and impassive conquerors of present-day Malta. Moorish wet nurses, with sparkling eyes and leaden, dark complexions, hold in their arms the beautiful children of Great Britain, whose hair is blond and curling, whose skin is pink and white, and who yet endure the hot sun of Calcutta as well as they do that of Malta or Corfu. Viewing these children in their black coats, beneath the burning gaze of half-African women, they seem like beautiful white lambs clinging to the teats of desert tigresses.

On the terrace, there is a different scene; the English and the Maltese share the space. On the one side, one sees young island girls each holding a guitar beneath her arm, strumming a few notes of an old national melody as wild as the climate; on the other, a beautiful young Englishwoman, leaning melancholically on her elbow, contemplating with indifference the life passing before her eyes, or leafing through the pages containing her country's immortal poetry.

Add to all this the Arabian horses ridden by English officers, pacing, with flowing manes, the sand of the quay; the Maltese carriages, sedan chairs on two wheels, drawn by a single Barbary horse which the driver follows on foot at the gallop, his loins tied with a red belt with long fringes, his forehead covered with the net or red cap, hanging down to his waist, of a Spanish muleteer; the wild cries from the naked children who rush into the sea and dive beneath our boat, the songs of the Greeks or Sicilians aboard the vessels anchored in the neighbouring harbour, and answering each other in chorus from one deck to another; the monotonous and skipping notes of the guitar, forming a kind of soft hum of the evening air above all these high-pitched sounds; and you will have an idea of the quay of Msida (*five or so miles from Valletta*) on a Sunday evening.

*July 24, 1832.*

We entered the port of Valletta under 'free pratique' (*clearance to enter a port without quarantine restrictions*): the Governor, Sir Frederick Ponsonby, having returned from his campaign in order to welcome us, received us at the Grand Master's Palace at two o'clock. — An excellent figure of an honest Englishman — probity is the hallmark of such men — elevation, gravity, and nobility, such is the type of the true English nobleman. We admired the palace — magnificent and dignified simplicity — beauty in its mass and an absence of vain decoration both inside and out — vast halls — long galleries — austere paintings — a wide, gently-rising, and resounding staircase — an armoury two hundred feet long, containing armour from every period of history relating to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (*the Hospitallers*) — a library of forty thousand volumes, in which we were received by the librarian, Giuseppe Giovanni Bellanti (*brother of the artist Michele Bellanti*), a young Maltese cleric, quite like the Roman Catholic priests of the old school: — penetrating and gentle eyes, a meditative and smiling mouth, a pale and articulate brow, elegant and rhythmic speech, a simple, natural, and refined politeness. We talked for a long time, for he is the kind of man best suited to a long, deep, and full conversation. There is in him, as in all those distinguished clerics I met in Italy, something sad, indifferent, and resigned, which partakes of the noble and dignified resignation of a fallen power. Raised among the ruins, indeed on the ruins, of a collapsed monument, they have absorbed its melancholy and indifference to the present.

'How', I said to him, 'can a man like you bear the intellectual exile and seclusion in which you live, inhabiting this deserted palace, amidst these dusty books?' 'It is true', he replied, 'I live alone, and I live sadly; the horizon of this island is limited; the noise I might raise here with my writings

can scarcely resonate far, and even that which other men make elsewhere barely reaches me. But my soul sees a freer and vaster horizon, beyond which my thoughts love to wander; we have here a beautiful sky above, warm air around, a wide and blue sea under our gaze; all this suffices for the life of the senses: as for the life of the mind, it is nowhere more intense than in silence and solitude. Life thus returns directly to its source, to God, without straying, without being altered by contact with worldly objects and concerns. When Saint Paul, bringing the fruitful word of Christianity to the nations, was shipwrecked in Malta (*circa 60AD, on his way to Rome*) and remained here for three months to sow his 'mustard seeds' (*see Matthew 13: 31-32, and the gospels of Mark and Luke, for the parable*), he did not complain of his shipwreck and his exile, which brought to that island the early knowledge of the Word and of divine morality: should I, then, born on these barren rocks, complain if the Lord confines me here to preserve his Christian truth in hearts where so many truths are on the verge of extinction? This life has its own poetry,' he added, 'when I am finally free from my efforts at classification and my catalogues, perhaps I too will write the poetry of solitude and prayer.' I left him, with regret and a longing to see him again.

The Church of Saint John, the island's cathedral, is full of character — all the gravity one can expect from such a monument in such a place — grandeur, nobility, richness. The keys of the island of Rhodes, carried to Malta by the knights after their loss of the former (*in 1522*), hang on either side of the altar, a symbol of eternal regret or hope forever disappointed. A superb vault, painted entirely by 'the Calabrian', Mattia Preti, is a work worthy of modern Rome in its finest artistic period.

Only one painting drew my attention, in the Chapel of the Election; it is by Michelangelo da Caravaggio, whom the knights of the time had summoned to the island to paint the vault of St. John's. He undertook the work, though the impetuosity and irritability of his wild nature prevailed; he feared being constrained to a lengthy stay. He left his masterpiece here in Malta, the *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (*1608*). If our modern painters, who pursue Romanticism systematically instead of embracing it naturally, viewed this magnificent work, they would find their supposed invention already realised. Here is fruit born of the tree, not moulded artificially in wax and painted in false colours; here are picturesque poses, an energetic composition, profound feeling, truth and dignity combined; vigorous contrasts, and yet unity and harmony, horror and beauty simultaneously — such is this painting. It is one of the finest I have ever seen. Here is the art the painters of the current school seek. It is here; it is found. Let them search no more. Nothing is new in Nature or the arts. Everything done has been done before — everything said has been said before — everything dreamed of has already been dreamed. Every century plagiarises past centuries; for all of us, artists or thinkers, perishable and fleeting, copy in different ways our immutable, eternal model, Nature — that thought, both single and diverse, of the Creator!

*July 25, 1832.*

From the summit of the observatory overlooking the Grand Master's Palace, one obtains a panoramic view of the towns, ports, and countryside of Malta; bare, formless, colourless fields, arid as the desert; the city, like a turtle-shell washed ashore, seemingly carved from a single block of living rock; the varied scenes of terraced roofs at nightfall; and women seated on these terraces. This is how David caught sight of Bathsheba. Nothing is more graceful and seductive than those white or black figures, like shadows, appearing in the moonlight on the roofs of the multitude of

houses. Women are only seen there, or in church, or on their balconies; all their speech and language is in the eyes; all love a long drawn-out mystery that words can in no way alter; a lengthy drama unfolds thus, and resolves itself without words. This silence, their appearances at certain times, these encounters in identical places, these intimacies of distance, these mute expressions, are perhaps the first and most divine manifestation of love, a feeling beyond words which like music expresses, in a language apart, what no language can express.

These aspects, these thoughts, rejuvenate the soul; they make one feel the one inexhaustible gift that God has bestowed upon the earth, and regret that the hours of life are so swift and so mingled with other things. Two feelings alone would suffice for human beings, even if they lived to the age of the ancient rocks: the contemplation of God and Love. Love and religion are the two thoughts, or rather the single thought, of the peoples of the South; they seek nothing else, these suffice. We pity them, yet we should envy them. What is there in common between our artificial passions, between the tumultuous agitations of our idle thoughts, and these two true thoughts that alone occupy the lives of these children of the sun: love and religion; one gracing the present, the other gracing the future?

And so, despite contrary prejudices, I have always been struck by the profound, rarely-troubled calm of the faces of the South, and by the repose, serenity, and happiness pervading the habits and visages of this silent multitude that breathes, lives, loves, and sings before one's very eyes — their song the superfluity of happiness and impressions in an overflowing soul! People sing in Rome, Naples, Genoa, Malta, Sicily, Greece, Ionia, on the shore, on the sea, on the rooftops; one hears the slow recitative of the fisherman, the sailor, the shepherd, or the vague drone of the guitar on serene nights. It is the music of happiness, whatever any may say. They are slaves, you think? What is the nature of their lot? Slavery or freedom, misfortune, or happiness, according to conventional opinion! Misfortune or happiness are, more correctly, merely elements of our own thinking. What does it matter to these crowds, peaceful people who breathe the sea breeze or bask in the warm rays of the sun of Sicily, Malta, or the Bosphorus, whether the laws are made by a priest, a pasha, or a parliament? Does it change anything in their relationship with Nature, the only sphere that truly occupies their thoughts? No, undoubtedly not: every free, every absolutist society resolves itself into servitudes, more or less keenly felt. We are slaves to the variable and capricious laws we make for ourselves; they are slaves to the immutable laws of Nature that God imposes upon them. All of this, as regards happiness or misfortune, amounts to the same thing. Human dignity and the progress of human intelligence and morality? Surely not! Yet, one should examine the matter before making that declaration.

Take a hundred people at random from among these enslaved nations, and a hundred from among our so-called free peoples, and compare them. In which group is there more or less morality and virtue? — I know, but shudder to say it. — Whoever reads this later might suspect me of a bias toward despotism or a contempt for liberty. — They would be wrong! — I love liberty, that difficult and ennobling endeavour on behalf of humanity — just as I love virtue for its merit and not for its reward; but where it is a question of happiness, as a philosopher I examine the matter, and say, like Montaigne: *What do I know?* (*'Que scais-je?' Michel de Montaigne's motto*) The truth is that our political issues, deemed so crucial in our high schools, and in our cafés and clubs, are petty enough when viewed from afar, from amidst the ocean, or high in the Alps, amidst the depths or the heights of philosophical and religious contemplation. — such issues interest only the few who

have bread and time to spare — the greater majority of the people deal only with Nature. A beautiful, good, and divine religion: that is a form of politics the mass of people can utilise. The principle of life is lacking in our own, that is why we stumble and fall, and fall again, and fail to advance: — the breath of life is lacking in us; we create forms, but the soul does not descend to vivify them. Lord, breathe life into us, or we perish!

*Malta, July 28, 29 and 30, 1832.*

We have been obliged to remain at Malta due to Julia's illness. She is quite recovered; we decided to journey to Smyrna (*Izmir*), halting at Athens on the way. There, my wife and child will settle, while I travel on, alone, through Asia, to visit other parts of the Orient. We weighed anchor and were about to leave the port when a vessel arrived from the Archipelago; it announced the capture of several ships by Greek pirates and the massacre of their crews. The French consul, Dominique Miège, advised us to wait a few days: Captain Edmund Lyons (*later Admiral the Lord Lyons, Baron Lyons of Christchurch*), of the English frigate *HMS Madagascar*, offered to escort our brig to Nafplio (*also Nafplion or Nauplio*), in the Morea, and even to tow us if the brig's speed was slower than his frigate's; he accompanied this offer with every obliging courtesy that could augment its value: we accepted; we departed on Wednesday, August 1st at eight in the morning. Hardly had we set sail when the captain, whose vessel was flying past us, furled his sails and waited for us. He had the crew throw a barrel overboard to which a cable was attached; we fished for the barrel and the cable, and followed, like a horse on a rein, that floating mass that carves the waves, and seems not to notice our weight.

I was unacquainted with Captain Lyons, who had been commanding one of the ships of the English Levant station for six years (*previously as captain of HMS Blonde*); I was not even known to him by name; I had not met him before in Malta, since he was in quarantine. And yet here was an officer of another nation, often a rival and hostile one to our own, who, at our first request, had agreed to slow his course by two or three days, subject his ship and crew to a manoeuvre that is often very perilous (that of towing another vessel), and hear them murmur perhaps at his unparalleled condescension toward an unknown Frenchman — all this out of a singular feeling of nobility of spirit, and sympathy for the anxieties of a woman and the suffering of a child. There is the English officer in all his personal generosity; there was the man himself in all the dignity of his character, and his mission. I shall never forget the gesture or the man; one who sometimes comes aboard to inquire about our well-being and to reiterate his pleasure in protecting us and seems to me one of the most loyal and open-minded people I have ever met. Nothing about him recalls the supposed roughness of the sailor, other than the firmness of a man accustomed to battling against the most terrible of the elements, which is admirably combined, in his still young and handsome face, with gentleness of soul, loftiness of thought, and grace of character.

Having arrived in Malta as strangers, we watched with regret as its white walls sank into the distance beneath the waves. Its houses, which we regarded with indifference just a few days ago, now possess a character and a language. We know those who live there, and benevolent glances follow the distant sails of our two ships from the heights of the terraces.

The English are a great people, both morally and politically; but, generally speaking, they are not a sociable people. Concentrated in the sacred and gentle intimacy of the family home, when they leave it, it is not for pleasure, nor the need to communicate their souls or spread their

sympathy; it is custom, and vanity that guides them. Vanity is the soul of English society; it is vanity that constructs the cold, staid, and rigidly structured form of that society; it is vanity, after all, that has created all classifications of rank, titles, dignities, and wealth, by which only human beings are marked, and which have rendered the individual a complete abstraction, by considering only the name, the dress, the social form. Are the English otherwise in their colonies? I can well believe so, based on what we experienced in Malta. Upon our arrival, we received from all who comprise that fine colony the most selfless and cordial marks of interest and goodwill. Our stay there was nothing but a brilliant and continuous show of hospitality. Sir Frederick Cavendish Ponsonby (*the brother of Lady Caroline Lamb*) and Lady Emily Ponsonby, his wife, a couple destined to represent worthily everywhere, he, the virtuous and noble simplicity of the great English lords, she, the gentle and graceful modesty of high-ranking women in her country; the family of Sir Frederick Hankey (*Chief Secretary to the Government at Malta*); George Nugent-Grenville (*the 2nd Baron Nugent, was appointed one of the Lords of the Treasury in 1830, but resigned his position in August 1832, to become Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands*) and Madame Nugent (*Anne Lucy, second daughter of Major-General the Hon. Vere Poulett*), Sir Hector Greig (*First Secretary to the Island of Malta, and Inspector of Quarantine),* and Monsieur Frere (*John Hookham Frere, diplomat and author*) the former ambassador to Spain (*in 1808*) welcomed us less as travellers than as friends. We saw them for eight days; we may never see them again; but we carry away from their kind cordiality an impression etched on the heart. Malta was for us the colony of hospitality; something chivalrous and hospitable, reminiscent of its former owners, can be found in these palaces, now possessed by a nation worthy of the high rank it occupies in civilisation. One may dislike the English, but it is impossible not to respect them.

The government of Malta is harsh and narrow; it is not worthy of England, which taught liberty to the world, to maintain in one of its possessions two classes, citizens and freedmen. In the English colonies, the provincial governments and local parliaments would readily join forces with the noble representatives of the mother country. The seeds of liberty and nationality, respected among conquered peoples, are the source of future virtue, strength, and dignity for all humanity. The shadow of the English flag should cover only free men.

*August 1, 1832, at midnight.*

Having set sail this morning in heavy seas, we were met with absolute calm thirty miles out to sea; it still persists. There is no wind in the sky, save for a few stray breezes that occasionally rustle the sails of the two vessels; they cause these great stretches of canvas to give out a sonorous throb, an irregular beat, like the convulsive flapping of the wings of a dying bird; the sea is flat and polished like the blade of a sword; not a ripple; but, here and there, broad cylindrical undulations slide beneath the ship and shake it, like subterranean tremors. Then the entire mass of the masts, yards, shrouds, and sails creaks and shudders, as if under an excessively heavy wind. We have not advanced a single mile in an hour; The pieces of orange peel that Julia throws into the sea float perfectly still around the brig, and the helmsman gazes nonchalantly at the stars, distracted, his hand untroubled by the helm. We have released the cable that tethered us to the English frigate, because the two ships, no longer able to steer, risked colliding together in the darkness.

We are now about five hundred paces from the frigate. Lighted lamps shine through the gunports at the rear of the large and handsome cabins occupied by the officers that crown her stern. A lantern, which the eye might mistake for one of the lights in the firmament, is raised and

attached to the tip of the mizzenmast, to rally us during the night. While our eyes are fixed on that floating beacon which is to guide us, delightful music suddenly rises from the luminous sides of the frigate, and resonates beneath its cloud of sails as if they were the sonorous vaults of a church.

The harmonies vary and follow one another for several hours, spreading far and wide, over this enchanted, slumbering sea, all the sounds we have heard in the most delightful hours of our lives. All the melodious reminiscences of our cities, our theatres, our pastoral airs, return to carry our thoughts back to times that are no more, to beings now separated from us by time or death!

Tomorrow, in a few hours perhaps, the terrible sounds of a hurricane that make the masts scream, the repeated blows of the waves on the hollow sides of the ship, the distress cannon, the thunder, the convulsive voices of two elements at war, and of the crew who fight against their combined fury, will take the place of this serene and majestic music!

These thoughts arise in every heart, and a complete silence reigns on both decks. Each person recalls some significant melody, deeply imprinted in their memory, that they once heard in some happy or sorrowful circumstance of their life; each thinks more tenderly of what they have left behind. Deep concern is expressed by the defiance with which human beings seemingly challenge the storm. It is such moments that one must register in one's mind forever; they contain, those few minutes, deeper impressions, more colour, greater vivacity, than entire years spent amidst the prosaic vicissitudes of ordinary life. The heart is full, and longs to overflow. It is then that the most ordinary person feels themself a poet to the very core; it is then that the finite and the infinite enter through every pore; it is then that one wants to burst forth, or simply reveal, to a sympathetic heart or all humankind, in the language of the spirit, what is happening in the mind; it is then that one would improvise songs worthy of earth and heaven; ah, if only we possessed a language in which to do so! But there is no such language, especially among the French; no, we have not the language in which to utter philosophy, love, religion, or poetry; mathematics is the language of our people; its words are dry, precise, and colourless like the numbers themselves. Let us go sleep.

*Same date, August 1, 2 a.m.*

I cannot sleep; I have roused my feelings too much; I return on deck — let me paint the scene — the moon has disappeared beneath an orange mist that veils the endless horizon. It is indeed night, but night at sea, that is to say, roofing a pellucid element that reflects the slightest glimmer of the firmament, and which seems to retain a luminous impression of the day. The night is not black; it is pale and pearly like the colour of ice when a light shines on it from the side or is placed behind it. The air, too, seems deadened and asleep on this soft layer of waves. Not a sound, not a breath, not even the canvas flapping against the yards, not even a trace of foam murmuring in the brig's wake or along the sides of the vessel, which also seems asleep.

I watch this mute scene of rest, emptiness, silence and serenity: I breathe the warm, light air my chest feeling neither heat, nor coolness, nor weight, and say to myself: 'This must be the air that one breathes in the land of departed souls, in the regions of immortality, in that divine atmosphere where everything is immutable, voluptuous, perfect.'

Glancing to the other side of the ship, I realised I have forgotten the English frigate; I have been gazing in the opposite direction: she is there, on the waves, a few cables' lengths from us. I

turned around by chance, and my eyes fell on that majestic colossus, which rested motionless, immense, without the slightest sway of its keel, as if on a pedestal of polished marble.

The gigantic, black mass of the ship's hull stood out in dark relief against its silvery base, silhouetted against the blue of the sky and the sea; not a breath of life escaped that majestic edifice; nothing indicated, either to the eye or the ear, that it was animated by so much intelligence and life, populated by so many thoughtful and active beings. One might have mistaken it for one of those great storm-wrecked vessels, adrift without a rudder, which the navigator encounters with dread in the solitude of the Southern Sea, aboard which not a voice remains to say how she perished; a floating register of death, without a name or date, that the sea leaves to float awhile before engulfing her completely.

Above the dark hull of the frigate, its cloudy sails, pyramiding around the masts, were clustered picturesquely. They rose story upon story, yard upon yard, forming a thousand bizarre shapes, unfurled in broad, deep folds, like the many tall turrets of a Gothic castle grouped around its keep; they lacked the movement and the brilliant, golden colour of sails seen from afar on the waves during the day; rather, motionless, dull, and tinged by the night with a slate grey, they resembled an immense flock of bats, or unknown seabirds, huddled together on a gigantic tree, hanging from its bare branches in the moonlight of a winter night. The shadow of this cloud of sails descended upon us from above, obscuring half the horizon. Never did a more colossal or stranger vision appear to Ossian's mind in a dream of ocean: all the poetry of the waves was there. The blue line of the horizon merged with that of the sky; everything above and below it had the appearance of a single ethereal fluid in which we swam. All this bodiless and boundless vagueness heightened the effect of the frigate's vast aspect on the waves, and plunged the soul, along with the eye, into the same depths of illusion. It seemed to me that the frigate, the aerial pyramid of its sails, and we ourselves, were all together lifted, and borne away, like celestial bodies, into the liquid abyss of the ether, resting on nothing, hovering, due to an inner force, over the azure void of the universal firmament.

We spend several similar days and nights aboard; a flat calm, a fiery sky; immense waves roll from the Adriatic Gulf into the African sea: they are vast cylinders, slightly fluted and golden, at morning and evening, like the columns of the temples of Rome or Paestum.

I spend my days on the bridge; I write a few stanzas for Monsieur de Montherot (*François de Montherot, politician and playwright*) my brother-in-law (*he had married Marie Suzanne Clémentine de Lamartine, who died in 1824*) entitled 'Thoughts at Sea' (*'Pensées en Voyage'*):

*'Ami, plus qu'un ami, frère de sang et d'âme' etc.*

*Friend, more than a friend, brother in blood and soul' etc*

*August 6, 1832, at sea.*

On the 6th, at noon, we see, beneath the white clouds on the horizon, the uneven peaks of the mountains of Greece: the sky is pale and grey as if on the Thames or the Seine in October; a storm, at sunset, tears apart the black curtain of fog which trails over the sea; there are bursts of

thunder, lightning flashes, and a strong breeze from the southeast brings us the freshness and humidity of our rainy autumn winds.

The gale blows us off course, and we find ourselves very close to the coast of Navarino (*Pilos*); we can make out the two islets that guard the entrance to its harbour, and the beautiful mountain with its twin peaks that crowns Navarino. It was there that the cannons of Europe once cried out to a resurrected Greece: Greece answered them poorly; freed from the Turks by the heroism of her sons, and by the assistance of Europe, she is now prey to her own ravages; she has spilt the blood of Capo d'Istra (*Ioannis Kapodistrias, the Greek statesman, assassinated in 1831*) who dedicated his life to the cause. That assassination of one of its foremost citizens ill-suits the beginning of a supposed era of renewal and virtue. It is painful that the thought of that great crime is among the first to come to mind when considering a land to which people sail seeking images of patriotism and glory.

As the ship approaches the Gulf of Modon (*Methoni*), the shores of the Peloponnese emerge and take shape; rising from the floating fog that envelops them. These shores, which travellers speak of with disdain, seem to me, on the contrary, exquisitely sculpted by Nature: great mountain ranges with graceful undulating lines. I can scarcely tear my gaze away. The scene is empty, yet brimming with the past: memory populates everything! This dark cluster of hills, capes, and valleys, which the eye can take in entirely, like a small island in the ocean, and but a dot on the map, has of itself produced more noise, glory, splendour, virtue, and crime than entire continents. This heap of islands and mountains, from which almost simultaneously sprang Miltiades, Leonidas, Thrasybulus, Epaminondas, Demosthenes, Alcibiades, Pericles, Plato, Aristides, Socrates, and Phidias; this land that devoured Xerxes' army of two million men, that sent its colonists to Byzantium, Asia, and Africa, that created or renewed the arts of the mind and the manual arts, and brought them, in a century and a half, to a point of perfection such that they have become our models, and are no longer surpassed; this land, whose history is our history, whose Olympus is still the heaven of our imagination; this land from which philosophy and poetry took flight to illumine the rest of the globe, and to which they return ceaselessly like children to their cradle: lies there! Every wave bears me toward her; I can almost touch her. Her appearance moves me deeply, though far less than if all these memories had not withered in my mind, through having been endlessly rehashed before my powers of thought could comprehend them. Greece is to me like a book whose beauties are tarnished, because we have been made to read before we could understand.

However, all is not lost. There is still a lingering echo of all those great names in my heart; something holy, sweet, and fragrant rises, with that horizon, within my soul. I thank God for having seen, in passing through this land, this country of the *doers of great things*, as Epaminondas is said to have called his homeland.

Throughout my youth I longed to do what I am now doing, to see what I now see. A desire finally fulfilled brings happiness. At the sight of these long-dreamed-of horizons, I experience what I have felt all my life in the possession of anything I have ardently desired: a calm, contemplative pleasure that turns inward, a repose of mind and soul that pauses for a moment, and says to itself: 'Let us rest here, and enjoy!' But ultimately, such joys of the mind and imagination are cold. The happiness of the soul is absent; which lies only in love, human or divine but always love.

*Same day, August 6, in the evening.*

We are sailing pleasantly, with a favourable wind driving us on, between Cape Matapan and the island of Cythera.

A Greek pirate ship approached us, while the frigate was a few leagues out at sea in pursuit of a suspicious vessel. This Greek brig was only a cable's length away. We all went on deck: we prepared for battle; our cannons were loaded; the deck was littered with muskets and pistols. The captain ordered the commander of the Greek brig to withdraw. The latter, seeing twenty-five well-armed men on our deck, decided not to risk boarding. He moved away, then returned a second time, and almost reached us. We were about to open fire. He withdrew again, in apology, remaining within pistol range for fifteen minutes. He claimed that his, like ours, was a merchant ship returning to the Archipelago. I observed his crew. Never have I seen faces in which crime, murder, and plunder were written in more hideous characters.

Fifteen or twenty bandits could be seen, some in Albanian dress, others in tattered European clothing, sitting, lying down, or moving about along the sides of the ship. All were armed with pistols and daggers whose handles gleamed with silver engraving. There was a fire lit on deck, over which two elderly women were frying fish. A young girl of fifteen or sixteen appeared from time to time among these hags: a heavenly figure, an angelic apparition, amidst these infernal characters. One of the old women pushed her back several times into the hold; she retired weeping. An argument apparently broke out between some of the crew: two daggers were drawn and brandished. The captain, who was casually smoking his pipe, leaning on the helm, threw himself between the two bandits, knocking one of them to the deck: all was calm; the young Greek woman returned, wiping her eyes with the long braids of her hair; she seated herself at the foot of the mainmast. One of the old women knelt behind her, and combed the girl's long hair. The wind freshened. The Greek pirate vessel set course for Cythera, and in the blink of an eye was cloaked by it sails, and soon no more than a white speck on the horizon.

We put out to sea to wait for the frigate, which fired a cannon to warn us. Within a few hours, she reached us. The other Greek pirate ship she was pursuing had escaped. It had entered one of the inaccessible coves along the coast, where the pirates always take refuge after such encounters.

Note from the same day, 11 a.m.

Whenever a powerful impression stirs my soul, I feel the need to express it, to write to someone what I feel, to find somewhere a joy reflecting my joy, an echo of what has struck me. Isolated feeling is not complete: mankind was created twofold.

Alas! When I look around me now, there is already so much emptiness. My daughter Julia, and my wife Marianne (*Mary Anne Elisa de Lamartine*) fill it by themselves; but Julia is still so young, that I can only tell her what is within her reach. That is, of the future, that will soon be the present for us all; but as to the past, where is it now? The person who would have enjoyed my happiness the most at this moment is my mother. In everything that happens to me, whether happy or sad, my thoughts involuntarily turn to her. I think I see her, hear her, speak to her, write to her. Someone we remember so vividly is never absent; what lives so completely, so powerfully within us is not dead to us. I still share with her, as I did during her life, all my impressions, which so quickly and entirely became hers; which were embellished, coloured, and illumined in her radiant

imagination. An imagination that was always only sixteen years old! I seek it, in thought, in the modest and pious solitude at Milly (*Milly-Lamartine*), where she raised us, where she thought of me when the vicissitudes of my youth separated us. I see her there still, receiving, reading, and commenting on my letters, more intoxicated than I myself by my impressions. A vain dream! She is no longer there; she dwells in the world of realities; my fleeting dreams are nothing to her anymore: but her spirit is with me, it visits, it follows me, it protects me; *my conversation is with her, in the eternal realms*.

Before reaching maturity, I lost most of those I loved most, or who loved me most, here below. My life as regards love became concentrated; my heart now has only a few hearts to take refuge in; my memory has scarcely anything left but tombs to rest upon on Earth; I live more with the dead than with the living. If God were to strike such blows two or three more times around me, I feel I might be become detached entirely from my own self; for I could no longer contemplate myself, no longer love myself in others; and it is only there that it is possible for me to so love.

From a very young age, indeed, I loved my own self: childhood is selfish. It was fine then, at sixteen, at eighteen, when I did not as yet know myself, when I knew even less than I do about life; but now, I have experienced too much, known too much, to cling to this form of existence termed the human self. What is a man? And how foolish to attach the slightest importance to what I feel, think, or write! What place do I hold in the world? What void will I leave? One of a few days' duration, in one or two hearts; a place in the sun; my dog seeking my presence; trees I once loved no longer witnessing my return to their shade: that is all! And all of that will pass away in turn. We must feel the futility of existence the day we are no longer needed by anyone, the moment when we can no longer be cherished. The only true reality, here below, I have always felt, is love, love in all its forms.

*August 7, evening, 6 o'clock.*

The lofty shores of Laconia are over there, a few cannon shots distant. We coast along in a pleasant breeze; they glide majestically before us. Leaning on the ship's rail, my gaze absorbs those classic forms of the mountains of Greece, so as to lodge them in my memory: they unfold in waves of stone and earth; they rise, fall, and gather before me like the clouds of his soul's homeland before the spirit of Ossian (*the narrator and purported author of a cycle of epic poems presented in 1762/3, by the Scottish poet James Macpherson, as authentic translations of an original oral work by a legendary Gaelic bard*). I have spent an hour or two silently reviewing the hills and recalling the sonorous names of this dead land. The Chromius (*Taygetus*) Mountains, where the Eurotas rises, thrust their rounded peaks into the air, like domes of gilded copper beneath the sun's rays which strike them, and set the layer of clouds ablaze; they seem transparent as the air that envelops them, and from which they can hardly be distinguished; one would swear that one sees, through them, the glow of another sun that has already set, or the immense reverberation of a distant fire.

One of these mountains, among others, presents to one's eyes the shape of an inverted crescent; it seems as if hollowed out, opening an aerial furrow for the sun, which sinks into the dusty golden vapour rising towards its disc. The nearer ridges, which the sun has already crossed, are tinged with purplish violet or pale lilac; they swim in an atmosphere as rich as a painter's palette; closer still, other hills, already covered with the evening shadow, seem clothed in dense black forests; finally, those that form the foreground, those that we skirt and whose foam washes the

cliffs, are plunged in darkness, the eye distinguishing only a few coves where the numerous pirates of these shores take refuge, and a few jutting promontories that bear, like Napoli di Malvasia (*Monemvasia, on the east coast of the Morea, the site of ancient Epidaurus Limera*), cities or fortresses on their steep summits.

These mountains, seen from the deck of a ship, at this very hour, when night drapes them in its thousand illusory colours, may be the most beautiful earthly forms my eyes have ever beheld; and then the ship is floating so gently, inclined like a mobile balcony over the sea that murmurs as it caresses its keel! The air is so warm and fragrant! The sails create such beautiful sounds with every breath of the evening breeze! Almost everything I love is here, tranquil, happy, safe, gazing at and enjoying the view beside me. Julia, and her mother, are leaning, close to me, against the shrouds. The child's face radiates light at every fresh aspect, every name, every historical event her mother recounts; her eyes traverse with ours all these scenes whose marvellous dramas are already familiar to her. There is profound intelligence in her gaze; one sees there the vibrant, warm, rapid thought of a mind blossoming beneath the attentions of the ardent and loving mind of her mother; she seems to rejoice as much as we do, especially because she sees us engaged and happy: for this child's soul lives on the sustenance ours provides; a tear comes to her eye if she sees me sad and dreamy; her features are a simultaneous reflection of mine, and our smiles of joy are always rewarded with a similar smile on her lips. How beautiful she is, then!

I have viewed, from every angle, the hills of Rome and Sabina; these surpass them in the variety of their formations, the majesty of their shapes, and the dazzling splendour of their hues; their lines are infinite; a volume would be needed to describe what a painting could convey in a glance. But to be seen in all their imagined beauty, they must be perceived at dusk; then they are clothed, as long ago, with forests and green pastures, rustic cottages, shepherds and their flocks; the shadows adorn them; they have no need, then, of the mists of the past, and the allure of distance, which the history of the people who graced them does, in order to capture and seduce our thoughts. Nothing should be seen in broad daylight, in the light of the present; in this sad world, only that which is ideal is truly beautiful. Illusion in all things is an element of beauty, except as regards love and virtue.

*Same date, August 7, 8 p.m.*

The breeze is cooler; we are sailing on a pretty sea before the mouths of various gulfs; we are approaching Cape San Angelo, ancient Cape Malea, we will soon reach it.

*August 8th, in the morning.*

The wind failed; we spent the night, without making any progress, a short distance from Cape Malea (*Maleas*).

*Same day, August 8, noon.*

The breeze is gentle and propels us towards the cape. The frigate towing us carves a flat track, murmuring ahead, while we fly in its wake through sprays of foam, which its keel throws off

as it flees from us. Captain Lyons, who knows these waters, wishes us to enjoy the view of the cape, and the land, by passing no more than a hundred fathoms from the coast.

At the tip of Cape San Angelo, or Malea, which juts far out into the sea, begins the narrow passage that timid sailors avoid by keeping the island of Cythera to port. The cape is known as the Cape of Storms to Greek sailors. Only pirates dare to brave it, knowing they will not be followed there. The wind blows from this cape with such force and fury that it often sends stones hurtling from the mountain onto the decks of passing vessels.

On the steep, inaccessible slope of the rock that forms the cape's tooth, one sharpened by storms and the breaking waves, chance has left three boulders, detached from the summit, suspended; their fall halted halfway down. They sit there forming something like a seabird's nest leaning over the foaming abyss. In a patch of reddish earth, also held in place by these three uneven rocks, five or six stunted fig trees are rooted, their twisted branches with broad grey leaves hanging over the noisy chasm that swirls at their feet. The eye can discern no path, no passable escarpment by which one might reach this little mound of vegetation. However, a small, low house can be distinguished beneath the fig trees, a house as grey and sombre as the rock on which it rests, and from which it is, at first glance, indistinguishable. Above the flat roof of the house rises a small, empty pointed arch, like those above the doorways of Italian convents: a bell hangs from it; to the right, one sees the ancient ruin of some red brick buildings, in which three arches open; these lead to a small terrace that extends in front of the house.

Eagles would fear to build their nests in such a place, without a tree or a bush to shelter them from the ever-roaring wind, the eternal crashing of the sea, and the foam that licks ceaselessly at the polished rock, under a perpetually scorching sky. Yet a man has done what the birds have not: he has chosen it as his refuge. He lives there: we caught sight of him; he is a hermit. We rounded the cape so close to shore that we could make out his long white beard, his staff, his rosary, and his brown felt hood like those worn by sailors in winter. He knelt as we passed, his face turned toward the sea, as if he were imploring heaven's aid for these strangers making their perilous passage. The wind, which bursts furiously from the gorges of Laconia began to resound in our sails, as soon as we rounded the cape causing the two ships to pitch and toss, and covering the sea with foam as far as the eye could see. A new gulf opened before us. The hermit, so as to follow our progress, climbed to the crest of one of the three summits; we could distinguish him there, kneeling and motionless, while we were still in sight of the cape.

Who is this man? He must have a soul thrice tempered, to have chosen this dreadful place; he must have a heart and senses hungry for strong, eternal emotions, to live in such a location, alone with the boundless horizon, the tempests, and the roar of the waves; his only spectacle from time to time a passing ship, its masts creaking, its sails in tatters, the distress cannon firing, and the sailors crying their peril.

These three fig trees, this small, inaccessible field, this spectacle of the elements' convulsive struggle, these harsh, austere, meditative impressions on the soul — this was one of the dreams of my childhood and youth. By an instinct, later confirmed by knowledge of humankind, I never envisaged happiness anywhere but in solitude; only later did I envisage love there: now I would set, there, love, God, and meditative thought. But that wild platform, suspended between sea and sky, shaken by the ceaseless clash of air and waves, still charms my heart. Only to stand there, in the posture of a mountain bird, its foot yet touching the sharp peak of the rock, already beating its

wings to soar higher into the realms of light! Any strong-minded person, in such a place, might well become a saint or a great poet; perhaps both. But what a violent upheaval that man's life must have undergone for him to reject the company of others, his situation stirring such thoughts and longings in me, God knows! In any case, he cannot be ordinary, one who has felt the voluptuous need to cling like a hanging vine to the cliff-walls of such an abyss, and to sway there, passing his whole life amidst the tumult of the elements, the dread harmony of the storms, alone, seeking his ideal, before Nature and before God.

*Same date. August 8.*

A few leagues from the cape, the sea is more serene. Frail Greek boats, without decks, in full sail, pass by us in the deep valleys of the waves: they are full of women and children going to sell baskets of melons and grapes in Hydra. The slightest breath of wind makes them heel over until their sails are well-nigh submerged. To protect themselves from the waves, they have only a stretch of canvas that raises the exposed sides a few feet; they are often hidden from our view by the swell and the foam; they rise again like corks bobbing on the crests. What a life! It is the life of almost all Greeks: water is their element; they play amidst it as the children of our hamlets play amidst the heathland of our mountain slopes. The destiny of their country was written by Nature: it is the sea.

*Same date. August 8.*

There are the distant peaks of the island of Crete rising to our right; there is Mount Ida covered in snow, which appears from here like the tall sail of a ship on the sea.

We enter a vast gulf, the Gulf of Argolis, and sail downwind with the speed of a flight of gulls; the rocks, the mountains, the islands on both shores flee like dark clouds before us. Night falls; we can already see the end of the gulf, which is ten leagues distant; the masts of three squadrons anchored off Nafplion stand out like a winter forest against the sky and the plain of Argos. Soon the darkness is complete; fires are lit on the mountain slopes and in the woods, where the Greek shepherds are tending their flocks; the ships fire their evening cannons. We see all the gunports of these sixty anchored vessels gleam in succession, like the streets of a large city as its streetlights are lit; We enter this maze of ships, and anchor, in the middle of the night, near a small fort that protects the harbour of Nafplion (*Nauplia*) opposite the city, and in the shadow of the Palamidi Fortress.

*August 9.*

I rise with the sun, eager to see the Gulf of Argos up close at last — and Argos, and Nafplion, the present capital of Greece (*from 1828 to 1834*). Utter disappointment: Nafplion is a wretched little town built on the edge of the deep, narrow gulf, on a strip of land carved from the high mountains that cover this entire coast. The houses have no native character whatsoever; they are built in the style of the most common dwellings found in the villages of France or Savoy. Most are in ruins, and sections of walls, felled by cannon fire in the last war, still lie in the middle of the streets. Two or three new houses, painted in garish colours, adorn the quay, and a few cafés and wooden shops jut out on stilts into the sea. These cafés, and the balconies over the water, are

crowded with several hundred Greeks in their most elaborate, but dirtiest, attire; they sit or lie on the planks or on the sand, forming a thousand picturesque groups. All the faces are beautiful, but sad and fierce; a weight of idleness hangs heavy on every visage. Neapolitan idleness is gentle, serene, and cheerful: it is the nonchalance of happiness; Greek idleness is heavy, morose, and sombre: a vice that exacts its own punishment. We turn our eyes away from Nafplion, we admire the beautiful fortress of Palamidi, which reigns over the entire mountainside which overlooks the city; its crenellated walls resemble the serrations of natural rock.

But where is Argos? A vast curve of bare and barren plain, intersected by marshland, is visible at the end of the gulf; it is bordered on all sides by grey mountain ranges. At the end of this plain, about five miles inland, one can see a hillock with a few walls on its fortified summit, with a ruined village sheltering in its shadow: such is Argos. Nearby is the tomb of Agamemnon. Yet what do I care about Agamemnon and his empire? I have lost the interest of youth in these historical relics, along with my urge for knowledge of them. I wish for nothing more than a valley in Arcadia; I prefer a tree, a spring beneath a rock, an oleander on the bank of a river beneath the collapsed arch of a bridge covered in vines, to the monuments of any of those classical kingdoms, which bring to mind only the feeling of boredom they inflicted on me in childhood.

*August 10.*

We spent two days in Nafplion; Julia is causing us concern again. We are staying here a few more days until she is completely recovered. We lodge at a shabby inn, opposite a Greek barracks. The soldiers lie about all day in the shade of the ruined walls, in the middle of the streets, and in the city squares; their costumes are rich and picturesque; their features bear the imprint of misery, despair, and all the ferocious passions that civil war kindles and foments in savage souls. Complete anarchy reigns at this moment in the Morea. Every day one faction triumphs over the other, and we hear the gunfire of the Klephts (*anti-Ottoman insurgents*) and the followers of Theodorus Kolokotronis (*leader in the Greek War of Independence*) who are fighting on the far side of the gulf against the government troops. With every messenger coming down from the mountains, we learn of the burning of a city, the pillaging of a plain, the massacre of a population, by one of the parties ravaging their own homeland. One cannot leave the gates of Nafplion without being exposed to gunfire. Prince Constantin Karadja (*a minister of the Ottoman Empire, born in Nafplion*) has kindly offered me an escort of his *palikaria* (*a palikari was a Greek or Albanian soldiers in the pay of the Sultan of Turkey*) to visit the tomb of Agamemnon, and Brigadier-General William Corbet (*an Irishman who fought for the French under Napoleon*), who commands the French troops, is willing to add a detachment of his soldiers; I refused; I did not want to expose, for the sake of vain curiosity, the lives of his men, which I would eternally reproach myself for.

*August 12, 1832.*

This morning, I attended a session of the Greek parliament. The chamber is a wooden shed; the walls and roof are made of poorly joined fir planks; the members of parliament are seated on raised benches around a sandy area: they are talking about their roles.

We sat down on a pile of stones at the door of the hall to watch them arrive. They appeared, one after another, on horseback, each accompanied by an escort of varying size, depending on the

leader's importance. The deputy dismounted, and his palikaria, laden with magnificent weapons, gathered some distance away on the small plain surrounding the hall. The plain resembled a military camp or a caravanserai.

The deputies' demeanour is martial and proud; they speak without confusion or interruption, their voices moved yet firm, measured, and harmonious. They are no longer the ferocious figures that once daunted the eye in the streets of Nafplion; they are the leaders of a heroic people, still holding the rifles or sabres with which they have just achieved their liberation, and deliberating together on how to secure the triumph of liberty. Their parliament is a council of war.

Nothing could be simpler and yet more imposing than the spectacle of this armed nation deliberating amidst the ruins of its homeland, beneath a wooden vault erected in the open field, while the soldiers polish their weapons at the gate of this senate, and the horses neigh, eager to return to the mountain tracks. Among these leaders are admirable and heroic figures possessed of beauty and intelligence; these are the mountain dwellers. The Greek merchants of the islands are easily recognisable by their more effeminate features, and cunning facial expressions. The commerce and ease of the cities have stripped their faces of nobility and strength, imprinting them with the mark of vulgar skill and cautiousness that characterises them.

*August 13, 1832.*

A delightful party was given on board by Vice-Admiral Henry Hotham, who commands the English station in the harbour of Nafplio. He showed us round his three-decker, the *Saint Vincent*, and staged a mock naval battle for us. A ship manned by sixteen hundred men, and seen thus at the moment of combat, is a masterpiece of human ingenuity.

An excellent man, whose countenance and manner combined that rare blend of the nobility of the old warrior and the benevolent gentleness of the philosopher, a common characteristic of the handsome faces of men of the English aristocracy. He offered us one of his warships to escort us to Smyrna. I refused, and requested the like favour from Rear-Admiral Hugon (*Gaud-Amable Hugon*), who commanded the French squadron. He was willing to give us the brig *Le Génie* commanded by Captain Cuneo d'Ornano (*Annibal Nicolas Cuneo d'Ornano*); but the latter can only escort us as far as Rhodes.

I am dining at the home of Monsieur Achille Rouen, the French Minister to Greece; I myself held this post during the Restoration. He offered me his sympathy on not having retained it. Monsieur Rouen, who has spent all the dark days of Greek anarchy in Nafplion, longs for his release. He finds solace in the severity of his exile by welcoming his compatriots and by representing, with perfect grace and cordiality, the noble protection of France in a country whose past and future are to be cherished.

*August 15, 1832.*

I write little: my soul is withered and dreary like the dreadful land that surrounds us; bare rocks, reddish or black earth, dusty creeping shrubs, marshy plains in which the icy north wind, even in August, whistles over mounds of reeds: that is all. This land of Greece is nothing but the shroud of a people now; it resembles an ancient sepulchre robbed of its bones; the very stones are scattered

and browned by the centuries. Where is the beauty then, of this much-vaunted Greece? Where is the golden and transparent sky? All is dull and cloudy, like a gorge in Savoy or Auvergne in the last days of autumn. The violence of the north wind, which drives noisy waves to the end of the gulf where we are anchored, prevents us from leaving.

*August 18, 1832, at sea, anchored in front of the Gardens of Hydra (a feature on the island of Hydra, in the Saronic Gulf)*

Finally, we set sail last night with a lovely southeasterly breeze; we slept in our hammocks. By seven o'clock we had left the gulf; the sea was calm and gently lapped against the sides of the brig. We were in the channel that runs between the mainland and the islands of Hydra and Spetses.

Around noon we were taken aback, near the mainland opposite Hydra. Fierce gusts of wind, coming from all directions, made manoeuvring perilous. Our sails were torn; we risked the masts breaking; for three hours we fought relentlessly against the furious gale; the sailors were exhausted; the captain was concerned for the ship's fate; finally, we managed to reach the shelter of a high cliff, an anchorage known to sailors, opposite the charming hill called the Gardens of Hydra. We dropped anchor there, a mile from the coast, and not far from the brig of war *Le Génie*, which had taken a like course.

A day of rest on a still choppy sea, buffeted by the wind whistling through our masts. We went ashore by boat; this is the most beautiful spot we have yet visited in Greece: high mountains dominate the landscape; they still retain some layers of soil, with pale green meadows on their rounded slopes; they descend in soft contours, a few olive groves at their feet; further on, they extend in gentle slopes to the Hydra canal, looking like a broad river rather than an arm of the sea. There, one can rest one's eyes on a few country houses surrounded by gardens and orchards; and on cultivated fields, clusters of chestnut and holm oak trees, flocks of sheep, and a few Greek labourers working the land. We set our dogs loose and hunted all day in the mountains, returning with game.

The town of Hydra, which covers the entire small island of that name, gleamed, white and resplendent on the other side of the channel, dazzling like stone hewn only yesterday. The island, from here, offers not an inch of soil to the eye: everything is stone; the town covers everything; the houses stand perpendicularly one upon another, a sanctuary for free trade and Greek opulence despite Turkish domination. One can measure the growth or decline of civilisation, as regards a nation, by the locations of its towns and villages: whenever security and independence are on the increase, the towns descend from the mountains to the plains; whenever tyranny and anarchy hold sway, they re-ascend the cliffs, or take refuge on the reefs. In the Middle Ages the towns of Italy, and those on the Rhine, and in France, were eagles' nests perched on the summits of inaccessible rocks.

*Same date. August 18.*

The night is calm. We are spending the fine evening on deck. We will leave tomorrow, unless the northerly wind picks up again, and with the same force.

## Athens

*August 18, 1832, at sea.*

We weighed anchor at three in the morning. A wind that rendered the vessel manageable allowed us to approach the tip of the continent jutting into the Saronic Gulf; but there a new storm assailed us, even more violent than the day before; we were instantly separated from the two ships sailing alongside. The waves were enormous; we rolled from one abyss to another, the yards drenched by the waves, and the foam leaping on deck. The captain tried stubbornly to double the cape; after several hours of fruitless manoeuvring, he succeeded: we were now in the open sea, but the wind was so strong that the brig was drifting considerably. We were forced to set a course for the mountains that rise on the western side of the gulf.

We are sailing at ten knots, in a damp mist, flakes of foam leaping above from the bow and both sides of the ship. From time to time the horizon brightens, and we glimpse Cape Colonna (*Akra Sounio*), whitening before us. We hope to anchor this evening below those temple columns, and pay homage to the memory of the divine Plato, who came to meditate, two thousand years before us, on that same promontory of *Sounion* (*Sunium*). My gaze never leaves the mountains of Attica on the horizon, from which the storm is driving us, towards the west. Finally, as the sun sets, the wind eases; off the island of Aegina, the captain tacks the ship. We reach well-nigh calm waters, sheltered by the island and the mainland coast, and at nightfall enter another region of the gulf formed by that island and the beautiful shores of Corinth. The sea is like a mirror, and we seem to be sailing on a waveless river, whose gentle current carries us to our anchorage. We drop anchor, just as night falls, in a vast enchanted lake, encircled by dark mountains, the rising moon casting its white glow on the Acropolis of Corinth, and the columns of the temple on Aegina (*the Temple of Aphaia*). We are a few hundred paces from the island, opposite gardens shaded by beautiful plane trees. A few white houses, gleam amidst the greenery. Rest and a quiet supper on deck, after a day of perils and fatigue; such is the life of travellers and of those on shore.

To our right lies the island of Aegina, a tongue of land, dotted with a few cypress trees, vines, and fig trees jutting from its steep dark slopes; the township terminates it; less oddly situated than the few Greek towns we have seen so far; the white-walled gymnasium, erected by order of Ioannis Kapodistrias, stands at its centre — a museum; I avoid visiting… I am tired of museums — graveyards of the arts. Fragments detached from their place, and purpose, and from the whole to which they belonged, are dead; dusty marble without life. — I go ashore alone, and spend two delightful hours in a garden of cypress and orange trees belonging to Georgios (*Georgios Voulgaris, appointed by the Ottomans*) the Bey of Hydra.

At ten o'clock, I return to the ship; as I descend the ladder, I find half the deck literally covered with heaps of watermelons and melons, immense baskets filled with bunches of grapes of all shapes and colours, some weighing three to four pounds, figs from Attica, and all the flowers that the season and the climate can provide. I am told that it was the governor of Aegina, Nicolas Scuffo, who, having learned the previous day from my Greek pilot of my passage through the gulf, came to visit me with a boat laden with this gift from his land. He recognised my name as that of a friend of Greece and brought me the first token of the prosperity that so many generous hearts have wished for her. He announced his return this evening. I requested a boat from Captain Cuneo

d'Ornano and went to Aegina to offer my thanks to the governor; I met him at sea. We returned to my ship together. A distinguished man, and a witty conversationalist: we spoke of Greece, its future state, and its present crisis. I find with sorrow that the religious spirit is extinguished in Greece; the clergy, steeped in ignorance, is despised; the commercial spirit alone lacks sufficient virtue to revive a people; I fear for the latter: at the first European crisis, all will fall apart again. Greece is like Italy: composed of the most intelligent, courageous and brilliant individuals, but with no common bond — similarly, here there are Greeks, but no nation!

Having departed Aegina at noon on the 18th, we watched the sun descend into the golden valley that winds along the Isthmus of Corinth, between Acrocorinth and the mountains of Attica; it set that entire part of the sky ablaze, and it was there that, for the first time, we encountered that splendour of the firmament which lends its charm and glory to the Orient. Salamis, the tomb of Xerxes' fleet in (*480BC*), lay some miles ahead: a grey coast, blackish earth, with no other attraction than its name — its naval battle and the memory of Themistocles prompts the traveller to salute it with respect. The mountains of Attica raised their dark peaks above Salamis, and to the right, on one of the receding summits of Aegina, the temple of Zeus Panhellenios (*now attributed to the local mother-goddess Aphaia*), gilded by the last rays of day, rose above this scene, one of the most beautiful as regards its natural setting, and cast a religious glow over the memory of past places and times. Humanity's religious thought mingles with everything and consecrates everything; but the religion of the Greeks, a religion of the mind and imagination, not of the heart, makes no impression on me whatsoever: those gods of the people were merely a play of poetry and art, gods feigned and dreamt of — nothing serious, nothing real, nothing drawn from the depths of nature and the human soul, until Socrates and Plato! With them, begins the religion of reason! Then comes Christianity, which received from its divine founder the word and the key to human destiny! The ages of barbarity the Christian religion was obliged to traverse to reach us has often altered and disfigured his image; but if he had encountered Plato and Pythagoras, where would we not have arrived? We will still arrive there, thanks to him, through his being, and with him.

A settled calm causes us to sit for six hours motionless on the transparent sea, amidst the tinted vapours of the Saronic Gulf. The Acropolis, with the Parthenon, rises like an altar three leagues before us, detached from Mount Pentelicus, Mount Hymettus, and Mount Anchesmus (*Lycabettus*); indeed, Athens is an altar to the gods, the most beautiful pedestal upon which past centuries might well have placed a statue of 'Humanity'! Today its aspect is sombre, sad, black, arid, desolate; a weight on the heart; nothing living, green, graceful, animated; nature exhausted, which only God could revive: liberty alone will not suffice. — For the poet or painter: 'It is all done with!' is inscribed on these barren mountains, on these capes whitened by collapsed temples, on those marshy or stony moors which retain nothing but their sonorous names. An apocalyptic land which seems stricken by some divine curse, by the words of some mighty prophet; a Jerusalem of the nations, in which there is no longer even a tomb; that is my impression of Athens and all the shores of Attica, the islands and the Peloponnese.

Arriving at Piraeus, at eight in the morning on August 19th, we dropped anchor. The horses were waiting for us on the beach; we mounted. I found a donkey, on which we placed a woman's saddle for Julia; and we set off. For a mile or more, the plain, though possessed of a light, manageable, and fertile soil is completely bare and uncultivated. During the war, the Turks burned the olive-trees there whose groves extended to the sea; a few blackened trunks still remain. We

entered however the olive and fig trees that encircle the group of hills comprising Athens like a verdant belt. We followed the still-evident foundations of the long wall, built by Themistocles, which connected the city to Piraeus. Several Turkish fountains, shaped like wells and surrounded by rustic troughs of rough stone, are placed at intervals. Greek labourers and a few Turkish soldiers lay around the fountains, drinking in turn. Finally, we passed beneath the high ramparts and the black rocks that serve as the pedestal for the Parthenon.

The Parthenon itself did not seem to grow larger, but rather to shrink, as we approached it. — The effect of this edifice, the most beautiful that human hands have erected on earth, in the judgment of every age, falls far short of expectations when seen in this light; and the pompous descriptions devised by travellers, painters, and poets cause a sadness at heart on viewing a reality so far removed from their images. It is not gilded as if by petrified rays of the Greek sun; it fails to soar in the air like some aerial island bearing a divine monument; it does not shine from afar over sea and the land, like a lighthouse proclaiming: 'Here is Athens! Here humankind exhausted its genius and offered its challenge to the future!' — No, none of that. Above your head, you see ancient, blackened walls rising irregularly, marked with white patches. These stains are marble debris from the monuments that already crowned the Acropolis before its restoration by Pericles and Phidias. These walls, flanked at intervals by other supporting ones, are crowned with a Byzantine square tower and Venetian battlements. They enclose a broad mount that once contained almost all the sacred monuments of the city of Theseus. At the end, facing towards the gulf, stands the Parthenon, or Temple of Minerva (*the Roman Athene*), that virgin goddess sprung from the mind of Jupiter (*the Roman Zeus*). This temple, whose columns are blackish, is marked here and there with patches of dazzling whiteness: they are the marks of the Turkish cannon fire, or the hammers of the iconoclasts. Its shape is a rectangle; it seems too low and too small for its monumental position. It fails to proclaim: 'It is I, the Parthenon, what else.' One must ask one's guide, and even when he has answered, one still has doubts.

Further on, at the foot of the Acropolis, one passes beneath a dark, low gate, under which some ragged Turks are lying beside their rich and beautiful weapons, and you are in Athens. The first monument worthy of sight is the Temple of Olympian Zeus, whose magnificent columns rise alone in a deserted, bare square, to the right of what was once ancient Athens, a worthy portico to a city of ruins! A few steps from there, one enters the city, that is to say, an inextricable labyrinth of narrow paths strewn with sections of collapsed walls, broken tiles, stones and pieces of marble heaped pell-mell, now descending into the courtyard of a collapsed house, now climbing the stairs or even onto the roof of another. In these small, white, sordid hovels, ruins built of ruins, are dirty and foul dens, in which families of Greek commoners are crammed together and buried. Here and there, a few women with dark eyes and gracious Athenian faces, emerged onto their doorsteps, at the sound of our horses' hooves, smiled at us with kind and astonished expressions, and greeted us with Attic courtesy: 'Welcome to Athens, foreign lords!'

After a quarter of an hour's walk, amidst the same scenes of devastation and the same heaps of collapsed walls and roofs, we arrived at the modest home of Monsieur Gaspari, the agent of the Greek consulate in Athens. I had that morning sent him a letter commending me to his kindness. I had no need of it: kindness is the hallmark of almost all our agents abroad. Monsieur Gaspari received us as newly-arrived friends; and while he sent his son to find lodgings for us in some house still standing, one of his daughters, a true Athenian lady, a beautiful and graceful image of

the hereditary beauty of the women of her country, served us, with eagerness and modesty, iced orange juice in porous earthenware vases of antique shape. After refreshing ourselves for a moment in this humble refuge of simple and cordial hospitality, so sweet to encounter under a burning sky, two thousand miles from one's homeland, at the end of a day of storm, sun, and dust, Monsieur Gaspari led us to the lower part of the city, descending amidst the same ruins, to a clean, white house, recently built, in which an Italian, M***, had established an inn. A few whitewashed and neatly furnished rooms, a courtyard cooled by a spring and a patch of shade, at the foot of the stairs a beautiful white marble lioness, abundant fruits and vegetables, honey from Mount Hymettus, a product maligned by Monsieur de Chateaubriand (see the '*Itinerary, Paris to Jerusalem and Back: Part I, Greece*'), Greek servants who understood Italian, attentive and intelligent, all of this was worth double the value to us, given the desolation and absolute nakedness of Athens.

You could not find better lodgings on the roads of Italy, England, or Switzerland. May this inn endure and prosper for the comfort and well-being of future travellers! But, alas! For forty-eight days, no stranger had crossed its threshold or disturbed its silence.

In the evening, Monsieur Gropius (*Georg Christian Gropius, the archaeologist and diplomat*) kindly made himself available to show Athens to us, and explain its sights. As fortunate as Chateaubriand had been, having been guided through the ruins of Athens by Monsieur Fauvel (*Louis-François-Sébastian Fauvel, the French vice-consul at Athens, when Chateaubriand visited in 1806*), we found in Monsieur Gropius a second Fauvel. Monsieur Gropius has been an Athenian for thirty-two years and, like his mentor, is building his retirement home among the ruins of a city where he spent his youth, and which he helps, as best he can, to emerge from beneath its poetic layers of ancient dust. Austria's consul in Greece, and a man of erudition and wit, he combines the most conscientious and profound scholarship as regards antiquity with that naive good nature and unassuming grace of character which is the hallmark of the true and worthy children of learned Germany. Unjustly accused by Lord Byron in his biting notes on Athens (*see 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto II'*), Monsieur Gropius chose not to deliver offence for offence, nor seek to tarnish the memory of the great poet; he only grieved that his name had been repeated in edition after edition, and delivered into the hands of fanatics ignorant of antiquity; but he had no desire to justify himself, and when one is on the spot, and witnesses the constant efforts this distinguished man makes to restore a word to an inscription, a lost fragment to a statue, or a form and a date to a monument, one is sure that Monsieur Gropius has never profaned what he adores, nor made a vile trade of the noblest and most disinterested of studies, the study of antiquities.

In the company of such a man, days are worth years to an ignorant traveller like myself. I asked him to spare me the doubtful antiquities, the conventionally-celebrated buildings, the systematic tour of Athens' sights. I abhor falsehood and effort in everything, but especially in displays of admiration. I wish to see only what God or man has made beautiful; beauty that is present, real, palpable, speaking to the eye and the soul, not the beauty of place and time: historical or critical beauty — that belongs to scholars — we poets desire beauty that is evident and perceptible — we are not beings made for abstraction, but for Nature and instinct: thus, have I traversed Rome many a time; thus, have I visited the seas and the mountains; thus, have I read the philosophers, historians, and poets; thus I have visited Athens.

It was a pure and lovely evening: the scorching sun descended, shrouded in a violet mist, above the narrow, dark ridge that forms the Isthmus of Corinth, and struck with its last rays of light the

battlements of the Acropolis, which curve like the summit of a tower over the wide, undulating valley where the shadow of Athens sleeps silently. We went along nameless, untraceable paths, constantly passing through breaches in dilapidated garden walls, or roofless houses, or ruins heaped on the white dust that shrouds the Attic soil. As we descended toward the bottom of the deep, deserted valley shaded by the Temple of Theseus, the Pnyx, the Areopagus, and the Hill of the Nymphs, we discovered a wide expanse of the modern city unfolding to our left, though identical in every way to that which we had seen elsewhere. A confused, vast, bleak, disordered jumble of collapsed houses, sections of walls still standing, sunken roofs, ravaged gardens and courtyards, and piles of stones blocking the paths and tumbling about underfoot; all the colour of recent destruction, that dull, flabby, discoloured grey which lacks even for the eye the sanctity of bygone times, and the grace of ancient ruins. No vegetation, except for three or four palm trees like Turkish minarets still towering above the mutilated city; here and there a few houses of vulgar, modern design, recently rebuilt by Europeans or Greeks from Constantinople — houses as in our villages of France, or in England, with tall, graceless roofs, numerous narrow windows, and an absence of terraces, architectural lines, or adornment — lodgings for a single lifetime only, built to await their impending destruction; but none of those palaces a civilised people erects confidently for both themselves and future generations. Amidst all this chaos, a few rare sections of the Panathenaic stadium, a few blackened columns of Hadrian's Arch and the Roman Agora, the dome of the Tower of the Winds, and Diogenes' Lantern (*the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates*), catch the eye but fail to detain it. — Before us, standing out from the grey mound on which it rises, was the Temple of Theseus (*formerly known as the Theseion, correctly the Hephaisteion*), isolated, exposed on all sides, entire on its pedestal of rock — this temple, after the Parthenon, the most beautiful, according to the specialists, of those which ancient Greece erected to its gods and heroes.

Approaching the monument, convinced by what I had read of its beauty, I was astonished to receive only a cold and sterile impression; my heart sought to feel moved, my eyes sought to admire. Nothing. I felt only what one experiences at the sight of a flawless work, a negative pleasure, but a real and strong impression, a new, powerful, involuntary delight? No. The temple is too small; it is a sublime artistic toy! It is not a monument for the gods, for mankind, for the ages. I felt only a single moment of ecstasy: it was when, seated at the western corner of the building, on its last steps, my gaze took in at once, along with the magnificent harmony of its forms and the majestic elegance of its columns, the empty and darker space of its portico, and on its inner frieze the admirable bas-reliefs of the battles of the Lapiths and Centaurs; and above, through the central opening, the blue and resplendent sky, spreading a mystical and serene light over the cornices, and the projecting forms of the bas-relief figures: they seemed then to live and move. Great artists of every kind alone possess this gift of imbuing their works with life — alas, to their cost — on the Parthenon, for example, only two figures remain, Mars and Venus, half-crushed by two enormous fragments of the cornice that, in sliding, have lodged against their heads; but these two figures alone are worth more to me than anything I have seen previously in sculpture: they live as no canvas or free-standing marble sculpture ever has. One suffers, feeling the crushing weight upon them; one longs to relieve their limbs, which seem to bend and stiffen under this mass; one feels that Phidias' chisel trembled, his hand on fire, when these sublime figures were born beneath his fingers. One feels (and this is no illusion, it is the truth, the painful truth) that the artist infused his own individuality, his own life-blood, into the forms, into the veins, of the

images he created, and that it is the force of his own living being that we see pulsating in these living forms, in these limbs ready to move, in these to lips ready to speak.

No, the Temple of Theseus is not worthy of its renown; it does not live as a monument, it says naught of what it ought to say: it possesses beauty, undoubtedly, but a cold, lifeless beauty from which only an artist's eye can remove the shroud and wipe away the dust. As for myself, I admired what I saw, but left without any wish to view it a second time. Yet, I have never left the beautiful stones of the Vatican colonnade, the majestic and colossal shadow of St. Peter's in Rome, without a pang of regret, without the desire to return!

Higher up, after climbing a dark hill covered with reddish pebbles and thistles, one arrives at the Pnyx, the site of those stormy assemblies of the Athenian people, which witnessed their fickle ovations for their orators or favourites. Enormous blocks of black stone, some as large as twelve or thirteen cubic feet in size, resting one upon another, once supported the terrace where the people gathered. Higher still, at a distance of about fifty paces, one sees an enormous square block, into which steps have been carved doubtless used by the orator to ascend to this platform, which overlooked the people, the city, and the sea. It has none of the elegant character of the days of Pericles; it suggests the Roman style; it is a place full of memories. Demosthenes spoke from there, and stirred or calmed the ocean of people, more tempestuous than the Aegean whose murmur he could hear behind him.

I sat there, alone and pensive, and remained almost till nightfall, reviving effortlessly its whole story, the most beautiful, the most urgent, the most vibrant of all the tales of the sword or the word. What a brilliant age! And what genius, grandeur, wisdom, light, even virtue (for not far from there Socrates died) was displayed at that time! The present hour in Europe, and especially in France the vulgar Athens of modern times, resembles that hour. — But only the upper echelons in France and Europe evoke ancient Athens; the mass of the people are still uncivilised!

Suppose Demosthenes were to utter a speech in his fiery, sonorous, and colourful language at a popular gathering in one of our present-day cities: who there would understand it? Inequality of education, a barrier to enlightenment, is the great obstacle to our achieving a completely modern society. The people are the masters, but they are not fully capable of assuming the role; that is why they cause destruction everywhere, and raise nothing beautiful, lasting, or majestic anywhere! All the Athenians understood Demosthenes, grasped the language, and were able to comprehend the laws and the arts. They were an elite people; with the passions of the masses, but not their ignorance; they committed crimes, but avoided foolish actions. Such is no longer the case: that is why democracy, necessary in principle, seems impossible to achieve in practice among large modern populations. Only time can render people capable of governing themselves. Their education is provided by revolution.

The fate of the orator, individuals like Demosthenes or Mirabeau the only pair truly worthy of the name orator, is more appealing than that of the philosopher or the poet; the orator wields both the language in all its glory, and the power of the masses, whom he acts upon, and through. He is a philosopher-king, if he is a true philosopher, yet that dread weapon, the people, breaks in his hands, and wounds, and kills him; moreover, what he achieves, what he says, what he stirs in humanity — passions, principles, fleeting interests — all is transient, mortal, by its very nature. The poet, on the contrary, and by poet I mean whoever embodies ideas in bronze, in stone, in prose, or in rhythmic verse; the poet evokes only what is imperishable in Nature and the human

heart; times pass, languages alter, but great poetry lives on, always complete in itself, always as fine and as new, always with the same power to sway the minds of its readers; the poet's fate is less human, but more divine! The poet is therefore greater than the orator.

The ideal would be to combine both roles: none has ever done so; yet there is no incompatibility between action and thought in a mature intellect. Action is the daughter of thought, but human beings, jealous of all pre-eminence, never attribute more than one supreme power to the same mind. Nature is more liberal! People banish from the realm of action all who excel in the realm of thought and speech; they would never ask a Plato to make the laws, nor a Socrates to govern even a small town.

I sent word to Youssouf Bey, the Turkish governor of Attica (*Youssouf was the cousin, sword-bearer, and deputy in Athens of Pasha Omar in Negroponte, an alternative name for Euboea*), to ask permission to go up to the citadel with my friends and visit the Parthenon. He sent a janissary to accompany me. We left on the 20th at five in the morning, accompanied by Georg Gropius. All visitors are rendered silent before the incomparable impression of the Parthenon, that temple of temples built by Ictinus, commissioned by Pericles, and decorated by Phidias. It is the unique and exclusive epitome of beauty in architecture and sculpture; a sort of divine revelation of ideal beauty received one day by artists of excellence, and transmitted by them to posterity in blocks of imperishable marble and in sculptures that will live forever.

This monument, as it once was, entire in its setting, on its natural pedestal, its tiers adorned with unrivalled statues, its grandiose forms, its execution perfect in every detail, its material, its colour, its petrified light; this monument inspired admiration, for centuries, without ever sating it. Seen as I saw it, its majestic remnants mutilated by Theodosius I's hammers (*following his edict of 380AD*), by Venetian bombs and the explosion of the powder magazine (*in 1687*) ordered by Francesco Morosini, and by the cannons of the Turks and the Greeks (*in 1821-22*), immense pieces of its columns lying on its platform, its capitals collapsed, its triglyphs shattered by Lord Elgin's agents, its statues carried off in English ships (*Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, a Scottish nobleman, diplomat, and controversial collector, procured the sculptures known as the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon, and from other structures on the Acropolis*), what remained was still enough for me to feel it the most perfect poem written in stone on the face of the earth; and yet, I also feel it is too small; the effect fails, or is destroyed. I spent delightful hours lying in the shade of the Propylaea, my eyes fixed on the crumbling pediment of the Parthenon. I could feel all of antiquity in what is the most divine of its works, a feeling that renders the rest scarcely worth the words with which one might describe them!

The Parthenon's appearance, more than its history, reveals the colossal grandeur of a people. Pericles' name is undying! What a civilisation! Superhuman indeed, that century which found a great man to demand, an architect to conceive, a sculptor to adorn it, others to execute statues, workmen to cut the stone, and a people ready to pay for its construction, and with eyes to understand and admire such an edifice (*the Parthenon was built between 447 and 432 BC, with the main construction effort completed by 438 BCE, and sculptural work continuing until 432*). When will there be again such an era and such a people? Nothing suggests it. As mankind ages, the species is losing its vitality, its verve, the disinterestedness necessary for true art! The Propylaea and the Temple of Erechtheus (*the Erechtheion or Temple of Athena Polias*) with its Caryatids, stand beside the Parthenon. Masterpieces in themselves, but subsumed within this masterpiece; the mind, struck too forcefully

by the sight of the greatest of these edifices, no longer has the strength to admire the others; one must view them and then depart — weeping less over the devastation of this superhuman work of humankind than over our inability to ever equal such sublimity and harmony.

Such are the revelations that heaven does not grant twice to Earth: like the Book of Job, or the Song of Songs, Homer's epics, or the music of Mozart! They are created, seen, heard; then no longer created, no longer seen, no longer heard, till the end of time. Blessed are they through whom the divine breath passes! They die, but they have proven to humankind what it is capable of, while God calls them to Himself so they might celebrate Him elsewhere and in language even more powerful! I wandered all day, mute, among those ruins, and I returned, my eyes dazzled by forms and colours, my heart full of emotion and admiration! Gothic art is beautiful; but it lacks order and light — order and light, those two principles of all eternal creation! Farewell forever to the Gothic.

Of all the forms of literature, the most difficult, in my opinion, is translation. Now, to travel is also to translate; it is to convey to the eye, the mind, the soul of the reader, the places, colours, impressions, and feelings that Nature or human monuments grant the traveller. One must know how to look, feel, and express: and express in what manner? Not with lines and colours, like the painter, which is relatively easy and straightforward; not with sounds, like the musician; but with ideas, with words that are neither sounds, lines, nor colours. Such were the reflections that filled my thoughts, seated on the steps of the Parthenon, with Athens, the olive groves of Piraeus, and the blue of the Aegean Sea before my eyes, and over me the majestic shadow of the frieze of the temple of temples. I wished to bear away, within myself, a living memory, a written memory of that moment in my life! I felt that the chaos of marble, so sublime, so picturesque in my eyes, would vanish from memory, and I wished to be able to retrieve it once more amidst the commonplaces of my future life. Let me attempt a description, then: it will not be the Parthenon itself, but it will at least be a shadow of that great shadow which cloaked me today.

From the midst of the ruins that were once Athens, a city which the cannons of the Greeks and Turks have pulverised, scattering debris throughout the valley and over the two hills where the city of Athene once stood, a mount rises, sheer on all sides. Enormous walls encircle it; and, covered at their base by fragments of white marble, higher up by the debris of ancient friezes and columns, they terminate here and there in Venetian battlements. This mount resembles a magnificent pedestal carved by the gods themselves so as to set their altars there. Its summit, levelled to receive the bases of these temples, is scarcely more than five hundred feet long by two to three hundred feet wide. It overlooks all the hills that formed the contours of ancient Athens; it overlooks the valleys of Pentelicus, the course of the Ilissos, the plain of Piraeus, the chain of valleys and peaks that curves and extends as far as Corinth, and finally the sea dotted with the islands of Salamis and Aegina, on whose summits the pediments of temples of Zeus Panhellenios gleam. The view is still admirable today, even though all the hills are bare and reflect, like polished bronze, the reverberating rays of the Attic sun. But what a horizon Plato must have had before his eyes, when Athens, alive and clothed in its thousand lesser temples, hummed at his feet like an overflowing beehive; when the great wall of Piraeus traced out a bustling avenue of stone and marble all the way to the sea, along which the population of Athens passed and repassed endlessly like waves; when Piraeus itself and the port of Phalerum, and the sea of Athens, and the Gulf of Corinth, were covered with forests of masts or sparkling sails; when the slopes of all the mountains,

from those that hide Marathon to the Acropolis of Corinth, together forming an amphitheatre, a semicircular arc ninety miles long, were clothed in forests, pastures, olive-trees and vines, and when villages and towns decorated the splendid belt of mountains on all sides!

From here, I can view the thousand paths that descend from those mountains, traced on the slopes of Hymettus, through all the winding gorges and valleys, which, like stream beds, flow towards Athens. I can hear again the noises rising from the city, the hammer blows of the stonecutters in the marble quarries of Mount Pentelicus, the rumble of blocks falling down its precipitous slopes, and all those sounds that fill the outskirts of a great capital with life and noise. On the city side, I can almost see the religious population of Athens ascending the Sacred Way, carved into the very side of the Acropolis, coming to implore Athene's aid, and to burn incense to all the well-known deities in the very place where I now sit, and where I breathe only the dust of their temples.

Let us imagine the Parthenon rebuilt: it is easy, the temple has lost only its frieze and its interior compartments. The exterior walls, sculpted by Phidias, and the columns, or fragments of those columns, are still here. The Parthenon was entirely built of white marble, called Pentelic marble, named after the nearby mountain from which it was quarried. It was designed as a rectangle, surrounded by a peristyle of forty-six Doric columns. Each column is six feet in diameter at its base and thirty-four feet high. The columns rest directly on the temple pavement and have no bases. At each end of the temple, there is, or once was, a portico of six columns. The overall dimensions of the building were two hundred and twenty-eight feet long by one hundred and one feet wide; its height was sixty-five feet. It presented to the eye only the majestic simplicity of its architectural lines. It was a single idea captured in stone, unified and intelligible at a glance, like all ancient thought. One had to approach it to contemplate the richness of the materials, and the inimitable perfection of the details and the ornamentation. Pericles intended it to be as much an assemblage of masterpieces produced by genius and human hands as a tribute to the gods; or rather, here was the whole of Greek genius, offering itself, in the guise of this emblem, as a tribute to the divine. The names of those who we know to have carved a stone or sculpted a statue for the Parthenon have become immortal.

Let us forget the past, now, and look around us at this site which time, war, barbaric religions, and foolish people, have trampled underfoot for more than two thousand years.

Only a few columns are missing from the forest of white columns: they have fallen, in intact, gleaming blocks, onto the paving stones or the walls of neighbouring temples. Some, like the great oaks of the forest of Fontainebleau, have remained leaning against other columns; some have slipped from the top of the parapet that encircles the Acropolis, and lie, in enormous shattered blocks, piled one upon another, like the quarry remnants rejected by the architect. Their sides are gilded with that coating produced by sunlight that the centuries spread across marble; their fragments are as white as yesterday's worked ivory. On this side of the temple, they form a hanging chaos of marble of every shape and colour, thrown about and piled high in the most bizarre and majestic disorder: from afar, one would think one was seeing the foam of enormous waves breaking on and whitening a sea-battered headland. The eye cannot tear itself away. We gaze at them, we follow their lines, we admire them and pity them with the feeling we would have for beings who once possessed or conceivably still possess senses. The effect of these ruins is the most

sublime effect human beings have ever been able to produce, because they are the ruins of the most beautiful building ever made!

If one walks beneath the peristyle and the porticoes, one might imagine oneself present at the moment the building was nearing completion; the interior walls are so well preserved, the marble surfaces so gleaming and polished, the columns so straight, the surviving parts of the structure so admirably intact, that everything seems to have sprung fresh from the craftsman's hands: except that the Parthenon's sole roof is the sky, sparkling with light, and, through the gaps in the walls, the eye plunges onwards towards the immense, sweeping horizon of Attica. The entire ground surrounding the temple is strewn with fragments of sculpture or blocks of stone that seem to await the hands that will raise them to their place in the monument. One's feet constantly strike against masterpieces of the Greek chisel: one lifts them, and tosses them away, to pick up a more interesting fragment; and one finally tires of this lost work; the mere remnants of a pulverised masterpiece. One's footsteps are printed on marble dust; one ends by gazing at it all with indifference, unmoved and silent, absorbed in contemplation of the whole, and in the thousand thoughts that arise from each element of the ruins.

Such thoughts are of the very nature of the scene where they are conceived; they are as solemn as these ruins of bygone times, as these majestic witnesses to the littleness of humanity; but they are also as serene as the sky above us, bathed in a harmonious and pure light, as lofty as the pedestal of the Acropolis itself, which seems to hover above the earth, as sacredly resigned as this monument erected to a divine idea, which God allowed to crumble to make way for ideas even more divine!

I feel no sadness here; the soul is light, though meditative; my thought embraces the realm of divine will, and of human destiny; it marvels that it was given to mankind to rise so high in the arts, and in the trappings of material civilisation; it comprehends also that God then shattered this admirable mould, that of an incomplete thought; and that the unity of the divine, finally recognised by Socrates in this very city, drew the breath of life from all the religions born of human imagination in earlier times; that these temples collapsed upon their gods; and that the idea of the one God instilled in the human mind was worth more than these marble dwellings where only shadows of that idea were worshipped. As religion became more spiritual, the pagan temples disappeared, the statues of demigods descended gradually from their pedestals, and the temples become plainer and simpler as they increasingly exemplified the majestic idea of a single God proven by reason and worshipped by virtue.

**The End of Part II of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part III: Rhodes to Mount Lebanon

## A Visit to the Pasha

On the evening of the 20th of August, I went to render my thanks to Youssouf, the Bey of Negroponte and Athens. I entered a Moorish courtyard, the wide galleries on two floors supported by small columns of black marble. An empty fountain stood in the centre of the courtyard; stables surrounded it. I ascended a wooden staircase, at the top of which several spahis stood in line, and was shown into the Bey's chamber. At the far end of a vast and opulent apartment, decorated with wood panelling which was divided into small compartments painted with flowers and arabesques, and embellished in gold, the Bey was seated, in the Turkish manner, on a large divan covered with Indian fabric; his beard was being attended to by his barber, a handsome young man dressed in a splendid military uniform, with superb weapons attached to his belt; half a score of slaves, in various poses, were scattered around the room. The Bey apologised to me for having been caught in the act of dressing, and asked me to sit on the divan, not far from him. I did so, and the conversation began.

We spoke of the purpose of my journey, the state of Greece, the new borders assigned by the London conference, the negotiations concluded by Stratford Canning (*Stratford Canning, 1st Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe was a British diplomat, long-time British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. He was a cousin of George Canning, Prime Minister in 1827*), all things of which the Bey seemed profoundly ignorant, and on which he questioned me with the keenest interest. (*During the London Conference of May, 1832, the Great Powers, Britain, France, and Russia established Greece as a monarchy under the Bavarian Prince Otto, defining the borders, and ending the Greek War of Independence, subsequently ratifying the agreement by the Treaty of Constantinople in July*). Soon a slave, carrying a long pipe with a yellow amber tip and a stem covered in pleated silk, approached me with measured steps, looking at the ground. When he had calculated exactly in his mind the precise point where, with its bowl on the floor, the pipe would reach my mouth, he set the bowl on the ground; And, walking in a circle so as not to disturb its placement, he approached me with a half-turn and, bowing, placed the amber stem in my hand within reach of my lips. I bowed in turn to the Pasha, who returned my greeting, and we each began to smoke.

A white Athenian greyhound, its tail and paws painted yellow, was sleeping at the Bey's feet. I complimented him on the beauty of the animal and asked if he hunted. He told me no, but that his son, then at Negroponte, was passionately fond of the pursuit; he added that he had seen me traversing the streets of Athens with a white greyhound as well, but of a smaller breed, which he had found incomparably beautiful; and that if I had several, he would be overjoyed to possess one similar. I promised him that, on my return to France, I would send him one as a token of remembrance, and in recognition of his kindness to me in Athens. Another slave then brought the coffee in very small Chinese-porcelain cups contained in small nets of gilded silver wire.

This Turkish ruler possessed the character I have since recognised in all the Muslims whom I have had occasion to observe in Syria and Turkey: nobility, gentleness, and the calm and serene resignation that the doctrine of predestination bestows upon these men, and which faith in Providence bestows upon true Christians; the same acceptance of the divine will: the one taken to the point of absurdity and error; the other, a sad and true expression of the universal and merciful

wisdom that presides over the destiny of all it has deigned to create. If a conviction could be a virtue, fatalism, or rather providentialism, would be mine! I believe in the complete, ever-active, ever-present action of God's will; only evil within us prevents this divine will from always producing the good. As soon as our destiny is altered, spoiled, perverted, we can always recognise if we look closely, that it is due to the exercise of our own will, human will, that is to say, a corrupt and perverse one; if we were to act according to the only will which is eternally good, we would always be good and happy ourselves: evil would cease to exist! The dogmas of the Koran are simply a modified form of those of Christianity, the modifications being of a nature however not to completely distort them. The people are full of virtue. I love these people, for they are a people of prayer!

*August 22, 1832.*

Deep anxiety concerning my daughter's health — a sad walk to the Temple of Olympian Zeus and the Stadium. I drank from the muddy, foul-smelling stream that is the Ilissus. I scarcely found enough water to dip my finger in; — aridity, bareness, the colour of slag, spreading over all this Athenian countryside. O countryside of Rome, golden tombs of the Scipios, green and sombre fountain of Egeria! How different! And how the skies above Rome surpass the much-vaunted skies of Attica!

*August 23, 1832.*

We left at night. A beautiful dawn amidst the olive groves of Piraeus, on the way to the sea. The warship *Génie*, captained by Annibal Cunéo d'Ornano, was waiting for us, and we weighed anchor. In three hours, a fine northerly breeze carried us to a point off Cape Sunium, whose yellow columns we could see marking the horizon, a place still alive with the language of Greek wisdom, of that Plato of whom I would be a disciple if Christ had neither spoken, nor lived, nor suffered, nor brought forgiveness through his dying.

A terrible night spent amidst the Cyclades. The wind dropped at midday; and we enjoyed a beautiful and gentle passage till evening. At nightfall, we encountered a furious squall between the islands of Amorgos and Stampalia (*Astypalaia*). The ship groaned as if in pain; the waves crashed dully against the stern. A rolling motion threw us from wave to another. I spent the night tending to my child, and walking on deck. A painful night! How often I shudder to think that I have staked so many lives on a single throw of the dice! How happy I would be if a celestial spirit were to bear Julia home to the peaceful shady environs of Saint-Point! My own life, half-consumed, has already lost more than half its value to me, but the life, mine also, shining in those beautiful eyes, beating in that young breast, is a hundred times dearer to me than my own! It is for her sake above all that I fervently prayed to the wind that stirs the waves to spare this being whom I have so imprudently entrusted to it. It granted my wish; the waves subsided, day broke, the islands fled behind us; Rhodes appeared to starboard, in the hazy distance, with Asia Minor on the horizon, the high peaks of the Caraman Coast (*Anatolia*), white as the snow of the Alps, rising resplendent above the floating clouds of night. So, this is where Asia begins!

The first impression is of a scene that surpasses those of Greece: the air feels gentler; the sea and sky are tinted a calmer, paler blue; nature unfolds in more expansive and majestic masses. I

breathe, and feel myself entering a broader and more elevated region! Greece is small — tormented, stripped bare; it is like the skeleton of a dwarf: here the landscape is that of a giant! Dark forests stain the flanks of the Marmaris mountains, and from afar one sees white torrents of foam falling into the deep ravines of Caramania.

## Rhodes

Rhodes emerges like a verdant bouquet from the heart of the waves; the light and graceful minarets of its white mosques rise above groves of palm, carob, sycamore, plane, and fig trees; from afar, they draw the voyager's eye to those delightful retreats, the Turkish cemeteries, where every evening one sees Muslims lying on the grass beside their friends' graves, smoking and telling stories quietly, like sentinels waiting to be relieved, or like indolent folk who like to lie in their beds and try to sleep before the hour of their final rest. At ten in the morning, our brig finds itself surrounded, suddenly, by five or six Turkish frigates under full sail cruising off Rhodes: one of them approaches within earshot and interrogates us in French. We are greeted politely, and soon drop anchor in the harbour of Rhodes, amidst thirty-six warships commanded by Grand Admiral Halil Pasha (*Damat Gürcü Halil Rifat Pasha, of Georgian origin*). Two French warships, one a steamship, *the Sphinx*, commanded by Captain Sarlat, the other also a corvette, the *Actéon*, commanded by Captain Vaillant (*August-Nicolas Vaillant, later Rear-Admiral*), are anchored not far from us. The officers come aboard to ask us for news from Europe. In the evening, we thank the commander of the brig *Le Génie*, Monsieur d'Ornano. He is leaving again, accompanied by the *Actéon*. We will continue our voyage alone towards Cyprus and Syria.

Two days spent in Rhodes exploring the mainly Turkish city — the oriental character of the bazaars, Moorish shops with carved wood — the Street of the Knights, where each house still bears intact, on its door, the coat of arms of an ancient House of France, Spain, Italy, or Germany. Rhodes possesses fine remnants of its ancient fortifications; the rich vegetation that crowns and envelops them grants them greater grace and beauty than those of Malta — the Knights Hospitaller who allowed themselves to be driven from such a magnificent possession received a mortal blow! Nature seems to have rendered the island an outpost of Asia; a European power that held it would simultaneously control the Archipelago, Greece, Smyrna, the Dardanelles, the Egyptian Sea, and the Syrian Sea. I know of no better maritime military position in the world, no more beautiful sky, no more smiling and fertile land.

The Turks have imprinted upon it the character of inaction and indolence which they carry everywhere: everything is in a state of inertia, and a species of misery. But these people, who create nothing, and renew nothing, neither break nor destroy anything: they at least leave the natural world around them free to act; they respect the trees even in the middle of the streets and houses they inhabit; water and shade, a drowsy murmur and a voluptuous coolness, are their first, their only needs. Thus, as soon as you approach, in Europe or Asia-Minor, a region inhabited by Muslims, you recognise it from afar by the rich, dark veil of greenery that veils it gracefully. Trees, under which one can seat oneself in the shade, gushing fountains beside which one can dream amidst their murmur, in silence, and mosques with slender minarets rise at every step from the heart of a pious land: that is all these people need; they only emerge from their gentle apathy to mount their desert steeds, the first servants of mankind, and to embrace death, fearlessly, in the service of their Prophet and their God. Fatalist dogma has rendered them the bravest people in

the world; and though life is pleasant and sweet for them, that which is promised by the Koran, in reward for a life given for the cause, is so much more beautiful, that they need only make a slight effort to leap from this world to the celestial world they envisage before them, radiant with beauty, peace, and love! It is a belief fit for heroes; but a belief that is fading within Islam, and heroism is thus diminishing with the faith that is its foundation: the less people believe in a dogma or an idea, the less willingly they will die a noble death. It is as in Europe: why risk dying if life is better than death; if there is nothing immortal to be gained by sacrificing oneself to duty? Thus, heroism will diminish and fade in Europe, until faith is rekindled and speaks to the human heart more powerfully than the base instinct for life.

Ravishing figures of women are seen in the evening, seated on terraces in the moonlight. They have the eyes of Italian women, but softer, more timid, more filled with tenderness and love — their figures are those of Greek women, but more rounded, more supple, with sweeter, more graceful movements. Their foreheads are broad, smooth, white, polished like that of the most beautiful women in England or Switzerland; but the regular, straight, and broad line of the nose lends more majesty and antique nobility to the face. The Greek sculptors would have been even more perfect had they taken their models of female figures from Asia-Minor! And then, it is so delightful for a European accustomed to the tired features, the strained and contracted expressions, of European women, and especially of salon ladies, to finally see figures as simple, as pure, as calm as marble fresh from the quarry; figures that have but one expression, repose and tenderness, and which the eye reads as quickly and easily as the capital letters in some magnificent deluxe edition!

Society and civilisation are obvious enemies of physical beauty. They create too many impressions and feelings; and as the face involuntarily receives and retains their imprint, it becomes complex and altered in expression; it acquires something confused and uncertain that destroys its simplicity and charm; it is like a language that possesses too many individual words, and can no longer be understood because it is too rich.

*August 27, 1832.*

At noon, we set sail from Rhodes for Cyprus, on a magnificent evening. My gaze was fixed on Rhodes, as it sank at last into the sea. I longed for that beautiful island like an apparition one wishes to revive; I would settle there, if it were less separate from the world in which destiny and duty compel us to live. What delightful retreats on the slopes of the high mountains, and on those terraces shaded by all the trees of Asia-Minor! I was shown a magnificent house belonging to the former Pasha, surrounded by three large, lavish gardens bathed by abundant fountains, adorned with charming kiosks. They are asking sixteen thousand piastres to purchase that same, that is to say, four thousand francs. Now there is happiness at a bargain price!

*August 28, 1832.*

The sea is beautiful, but with a heavy swell; there is no wind; immense waves arrive from the west, rolling majestically beneath our stern, and tossing us about for three days and three nights, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other. An unbearable torment, this fruitless movement! It is like rolling a boulder in Hell. On the fourth day, we sighted the eastern tip of

Cyprus; a day spent coasting along the island; we did not drop anchor in the harbour of Larnaca till the morning of the sixth day since leaving Piraeus.

Monsieur Alphonse Bottu, the French consul in Cyprus, recognised the vessel on which he knew we had embarked. He sent one of his consular representatives aboard to encourage us to disembark and accept his hospitality to which we had no other right than his own kindness and courtesy. I accepted — we disembarked. An excellent and cordial welcome from Monsieur and Madame Bottu. Monsieur Perthier and Monsieur Alexiano Guillois, attached to the consulate, showered us with like courtesies; we paid and received visits — gifts — coffee and Cypriot wine sent by Monsieur Mathéi, one of the Cypriot magnates.

## Cyprus

*August 31.*

Two days spent in Cyprus; the charm of rest after a long voyage and the delights of a most unexpected, amiable and hospitable reception; such are the feelings I experience in Cyprus; but that is all. The island, which has formerly been praised to me as an oasis amongst the Mediterranean islands resembles all the dull, dusty and naked isles of the Archipelago; it is the skeleton of one of those enchanted isles in which antiquity set its most poetic cults. It is true that, eager to reach Asia-Minor itself, I obtained only glimpses of the remote and picturesque scenes with which this island is said to be filled; on my return journey, I intend to spend a month here, and explore the mountains of Cyprus in detail.

The island is fertile throughout, and oranges, olives, grapes, figs, vines, cotton — everything must thrive here, even sugarcane. This land of promise, this beautiful kingdom for a crusading knight or a companion of Bonaparte, once supported up to two million people; now only thirty thousand Greek inhabitants and a few Turks remain. Nothing would be easier than seizing this realm; an adventurer could easily succeed with a handful of soldiers and a few million piastres; it would be worthwhile, if there were a chance of keeping it. But Europe, which so desperately needs colonies, opposes such status being granted; the jealousy of the major powers would come to the aid of the Turks, sow discord throughout the new conquest, and the conqueror would suffer the fate of King Theodore (*Freiherr Theodor Stephan von Neuhoff, a German adventurer, briefly crowned himself King Theodor I of Corsica, in 1736*) What a pity! It is a beautiful dream; which a mere week might render a reality.

*At sea, departing the island of Cyprus, September 2, 1832.*

We set sail yesterday at midnight. Our friends from Cyprus, Messieurs Bottu and Perthier, spent the evening with us on the deck of the brig and did not leave until midnight. We carry with us the deepest gratitude for the truly warm welcome we received from Monsieur and Madame Bottu. It is a singular destiny, that of the traveller: he sows affection, memories, and regrets everywhere; he never leaves a shore without the desire and hope of returning to find those whom he knew not a few days before. When he arrives, everything on earth, over which he lets his eyes wander, is a matter of indifference to him; when he departs, he feels that others' eyes and hearts follow him from the shore he sees receding behind him. He himself fixes his gaze upon it,

he leaves something of his own heart there; then the wind carries him toward another horizon where the same scenes, the same impressions, will be renewed. To travel is to multiply, through arrival and departure, welcomes and farewells, impressions that the events of a sedentary life provide only at rare intervals; it is to experience a hundred times a year a little of what one experiences in ordinary life, in knowing, loving, and losing people placed on our path by Providence. Leaving is like dying, every time one departs some distant land to which destiny will not lead one twice. To travel is to summarise a long life in a few years; it is one of the strongest experiences that a man can grant his heart as well as his mind. The philosopher, the politician, the poet, should travel extensively. To change one's moral horizon is to change one's thinking.

*September 3, 1832.*

We wake in the middle of the gulf. We can no longer see the white shores of the island, nor the rounded summit of Mount Olympos (*the mountain in Cyprus, not the 'home of the gods' of that name in Thessaly*). The sea is as calm as a vast lake; a thick, silvery mist lines the horizon on all sides. A weak, idle, breezy gust occasionally dies in our broad sails. A blazing sun scorches the deck planks, which are hosed to cool them. Everyone is lying on the rudders or the rigging, speechless, motionless, foreheads streaming with sweat. The air is stifling; a veritable simoom (*the hot, dry desert wind*) blows over the sea. It seems as if we are already breathing the humid, burning air of the desert sands, still a few hundred miles away. The days pass thus. We lack the strength to speak, even the strength to read. I sometimes half-open the Bible to look for anything concerning Lebanon, whose peaks will soon meet our gaze. I am reading the story of Herod in the works of Flavius Josephus (*the first-century AD Romano-Jewish author of 'The Jewish War' and 'Antiquities of the Jews'*).

*September 4, 1832.*

The same absence of wind; the same blazing sky. The sea steams with heat, and the still waters are veiled in a fog that not a breath of breeze disperses. We scan the horizon for the faint ripples that a few stray gusts trace on its surface: we see one of them slowly approach the brig, bringing a touch of bright colour to the sea again; it swells our mainsails slightly: the ship creaks, and raises a little foam at its bow. Our chests expand; we approach the shore from which the breeze blew. We feel a touch of coolness slide across our foreheads, beneath the damp curls of our hair; and then all returns to calm and the abiding furnace-like heat. The water we drink is lukewarm; no one has the strength to eat. If this state were to continue, none would live long. Fortunately, we only have six weeks of this heat to fear; it ends in mid-October.

*September 4th, in the evening.*

From five to eight o'clock, a fresh wind from the Gulf of Alexandretta propelled us a few leagues. We must be about halfway between Cyprus and the Syrian coast; perhaps tomorrow, when we wake, we will be in sight of the coast.

*September 5, 1832.*

When I awoke, I heard the faint murmur of the ship's wake as the vessel slid forward. I hurried up on deck to see the coast, but nothing was yet visible. The frequent currents in this sea may have carried us far beyond our estimated position; perhaps we are off the low-lying land stretching to Idumea (*Edom*), or off the shores of Egypt. Impatience is mounting in us all.

*Same date, September 5, at two o'clock.*

The brig's captain recognised the peaks of Mount Lebanon. He summoned me, so as to point them out. I searched for them in vain in the fiery mist his finger indicated. I saw nothing but the translucent fog raised by the heat, and, above it, a few layers of dull white cloud. He insisted, I looked again, but in vain. All the sailors smiled and pointed out Lebanon to me; the captain failed to understand why I was unable to see it as he did. 'Well, where are you looking?' he said to me, 'You are seeking it too far away. There, closer, and above.' I then raised my eyes to the sky, and indeed, there rose the white and gold crest of Mount Sannine, hovering in the firmament above us. The sea mist prevented me from seeing its base and flanks. Only the summit was visible, radiant and serene against the blue of the sky. It was one of the most magnificent and sweetest impressions I have received in all my long voyages.

This was the land toward which all my thoughts at that moment were directed, as a man and as a traveller; it was the sacred land, to which I had travelled from afar seeking the memories of earlier peoples; and then it was the land where in a delightful clime, in the shade of orange and palm trees, beside snow-covered streams, in a house on some cool and verdant hillside, I would lodge all that I held most dear in the world, my wife and my daughter Julia.

I have no doubt that a year or two spent under this beautiful sky will strengthen Julia's health, which for the past six months has sometimes given me dire premonitions (*she had, in fact, contracted tuberculosis*). I welcome these mountains of Asia-Minor as a refuge to which God has led her so as to heal her; a secret and profound joy fills my heart; I can no longer take my eyes off Mount Lebanon.

We dine in the shade of a tent pitched on the deck. The breeze continues, picking up again as the sun sets. Every few moments, we run to the bow to gauge the ship's progress from the sound it makes as it slices through the waves; finally, the wind freshens, the waves break; we are making five knots an hour; the flanks of the high mountains pierce the fog and advance like aerial capes before us. We can make out the deep, dark valleys that widen as they reach the coast; the ravines whiten, the rocks of the ridges rise higher, and appear jagged, the first hills that rise from the vicinity of the sea seem more rounded; little by little, we think to recognise villages clinging to the hillsides, and great monasteries that crown, like Gothic castles, the summits of the intermediate mountains. Every sight we take in brings joy to our hearts; everyone is on deck. Each person points out to their neighbour something they had failed to notice; one of them sees the cedars of Lebanon in a black stain on a mountainside, another a keep atop the mountains near Tripoli; some think they can make out foaming waterfalls on the precipitous slopes.

All long to reach that long-dreamed-of, long-desired shore before nightfall; they tremble lest, just as we are about to arrive, a new calm will lull the ship to sleep for long days on these waves

that frustrated us, or that a contrary wind might blow from the coast and drive us back to the Sea of Candia (*Crete*): this Syrian sea, an immense gulf surrounded by the high peaks of Lebanon and the Taurus Mountains, is treacherous for sailors; if there is not a gale blowing, there is either a flat calm or a strong current; these currents irresistibly carry ships far from their course; and then there are no harbours along the coasts; one must anchor in dangerous road-steads, a great distance from shore; an almost constant swell ploughs these road-steads and drags at anchor cables, we will only be at peace and certain of having arrived when we have disembarked.

While we were amidst these deliberations, wavering between hope and fear, night suddenly falls, not as in our climate, with the gradual onset of twilight, but like a curtain drawn over the sky and the earth. Everything fades, everything disappears on the blackened slopes of Lebanon, and we can see nothing but the stars between which our masts sway. The wind also dies; the sea sleeps; and we each descend into our cabins, uncertain of tomorrow.

I was not asleep; my mind was too agitated. Through the poorly joined planks that separated my room from Julia's, I could hear the breathing of my sleeping child, and my whole heart was preoccupied by her. I thought that perhaps in the following days I too would be able to sleep more peacefully, mindful of this precious life of hers, which I regretted having risked, so greatly, on the sea — a life a storm could snatch away in its prime. In my thoughts, I prayed to God to forgive my imprudence, and not punish me for having trusted in him too much, for having asked more of him than I had a right to do.

I reassured myself. I told myself: 'She is a visible angel who protects both her own destiny and ours. Heaven will reward us for her innocence and purity; it will lead us; it will bear us home safely because of her. She will have seen, at the most beautiful period of life, at that age when all impressions are incorporated, so to speak, within us, and become the very elements of our existence, she will have seen all that is beautiful in Nature, in creation; her childhood memories will be of the marvellous monuments, and masterpieces of painting, in Italy. Athens and the Parthenon will be engraved in her memory, like ancestral sites; the beautiful islands of the Archipelago, the Taurus Mountains, the mountains of Lebanon, Jerusalem, the Pyramids, the desert, the tents of the Arabs, the palm trees of Mesopotamia, will provide material for the tales of her old age. God gave her beauty, innocence, genius, and a heart ablaze with generous and sublime feelings; I, for my part, would give her what I could add to those heavenly gifts: the spectacle of the most marvellous, the most enchanting scenes on earth. What a being she will be at twenty! Her life will have been filled with happiness, piety, love, and wonders! Oh! Who will be worthy to complete it with love? I wept, and I prayed with fervour and confidence; for I can never have a strong feeling in my heart without it tending toward the infinite, without it resolving itself into a hymn or an invocation to the One who is the end of all our feelings, who produces them and absorbs them all once more: to God himself!

As I was about to fall asleep, I heard hurried footsteps on the bridge, signalling some manoeuvre: I was astonished, since there had been utter silence for a long while, and the sea produced only a slight ripple, now and then to tell me the brig was still moving. Soon I heard the rattle of the anchor chain being unwound heavily from the capstan; then I felt that sharp jolt that makes the whole ship vibrate when the anchor has reached the solid bed and finally bites into the sand and seagrass. I rose, and opened my narrow window. We had arrived; we were in the roadstead off Beirut. I could see a few lights scattered on the distant shore, and hear dogs barking

on the beach. It was the first sound I heard from the coast of Asia; it gladdened my heart. It was midnight. I gave thanks to God and fell into a deep and peaceful sleep. No one else below deck had awakened.

## Beirut

*September 6, 1832, nine in the morning.*

We were anchored before Beirut, one of the most populous cities on the Syrian coast, formerly Berytus, which became a Roman colony under Augustus, who gave it the name *Felix Julia* (*Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytus*). This epithet, meaning 'the Fortunate,' was bestowed upon it because of the fertility of its surroundings, its incomparable climate, and the magnificence of its location. The city occupies a graceful hill that slopes gently down to the sea; several promontories or rocky outcrops jut out into the waves, bearing Turkish fortifications, to the most picturesque effect; the harbour is enclosed by a strip of land that protects the sea from easterly winds: this entire strip of land, as well as the surrounding hills, are covered with the richest vegetation; mulberry silk trees (*Morus alba*) are planted everywhere, and raised tier by tier on artificial terraces; carob trees with dark greenery and a majestic dome, fig trees, plane trees, orange trees, pomegranate trees, with a quantity of other trees or shrubs foreign to our climate, spread over all the coast near the sea the harmonious veils of their various foliage; further away, on the lower slopes of the mountains, olive groves tint the landscape with their grey and ashen greenery: a few miles from the city, the high mountains of the Lebanon ranges rise; there, deep gorges open, in which the eye is lost amidst distant shadows; there, wide torrents flow, which become rivers taking various directions, some towards Tyre and Sidon, others towards Tripoli and Latakia; while the uneven peaks, lost in the clouds or whitened by reflected sunlight, resemble our Alps covered in eternal snow.

The quayside at Beirut, constantly lapped by the waves and sometimes covered with foam, was teeming with Arabs, displaying all the splendour of their bright costumes and weapons. There was as much activity there as on the quays of our great maritime cities; several European ships were anchored near us in the harbour, and longboats, laden with goods from Damascus and Baghdad, were constantly shuttling between the shore and these vessels. The city's houses rose in a confused cluster, the flat roofs of some serving as terraces for others, a few with crenellated balustrades. The houses possessed numerous pointed-arch windows with painted wooden grilles that sealed them tightly like the veils insisted upon by Oriental jealousy, while palm-fronds seemingly sprouting from the stone rose above the rooftops, bringing a touch of greenery to the eyes of the women imprisoned in the harems — all this captivated our gaze and heralded the Orient. We could hear the shrill cries of desert Arabs arguing on the docks, and the harsh, mournful sounds from the camels, groaning in pain as they were forced to bend their knees to receive their loads. Occupied by this spectacle, so new and so striking to our eyes, we gave no thought to disembarking. In this land to be our new home, the French flag, however, flew atop a mast on one of the tallest houses in the city, seeming to invite us to rest in its shade, after our long and arduous voyage. But we had too many people and too much luggage to risk landing before we had reconnoitred the place, and chosen a house, if we could find one. I left my wife, with Julia, and two of my companions, on the brig, and had the dinghy launched in order to explore.

In a few minutes, a beautiful, flat, silvery wave tossed us onto the sand; and a pair of Arabs, their legs bare, carried me in their arms to the entrance of a dark street of fast-flowing traffic that led to the French consulate. The consul, Henri Guys, whom I had seen in Marseille, and for whom I had letters of introduction, had not yet arrived. I found in his place Joseph Hélouis-Jorelle, head of the consulate and dragoman (*interpreter, translator and guide*) of France in Syria, a young man whose gracious and benevolent countenance predisposed us to him, and whose many kindnesses during our long stay in Syria justified this first impression. He offered us part of the consulate building as our initial refuge, and promised to find us a house in the vicinity of the city, in which we could set up camp. Within a few hours, the longboats of several ships, and the porters of Beirut, under the supervision of the consulate's Janissaries (*Turkish infantry forming the Sultan's guard*) had unloaded our entourage, along with our provisions of all kinds; and before nightfall we were all ashore, temporarily housed, and showered with care and attention by Monsieur and Madame Jorelle.

It is a delightful moment when, after a long and stormy crossing, having barely arrived in an unknown land, you cast your eyes, from a fragrant and cheerful terrace, on the element you are finally quitting for a long time; on the brig, bobbing in the harbour's choppy waters, that brought you through the storms; on the shaded and peaceful countryside that surrounds you; on all the scenes of life on land that seem so sweet when one has been long deprived of them: there is something of the feeling of convalescence after a long illness in the impression of the first few hours, the first few days spent ashore after a voyage. We enjoyed that feeling all evening. Madame Jorelle, a young and charming woman born in Aleppo, had retained the rich and noble dress of Arab women: the turban, the embroidered jacket, the dagger at her belt. We never tired of admiring this magnificent costume, which further enhanced her distinctly Oriental beauty.

When night fell, we were served a European-style supper in a kiosk, the large, barred windows of which opened onto the port, and in which, amidst the candlelight, a refreshing evening breeze played. I had a case of French wine broken open, and added it to the hospitable feast, and we thus spent our first evening discussing the two countries, France and Lebanon, the one which we had left behind, the other which we were now visiting: a question about France was answered and accompanied by a question about Asia. Julia played with the long braids of hair of some Arab women and Black African slaves, who came to visit us; she admired these new costumes; her mother braided the long curls of her own blond hair, in imitation of those of the ladies of Beirut, and arranged her shawl into a turban on her head. I have seen nothing more ravishing, among all the faces of women that are engraved in my memory, than the figure of Julia wearing an Aleppo turban, with the sculpted gold cap, from which fell fringes of pearls and chains of gold sequins, the braids of her hair hanging over both shoulders, and with that astonished look raised to her mother and to me, and that smile which seemed to say to us: 'Feast your eyes; see how beautiful I am too!'

After speaking a hundred times about our homeland, and naming all the places and people that a shared memory could bring back to mind; after we had exchanged all the information that might interest us, we spoke of poetry. Madame Jorelle asked me to read some pieces of French poetry, and she herself translated for us some fragments of poetry from Aleppo. I told her that Nature was always more poetic than the poets, and she herself at that moment, at that hour, in that beautiful place, in the moonlight, in that foreign costume, with that oriental pipe in her hand and that diamond-hilted dagger at her belt, was a more beautiful subject for poetry than all that

those poets had ever conceived. And when she replied that it would be most agreeable to receive a souvenir of our journey to send to her father in Aleppo, in the form of a few lines written for her. I withdrew for a while, and then recited a few stanzas to her, which had no merit other than the place where they were written and the feeling of gratitude that inspired them:

Qui? Toi? Me demander l'encens de poésie!
Toi, fille d'Orient, née aux vents du désert!
Fleur des jardins d'Alep, que Bulbul eût choisie
Pour languir et chanter sur son calice ouvert! Etc.

Why ask of me the incense poetry scatters!

Daughter of the East, born to the desert breeze!

Flower of Aleppo, you whom the nightingale

Has chosen to sing of, on its flowering branch! Etc.

We could not tear ourselves away from this first scene of Arab life. Finally, for the first time in three months, we were able to rest in out beds, and sleep without fear of the waves. A fierce wind roared across the sea, rattling the walls of the high terrace beneath which we lay, and making us appreciate all the more the value of a peaceful stay after so much turmoil. I considered Julia and my wife to be safe at last from all peril, and for a long while, and spent part of the night planning how to ensure a secure and pleasant stay for them, while I myself would continue my travels through this land on which I had finally set foot.

*September 7, 1832.*

I rose with the dawn, opened the cedarwood shutter, the only window closure of the bedroom in which one sleeps in this beautiful climate. I cast a first glance at the sea, and the sparkling coastal chain that extends in a curve from Beirut to Cape Batroun, halfway to Tripoli.

Never has a mountain panorama made such an impression on me. Lebanon possesses a character I have seen neither in the Alps nor in the Taurus Mountains: the imposing sublimity of its peaks and contours blends with a grace of detail, and a variety of tints and hues. Mount Lebanon is as solemn as its name suggests; it is the Alps beneath an Asian sky, thrusting airy summits into the profound serenity of the sky's eternal splendour. It seems as if the eternal heavens rest upon the golden angles of these ridges; the dazzling whiteness with which they imprint them blends seamlessly with that of the snows which remain, till midsummer, on the highest peaks. The range unfolds before the eye for a distance of at least a hundred and sixty miles, from Cape Said, the ancient Sidon, to the vicinity of Latakia, where it begins to decline, Mount Taurus spreading its roots into the plains of Alexandretta (*Iskenderun*).

Sometimes the mountain chains of Lebanon rise almost perpendicularly from the sea, villages and great monasteries clinging to their precipices; sometimes they swerve from the shore, forming immense gulfs, and leaving verdant stretches, or strips of golden sand, between themselves and

the waves. Sails criss-cross these gulfs and enter the numerous harbours that the jagged coastline offers. The sea there is of the bluest and darkest hue; and, though there is almost always a swell, the waves, which are tall and broad, roll in vast sheets over the sands and reflect the mountains like spotless mirrors. These waves produce, all along the coast, a muffled, indistinct but harmonious murmur that rises even beneath the shade of the vines and carob trees, filling the countryside with life and sound.

To my left, was the low coast of Beirut, a continuous extent of small tongues of land covered in vegetation, protected from the sea only by a line of rocks and reefs, most of which are covered in ancient ruins. Further on, hills of red sand, like that of the Egyptian deserts, jut out like a cape and serve as a landmark for sailors; on the summit of this cape, one sees the broad, umbrella-like crowns of an Italian pine forest; and the eye, gliding between the scattered trunks, comes to rest on the flanks of another Lebanese range, and further still the jutting promontory that once bore Tyre (now Sur).

When I turned round, I could see the tall minarets of the mosques, isolated columns, rising into the blue, shimmering morning air; the Moorish fortresses overlooking the city, their cracked walls supporting a forest of climbing plants, wild fig trees, and wallflowers; then the oval crenellations of the defensive walls; then the level plateaus in the countryside planted with mulberry trees, with here and there the flat roofs and white walls of country houses or the cottages of Syrian farmers and labourers; and finally, beyond them, the rounded grassy slopes of the Beirut hills, each bearing picturesque buildings — Greek and Maronite monasteries, mosques, and sacred tombs (*santons*) — and covered in foliage and cultivated fields like the most fertile hills of Grenoble, or Chambéry (*in Savoy*). Against this backdrop, always, Mount Lebanon; forming a thousand curves, clustered in gigantic masses, casting its vast shadows or displaying its high sparkling snows, above every part of the landscape.

*Same date. September 7, 1832.*

I spent the entire day exploring the area around Beirut, and looking for a place to settle and establish a home. I have rented a group of five houses, which can be linked via wooden staircases, galleries, and openings. Each house here consists of little more than a basement that serves as a kitchen, and a bedroom in which the entire family sleeps, however large that family might be. In such a climate, the true home is the flat roof. That is where the women and children spend their days and often their nights. In front of the houses, between the trunks of a few mulberry or olive trees, the Arabs build hearths with three stones, and it is there the wives prepare food. A straw mat is thrown over a pole that stretches from the wall to the tree branches. Under this shelter, all the housework is done. The women and girls squat there all day, busy combing their long hair, braiding it, bleaching their veils, weaving their silks, feeding their chickens, or playing and chatting together, just as in our villages in the south of France, on Sunday mornings, when the girls gather at the doorways of the cottages.

*Same date, September 7, in the evening.*

The entire day was spent unloading the brig, and carrying our caravan of luggage from the town to our country house (*on Mar Mitr hill*). Each of us will have our own room. A vast

grove of mulberry and orange trees stretches around the five houses together, each of us having some space to walk about in front of our doorways, and cool air to breathe in the shade. I purchased some mats from Egypt, and carpets from Damascus, to serve as our beds and divans. I found some very active and intelligent Arab carpenters who are already at work making doors and window frames for us; and this evening we will already be able to sleep in our new home.

*September 8, 1832.*

Nothing could be more delightful than waking up after the first night in our own house. We had lunch brought to the largest terrace, and from there could take in the surrounding area in a glance.

The house is ten minutes from the city. You reach it along paths shaded by immense aloes whose spiky figs dangle over the heads of passers-by. You encounter a few ancient arches and a huge square tower, built by the Druze emir, Fakardin (*Fahkr al-Din II, the seventeenth century Ottoman governor*); a tower that now serves as an observation post for a few sentries of Ibrahim Pasha's army (*Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt, army commander for his father Muhammad Ali the Viceroy of Egypt, was in the process of conquering Syria*) who watch over the entire countryside from there. You then slip between the trunks of mulberry trees, and arrive at a group of low houses hidden among the trees, flanked by a grove of lemon and orange trees. These houses are irregular, and the middle one rises gracefully like a pyramidal tower, above the others. The roofs of all these little houses are connected by means of a few wooden ramps, and thus form a fitting ensemble for guests who have just spent many a day below deck on a merchant ship.

About a hundred paces from us, the sea advances inland; and seen from here, above the green crowns of the lemon trees and aloes, it resembles a beautiful inland lake, or a wide river of which only a segment is visible. A few Arab boats are anchored there, gently rocking on its imperceptibly undulating waves. If one climbs to the upper terrace, this beautiful lake transforms into an immense gulf enclosed on one side by the Moorish castle of Beirut, and on the other by the immense dark walls of the mountain range that runs towards Tripoli. But opposite us, the view stretches even further: it begins by traversing a plain of admirably-cultivated fields, lined with trees that completely conceal the ground, and dotted here and there with homes similar to ours, their roofs like so many raised white sails on an ocean of green; the view then narrows near a long, graceful hill, on the summit of which a Greek monastery displays its white walls and blue domes; a few umbrella pines hover, a little higher, above the domes of the monastery itself. The hill descends in steps supported by stone walls, and bears groves of olive and mulberry trees.

The sea washes the last of these steps; the view then recedes, and a second, more distant plain, curving and deepening, allows passage of a river that meanders for a long time among holm-oak woods, and flows into the gulf, its current yellowing the bordering waters. This plain ends only at the golden slopes of the mountains. These mountains do not rise in one go; they commence as enormous hills resembling immense blocks, some rounded, others almost square. A little vegetation covers the summits of these hills, and each one bears either a monastery or a village, reflecting the sunlight and drawing the eye. The slopes of the hills gleam like gold: they are walls of yellowish sandstone, crushed by earthquakes, each fragment reflecting and darting the light.

Above these first mounds, the steps of Lebanon widen; there are plateaus two to five miles across: uneven, hollowed out, furrowed, ploughed by ravines, the deep beds of torrents, and dark gorges in which one's gaze is lost. Beyond these plateaus, the high mountains begin to rise again almost vertically; however, one can still see the dark patches of cedars and firs that cover them, a few inaccessible convents, and a few villages, their names unknown to me, that seem to lean precariously over the precipitous drops. On the sharpest peak of this second range, trees, which appear gigantic, form a sparse mane to its bald brow. From here, one can distinguish their uneven and jagged crowns, which resemble battlements on the crest of a citadel.

Beyond this second mountain range, the true Lebanon finally rises; one cannot distinguish whether its slopes are steep or gentle, bare or covered in vegetation: the distance is too great. The flanks merge with the transparent air of which they seem to be a part; one sees only the reflection of the ambient sunlight that envelops them, and their fiery crests blending with the purple morning cloud, and hovering like inaccessible islands amidst the waves of the firmament.

If one's gaze descends from this sublime mountain landscape, it finds nothing but majestic clusters of palm trees planted here and there in the countryside beside the Arab houses; the green undulations of larch-tree crowns, scattered in small clumps across the plain or on the slopes of the hills; and hedges of prickly-pear cacti, or other succulents whose heavy leaves cascade, like stony decorations, over the low walls that support the terraces. The walls themselves are so covered with flowering lichens, ground ivy, wild vines, and bulbous plants bearing flowers of every hue, and clusters of every shape, that one cannot distinguish them from the stones from which the walls are built: they are nothing but ramparts of greenery and flowers.

Finally, quite close to us, right before our eyes, two or three homes similar to our own, half-veiled by the canopies of orange trees in bloom and laden with fruit, offer those lively and picturesque scenes that are the lifeblood of any landscape. The Arab men sit on mats, smoking on the rooftops. A few women lean out of the windows to see us, and hide when they realise we are watching them. Beneath our terrace, two Arab families — fathers, brothers, wives, and children — are eating their meal, in the shade of a small plane tree, at the thresholds of their houses; and a few steps away, beneath another tree, two young Syrian girls of incomparable beauty are adorning themselves in the open air, adorning their hair with white and red flowers. One of them has tresses so long and so thick that they cover her entirely, like the branches of a weeping willow covering its trunk on all sides: only when she shakes her flowing mane are her beautiful forehead and eyes, radiant with naive gaiety, glimpsed, for a moment, beneath this natural veil. She seems to revel in our admiration. I throw her a handful of the small gold coins (*bearing the title 'Al-Ghazi', 'warrior' or 'conqueror', seen on coins from many periods*) from which Syrian women make necklaces and bracelets by stringing them on a strand of silk. She clasps her hands and places them on her brow to thank me, then goes downstairs to show them to her mother and sister.

*September 12, 1832.*

Habib-Barbara, a Greek-Syrian living in Beirut, whose house is next to ours, serves as our dragoman, that is to say, interpreter. Having served in this capacity for twenty years at various French consulates, he speaks French and Italian; he is one of the most obliging and intelligent men I have met in my travels. Without his assistance and that of Monsieur Jorelle, we would have found endless difficulty in establishing ourselves in Syria. He provides us with several

servants, some Greek others who are Arabs. I first bought six second-string Arab horses and, as the locals do, kept them in the blazing sun in a field in front of the house, their legs hobbled with iron rings and tethered by a stake driven into the ground. I had a tent pitched near the horses for the Arab grooms. These men seemed gentle and intelligent; as for the animals, in two days they knew us and sniffed at us like dogs. Habib-Barbara introduced us to his wife, and a daughter whom he was to see married in a few days: he invited us to the wedding. Curious to observe a Syrian wedding, we accepted, and Julia prepared our gift for the bride. I gave her a small gold watch, which I had brought along for such occasions; she added a small pearl chain.

I mounted my horse to explore the area around Beirut: a superb Arab steed, belonging to Madame Jorelle, with a harness of blue velvet plated with silver; its chest was adorned with bosses of the same sculpted metal, which hung in clusters and resonated against that beautiful animal's hide. Monsieur Jorelle is selling me one of his horses for my wife's use; I am also having Arabian saddles and bridles made, for fourteen horses.

About a mile or so from the city, to the east, Emir Fakardin has planted a forest of umbrella pines on a sandy plateau that stretches between the sea and the plain of Baghdad, a beautiful Arab village at the foot of Lebanon. The emir, it is said, planted this magnificent forest to create a bulwark against the hills of red sand that encroach a little further on, threatening to engulf Beirut and its rich plantations. The forest has grown magnificently; the individual tree trunks are sixty to eighty feet tall. Their broad, motionless heads extend to meet one another, casting a vast shadow over an immense space; sandy paths run beneath the pine trunks, offering the softest ground to the horses' hooves. The rest of the area is covered with a light down of grass, sown with flowers of the most brilliant red; the bulbs of the wild hyacinths are so large that they are not crushed by the horses' hooves. Through the cottony canopy of these fir trunks, one sees on one side the white and reddish sand dunes that conceal the sea; on the other, the plain of Baghdad and the course of the river traversing it, along with a corner of the gulf, like a small lake, so closely is it framed by the land; then the twelve or fifteen Arab villages scattered across the lower slopes of Mount Lebanon, and finally the clusters of villages on Mount Lebanon itself, which forms the backdrop to this scene. The light is so clear and the air so pure that, from several miles away, one can distinguish the shapes of cedars or carob trees on the mountains, and great eagles gliding on motionless wings through the aether.

This evergreen forest is certainly the most magnificent of all the sites I have seen in my life. The sky, the mountains with their caps of snow, the blue horizon of the sea, the red and funereal horizon of the sandy desert; the meandering lines of the river; the solitary crowns of cypresses; the clusters of palm trees scattered across the countryside; the graceful aspect of the thatched cottages with orange trees and vines cascading over their roofs; the austere aspect of the Maronite monasteries on high, casting broad patches of shadow or broad beams of light on the sculpted slopes of Lebanon; the camel caravans laden with goods from Damascus, passing silently between the trees; bands of poverty-stricken Jews riding on donkeys, holding a pair of children on each arm; women on horseback, wrapped in white veils, riding to the sound of the fife and tambourine, and surrounded by a crowd of children, dressed in red fabrics embroidered with gold, who dance in front of the horses; Arab horsemen running courses with the djerid (*javelin*) around us, on steeds whose manes literally sweep the sand; groups of Turks, seated in front of a café built of foliage, smoking pipes or praying; a little further on, the endless deserted hills of sand, tinged with gold by

the rays of the evening sun, from which the wind raises clouds of burning dust; and finally, the muffled roar of the sea which mingles with the musical sound of the wind in the tops of the fir trees, and with the song of thousands of unknown birds; All this offers to the eye and the mind of the traveller the most sublime, the sweetest, and at the same time the most melancholic mixture of impressions that has ever intoxicated my soul: it is the land of my dreams, I would wish to return to it every day.

*September 16, 1832.*

We have spent the past few days enjoying the knowledge we have acquired with regard to the people in general, their customs, the various locations nearby, and all the amusing details of settling into an entirely new place. Our five houses have become, with the assistance of our friends and the Arab workmen, a sort of Italian villa like those we so delightfully inhabited in the mountains of Lucca, and on the coasts of Livorno, in other times. Each of us has his own apartment; and a drawing room, preceded by a flower-adorned terrace, is the meeting place. We have placed divans there; we have arranged our ship's library on shelves; my wife and Julia have frescoed the walls, and have set out their books, their necessities, and all those little feminine objects that adorn marble and mahogany tables in London and Paris, on a cedar table: it is there that we gather during the hottest hours of the day, for in the evening our drawing room is outdoors, on the terrace itself; it is there that we receive visits from all the Europeans, whom the trade with Damascus, of which Beirut is the port, detains in this beautiful country.

The Egyptian governor appointed by Ibrahim Pasha came to offer us, with a grace and cordiality more than European, his protection and services during our stay, and for any journeys we might wish to undertake. I gave him dinner today: he is a man who would not be out of place at any gathering anywhere. An old soldier serving the Pasha of Egypt, he has for his master, and especially for Ibrahim, that blind and trusting confidence in fate, that I remember having seen in the Emperor Napoleon's generals; but this Turkish devotion has something more touching and noble about it, because it stems from a religious sentiment, and not from personal interest. Ibrahim Pasha is destiny, Allah embodied, for his officers; Napoleon merely represented glory and ambition to his generals.

The governor drank Champagne with pleasure, and adopted all our customs as if he had never known any others; pipes and coffee, indulged in several times, filled the afternoon. I gave him a letter for Ibrahim Pasha, in which I informed him of the arrival of a European traveller in the country under his control, and requested the protection one would expect from a man fighting for the cause of European civilisation. Ibrahim recently passed through with his army; he is now in the desert near Homs, a large city between Aleppo and Damascus; he has left few troops in Syria; the main cities, such as Beirut, Sidon, Jaffa, Acre, and Tripoli, are occupied, with Ibrahim's agreement, by the soldiers of Emir Bashir (*Bashir Shihab II*), Grand Prince of the Druze, who rules Lebanon. This prince offered Ibrahim no resistance; he abandoned the Turkish cause, at least outwardly, after Ibrahim's capture of Acre, and is merging his troops with those of the Pasha. If Ibrahim were to be defeated at Homs, Emir Bashir could cut off his retreat and annihilate the remnants of the Egyptians. This skilful and warlike prince has reigned for forty years over all the mountains of Lebanon. He has united the Druze, the Metualis, the Maronites, the Syrians, and the Arabs into a single people, who live under his rule. He has sons, warriors like himself, whom he

sends to govern the cities Ibrahim entrusts to him. One of his sons is encamped a quarter of a mile from here, on the plain bordering Lebanon, with five or six hundred Arab horsemen. We are to see him; he has sent his respects.

An Arab was telling me today about Ibrahim's entry into the city of Beirut (*in 1831*). Some distance from the gate, as he crossed a sunken path whose moat was covered with climbing roots and intertwined shrubs, an enormous snake emerged from the undergrowth and glided forward slowly over the sand, advancing to the hooves of Ibrahim's horse. The horse, terrified, reared up, and some slaves who were following the Pasha on foot rushed forward to kill the serpent. But Ibrahim stopped them with a gesture, and, drawing his sword, cut off the head of the reptile before him and trampled the severed parts under his horse's hooves. The crowd cried out in admiration, and Ibrahim, a smile on his lips, continued on his way, delighted by the event, a sure omen of victory among the Arabs.

There is no incident in life, no natural phenomenon, the Arab tribes encounter without their attaching to it a prophetic and moral meaning. Is this habit a vague memory of that first, more perfect language that humankind once understood, a language in which all of Nature explained itself by natural means? Does it spring from a greater vividness of imagination, which seeks correlations between things that are not given to mankind to grasp? I know not, but I lean towards the former interpretation: human instincts have not arisen without motive, without purpose, without cause; an instinct for divining the future has tormented all ages and all peoples, especially primitive peoples; meaningful divination must therefore once have existed, and perhaps could exist once more; but divination is a language the key to which must have been lost on exile from that higher state, that Eden of which all peoples have a confused tradition: then, Nature doubtless spoke more clearly and profoundly to the mind; mankind conceived the hidden relationship of all natural existents, and the links between them would then have led to the perception of future facts or events, for the present is always the generative and infallible seed of the future; it is only a matter of vision and understanding.

*September 17, 1832.*

Life goes on the same. We have found as much helpfulness as kindness among the European consuls in Syria, whom the war has all concentrated in Beirut. The Sardinian consul, Giovanni Bianco; the Austrian consul, Pierre Laurella; and the English consuls, John Farren and Peter Abbott, quickly put me in touch with all the Arabs who can help with my plan to travel inland. It would be impossible to find a warmer welcome or greater hospitality. Some of these gentlemen have lived in Syria for many years and are acquainted with Arab families in Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem, who themselves have connections with the principal Arab sheikhs in the desert we are to traverse. In this way, I am forming in advance a chain of recommendations, relationships and hospitality along the different paths that could lead to Baghdad.

Monsieur Jorelle has provided me with an excellent dragoman or interpreter in the person of Joseph-Antoine Mazoillier (*author in 1854 of 'Les Chevaux Arabes de la Syrie', 'The Arab Horses of Syria'*), a young Frenchman by origin, though born and raised in Syria, who is very well versed in the scholarly language and the various dialects of the regions we are to travel through. He is now staying with us, and I am entrusting him with the management of the entire Arab section of my house. This Arab section consists of a cook from Aleppo, named Aboulias; a young Syrian from

the country, named Elias, who, having already been in the service of the consuls, understands a little Italian and French; a young Syrian girl, also speaking French, who will serve as an interpreter for the women; and finally, half a dozen Greek, Arab, and Syrian grooms from different parts of Syria, intended to take care of our horses, pitch the tents, and serve as our escort on journeys.

The story of our Arab cook, Aboulias, is too singular not to be repeated. As a young, intelligent Christian, he had established a small business in Aleppo trading in local fabrics, which he would sell himself, travelling on a donkey among the tribes of wandering Arabs who camped in the plains around Antioch during the winter. His business prospered; but his status as a non-Muslim caused him some anxiety, so he thought it wise to partner with a Muslim Arab from Aleppo. Business only improved, and after a few years, Aboulias became one of the most respected merchants in the country. But he was in love with a young Greek-Syrian woman; they would only allow him to wed her on condition that he leave Aleppo and settle near Sidon, where his beautiful fiancée's family lived. The business therefore had to be liquidated, and a quarrel arose between the two partners over the division of their jointly acquired wealth. The Muslim Arab set a trap for poor Aboulias: he planted hidden witnesses who, during an argument with his partner, overheard him blaspheme against Muhammad, a fatal crime for an infidel.

Aboulias, having been led before the Pasha, was condemned to be hanged. The sentence was carried out; but, the rope broke, and the unfortunate Aboulias collapsed at the foot of the gallows and was left for dead in the execution square. However, his fiancée's parents, having obtained permission from the Pasha for his body to be given to them for burial, in accord with their religion, carried it home. Finding that Aboulias still showed signs of life, they revived him, hid him in a cellar for a few days, and buried an empty coffin so as not to arouse the Turks' suspicion. But the latter had learned of the deception, and Aboulias was arrested again as he was escaping through the city gates at night. Brought before the Pasha once more, he told him how he had been saved, entirely against his will. The Pasha, citing a passage in the Quran (*Koran*) that favoured the accused, gave him the choice between being hanged a second time, or converting to Islam. Aboulias chose the latter and practised that religion for a time. When his ordeal was long forgotten and his conversion confirmed, he managed to escape from Aleppo and sail to Cyprus, where he reverted to Christianity again. He married the woman he loved, sought protection from the French, and was able to reappear with impunity in Syria, where he continued to trade with the Druze, Maronites, and Arabs. He was just the man we needed to travel in those lands.

His culinary talent consists of making a fire of thorny bushes or dried camel-dung in the field, and suspending a copper pot from a pole set on two others forked at the top, in which he boils rice and pieces of chicken or mutton. He also heats rounded pebbles in the hearth and, when they are almost red, coats them in dough kneaded from barley flour, and that is our bread.

*September 19, 1832.*

Today, my wife and Julia were invited by the wife and daughter of a local Arab chieftain to spend the day at the bathhouse (*hammam*); this is a form of entertainment among women in the East. A visit to the hammam is announced two weeks in advance, like a ball in Europe. Here is the description of this celebration, as my wife delivered it last night:

The bathrooms are a public place, forbidden to men every day until a certain hour, as they are reserved prior to that for the women, or for the entire day when there is a bathing session like the one in question allocated to a bride. The rooms are illuminated by dim light from small stained-glass domes. They are paved with marble in compartments of various colours, worked with great artistry. The walls are also adorned with marble and mosaic tiles, sculpted mouldings, or Moorish columns. The rooms are temperature-controlled: the first ones entered are adjusted to that of the outside air, and the first few baths are lukewarm, the others successively hotter, until the last, where the steam from well-nigh boiling water rises from the basins and fills the air with a stifling heat. Generally, there is no sunken basin in the centre of the rooms; only taps that run continuously, pouring about half an inch of water onto the marble floor. This water then drains away through channels, and is constantly replenished. What is called bathing in the East is not a complete immersion, but a successive sprinkling of water, more or less hot, and the sensation of steam on the skin.

Two hundred women from the town and surrounding area were invited to the hammam that day, including several young European women. Each arrived enveloped in the immense white linen sheet that completely covers the magnificent attire of women when they go out. They were all accompanied by their Black African slaves or free servants. As they arrived, they gathered in groups, and seated themselves on mats and cushions prepared in the first vestibule, their attendants removed the linen sheets, and they appeared in all the rich and picturesque magnificence of their clothes and jewels. These costumes varied greatly in the colour of the fabrics and the number and brilliance of the jewels; but they were formless as regards the cut of the garments.

These latter consist of trousers with wide pleats of striped satin, tied at the waist with a red silk fabric, and fastened above the ankle with a gold or silver bracelet; and a gold brocaded gown, open at the front and tied beneath the breast. The sleeves are gathered below the armpit, and then free from the elbow to the wrist; allowing a silk gauze chemise to pass through, which covers the breast. Over this gown they wear a brightly coloured velvet jacket, lined with fur, ermine or marten, and embroidered in gold along all the seams; its sleeves are also open. The hair is parted above the head; some falls over the neck, the rest is braided into plaits and reaches down to the feet, lengthened by black silk braids that imitate hair. Small twists of gold or silver hang from the ends of these braids, and their weight makes them float about the waist; The women's heads are further adorned with small chains of pearls, strings of gold sequins, and natural flowers, all mingled and scattered in incredible profusion. It is as if a casket has been poured haphazardly over the head, all glittering and perfumed with jewels and flowers. This barbaric luxury is most picturesque on the young faces of fifteen to twenty years old; on the crown of their heads, some women still wear a cap of chased gold, shaped like an inverted cup; from the centre of this cap protrudes a gold tassel bearing a tuft of pearls, which floats at the back of the head.

Their legs are bare, and their feet shod with yellow morocco leather slippers that they drag as they walk along. Their arms are covered with bracelets of gold, silver, and pearls; their chests, with several necklaces that form a braid of gold or pearls on the exposed breast.

Once all the women were gathered together, a wild music was heard; women, whose upper bodies were wrapped in simple red gauze, uttered high-pitched cries of lamentation, while playing on fifes and tambourines: this music continued all day, and gave the scene of pleasure and celebration a character of tumult and frenzy quite barbaric.

When the bride appeared, accompanied by her mother and young friends, and dressed in such a magnificent costume that her hair, neck, arms, and breasts were entirely concealed beneath a flowing veil of garlands of gold coins and pearls, the bathers seized her and stripped her, garment by garment, of all her clothes. Meanwhile, all the other women were being undressed by their slaves, and the various bathing ceremonies began. They moved, always to the sounds of the same music, always with increasingly bizarre ceremonies and words, from one room to another;

They took steam baths, then ablution baths, then perfumed, soapy waters were poured over the women, and finally the entertainment began. All the women, with various gestures and cries, did what a group of schoolchildren do when taken to swim in a river, splashing each other, plunging their heads into the water, throwing water in each other's faces; and the blaring music resounded louder each time one of these childish tricks aroused the noisy laughter of the young Arab girls. Finally, they left the bath; the slaves and the attendants braided their mistresses' damp hair again, retied necklaces and bracelets, clad them in their silk dresses and velvet jackets, spread cushions on mats in the rooms whose floors had been wiped dry, and brought out, from baskets and silk packets, the provisions they had brought. These were pastries and preserves of every kind, in which the Turks and Arabs excel; sorbets, orange blossom preserves, and all those iced drinks that Orientals consume at all times of day. Pipes and hookahs were also brought for the older women; a cloud of fragrant smoke filled and obscured the atmosphere; coffee, served in small cups enclosed in little vases with openwork of gold and silver thread, circulated continuously, and the conversation became animated; Then dancers appeared, who performed Egyptian routines, and the monotonous movements of Arabia, to the same music. The entire day passed in this manner, and it was only at nightfall that the procession of women escorted the young bride back to her mother's house. This bathing ceremony usually takes place a few days before the wedding.

*September 20, 1832.*

Our establishment being complete, I am now organising my caravan for the journey into the interior of Syria and Palestine. I have purchased fourteen Arabian horses, some from Lebanon, others from Aleppo and the desert; I have had saddles and bridles made in the local style, rich and adorned with silk fringes and gold and silver thread. The respect one commands from the Arabs is proportional to the luxury one displays; one must dazzle them, to capture their imagination and to travel with complete safety among their tribes. I am having our weapons repaired, and I am buying even finer ones to arm our Carvas (*guards*). These Carvas are Turks who replace the Janissaries that the Porte (*'The Sublime Porte,' was a widely used term for the central government and court of the Ottoman Empire, a translation from the Turkish Bâb-ı Âlî, which means 'the High Gate' initially that of the Grand Vizier's complex in Constantinople/Istanbul.*) formerly assigned to ambassadors or travellers it wished to protect: they are both soldiers and magistrates; they are roughly equivalent to the gendarmerie corps of the European states. Each consul has one or two such attendants attached to his person; they travel on horseback with him; they announce him in the towns they are to pass through; they inform the sheikh, the pasha, the governor; they see that whichever house in the town or villages they have chosen is emptied and prepared for them; and they protect, through their presence and authority, any caravan to which they have been attached.

The Cavas are dressed in costumes of varying splendour, according to the luxury or importance of the person who employs them. European ambassadors or consuls are the only foreigners who

are allocated them by right, but, thanks to the kindness of Monsieur Jorelle and the generosity of the Egyptian governor of Beirut, I have been granted several. I will leave some here for the service of my wife and Julia, and for their safety when they have to go out; and am taking the youngest, most intelligent, and bravest to lead our detachment. These men are gentle, helpful, and attentive, and require almost nothing more than fine weapons, fine horses, and fine clothing; they live, like all the other Arabs in my employ, on barley-flour cakes and fruit; they sleep in the open air, under the mulberry trees in the gardens, or in a tent that I have had erected near the place where the horses are kept.

The Sardinian consul, Monsieur Bianco, whom we see every day, he being a friend known for many a year, facilitates all these domestic arrangements, which will ensure the safety of my wife and child during my absence, and will also contribute to our own safety on the road. I purchase tents, and he lends me his finest one.

*September 22, 1832.*

The stifling heat of September has delayed our departure for a while. We spend our days receiving visits from and paying visits to all our neighbours, Greeks, Arabs, Maronites, and forming relationships that will make our stay pleasant. We would find in Europe no more kindness and hospitality than we are shown here: these people are accustomed to seeing only Europeans engaged in commerce, arrive in their country, whose every relationship has a self-serving purpose; they could not understand at first why someone would choose to live and travel among them solely to know them and admire their beautiful landscapes, and ruined monuments; they began by suspecting the intention of a mere traveller; and since tradition leads them to believe that treasures are buried beneath all the ruins, they think that we possess the secret of unearthing those same, and that this is the purpose of our expense and our efforts; but once they have been convinced that one is not travelling with that intention, that one is here only to admire the work of God in the most beautiful regions of the world, to study customs, to see and love the people; when, moreover, they are offered gifts without being asked in return for anything other than their friendship; when one has accompanying one, as we do, a doctor and a pharmacy, and one distributes to them free of charge prescriptions, consultations and medicines; when they see that the foreigner is celebrated and well-regarded by the other Franks, has at his disposal a fine ship which carries him at will from one port to another, and refuses to take on any trade goods, they are struck by the idea of a power, grandeur and disinterestedness which contradicts all their systems, and they quickly pass from distrust to admiration, and from admiration to devotion.

Such is their disposition toward us. Our courtyard is continually filled by Arabs from the mountains, Maronite monks, Druze sheikhs, women, children, and the sick, who have come from forty to fifty miles away to see us out, ask our advice, and offer us hospitality if we desired to pass through their lands. Almost all of them arrive with gifts of wine or local fruit. We receive them well, offering them coffee, pipes, and iced sherbet. In exchange for their gifts, I give them presents of European fabrics, various weapons, a watch, and items from a large quantity of small, inexpensive jewellery. They return home, delighted with our welcome, and spread the reputation of *Emir Frangi* (that is what they call me), the *Prince of the Franks*. I have no other name in the entire area around Beirut and in the city itself. And since this consideration may be of great use to me in

our adventurous journeys in all countries, Monsieur Jorelle and the European consuls are kind enough not to disabuse them, and to let this humble poet pass for a powerful man in Europe.

One cannot imagine how quickly news travels from mouth to mouth in Arabia: already, it is known in Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia, Sidon, and Jerusalem that a foreigner has arrived in Syria and is going to travel through these lands. In a country where there is little change in things, or people's minds, the smallest event out of the ordinary immediately becomes the subject of conversation; it circulates, at the speed of conversation, from one tribe to another; the sensitive, heightened imagination of the Arabs magnifies and colours everything, and a rumour spreads two hundred and fifty miles about, in a fortnight. This disposition of the people, which Lady Stanhope (*Hester Lucy Stanhope, writer, antiquarian, niece of the former Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, and one of the most famous travellers of her age, had settled in the Lebanon, near Sidon, and passed as a prophetess among the Druze. She thus wielded a degree of political influence*) once experienced in circumstances almost identical to mine, are too favourable to me for me to complain. I let things be, I tolerate what is said of me, and accept, without disabusing the people of their illusions, the titles, wealth, and virtues with which the Arab imagination has endowed me, ready to relinquish them humbly afterwards, on returning to my true proportions and mediocrity.

*September 27, 1832, Fakardin Tower.*

We spent the entire day at the wedding of the young Syrian-Greek woman. The ceremony began with a long procession of Greek, Arab, and Syrian women, some on horseback, others on foot, along paths lined with aloes and mulberry trees, to assist the bride during this tiring day. For several days and nights now, a number of the women have not left Habib's house, constantly uttering cries, songs, and high-pitched, prolonged moans, like the shouts of grape harvesters and haymakers on the hillsides of France during harvest time. This clamour of lamentations, tears, and affected joy must keep the bride awake for several nights before the wedding. The members of the husband's family, young and old, are doing the same, and have not allowed him any rest for eight days. We have no idea of the reason for this custom.

Led to the gardens of Habib's house, the women were ushered inside the rooms (*diwans*) to pay their respects to the young woman, admire her finery, and observe various ceremonies. We, however, remained in the courtyard and from there were invited into a lower room. There, a table was set in the European style, laden with a multitude of candied fruits, honey and sugar cakes, liqueurs, and sorbets; and throughout the evening, this refreshment was replenished once consumed by the numerous visitors. I was able, as an exception, to gain entry to the women's diwan just as the Greek archbishop was giving the nuptial blessing. The young woman stood beside her fiancé, covered from head to toe in a red gauze veil embroidered with gold. The priest drew back her veil for an instant, and the young man caught a glimpse, for the first time, of the woman to whom he would be united: she was breathtakingly beautiful. The pallor, born of fatigue and emotion, which covered her cheeks, a pallor further enhanced by the reflections from the red veil and the countless ornaments of gold, silver, pearls, and diamonds with which she was adorned, and by the long braids of her black hair that fell all around her waist. Her eyelashes were painted black, as well as her eyebrows and the rims of her eyes; her hands, the tips of her fingers and nails dyed red with henna, and decorated with Moorish patterns and designs — all this gave her ravishing beauty a character of novelty and solemnity that struck us deeply. Her husband barely

had time to look at her. He seemed overwhelmed, himself nearing the end of the sleepless nights and weariness with which these bizarre customs exhaust even the strongest love.

The bishop took a crown of natural flowers from one of his priests, and placed it on the young woman's head, raised it again and placed it on the young man's hair, raised it again to place it over the bride's veil, and thus passed it several times from one head to the other. Rings were placed on each of their fingers in turn. They then broke the same piece of bread, and drank consecrated wine from the same cup. After this, the young bride was taken to private apartments where only the women could follow her, to change her attire once more. The groom's father and friends led him, separately, into the garden, and he was seated at the foot of a tree surrounded by all the men of his family. Then the musicians and dancers arrived, and continued, till sunset, their barbarous symphony, shrill cries and contortions beside the young man, who had fallen asleep at the foot of the tree, and whom his friends tried to wake at every moment, though in vain.

When night fell, he was led alone in a procession to his father's house. Only after eight days was the new husband allowed to reappear to take his wife home.

The women who had filled Habib's house with their cries also emerged a little later. Nothing was more picturesque than this immense procession of women and girls in the most splendid and extravagant costumes, covered in sparkling jewels, each surrounded by their attendants and slaves carrying torches of resinous fir to light the way, their luminous line extending along the long, narrow paths by the sea shaded by aloes and orange trees, sometimes in prolonged silence, sometimes uttering resounding cries above the waves or beneath the great plane trees at the foot of Mount Lebanon. We returned to our home, near Habib's country house, where we could still hear the sounds of the women's conversations; we went up onto our terrace, and for a long time watched those wandering lights straying in every direction among the trees of the plain.

*September 29, 1832.*

There is talk of Ibrahim Pasha being defeated. If the Egyptian army were to suffer a setback, the revenge of the Turks, currently oppressed here by the Christians of Lebanon, would be something to be feared, and excesses could occur in isolated rural areas, especially like ours. I have decided to rent a house in the city, as a precaution: I found one this morning that can accommodate us all.

Like all Arab palaces, it consists of a small, dark corridor that opens onto the street through a low doorway; this corridor leads to an inner courtyard paved with marble and surrounded by diwans or open salons. In summer, a tent is erected over this courtyard, and it is there that the Arabs receive visitors. A fountain flows and murmurs in the centre of the courtyard; when there is no running water, there is at least a covered well in one of the corners. From this courtyard, one reaches several large rooms also paved with mosaics or marble slabs, the walls decorated, to waist height, with sculpted marble in niches, pilasters, small fountains, or panelling admirably worked in yellow cedar.

The first section of each of these diwans is one step lower than the second, and this second half of the apartment is protected by an elegantly carved wooden balustrade. Slaves and servants stand in the first section, holding a cup of coffee, a sherbet, or a pipe. In the second room, the masters sit on rugs, leaning on cushions. Generally, at the far end of the room, there is a small

wooden staircase hidden by the panelling, leading to a kind of high gallery that occupies the rear of the room. This gallery opens on one side to the street through small pointed-arch windows fitted with grilles, and on the side facing the apartment, it is also screened with wooden grilles, in the fashioning of which the local carpenters display their full artistry in the designs and workmanship. These galleries are very narrow and can only accommodate a divan covered with silk mattresses and cushions. This is where wealthy Turks or Arabs retire for the night; others are content to spread cushions on the floor and sleep fully-clothed, with no other covering than the heavy, beautiful furs they usually wear.

There are five or six similar rooms in my townhouse on the first floor, and as many on the second, besides a large number of small, detached, high-ceilinged rooms for European servants; the Janissaries (*guards*), the sais (*seyis*, *grooms*), and the Arab servants sleep by the street door, or beneath the corridor, or in the courtyard; no effort is made to find them a place or a bed. The common people here have no bed other than the earth, and an Egyptian straw mat. The benevolent climate provides everything necessary, and we ourselves find that there is no more delightful canopy for a bed than the beautiful starry firmament, the light sea breezes bringing a little coolness and encouraging sleep; there is little or no dew, and it suffices to cover one's eyes with a silk handkerchief to sleep thus in the open air, without any discomfort.

This house is merely a refuge for my wife and child in case Ibrahim Pasha withdraws from the city. I simply collected the keys, and we would only occupy the place if the rest of the country became uninhabitable. Under the guaranteed protection of the European consuls, within a walled city, and next to a port where ships of all nations are constantly at anchor, there can be no imminent danger for travellers. I have rented this town house for a year for a thousand piastres, that is to say, a little more than three hundred francs; the five country houses combined cost me only three thousand piastres, a total of about thirteen hundred francs a year, for six houses, one of which alone, the one in town, would cost at least four or five thousand francs in Europe.

On a strip of land on the west side of the port, there is one of the most delightful dwellings one could wish for in the world: it belongs to a wealthy Turkish merchant. I proposed renting it. He refused to do so, but offered to sell it for thirty thousand piastres, that is to say, for about thirteen thousand francs. It stands in the middle of a very large garden, planted with cedars, orange trees, vines, and fig trees, and watered by a beautiful spring of fresh water; the sea surrounds it on two sides, and foam bathes the foot of the walls. The whole beautiful harbour of Beirut stretches out before one, with its ships at anchor, from which one hears the sound of the wind in their rigging; It adjoins an old Moorish castle that juts out into the sea, which is joined to beautiful green lawns by bridges, and whose high battlements stand out in dark relief against the snowy background of Mount Sannine, revealing through their interstices Ibrahim's sentinels who walk up and down looking out to sea.

The house is much more beautiful than the one I have just rented. All the walls are covered with admirably carved marble, or with cedar panelling of the richest workmanship; fountains murmur continuously in the centre of the ground-floor rooms, and projecting, grilled balconies, which encircle the upper floors, allow the women to spend, unseen, days and nights in the open air, and to feast their eyes on the magnificent spectacle of the sea, the mountains, and the lively views of the port. The Turk received me very graciously; he lavished sherbet, pipes, and coffee upon me, and personally led me through all the rooms of the house. He had previously sent a

Black African eunuch to warn his wives to retire to a pavilion in the garden; but when we arrived at their apartment in the harem, the order had not yet been carried out, and we saw five or six young females, some no more than fifteen or sixteen years old, others twenty to thirty, in the beautiful and graceful attire of Arab women, and in all the disarray of their indoor clothes, rising precipitously from their mats and divans, and fleeing barefoot and bare-legged, some hastily throwing veils over their faces, others carrying small children against their breasts, in all the shame and confusion natural to such a surprise. They slipped into a dark corridor, and the eunuch positioned himself at the door. The Arab merchant seemed neither embarrassed nor distressed by this circumstance, and we inspected all the inner rooms of the harem as we might have done in a European house.

## A Visit to Lady Hester Stanhope

Lady Hester Stanhope, a niece of William Pitt the Younger, left England after the death of her uncle, and travelled throughout Europe. Young, beautiful, and wealthy, she was received everywhere with the eagerness and interest that her rank, fortune, intelligence, and beauty was destined to attract; but she consistently refused to unite her fate with any one of her worthiest admirers, and, after a few years spent in the principal capitals of Europe, she embarked with a large entourage for Constantinople. The reason for this expatriation was never known: some attributed it to the death of a young English general killed at that time in Spain (*Sir John Moore, who died at Corunna in 1809*), eternal sorrow for whom was to keep him forever present in Lady Hester's heart; others, to a simple taste for adventure that the enterprising and courageous nature of this young woman may have suggested. Be that as it may, she departed; spent a few years in Constantinople; and finally embarked for Syria on an English ship that also carried most of her possessions, and immense amounts of jewellery and gifts of every kind.

The storm assailed the ship in the Gulf of Macri (*Fethiye*), bordering Caramania, opposite the island of Rhodes. It ran aground on a reef a few miles from shore. The vessel was broken apart in a few moments, and Lady Stanhope's possessions were swallowed by the waves. She herself narrowly escaped death and was borne on a piece of wreckage to a small, deserted island, where she spent twenty-four hours without food or assistance. Finally, fishermen from Marmoris, searching for the wreckage, found her and escorted her to Rhodes, where she identified herself to the English consul. This deplorable event did not weaken her resolve. She went to Malta, and from there to England. She gathered the remnants of her fortune; she sold part of her estates at a loss; she loaded a second ship with riches and gifts for the lands she was to visit, and she set sail. The journey was a happy one, and she landed at Latakia, the ancient Laodicea, on the Syrian coast between Tripoli and Alexandretta. She settled in the area, learned Arabic, surrounded herself with people who could facilitate her interactions with the various Arab, Druze, and Maronite populations of the country, and prepared herself, as I myself was doing at the time, for future travels of discovery in the least accessible parts of Arabia, Mesopotamia and the desert.

When she was well acquainted with the language, dress, customs and manners of the country, she organised a large caravan, loaded camels with rich gifts for the Arabs, and travelled throughout the whole of Syria. She visited Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Baalbek and Palmyra: it was in this last place that the many wandering Arab tribes who had facilitated her access to these ruins, gathered around her tent numbering forty or fifty thousand, and charmed by her beauty, her grace

and her magnificence, proclaimed her Queen of Palmyra, and issued *firmans* (*Ottoman permits*) to her, in which it was stated that any European under her protection could visit the desert and the ruins of Baalbek and Palmyra in complete safety provided they agreed to pay a tribute of one thousand piastres. This edict still exists, and would doubtless still be faithfully executed by the Arabs, were they given positive proof of Lady Stanhope's protection.

Upon her return from Palmyra, she was nearly abducted by a large tribe of other Arabs, enemies of the people of Palmyra. She was warned in time by her entourage and owed her safety and that of her caravan to a forced march through the night and the speed of her horses, which covered an incredible distance in the desert in twenty-four hours. She returned to Damascus, where she resided for a few months under the protection of the Turkish Pasha, to whom the Sublime Porte had strongly recommended her.

After a life of wandering throughout the lands of the Orient, Lady Esther Stanhope finally settled, in solitude, on a hilltop, among the well-nigh inaccessible mountains of Lebanon, near Said, the ancient Sidon. The Pasha of Acre, Abdullah Pasha ibn Ali, who held her in great respect and absolute devotion, granted her the remains of a convent and the village of Joun, inhabited by the Druze. There she built several houses, surrounded by a wall similar to our medieval fortifications; she created a charming garden in the Turkish style: with flowers and fruit-bushes, rows of vines, kiosks adorned with sculptures and painted arabesques, water flowing in marble channels, fountains set amidst the paving stones of the kiosks, and a canopy of orange, fig, and lemon trees. There, Lady Stanhope lived for several years in completely oriental luxury, surrounded by a large number of European or Arab dragomans, a large retinue of women, and Black African slaves, while enjoying a sustained, friendly, and even politically influential relationship with the Porte, with Abdullah Pasha, with Emir Bashir Shihab II, the ruler of Lebanon, and especially with Arab sheikhs from the deserts of Syria and Baghdad.

Her fortune, still considerable, soon diminished due to the disruption in her financial affairs, which suffered from her absence; and was reduced to an income of thirty or forty thousand francs, which in that country was still sufficient for the lifestyle Lady Stanhope was obliged to maintain. Meanwhile, those who had accompanied her from Europe died or moved away; the friendship of the Arabs, which must be constantly maintained through gifts and prestige, cooled; contact became less frequent, and Lady Esther was reduced to the complete isolation in which I myself found her; but it was in that state that the heroic temperament of her character displayed itself, with all the energy, steadfastness, and resolve her spirit commanded. She had no thoughts of returning to England; she had not a single regret for that world or the past; she never wavered despite solitude, misfortune, nor the prospect of old age, and of being forgotten by the living; she remained alone where she still dwells, without books, newspapers, letters from Europe, without friends, without even servants attached to her person, surrounded only by a few Black African women and Black African slave children, and a number of Arab labourers to attend to her garden, her horses, and to ensure her personal safety.

It is generally believed in the country, and my own dealings with her also lead me to believe, that she finds her supernatural strength of spirit and resolve not only in her character, but also in exalted religious ideas, in which European Enlightenment is conflated with certain Eastern beliefs, and especially with the intricacies of astrology. Be that as it may, Lady Stanhope is a great name in the East, and a great source of wonder to Europe. Being so close to her home, I longed to see her:

her ideas of solitude and meditation had such apparent sympathy with my own that I was eager to see what we might have in common. But nothing is more difficult for a European than to be admitted to her presence; she refuses all communication with English travellers, with women, and even with members of her own family. I therefore had little hope of meeting her, and had no letter of introduction: knowing, however, that she maintained some distant ties with the Arabs of Palestine and Mesopotamia, and since a recommendation from her to those tribes could be extremely useful to me in my future travels, I decided to send an Arab carrying a letter to her, the contents of which were as follows:

'Milady, a traveller like yourself, a stranger like you in the Orient, who has come here seeking, like you, only the spectacle of its landscapes, its ruins, and the works of God, I have recently arrived in Syria with my family. I would count among the most interesting days of my journey the one on which I met a woman who is herself one of the wonders of this Orient that I have come to visit.

If you would be so kind as to receive me, let me know the day which suits you, and let me know if I should visit alone, or if I may introduce you to some of the friends who accompany me, and who would value no less than myself the honour of being presented to you.

May this request, Milady, in no way impose upon your politeness is my seeking what may be repugnant to your habit of absolute seclusion. I myself understand too well the price of freedom, and the charm of solitude, not to understand and respect a refusal.

Please accept, etc.'

## Joun

I had not long to wait for a reply: on the 30th, at three in the afternoon, Lady Stanhope's equerry, who is also her physician, arrived at my house under orders to accompany me to Joun, the residence of this extraordinary woman. We set off at four. I was accompanied by the equerry, Doctor Leonardi, and by Amédée de Parseval, a servant, and a guide; we were all on horseback. Half an hour from Beirut, we traversed a magnificent fir grove, originally planted by Emir Fakhr al-Din II on a high promontory, the view from which extends to the west over the stormy Syrian Sea and to the east over the magnificent valley of Lebanon — an admirable vantage point, where the rich vegetation of the West — vines, fig trees, mulberry trees, and pyramidal poplars — mingled with a few tall columns of Eastern palm trees, whose broad leaves, seen against the blue sky, were tossed about like plumes by the wind. A short distance away, one enters a kind of desert of red sand, piled up in enormous, shifting waves like those of the ocean.

It was an evening of strong breezes, and the wind furrowed, rippled, and scored these waves of sand, as it ripples the waves of the sea, and makes them quiver. The sight was new and melancholy, an apparition of the true and vast desert that I was soon to traverse. No trace of men or animals remained in this undulating arena; we were guided only by the roar of the waves on one side, and the gleaming peaks of the Lebanese mountains on the other. We soon found ourselves again on a kind of road or path strewn with enormous blocks of stone. This road, which follows the sea in the direction of Egypt, led us to a ruined house, the remains of an old fortified tower, where we spent the dark hours of the night, lying on rush mats, and wrapped in our cloaks.

As soon as the moon had risen, we remounted our horses. It was one of those nights when the sky is ablaze with stars, when the most perfect serenity seems to reign in those ethereal depths that we contemplate from so far below, but when Nature, all around us, seems to groan and writhe in sinister convulsions. The desolate aspect of the coast, for some miles now, added to this distressing impression. We had left behind us, with the twilight, the beautiful shaded slopes, the verdant valleys of Lebanon. Harsh hills, strewn from top to bottom with black, white, and grey stones, the debris from earthquakes, rose up close to us; to north and south, the sea, stirred since morning by a muffled storm, unfurled heavy and menacing waves, which we saw approaching from afar, casting their shadows before them, to strike the shore, each landing a thunderous blow, and finally extending their broad and bubbling sheets of foam to the edge of the wet sand where we were riding, flooding the feet of our horses each time and threatening to carry us away. The moon, as bright as a winter sun, shed enough rays on the sea to reveal the latter's fury to us, yet not enough to light our path and reassure the eye as to the perils of the road.

Soon a fiery glow over the peaks of the Lebanese mountains melted the whiter or darker mists of morning, and spread over the whole scene a false, pallid hue, neither day nor night, owning neither to the brilliance of the one nor the serenity of the other: a painful hour for the eye and the mind, a struggle between two opposing principles the distressing image of which Nature sometimes offers, but which one more often finds within one's own heart. At seven, under an already blazing sun, we left Said, ancient Sidon, which juts out into the sea like a glorious reminder of past dominion, and climbed the bare, jagged chalk hills that, rising imperceptibly from one level to the next, led us to the solitude we had been seeking. Each hillock we climbed revealed a higher one, which we had to circumvent or ascend; mountains followed one another like the links of a tightly bound chain, leaving between them only deep, waterless ravines, bleached white and strewn with patches of greyish rock. These mounts are completely devoid of vegetation and soil. They are the skeletons of hills that water and wind have eroded over the centuries. This was not where I had expected to find the dwelling of a woman who had travelled the world and had the whole universe to choose from.

Finally, from the top of one of these mounts, my eyes fell upon a deeper, wider valley, bordered on all sides by more majestic, but no less barren, mountains. In the middle of this valley, like the base of a broad tower, Mount Joun rose, clothed with rounded boulders which, tapering towards the summit, formed a lofty plateau hundreds of yards wide, crowned with beautiful, graceful, green vegetation. A white wall, flanked by a kiosk at one corner, enclosed this mass of greenery. This was Lady Hester's residence. We reached it at noon. The house is not what is called a house in Europe, nor is it even what is called a house in the East; it is a confused and bizarre collection of ten or twelve small cottages, each containing only one or two ground-floor rooms, without windows, separated from each other by small courtyards or gardens, an arrangement quite like that of those poorer monasteries one finds high in the mountains of Italy or Spain, belonging to the mendicant orders.

As was her custom, Lady Stanhope did not receive visitors until three or four in the afternoon. We were each led into a kind of narrow cell, without light or furniture. We were served breakfast, and threw ourselves onto our divans, awaiting the awakening of the unseen hostess of this romantic retreat. I was asleep when, at three, there was a knock at my door, and I was told that she was expecting me. I crossed a courtyard, a garden, a pavilion with a jasmine canopy, then two

or three dark corridors, and was ushered, by a small Black African child of six or eight, into Lady Hester's study. Such profound darkness reigned there that I could scarcely make out the noble, grave, gentle, and majestic features of the white figure who, dressed in Oriental costume, rose from the divan and approached, extending her hand to me.

Lady Hester appeared to be about fifty years old (*she was fifty-six at the time*); she has those features that the years cannot alter: freshness, colour, grace, these fade with youth; but when beauty resides in the very form, in the purity of line, dignity, majesty, and intelligence of a man's or woman's face, beauty changes with the different stages of life, but does not pass away — such is Lady Stanhope's. She wore a white turban on her head, a purple woollen band, across her forehead, falling on either side of her head to her shoulders, a long yellow cashmere shawl, and an immense white silk Turkish gown with flowing sleeves, which clothing enveloped her entire person in simple and majestic folds; and only through the opening at the chest of her first gown could one glimpse a second dress of Persian fabric adorned with a thousand flowers, which rose to her neck, and was fastened there with a pearl clasp. Turkish boots of yellow morocco leather, embroidered with silk, completed this beautiful Oriental costume, which she wore with the freedom and grace of someone who had not worn any other since her youth.

'You have made a long journey to see a hermit,' she said to me; 'you are most welcome. I receive few strangers, barely one or two a year; but your letter pleased me, and I longed to meet someone who, like me, loves God, Nature, and solitude. Something, moreover, told me that our stars were aligned, and that we would be well suited to one another. I am pleased to see my premonition has not deceived me; and the features I see now, and the mere sound of your footsteps as you crossed the corridor, have taught me enough about you that I do not regret having wished to see you. Let us sit down and talk; we are already friends.' 'How,' I asked her, 'can you so readily bestow the name of friend upon a man whose name and life are completely unknown to you? You do not know who I am.' 'That is true,' she replied. 'I know neither who you are according to the wider world, nor what you do while you live among others; but I already know who you are before God. Do not take me for a fool, as the world often terms me, but I cannot resist the need to speak to you frankly. There is a science, lost today in your Europe, a science that was born in the East, which has never perished there, that still lives. I possess its secret. I read the stars.

We are all children of one of those celestial fires that presided over our birth, and whose happy or malevolent influence is written in our eyes, on our foreheads, in our features, in the lines on our hands, in the shape of our feet, in our gestures, in our gait. I have only seen you for a few minutes; well, I know you as if I had lived a century with you. Do you wish me to reveal you to yourself? Do you wish me to predict your destiny?' 'Beware of that, Milady!' I replied, smiling. 'I do not deny what I have scant knowledge of; I will not assert that in visible and invisible Nature, where everything is connected, where everything is linked together, beings of a lower order like men and women are not under the influence of higher beings, like the stars or the angels; but I have no need of their revelation to know myself — a thing of corruption, infirmity, and wretchedness — and as for the secrets of my future destiny, I would believe I was profaning the Divinity that hides them from me if I were to ask them of the Creature. As for the future, I believe only in God, freedom, and virtue.' 'That is of no account' she replied. 'Believe what you please. As for me, I can clearly see that you were born under the influence of three fortunate, powerful, and virtuous

planets, which endowed you with similar qualities, and which are leading you toward a goal that I could, if you wished, indicate to you today. God brings you here to enlighten your soul; you are one of those men of desire and goodwill whom He needs, as instruments, for the marvellous works He will soon accomplish among mankind. Do you believe the reign of the Messiah has arrived?'

'I was born a Christian, I told her: there is your answer.' 'Christian!' she retorted after a slight sign of irritation; 'I too am a Christian; but didn't the one you call Christ say: "I still speak to you in parables, but he who comes after me will speak to you in spirit and truth"? Well! Such is the one we await! The Messiah who has not yet come, who is not far off, whom we will see with our own eyes, and for whose arrival everything is being prepared! What is your answer to that? And how can you deny or refute the very words of your Gospel that I have just quoted to you? What are your reasons for believing in Christ?' 'Allow me,' I replied, 'Milady, not to enter into such a discussion with you: I do not enter into it with myself. There are two lights for man: one that illuminates the mind, which is subject to discussion and doubt, and which often leads only to error and waywardness; the other that illuminates the heart and never deceives, for it is both evidence and elicits conviction; and, for us wretched mortals, truth is only a conviction. God alone possesses truth in a different way, as pure truth; we possess it only as faith. I believe in Christ because he brought to earth the holiest, most fruitful, and most divine doctrine that has ever shone upon human intelligence. Such a heavenly doctrine cannot be the fruit of deception and falsehood. Christ spoke, as reason speaks: doctrines are known by their morality, as a tree is known by its fruit; the fruits of Christianity (I speak of its future fruits even more than of its already-gathered but corrupted fruits) are infinite, perfect, and divine; therefore, the doctrine itself is divine; therefore, its author is the divine Word, as he called Himself.

That is why I am a Christian, that is my entire religious argument, within myself; with other people I have none: one can only prove to a person what they already believe.' 'But then,' she continued, 'do you find the social, political, and religious world well-ordered? And do you not feel what everyone feels, the need, the necessity of a revealer, a redeemer, the Messiah we await, and whom we already see in our dreams?' 'Oh, that,' I replied, 'is another question! No one suffers and complains more than I amidst the universal complaint of Nature, of humankind, and of our societies. No one confesses more openly the enormous social, political, and religious abuse that exists. No one desires more and hopes more for a remedy for the intolerable evils of humanity. No one is more convinced that the remedy can only be a divine one! If you call this waiting for a Messiah, I await that same as you do, and more than you I long for the Messiah's imminent appearance. As and more than you do, I see in humanity's wavering beliefs, in the turmoil of its ideas, in the emptiness at its heart, in the depravity of social conditions, in the continual fragility of its political institutions, all the symptoms of upheaval, and consequently of coming, and imminent, renewal. I believe that God always reveals himself at the precise moment when everything human is insufficient, when humanity confesses that it can do nothing for itself.

The world is in that state. I therefore believe in a Messiah close to appearing in our time; but in this Messiah I do not see Christ, who has nothing more to give us in wisdom, virtue, and truth; I see the one whom Christ foretold would come after him. Whether this holy spirit, ever active, ever assisting humanity, ever revealing to it, according to the age and its needs, what it must do and know, is embodied in a person or a doctrine, in a fact or an idea, it matters little, it is all one. Person or doctrine, fact or idea, I believe in that same, I hope and await that same, and more than

you, Milady, I invoke that same! You see, then, that we may understand each other, and that our stars are not as divergent as this conversation may have led you to think.'

She smiled; her eyes, sometimes veiled with a touch of temper while I confessed my Christian rationalism, lit up with a tender gaze and an almost supernatural light. 'Believe what you will,' she said, 'you are nonetheless one of those people I have been awaiting, whom Providence sends me, and who have a great part to play in the work that is being prepared. Soon you will return to Europe: Europe is finished, France alone still has a great mission to accomplish; you will participate in it, I do not yet know how; but I can tell you this evening, if you wish, when I have consulted your stars. I do not yet know the names of all: I see more than three now; I distinguish four, perhaps five planets, and, who knows, even more. One of them is certainly Mercury, which gives clarity and colour to intelligence and speech. You must be a poet: that is evident in your eyes and in the upper part of your face; below, you are under the influence of entirely different, almost opposing, planets. There is an influence towards energy and action; there is also something of the Sun,' she said, suddenly, 'in the position of your head, and in the way you glance over your left shoulder. Thank God: there are few men born under more than one planet, few whose rising planet is fortunate, and even fewer whose planet, though favourable, is not counterbalanced by the malignant influence of an opposing one. You, on the contrary, have several; and all are in harmony to serve you, and all help each other in your favour. What is your name?' I told her. 'I have not heard of you before today!' she replied, with the accent of truth.

'There, Milady, is the sum of fame. I have composed a few verses, which have caused my name to be repeated a hundred thousand times by all the literary echoes of Europe; but those echoes are too faint to cross your sea and your mountains, thus, here, I am a completely new man, a man totally unknown, a name never before uttered! I am all the more flattered by the kindness you lavish upon me: I owe it only to you and myself.' 'Yes,' she replied, 'poet or no, I love you and have faith in you; we shall meet again, be certain of it! You will return to the West, but it will not be long before you return to the East: it is your homeland.' 'It is, at least,' I said, 'the homeland of my imagination.' 'Don't smile', she replied 'it is your true homeland, it is the homeland of your ancestors. I am sure of it now: look at your feet!' 'I see there,' I said, 'only the dust of your paths covering it, which I would be ashamed of in a drawing room in old Europe.' No, no; that's not it,' she replied again, 'look at your feet. I had not noticed myself till now. You see; the instep of each foot is very high, and between your heel and your toes, when your foot is on the ground, there is enough space for water to pass through without wetting you. These are the feet of the Arab, the feet of the East; you are a son of these lands, and we are approaching the day when each will return to the land of his fathers. We will meet again.'

A Black African slave then entered, and, lying down before her, his forehead on the rug and his hands on his head, spoke a few words to her in Arabic. 'Go,' she said to me, 'your refreshments are served: eat quickly, and return soon. I shall attend you then, and see more clearly amidst the confusion of my thoughts about you and your future. I myself never eat with anyone; I live too frugally. Bread and fruit, when the need arises, are enough for me; I must not subject a guest to my diet.'

I was led, beneath an arbour of jasmine and oleander, to the gate of her garden. The table was set for Monsieur de Parseval and myself: we dined very quickly, but she scarcely waited until we had left the table before sending Doctor Leonardi to tell me that she was expecting me. I hastened

there; I found her smoking a long Oriental pipe. She had one brought to me. I was already accustomed to seeing the most elegant and beautiful women of the Orient smoking; I no longer found anything shocking in that graceful and nonchalant posture, nor in the fragrant smoke escaping in light columns from the lips of a beautiful woman, which interrupted the conversation without dampening it. We talked for a long time in this manner, always on our favourite subject, the unique and mysterious theme of this extraordinary woman, a modern-day sorceress, entirely reminiscent of the famous sorceresses of antiquity; a Circe of the deserts.

It seemed to me that Lady Hester's religious doctrines were a skilful, though confused, mixture of the different religions among which she had condemned herself to live; mysterious like the Druze, whose mystical secrets she, perhaps alone in the world, knew; resigned like the Muslims, and fatalistic like them; awaiting the Messiah with the Jews; and professing the worship of Christ and the practice of his morality of charity with the Christians. Add to this the fantastic colours and supernatural dreams of an imagination tinged with the Orient and inflamed by solitude and meditation, and a few revelations, perhaps, of the Arab astrologers, and you will gain an idea of her sublime and bizarre compound of beliefs, which it is easier to call madness than to analyse and understand. No, the woman is not mad. Madness, which is visible, all-too-obviously, in the eyes, is not visible in her beautiful and direct gaze; madness, which always betrays itself in conversation, whose flow it always involuntarily interrupts with sudden, disordered, and eccentric digressions, is not at all perceptible in the lofty, mystical, cloudy, but sustained, connected, linked, and vigorous conversation of Lady Hester. If I had to give a definitive opinion, I would say it is a deliberate, studied mask of madness, one that is self-aware, she possessing her own reasons for appearing mad. The powerful admiration that her genius has inspired, and continues to inspire, in the Arab populations bordering the mountains proves quite clearly that her supposed madness is merely a means to an end.

The people of this land of wonders, of the rocks and deserts, whose imaginations are more colourful and hazier than the horizon of their sands or their seas, need the word of a Muhammad or a Lady Stanhope! They need the communion of the stars and planets, prophecies, miracles, the 'second vision' of genius! Lady Stanhope has understood this through the profound reach of her truly superior intelligence; then perhaps, like all beings endowed with powerful intellectual faculties, she has ended by seducing herself, and has become the first neophyte of the Messianic figure she has created for others. Such is the effect this woman had on me. One cannot judge or classify that figure in a word; it is a statue of immense dimensions and can only be judged from her own perspective. I would not be surprised if one day soon it were to fulfil part of its promised destiny: an empire in Arabia, a throne in Jerusalem! The slightest political upheaval in the region of the Near East it inhabits could stir it even there.

'I have only one reproach to you on this subject,' I told her: 'that you have been too timid as regards events, and have not yet exercised your influence to the extent you could.' 'You speak,' she said, 'like a man who still believes too much in human will, and not enough in the irresistible power of destiny alone. My influence lies there. I await the future; I do not summon it. I am growing old, my fortune is considerably diminished; I am now alone and abandoned on this desolate hilltop, prey to the first audacious person who attempts to force my doors, surrounded by a band of faithless servants and ungrateful slaves who rob me daily and sometimes threaten my life. Just recently, I owed my salvation only to this dagger, which I was forced to use to defend my

breast against that of a Black African slave whom I raised. Yet, amidst all these tribulations, I am happy. I answer everything with the sacred words of the Muslims: *Allah Kerim*! God is Bountiful! And I await with confidence the future I have spoken of, and the certainty of its reality which I would like to inspire in you, and that you require.'

After smoking several pipes and drinking several cups of coffee, which the Black African slaves brought every fifteen minutes or so, she said: 'Come, I will lead you to a sanctuary which I allow no outsider to enter: it is my garden.' We descended a few steps, and I walked with her, in a state of true enchantment, through one of the most beautiful Turkish gardens I have ever seen in the Orient. Dark trellises whose green canopies bore, like thousands of chandeliers, the sparkling grapes of the promised land; kiosks where sculpted arabesques intertwined with jasmine and climbing plants, the vines of Asia-Minor; pools, artificial it is true, to which water flowed from a two miles or more away, murmuring and gushing forth from marble fountains; paths lined with all the fruit trees of England, of Europe, and of those beautiful climes; green lawns dotted with flowering shrubs, and marble compartments enclosing sprays of blossom new to my eyes: such was her garden. We rested in turn in several of the pavilions that adorn it, while Lady Hester's inexhaustible conversation never lost the mystical tone and elevated subject matter it had displayed that morning. 'Since destiny,' she said to me at last, 'has sent you here, and since such an astonishing affinity between our ruling planets allows me to confide in you what I would conceal from so many of the uninitiated, come; I wish you to see with your own eyes a natural marvel whose purpose is known only to me and my followers: the prophecies of the East foretold it for many centuries, and you will judge for yourselves whether those prophecies have been fulfilled.'

She opened a garden gate that led to a small inner courtyard, in which I glimpsed two magnificent Arabian mares of the finest breed, and of rare perfection of form. 'Come closer,' she said, 'and look at this bay mare; see if Nature has not fulfilled in her what is written about the mare who is to bear the Messiah, that she will be born fully saddled.' I did indeed see in this beautiful animal a quirk of Nature rare enough to serve the illusions of vulgar credulity among semi-barbaric peoples: the mare had, in the absence of flesh on the withers, a cavity so wide and so deep, imitating the shape of a Turkish saddle so well, that one could truly say that she was born fully saddled; and, apart from the stirrups, one could indeed ride her without feeling the need for an artificial saddle. This mare, magnificent in other respects, seemed accustomed to the admiration and respect that Lady Stanhope and her slaves showed her, and to sense the dignity of her future mission; no one had ever ridden her, and two Arab grooms cared for and watched over her constantly, without losing sight of her for a single moment. Another white mare, in my opinion infinitely more beautiful, shares Lady Stanhope's respect and care with the Messiah's mare: no one has ridden her either. Lady Hester didn't tell me, but hinted that, although the white mare's destiny was less sacred, it nonetheless had a mysterious and important one also; and I gathered that Lady Stanhope was reserving her to be ridden by herself on the day she would make her entrance, alongside the Messiah, into the reconquered Jerusalem.

After walking these two animals for a while on a lawn outside the fortress walls, and enjoying the suppleness and grace of these superb creatures, we returned, and I renewed my entreaties to Lady Hester to finally allow me to present Monsieur de Parseval, my friend and travelling companion, who had followed me to her house against my will, and who had been waiting in vain since morning for a favour of which she is so sparing. She finally consented, and the three of us

returned to spend the evening or night in the small drawing room I have already described. The coffee and pipes reappeared in Oriental abundance; and the drawing room was soon filled with such a cloud of smoke that Lady Stanhope's face appeared to us only through an atmosphere akin to the magical atmosphere of invocations. She conversed with the same force, the same grace, the same abundance, but infinitely less of the supernatural, on subjects less sacred to her, than she had done with me alone all day.

'I hope,' she said to me suddenly, 'that you are of the aristocracy: I have no doubt of it, seeing you.' 'You are mistaken, Milady,' I told her. 'I am neither an aristocrat nor a democrat; I have lived long enough to see both sides of humanity's coin, and to find them equally hollow. Neither aristocrat nor democrat: I am simply a man, and an exclusive supporter of that which can improve and perfect the whole person, whether born at the summit or the foot of the social ladder! I am neither for the common people nor for those in power, but for all humanity; and I believe neither aristocratic nor democratic institutions possess the exclusive virtue of perfecting humanity; this virtue resides only in a divine morality, the fruit of a perfect religion: the true civilisation of peoples is their faith!' 'That is true, she replied; but, nonetheless, I am an aristocrat in spite of myself; and you will agree,' she added, 'that if there are vices in aristocracy, at least there are noble virtues alongside them to redeem and compensate for them; whereas in democracy I clearly see the vices, the lowest and most envious ones, but search in vain for the nobler virtues.' 'That is not so, Milady,' I said, 'there are vices and virtues on both sides, but in the upper classes those very vices have a brilliant side, while in the lower classes, on the contrary, these vices show themselves in all their nakedness, and wound moral sensibility more deeply in the gaze that beholds them: the difference is in appearance, not in fact; in reality, vice is more vicious in the rich, educated, and cultured person than in one without land and without bread; for in the one, vice is a matter of choice; in the other, a matter of necessity. So, let us despise vice everywhere, and even more so in the vicious aristocracy, and let us not judge humanity by class, but by the individual: the great would have the vices of the people, if they were of the people, and the lowly would have the vices of the great, if they were great. The scales are balanced; let us not weight them.'

'Well! Let us move on,' she said; 'but leave me to believe you are an aristocrat like myself: it would pain me too much to think you were among those young Frenchmen who stir up popular discontent against all the notables that God, Nature, and society have created, and who tear down the edifice to build, from its ruins, a pedestal for their envious baseness!' 'No,' I replied, 'rest assured; I am not one of those people: I am merely one of those who do not despise what is below them in the social order, while still respecting what is above, but whose desire or dream would be to call all people, regardless of their rank in the arbitrary hierarchy of politics, to the same light, the same freedom, and the same moral perfection. And since you are a religious person, since you believe that God loves all his children equally, and since you await a second Messiah to set all things right, you doubtless think like them and like myself.' 'Yes,' she replied, 'but I no longer concern myself with human politics, I have had enough of those: I saw too much during the ten years I spent in the company of my uncle, William Pitt, during which time all the intrigues of Europe echoed around me. I despised politics when I was young, I no longer wish to hear about it anymore; everything that people do on their own account is fruitless: the forms of it are indifferent to me.' 'And to myself also,' I replied. 'The heart of the matter,' she continued, 'is God and virtue!' 'I think exactly the same,' I replied. 'So let us not talk about it anymore, we are in agreement.'

Turning to less serious matters, and joking about the kind of divination that allowed her to understand a man entirely at first glance and simply by observing his ruling planet, I put her wisdom to the test and questioned her about two or three travellers I knew who had presented themselves to her over the past fifteen years. I was struck by the perfect accuracy of her assessment of two of these men. Among other things, she analysed, with a prodigious perspicacity of intelligence, the character of one of them, whom I myself knew perfectly well; a character difficult to grasp at first glance, grand, but veiled beneath the simplest and most seductive appearance of affability. And what completed my astonishment, and made me admire the inflexible memory of this woman most, was that this traveller had spent only two hours at her home, and that sixteen years had passed between his visit and the account she gave, at my request, of her impressions of the man. Solitude concentrates and strengthens all the faculties of the soul. — Prophets, saints, great individuals, and the poets have understood this perfectly; and their character drives all of them to seek the desert, or isolation among others.

The name of Bonaparte arose, as always, in the conversation. 'I thought,' I said, 'that your support for the man would set a barrier between us.' 'I was only a supporter of his in his misfortunes, and I pitied him,' she replied. 'And so was I,' I said; 'speak of him no more, we are in accord.'

I failed to understand how a religious and moral woman could worship power alone, devoid of religion, morality, or freedom. Bonaparte was undoubtedly a great innovator; he remade the social world, but paid too little attention to the elements from which he was re-composing that same: he moulded his statue out of mud in a spirit of self-interest, instead of carving it from divine and moral sentiments, virtue, and liberty!

The night passed in this way, Lady Hester. freely and unaffectedly, touching upon every topic that a word might bring up or carry away in a chance conversation. I felt that no string was lacking from that firm and lofty intellect, and that every key on the keyboard produced a true, strong, and full sound, except perhaps as regards the metaphysical note, which too much introspection and solitude had distorted, or raised to a pitch too high for mortal understanding. We parted with sincere regret on my part, and with an obliging regret expressed on hers.

'No goodbyes,' she said to me: 'we will see each other often on this journey, and even more often on other journeys that you have not even planned yet. Go and rest, and remember that it is a friend you leave behind in the solitudes of Lebanon.' She held out her hand to me; I placed mine on my heart, in the Arab manner, and departed.

## A Visit to Emir Bashir Shihab II

The next day, at four in the morning, Monsieur de Parseval and I were descending the steep slope that leads from her monastery into the deep valley of a river, named here as the Belus. We forded the waters, sluggish from the summer, and began to climb the high mountains of Lebanon that separate Joun from Deir El Qamar, and the 'House of Faith', the palace of Emir Bashir, sovereign prince of the Druze and of all the mountains of Lebanon. Lady Hester had given us her physician to act as our dragoman, and one of her Arab grooms as our guide. After a two hours' ride, we arrived at a valley deeper, narrower, and more picturesque than any we had traversed. To the right and left rose, in two perpendicular ramparts three to four hundred feet

high, twin mountain ranges that seemed to have been recently separated from one another by a blow of the Creator's hammer, or perhaps by the earthquake that shook Lebanon to its very foundations, when the Son of Man, giving up his soul to God not far from these same mountains, breathed that last sigh which banished the spirit of error, oppression, and falsehood from, and breathed truth, liberty, and life into, a renewed world. The gigantic blocks detached from both sides of the mountains, scattered like pebbles in children's hands into the valley, formed the horrible, deep, immense, bristling bed of this dry torrent; some of these stones were masses taller and longer than tall houses. Some stood perfectly upright like solid and eternal cubes; others, suspended on their corners, and supported by the pressure of other, unseen rocks, seemed as if they were still descending, ready to roll further yet, presenting the image of ruination in action, incessant collapse, a chaos of stones, an inexhaustible avalanche of boulders — rocks of funereal colours, grey, black, marbled with fire, or an opaque whiteness; petrified waves of a granite river. There was not a drop of water in the deep crevices of this bed scorched by the burning Syrian sun; not a blade of grass, not a stem or climbing plant, either amidst this fractured torrent or on the jagged, arduous slopes on either side of the abyss: it was an ocean of stones, a cataract of rocks, to which the diversity of their forms, the variety of their poses, the strange nature of their collapse, the interplay of shadows and light on their sides and surfaces, seemed to lend them movement and fluidity.

If Dante had needed a model in order to depict, in his Inferno, a further circle, one of stoniness, aridity, ruin, the disintegration of things, the degradation of worlds, the transience of ages, he would only have needed to describe this scenery: it was like a ravine amidst the world's last hour, when fire will consume everything, and the Earth, revealing its entrails, will be nothing but a mutilated block of calcined stone beneath the feet of the terrible Judge who will visit it. We followed this Valley of Lamentation for two hours, without the scene varying except for the different courses the torrent itself followed between the mountains, and the more or less fearful manner in which the rocks clustered in their foaming bed of stones. That vale will never be erased from my imagination. The land feels primal, a place of terrifying poetry and human woe; the mournful and grandiose accent of the prophecies is felt there in all its savage power. All the images of the biblical imagination are engraved in capital letters on the furrowed face of Lebanon and its golden peaks, its river valleys, and its silent, lifeless valleys. Compared to ourselves, the divine spirit, the superhuman breath that vivified the souls, and inspired the music, of a people to whom God spoke in symbols and images, filled the minds of their sacred bards more fully, and nourished them with a stronger milk. We are but pallid heirs of the ancient lyre; we, who have before our eyes only graceful, gentle, and cultivated scenes of Nature; a Nature civilised and colourless as ourselves.

At noon, we reached the highest section of the mountains we had to cross. We began our descent along the steepest paths, where our horses' hooves trembled on the loose stones that separated us from the precipice. After an hour's descent, as we rounded a hill, we caught sight of the fantastic Palace of Beiteddine, near Deir El Qamar. We cried out in surprise and admiration, and involuntarily stopped our horses to contemplate the new, picturesque, Oriental scene that unfolded before our eyes.

## Beiteddine Palace

A few steps away, an immense sheet of foaming water gushed from a mill sluice and plunged from a height of fifty to sixty feet onto rocks that shattered it to flying spray; the sound of this waterfall and the coolness it spread through the air, which moistened our burning foreheads, deliciously prepared our senses for the wonder they so longed to view. Beyond this waterfall, which disappeared into abysses whose depths we could not penetrate, a vast. deep valley opened like a funnel, cultivated from foot to summit with mulberry trees, vines, and fig trees, the ground being covered everywhere with the freshest and lightest greenery; several beautiful villages were perched on terraces on the mountain slopes that surround the valley of Deir El Quamar. On one side only, the horizon opened out, revealing, beyond the lower peaks of Lebanon, the Syrian Sea. *'Ecce mare magnum!'* said King David (*see the 'Vulgate: Psalm 103.25'*). 'There lies the great blue sea with its waves and its roaring, and its immense reptiles!' King David was at this very place, perhaps, when he uttered his poetic exclamation. Indeed, one can see the Egyptian sea, tinted a blue darker than the sky, and blending in the distance with the horizon through the vaporous, violet mist that veils all the shores of this part of Asia.

At the bottom of this immense valley, the hill of Beit ed Dine, upon which the Emir's palace stands, rose like a vast tower, flanked by ivy-covered rocks, from whose fissures and battlements hung fans of floating greenery. This hill climbed to the level of the precipitous path where we ourselves hung separated from it by a narrow, roaring abyss. At its summit, and a few steps from us, the Moorish palace of the Emir extended majestically over the entire plateau of Beit ed Dine, with its square towers, pierced with ogives crenellated at the top, its long galleries rising one on top of the other, and presenting rows of light and slender arches like the stems of the palm trees that crowned them with their aerial plumes. These vast courtyards descended in immense steps from the mountaintop to the fortification's walls. At the far end of the largest of these courtyards, which we could see from our vantage point, the irregular façade of the Palace of Women (*Dar el Harim*) came into view, adorned with light and graceful colonnades the slender, tapering trunks of which, irregular and uneven in shape, rose to the rooftops and supported, like a parasol, the light painted wooden hangings that served as a portico for the palace. A marble staircase, decorated with balustrades carved in arabesques, led from this portico to the gate of the Palace of Women. This gate, carved from variously coloured wood, framed in marble. and surmounted with Arabic inscriptions, was surrounded by magnificently dressed Black African slaves, armed with silver pistols and with Damascene sabres gleaming with gold and intricate carving.

The vast courtyards facing the palace were themselves filled with a multitude of servants, courtiers, priests, and soldiers, in all the varied and picturesque costumes adopted by the six peoples of Lebanon: the Druze, Christians, Armenians, Greeks, Maronites, and Metualis (*the Matawila, Shia Muslims*). Five to six hundred Arabian horses were tethered by their feet and heads to taut ropes that crossed the courtyards; they were saddled, bridled, and covered with brightly coloured blankets; and several groups of camels, some lying down, others standing, others kneeling to be loaded or unloaded; while, on the highest terrace of the inner courtyard, several young pages, riding one against another, were hurling *djerids* (*javelins*), avoiding them in turn by lying flat on their horses backs, returning at full gallop to their unarmed opponent, and performing, with admirable grace and vigour, all the rapid manoeuvres that military exercise requires. After contemplating this Oriental scene, so new to us, for a few moments, we approached the immense, massive gate of

the first courtyard of the palace, guarded by Arabs armed with rifles and with long, light spears, like the stems of long reeds. There, we sent to the prince the letters we had for him.

A few moments later, he sent us his chief physician, Monsieur Bertrand, born in Syria to a French family, who still retained the language and memories of their homeland. He led us to the apartment that the Emir's hospitality offered, and summoned a few slaves. They led our retinue and horses to another part of the palace.

Our apartments consisted of a pretty courtyard decorated with arabesque pilasters, with a fountain in the centre, flowing into a large marble basin; around this courtyard were three rooms and a diwan, that is to say, an apartment larger than the others, formed by an arcade opening onto the inner courtyard, and which had neither doors nor curtains to close it off: it was a transitional space between the house and the street, serving as a garden for idle Muslims, and whose motionless shade replaced for them that of trees, which they had neither the ingenuity to plant nor the strength to seek out wherever Nature had made them grow. Our rooms, although sited within a magnificent palace, would have seemed too dilapidated even for the poorest of our farm labourers' cottages: the windows lacked panes, a luxury unknown in the Orient, despite the rigours of winter in these mountains; there were neither beds, nor furniture, nor chairs; nothing but bare, decrepit walls, riddled with holes made by rats and lizard; while the uneven floor was of beaten earth and chopped straw. The slaves brought rush mats, which they spread over this floor, and Damascus carpets, with which they covered the mats; they then brought a small table from Bethlehem, made of wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl: these tables are not six inches in diameter, and no taller; they resemble a section of a column, and can only support a tray, on which the Muslims set the five or six dishes that make up their meal.

Our dinner, placed on this table, consisted of a pilaf, a dish of soured milk mixed with oil, and a few pieces of minced mutton, pounded with boiled rice, used to stuff certain gourds similar to cucumbers. This is indeed the most sought-after and delicious dish one can eat in all the Orient. For drink, pure water is served from earthenware bowls with long spouts, passed from hand to hand, the water being poured into the half-open mouth without the bowl touching the lips. No knives, spoons, or forks are used: one eats with one's hands; but frequent ablutions make this custom less offensive to Muslims.

We had scarcely finished dinner when the Emir sent word that he was expecting us. We traversed a vast courtyard adorned with fountains, and a portico formed of tall, slender columns rising from the ground and supporting the palace roof. We were ushered into a most beautiful hall, its floor paved with marble, its ceilings and walls painted in vivid colours and elegant arabesques by artists from Constantinople. Jets of water murmured in the corners of the room; and at the far end, behind a colonnade whose intercolumniations were grilled and glazed, one could see an enormous tiger, sleeping with its head resting on its crossed paws. Half the room was occupied by secretaries in long robes, carrying silver writing-tablets tucked into their belts like daggers; richly dressed and armed Arabs; African black slaves and mulattoes awaiting orders from their master; and a few Egyptian officers dressed in European jackets and wearing red Greek cloth caps, the long blue tassels hanging down to their shoulders.

The floor of the other part of this room was about a foot higher, and a wide red velvet divan stretched all around it. The Emir was squatting in the corner of this divan. He was a handsome old man with keen, penetrating eyes, a fresh and lively complexion, and a flowing grey beard. A

white robe, cinched with a cashmere belt, covered him entirely, and the gleaming hilt of a long, broad dagger protruded from the folds of this robe at chest level, adorned with a cluster of diamonds the size of oranges. We greeted him in the local manner, placing our hands first on our foreheads, then on our hearts. He returned our greeting graciously and with a smile, and beckoned us to approach and sit beside him on the divan. An interpreter was kneeling between him and ourselves. I started the conversation by expressing my pleasure at visiting the interesting and beautiful country which he governed with such firmness and wisdom. Among other things, I told him that the highest praise I could offer his administration was simply my being there; that the safety of the roads, the richness of the culture, and the order and peace in the cities were eloquent testimonies to the prince's virtue and skill. He thanked me and then asked me a multitude of questions about Europe, and especially about European politics as regarded the struggle between the Ottoman Turks and the Egyptians. These questions demonstrated both his keen interest in the subject and a knowledge and understanding of affairs uncommon in a prince of the East. Coffee and long pipes were brought in and replenished several times, and the conversation continued for nearly an hour.

I was delighted by his wisdom, insight, and manners, both noble in nature and worthy of this old prince, I rose, after our lengthy talk, to accompany him to the baths, which he wished to show us himself. These consisted of five or six marble-paved rooms with compartments, their vaults and walls plastered with stucco and painted in tempera, with great taste and elegance, by artists from Damascus. Jets of hot, cold, or lukewarm water sprang from the pavement, spreading warmth or coolness throughout the rooms. The last room was a steam bath in which we could not remain a minute. Several handsome white slaves, bare-chested and with their legs wrapped in shawls of unbleached silk, stood in these rooms, ready to perform their duties as bathers. The prince offered us the opportunity to bathe with him; we declined, and left him in the hands of his slaves, who were preparing to undress him.

From there, we went with one of his grooms to visit the courtyards and stables where the Emir's magnificent Arabian steeds were chained. One must have visited the stables of Damascus, or those of Emir Bashir, to truly understand the Arabian stallion. This superb and graceful animal loses some of his beauty, gentleness, and picturesque form when transplanted from his native land and familiar habits to our cold climates, and the shadow and solitude of our stables. One must see him at the door of a desert Arab's tent, his head between his legs, shaking his long black mane like a mobile parasol, and sweeping his flanks, polished like copper or silver, with his swirling tail, the tip of which is always dyed purple with henna; one must see him dressed in gleaming saddlecloths, highlighted with gold and pearl embroidery; his head covered with a net of blue or red silk, woven with gold or silver, with sonorous and floating aiguillettes that fall from his forehead to his nostrils, and with which he veils or unveils in turn, with each undulation of his neck, the flaming orbs, immense, intelligent, gentle and proud, of his eyes: you must see him especially, as he was there, amidst a mass of two or three hundred horses, some lying in the dust of the courtyards, others hobbled by iron rings, and attached to long ropes that crossed those courtyards; others running free over the sand, and leaping amongst the lines of camels that opposed their racing; or held by young Black African slaves dressed in scarlet jackets, the stallions resting their heads caressingly on the shoulders of these children. The horses played together, free and unleashed like foals in a meadow, rearing up against one another, or rubbing foreheads together, or mutually licking their beautiful, lustrous, silvery coats; all watching us with anxious and curious attention because of our

European clothes and foreign language, but soon becoming familiar, and gracefully offering their necks to the caresses and flattering touches of our hands. It is an incredible thing, the lucid expressiveness of these horses' faces, when one has not witnessed it. All their thoughts are painted in their eyes and in the convulsive movement of their cheeks, lips, and nostrils, with as much clarity, and character as the impressions of thoughts on a child's face. When we first approached them, they made faces and grimaces of repugnance and curiosity, all at once. Their reaction was similar to that an impressionable man might have displayed on seeing something unexpected and unsettling. Our speech, in particular, struck and astonished them greatly; and the movement of their ears, pricked back, or stretched forward, testified to their surprise and unease. I especially admired several priceless mares, reserved for the Emir himself. I had my dragoman offer the squire up to ten thousand piastres for one of the prettiest; but no price can persuade an Arab to part with a mare of the first blood, and I was unable to purchase her.

We returned to our apartment at the end of the day, and a supper similar to dinner was brought to us. Several of the Emir's officers came to visit us on his behalf. Monsieur Bertrand, his chief physician, spent the evening with us. Thanks to the little Italian and French he has retained, we were able to talk about his family history. He gave us the most interesting information concerning the domestic life of the Druze emir. This prince, though sixty-five years old, having recently lost his first wife (*Shams al-Madid, who died in 1829*), to whom he owed his entire fortune, had just remarried. We regretted not having been able to see his new wife (*Hisn Jihan*): she is, it is said, remarkably beautiful. She is only fifteen years old; she is a Circassian slave whom the emir purchased from Constantinople, and whom he converted to Christianity before marrying her, since Emir Bashir is himself a Christian, even a Catholic, or rather, as is the rule in tolerant countries, he belongs to all the official religions of his country: he is a Muslim for the Muslims, a Druze for the Druze, a Christian for the Christians. He has mosques and a khalwat (*Druze house of worship*) there; but for some years now his family religion, the religion of his heart, has been Catholicism. His policies are such, and the fear of his name so well established, that his Christian faith inspires neither distrust nor repugnance among the Muslim Arabs, the Druze, nor even the Metualis who live under his rule. He does justice to all, and all respect him equally.

That evening, after supper, the Emir sent some of his musicians and singers to us, who improvised Arabic verses in our honour. He has among his servants Arabs solely dedicated to these kinds of ceremonies. They fulfil exactly the role troubadours filled in medieval castles, or folk poets in Scotland. Standing behind the cushion of the Emir or his sons while the latter dine, they sing verses in praise of the masters they serve, or of the guests the Emir wishes to honour. Some of these poetic tributes were translated for us by Monsieur Bertrand: they were generally very trite, or so contrived in their ideas that it would be impossible to render them with ideas and imagery appropriate to our European languages. Here is the only somewhat comprehensible verse I can find noted in my album:

'Your ships have wings, but the Arab's steed has wings too. Its nostrils, when it flies over our mountains, make the sound of the wind in a ship's sails. The motion of its swift gallop is like a stone flattening the hearts of the weak; but it gladdens the heart of the Arab. May its back be for you a seat of honour, and often bear you to the Emir's diwan!'

Among the Emir's secretaries was one of the greatest poets writing in Arabic (*Nasif Al-Yaziji*). I was unaware of this, and only learned of it later. When he learned from others in Syria that I

myself was a poet in Europe, he wrote me verses always imbued with that affectation, always marred by those plays on words, which are characteristic of the languages of ancient civilisations, but in which one nevertheless senses a great elevation of talent, and an order of ideas far superior to that which we imagine in Europe.

We slept on divan cushions spread out on a mat, to the sound of fountains murmuring all around us in the gardens, courtyards, and halls of this part of the palace. When day broke, I saw through the grilles several Muslims praying in the palace's main courtyard. They would spread a rug on the ground to avoid touching the dust, stand for a moment, then bow completely, touching the rug several times with their foreheads, their faces always turned toward the mosque; then they would lie flat on the rug; strike the ground with their foreheads; and rise to their feet, and repeat the same rituals many times, assuming the same postures and murmuring prayers. I found not the slightest absurdity in these postures and rituals, however bizarre they may seem to us, in our ignorance. The faces of Muslims are so imbued with the religious sentiment they express through these gestures that I have always deeply respected their acts of prayer: the motive involved sanctifies everything. Wherever the divine idea descends and acts upon human beings, it imprints upon them a superhuman dignity. One might well say: 'I do not pray like you, but I pray with you to the Lord, the Lord you believe in and wish to acknowledge and honour, just as I wish to acknowledge and honour him myself, in another manner. It is not for me to mock you; it is for God to judge us all.'

We spent the morning visiting the palaces of the Emir's sons, which are a short distance from his own; a small Catholic church, quite like our modern village churches in France or Italy; and the palace gardens. Emir Bashir has had another country palace built about a mile from Beit ed Dine. It is the sole object of his rides on horseback, and the road there is almost the only one where even an Arabian horse can gallop without danger; everywhere else the paths leading to Beit ed Dine are so steep, clinging to the sheer edges of precipices, that one cannot traverse them without trembling, even at walking pace.

Before leaving Beit ed Dine and Deir El Qamar, I have transcribed various truthful and curious facts, gathered on the spot, concerning the skilful and warlike old man I had visited.

**The End of Part III of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part IV: Emir Bashir and the Druze

## Notes on the Emir Bashir

Upon the death of the last descendant (*Ahmad ibn Mulhim ibn Yunus Ma'n, who died in 1697*) of Emir Fakardin (*Fakr al-Din II*), command of the mountain passed into the hands of the Shihab (*Chehab*) family. This family has only been established in Lebanon for about a hundred and forty years. Here is what the old Arab chroniclers of the Damascus desert recounted:

Around the beginning of the first century of the Hijra (*or Hegira, Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina, which took place in 622AD*), at the time when Abu Bakr's armies invaded Syria, a man of great bravery named Abdalla, a resident of the small village of Bet-Shihabi in the desert near Damascus, distinguished himself at the siege of that city and was killed beneath its walls. The Muslim general showered his family with blessings, who then left Bet-Shihabi to settle in Hasbaya (*at the foot of Mount Hermon*), in the Anti-Lebanon. The original line of this family can still be found there, from which came the branch that reigns today over Lebanon.

Emir Bashir, one of Abdalla's descendants, was orphaned at a young age. His father, Quasim (*Qasim ibn Umar ibn Haydar ibn Husayn Shihab*), had received the hakem cloak and ring of command, when his uncle Emir Mulhim left office to spend his final days in retirement; but Quasim, who then ran the administration, was inept and lacking in energy, and Mulhim, forced to take command again, had to repair his nephew's mistakes and quell the unrest that his incompetence had caused.

As Volney (*the Orientalist, Constantin-François Chassebœuf de La Giraudais, Comte de Volney*) reported, power then passed successively from Mansur to Yusuf, the former the brother, the latter the son, of Mulhim. When Yusuf first assumed command (*in 1770*), Bashir was only three years old. His father, Quasim, having died in 1767, Yusuf took Bashir under his wing and had him educated carefully. Later, recognising in him a quick and courageous mind, he brought him into the affairs of his government.

At that time, Djezzar (*Ahmed Pasha al-Jazza*) the Pasha of Acre, who had succeeded Daher (*Daher al-Umar al-Zaydani*), had long been harassing Emir Yusuf, attacking him, and demanding exorbitant taxes. War broke out; but Bashir could not accompany Yusuf on this expedition: it was only in 1784 that he participated in the second expedition against Djezzar Pasha. The young Bashir, then seventeen years old, ran into great danger in the town of Ryde, which the Druze had seized. Pursued by troops the Pasha, forced to evacuate the town, found himself surrounded by the enemy during his retreat. The situation was critical: Bashir urged his horse swiftly towards a wall, from the top of which he plunged beneath a hail of bullets; fortunately, he was not hit, but his horse was killed in the fall.

Upon returning to Lebanon, Bashir devoted himself entirely to affairs of state and sought to restore order to Emir Yusuf's administration. Soon, ambition stirred within him; he remembered his lineage and, despite his poverty, coveted supreme power. His manners and courage had already earned him the friendship of several powerful families; he worked to win over others disgusted by Emir Yusuf's misrule, and succeeded in securing the allegiance of a considerable and highly influential family, the Jumblatt, whose head, the most capable man then in Lebanon, was

immensely wealthy and bore the title of Sheikh Beschir, meaning great and illustrious. Bashir needed only one more opportunity: and it presented itself.

Since 1785, when Djezzar Pasha had restored to Yusuf the command he had withheld for over a year, hostilities between the two princes had completely ceased. Every year, Emir Yusuf sent officers to Acre with the customary compliments, to renew his cloak of authority; however, he always feared a misunderstanding between himself and the Pasha, which soon materialised.

In 1789, a violent quarrel erupted between these two princes; and Emir Yusuf, unable to resist the pressure, resolved to abdicate. Bashir had influence; Yusuf liked him: he summoned him and advised him to go to Acre to request the ring of command. Bashir initially refused, explaining to Yusuf that he would then be forced to remove him from his domain, since the Pasha would demand it, and that his presence in Lebanon would be a constant source of conflict. Yusuf, in proposing the course of action to his relative, had two objectives: to prevent power leaving his family; and to retain command once Bashir had resolved the difficulties, either through conciliation or by force of arms.

He therefore persisted; and, on the promise Yusuf gave to leave the country as soon as Bashir received command, the young prince departed for Acre. Djezzar Pasha welcomed him kindly, entrusted him with the command of Lebanon, and gave him eight thousand men to consolidate his power and capture Emir Yusuf. Upon arriving at the bridge of Jisr El Qadi, Bashir secretly wrote to Yusuf, informing him of the instructions he had received from the Pasha, and urged him to withdraw. Emir Yusuf retreated to Jbeil (*Byblos, also Gibel*), in Keserwan, where he gathered his supporters. Bashir added to his own soldiers those he had brought from Acre and marched against Yusuf, whom he met in Keserwan. He engaged him in battle and inflicted heavy losses; however, several months passed without any decisive result.

To settle the dispute, Yusuf sent a messenger to Acre promising the Pasha a tribute higher than that paid by Bashir, if he were reappointed; Djezzar agreed, summoned him to Acre, granted him command, and provided him with the same eight thousand men who had fought against Bashir to drive the latter out. Emir Bashir withdrew to the district of Mar-Méri (*Beit Meri*), where he worked to overthrow his rival, offering even more than Emir Yusuf had promised. The Pasha accepted, and Yusuf was once again forced to relinquish power. He returned to Acre to attempt further intrigues; but Bashir offered the pasha four thousand purses (containing five hundred coins worth forty centimes each) if he would have Yusuf killed, hoping to put an end to the unrest in the mountains.

Djezzar was in Damascus at the time. His customs officer (a Greek in whom he had complete confidence and who, in his absence, was considered the Pasha of Acre) negotiated on his behalf and informed his master of the deal he had concluded. Djezzar was initially pleased with the proposal, ratified the agreement, and ordered the execution by hanging of Emir Yusuf and his minister Gandour.

No sooner had Djezzar issued this order than he regretted it. It seemed to him that the enmity between the two princes was to his advantage, and he sent a second order revoking the first; but whether it arrived too late, or the minister had been won over, Emir Yusuf was hanged (*in 1790*). This execution angered the Pasha; he went to Acre, demanded an account of the affair, claimed he

had been deceived, and had his customs officer drowned, along with his entire family, as well as several other people accused of involvement in the affair.

Djezzar confiscated the immense treasures of his favourite, and wrote a letter of reproach to Bashir. The tone of the dispatch showed the young prince that he was compromised. He tried to justify himself to the Pasha, who concealed the matter until the time of the governor's re-election: then Djezzar invited the prince to Acre to receive the investiture.

He arrived unsuspectingly with his minister, Sheikh Beschir (*Jumblatt*); but no sooner had they arrived than they were thrown into a dungeon, where they had to endure all kinds of hardships during eighteen to twenty months of captivity. Djezzar's aim in treating them in this manner was to force them to pay a large ransom; but the prince had insufficient resources; he had held command for too short a time to amass great wealth. His minister took matters into his own hands: he secretly sent to the Pasha a Druze prince's widow named Sitt Abbous, with whom he had had an intimate relationship; he instructed her to offer the Pasha the required sum, and pretend to pawn her own jewels to make up the ransom. She departed. She was a shrewd, bold, and most cunning woman. She found the Pasha in Acre and won him over so completely by her personal charm and intellect that Djezzar considerably reduced the sum he had initially demanded. The investiture was returned to Emir Bashir, who was thus restored to the Pasha's favour (*in 1797*).

During this captivity, Emir Yusuf's brother, Emir Haydar of Baabda, had seized power and taken the necessary measures to prevent Emir Bashir from returning to his states should Djezzar grant him his freedom. As soon as he was released from prison, the prince, not deeming it prudent to reappear among his people, sent his minister, Sheikh Beschir, to gauge public opinion, and withdrew to the village of Homs to await the outcome of his negotiations. He also worked to win over Emir Abbets, the Druze prince of Salima, who until then had maintained neutrality and who enjoyed the highest esteem among the Druze and Christians, especially those of the district of Marcaeutre.

Emir Abbets, judging Emir Bashir's cause just, took his side and urged him to join him. As communication was extremely difficult, he sent his dispatch via an Italian, a lay brother from a monastery in Salima. Bashir gathered his supporters, whose numbers Sheikh Beschir had increased through his generosity and skill, and impetuously attacked his rivals' army, scattered it, and captured the two princes then in power.

Emir Baschir, now a peaceful possessor of power, had married the widow (*Shams al-Madid*) of a Turkish prince (*Bashir ibn Najm*), like himself from the Chehab family, whom he had killed ten years earlier. This union had made him master of an immense fortune. Before marrying, this princess, who was of great beauty, was baptised. The marriage was most happy. At the age of sixty-eight, the princess was afflicted with infirmities and paralysis that deprived her of the use of her legs. The Emir and his wife offered an example of the most ardent affection and the most perfect union.

Upon his death, Emir Yusuf had left behind three young children. Giorgios, the Bey of Hydra, and his brother Abdallah had raised them carefully, hoping that they would one day revive the party of Yusuf, and overthrow Emir Bashir; but the latter triumphed over all these obstacles, and enjoyed a peaceful exercise of power until 1804.

Events of the utmost importance were taking place in Egypt: Bonaparte, having entered Syria with an army corps, arrived before Acre, which was to open the gates of the East to him. The French general urged the Prince of Lebanon (*Bashir*), through pressing letters and emissaries, to take his interests into account and help him seize the city. Emir Bashir replied that he was willing to join him, but that he would only do so after the capture of Acre. A Frenchman once reproached the Emir for not having enthusiastically embraced the cause of the French army, and perhaps hindering thereby the regeneration of the East; he replied:

'Despite my fervent desire to join General Bonaparte, and the profound hatred I harboured for the Pasha, I could not embrace the cause of the French army. The fifteen or twenty thousand men I could have sent from the mountains would have done nothing to ensure the success of the siege. If Bonaparte had succeeded in taking the fortress without my assistance, he would then have invaded the mountains without a fight, for the Druze and the Christians ardently desired it; and I would therefore have lost my command. Conversely, if I had aided General Bonaparte and we had not taken the fortress (which would likely have been the case), the Pasha of Acre would have had me hanged, or thrown into a dungeon. Who would have come to my aid? Whose protection could I have sought? That of France which was so far away, which had England and all Europe on its hands, and which was itself torn apart by civil war and factions?' Bonaparte understood Prince Bashir's situation; and, as proof of his friendship, presented him with a superb rifle, which Bashir kept in memory of the great man.

Before recounting the story of the events that followed the downfall of Emir Yusuf, it would be appropriate to relate an adventure that perhaps prompted Pasha Djezzar's fierceness and cruelty as an individual.

In the early years of his command, he would, according to custom, meet the caravan returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca. (Later, the Pasha of Damascus was entrusted with this ceremony, while the Pasha of Acre was only required to cover the caravan's expenses, and pay tribute to the desert Arabs.) The Mamluks (*a non-Arab warrior class in the Muslim world, derived from slave-soldiers*), to whom Djezzar had entrusted the guard of his seraglio in his absence, forced the gates and gave free rein to the full brutality of their passions.

The Pasha returned; far from fleeing at his approach, the Mamluks seized the treasury, and closed the city gates, determined to respond to force with force. With the small escort that accompanied him, Djezzar could not prevail: however, the Mamluks informed him that if he would allow them to withdraw with their weapons and horses, the city gates would be opened to him; otherwise, they would fight, and would rather die weapon in hand than surrender.

Djezzar-Pasha needed little time to reflect: he knew he was hated by the Turks as well as the Christians, because of his exactions; he also knew that if Emir Yusuf were to learn of his position, he would ally himself with the Mamluks, and wage a war against him that could prove fatal.

He granted the Mamluks' demands, and they quickly departed, Pasha then entering the city. No sooner had Djezzar reached his palace than he dispatched his cavalry in pursuit of the fugitives; though in vain: the Mamluks arrived safely in Egypt. Djezzar then took his revenge on his wives; he had them all flogged, then thrown into a large pit, and finally covered with quicklime. This atrocious method of execution was not the fate of his favourite; instead, she was dressed in her finest clothes and adorned with jewels, then placed in a chest and thrown into the sea.

This event further darkened Djezzar's character. He was already miserly and a swindler; he became fierce and cruel: he spoke only of slicing off noses, chopping off ears, and gouging out eyes. At the hour of his death, no longer able to speak or order executions, he gestured to those around him, pointing to the head of his bed. Fortunately, he was not understood. After his death, a long list of people condemned to die once he regained his health was found. His ferocity followed him even to the grave.

Let us return to Prince Bashir. As soon as Emir Yusuf's sons were old enough to vie for power, Giorgios Bey and Abdallah resolved to put their plans into action. They took advantage of a moment of tension between Djezzar and Prince Bashir and roused their protégés. The Emir, caught off guard, was forced to retreat to the Hauran region and sought the Pasha's mediation, appealing to his avarice and greed. Djezzar intervened and imposed a treaty that reconciled the two parties but greatly favoured Bashir, granting him the Druze territory, while Yusuf's sons retained Jbeil and Keserwan.

This treaty was observed for only a few years. The sons of Yusuf sought every possible means to overthrow their enemy. As they were the stronger, they succeeded; and Djezzar, refusing to heed Bashir's representations, sanctioned the usurpation. The Emir then had no other recourse than to throw himself into the arms of the Viceroy of Egypt.

At that time (*1801*), the English admiral Sydney Smith was in the vicinity of Syria with several ships. Bashir begged him to take him on board and transport him to Egypt. After spending several months at sea, stopping at Cyprus, Smyrna, Crete, and Malta, he landed at Alexandria, where he went to see the Viceroy, accompanied by a few friends who had remained loyal to him.



'Alexandria (1846-1849)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Artvee*

The Viceroy gave him a most flattering welcome, treated him with all the respect due to his position, showered him with gifts, and sent him back to Syria on one of Admiral Sydney Smith's ships, with a letter for Djezzar full of reproaches and threats, in which he ordered him to reinstate Emir Bashir in his command. The Viceroy was powerful: Djezzar Pasha hastened to obey, for the tone of the dispatch made him realise that he should neglect nothing to satisfy Bashir. He therefore ordered the sons of Yusuf, who dared offer little resistance, to conform in all things to the treaty; and, until his death, the deepest peace reigned between the two parties.

Emir Bashir, however, did not rely entirely on the protection of Muhammad Ali alone; he saw the party of the three princes growing stronger every day and feared falling victim to some plot, for he knew the burning thirst for revenge that led them to oppose him. The skill of their ministers, Giorgios-Bey and Abdallah, further increased his anxieties. He therefore resolved to strike a decisive blow, capable of instilling terror in the hearts of his enemies. He took advantage of the investiture of Sulayman Pasha (*al-Adil*), who had succeeded Djezzar (*in 1805*), to carry out his plan. At that time, all seemed calm in Lebanon: the three princes governed their provinces peacefully and appeared to submit, without reservation, to the supremacy that the treaty granted to their enemy, while their ministers secretly prepared everything for a new attack.

Emir Bashir took the initiative. Informed of the opportune moment by his confidants, he summoned Giorgios Bey to Deir El Quamar under the pretext of business. At the same time, his brother, Emir Hassem, attacked Jbeil, seized the princes, and hanged Abdallah. The three brothers were taken to Zouk Mikael, where their eyes were gouged out. Their property was confiscated to the benefit of Emir Bashir. Upon hearing of these events, Giorgios Bey threw himself from a prison window, and died; this did not prevent the Emir from having his corpse hung as an example to his enemies. Five chiefs of Deir El Quamar, and a brother of Sheikh Beschir, all from the house of Jumblatt, accused of having helped the defeated princes, were put to death, and their property confiscated.

After these executions, Prince Bashir assumed supreme authority over all of Lebanon, giving his brother Jihan the command of Keserwan, whose capital was then Ghazir; but as he died shortly afterward, Emir Bashir was accused of having poisoned him, because he suspected him of secretly scheming against him, being driven by ambition. This accusation was unfounded, and public opinion refuted it.

Around 1819, the regions of Jbeil (*Byblos*), Gibes, and Keserwan rose up in revolt over a tax that sparked widespread discontent. On the advice of the Catholic Patriarch Yusuf Istafan, the rebels resolved to attack Emir Bashir in the Druze region, where he then resided. Without giving the insurgents time to assemble, the prince himself set out to meet them at the head of a small army corps, after ordering his lieutenant general, Sheikh Beschir, to follow him with a force of three thousand men hastily assembled. The Emir entered the region of Gibes and camped in a valley in the district of Aachqout, between Djani and the territory of Ghazir. The following night and the next morning, he came under heavy fire from several enemy detachments holding the high ground. His tent was riddled with bullets, and despite the entreaties of his son Khalil, he refused to change position. As day drew on and the enemy fire intensified, Bashir believed the rebels had increased their forces and intended to block his path. He then rose from the carpet on which he had remained during the skirmish, mounted his horse, and rode straight toward the enemy,

accompanied by his small escort. At his approach, the insurgents dispersed without resistance, and he arrived at Gibes, where he took decisive action to prevent their forces from increasing.

His lieutenant general, Sheikh Beschir, who had been following him closely, crossed the Dog River (*Nahr el- Kalb*) and, with his three thousand men, seized two key villages of Keserwan, Zouk-Mikael and Zouk-Mosbeh, which lay along his route. On the very day of this occupation, a priest was arrested at one of the outposts, carrying dispatches to Bishop Yusuf; Sheikh Beschir, having read these letters, presented his khanjar (*traditional curved dagger*) to the man who had brought them to him, and ordered him to kill the priest, and bury him where he had been arrested. A few hours later, another secret messenger met the same fate.

The following day, Sheikh Beschir set off again. He occupied Keserwan without hindrance and had all those whom Emir Bashir had listed on a note he had sent him strangled. He thus reached Jbeil, where he joined the prince, who had arrived from Gibes. Emir Bashir remained nine days in this province, during which he completely crushed the revolt by having all the prominent rebels from the three districts of Gibes, Keserwan, and Jbeil hanged or strangled; several others were flogged and, in addition, ruinous ransoms were demanded of them.

Among them was a poor old man of seventy-five, condemned to pay seventy purses; he could not pay them. His son wrote to him, saying that he was going to obtain a loan, and begging his permission. The old man replied that he would pay nothing, adding some rather unkind remarks about the prince. The letter was intercepted, and the old man was condemned to torture. The unfortunate man, already burdened by age, could not withstand the pain, and when, on the orders of Sheikh Beschir, he was returned home, he died after twenty days of suffering. His son inherited the sentence laid down for his father's crime; his property was confiscated for the benefit of the Emir, who left him only a thousand piastres.

Emir Bashir ascended the mountains to Ehden, traversed the Cedars of Lebanon (*Arz Lebnane*), and descended to Baalbek on the other side of the mountain, while Sheikh Beschir occupied the rebellious province. On arrival at Baalbek, the Prince (*Bashir*) ordered his lieutenant-general to return by the same route he had taken, and to raise, on the way, a contribution of four hundred purses (of five hundred piastres each) from the three provinces.

It might seem miraculous that the Prince of Lebanon, with three thousand men, suppressed sedition in three such difficult provinces, if it were not remembered that the insurrections were partial, and that Bashir's supporters, in these provinces, greatly helped to triumph over them.

In the meantime, the Pasha of Damascus had sent an Aga to Bekaa to collect, according to custom, the harvests from the lands under his Pashalik's jurisdiction. This officer entered the village of Aammiq, which belonged to the Principality of Lebanon, and levied taxes in livestock and money. The inhabitants, unwilling to submit, informed Prince Bashir, who wrote to the Aga, expressing his displeasure. However, the Aga paid no heed to his remonstrances, committed the most heinous acts, and returned home. Prince Bashir, angered, informed the Pasha of Acre (*Abdullah ibn Ali*), forcefully expressing his resentment. Abdullah, whether out of consideration for Bashir or because he had a personal vendetta against the Aga, ordered the Pasha of Damascus (*Dervish Pash*a) to punish him severely. The Pasha replied evasively, expressing surprise at the Pasha of Acre's involvement in a matter concerning Christians. Abdallah relayed this response to Bashir, urging him to take revenge on the Pasha of Damascus himself. The Prince of Lebanon hastily

assembled ten thousand men and marched on Damascus. The Pasha marched out to meet him, and the two armies clashed several times, but Prince Bashir always prevailed.

Meanwhile (*in 1821*), Abdullah issued a fake firman in which the Pasha of Damascus was declared deposed from his pashalik, which had been merged with that of Acre. However, the Pasha of Damascus appealed to the neighbouring pashas and the court of Constantinople, which condemned the Pasha of Acre to death and deposed Prince Bashir from his governorship. The Emir was already at the gates of Damascus when the firman arrived. He assumed that Abdullah's firman was genuine, and deemed it prudent to withdraw to the province of Deir El Qamar. From there, gathering that the fate of Giorgios Bey's brother Abdallah awaited himself, he sought refuge near Beirut, requesting the governor to receive him and his escort. The governor refused, claiming that the Emir's presence in the city would incite sedition. The prince then informed his relative, Emir Abbas, to whom he had left the command of the mountains, that he wanted to return to his realm and take up arms against the Pashas sent by the Sublime Porte. Abbas replied that the mountain people lacked food and money, and strongly advised him not to attempt such a perilous project.

In these dire circumstances, the prince once again turned his attention to Egypt and approached a Frenchman, asking him to facilitate his departure from Syria. This Monsieur Aubin arranged for him to embark (*in August 1821*), between Beirut and Sidon, on a French vessel sailing for Alexandria. After his departure, Sheikh Beschir and his relative, Emir Abbas, allied themselves with the coalition of Pashas and vied for command of the mountains; this was the source of the division that tore Lebanon apart in 1823.

Combined troops had laid siege to Saint Jean'd Acre (*the city of Acre*) in July 1822, and continued unsuccessfully until April 1823, when it was finally lifted. Then the young Pasha of Acre, extremely miserly, devised a way to avoid paying the tribute he owed to the Sublime Porte. To this end, he had the officers who paid the tribute assassinated near Latakia and obtained the money from the assassins. He then complained to the Porte about the murder of his agents and the theft of a fee belonging to the Grand Seigneur. The Pasha of Acre (*Abdullah ibn Ali*), through this odious conduct, hoped first to exempt himself from the tribute and then to compromise the Pasha of Latakia, whom he assumed the Grand Seigneur would execute, thereafter uniting the former's pashalik with that of Acre. But Abdullah Pasha was mistaken.

The Grand Seigneur, informed of the Pasha of Acre's treachery, demanded his head for the second time. But what could the Pashas of Damascus, Aleppo, and Adana do against Acre, even with an army of twelve thousand foot soldiers, since the latter were poorly disciplined, lacked artillery capable of breaching the walls, possessed only a few large-calibre cannon the ammunition for which was inadequate; and three to four thousand cavalrymen without baggage; while the infantry spent their time, day and night, smoking in their tents? Meanwhile, Abdullah Pasha, master of the foremost stronghold in the Levant, prepared, fearlessly, to mount a vigorous defence.

An English corvette, anchored in the harbour, offered one of its officers to take command of the besiegers' artillery. The Pashas accepted and placed the guns under his command. But after three days, he realised he would never take the town from the Turks who refused to surrender, unless he approached the walls with his cannons, which would be the only way to breach them.

Despite the Pashas' army, Abdullah remained at ease. He had nothing to fear on the landward side, from such poorly organised troops, and he answered their cannon fire with rifle fire, to show how much he despised their attacks. He had loyal, well-paid soldiers, and provisions and munitions arriving in abundance by ship, both from Europe and Asia; he was even suspected of having dealings with the Greeks of the Morea.

Emir Bashir, who at that time was under the protection of the Viceroy of Egypt (*Muhammad Ali*), maintained regular correspondence with Abdullah, who, through the Viceroy, sought peace and the Sublime Porte's pardon. While the Pasha had nothing to fear on land, he had reason to fear that the Divan of Constantinople, blockading the city by sea, might intercept his communications with foreign countries and limit his re-supply, which would have reduced his people to famine, incited his soldiers to revolt, and forced him to submit himself to the Sublime Porte. The Divan pardoned him, knowing that Abdullah could have surrendered the city to the insurgents of the Morea; but fined him three thousand purses and ordered him to pay the costs of the war.

The Viceroy, having obtained Abdullah Pasha's pardon, also requested and obtained that of Emir Bashir, who resumed his command. Muhammad Ali took advantage of this situation to gain credit with the Divan, and increase his immediate influence over the Prince of Lebanon, whose political interests were now linked with his own.

At the end of 1823, Emir Bashir landed in Saint-Jean d'Acre to agree the cost of the siege with Abdullah, and fix the sum representing his share of the debt.

Upon his return to Lebanon, he levied a tax of a thousand purses, as he was in a precarious financial situation due to his exile and the expenses incurred during his stay in Egypt. His people were also poor; and, not wanting to alienate them by imposing so heavy a tax, he resolved to make his former lieutenant-general, Sheikh Beschir, pay the whole, thereby taking revenge for the intrigues the latter had carried out with his relative, Abbas, to wrest command of the mountains from him. Sheikh Beschir refused to pay and withdrew to Karan, a province of Lebanon. He then returned to his palace at Moukhtara, where he conspired with Prince Abbas to overthrow Bashir. He even managed to draw three of that prince's younger brothers, who until then had remained in their provinces, into the conspiracy. This conspiracy could have been fatal to Emir Bashir, were it not for the help of Abdullah Pasha.

Sheikh Beschir was pursued and arrested on the plains of Damascus, with an escort of two hundred people. He could easily have escaped, but on the assurance given to him by a Turkish officer, acting on behalf of the Pasha of Damascus, that the Prince of Lebanon would pardon him, he surrendered himself and was taken to Damascus. There, he was stripped of his clothes, his hands were bound, one across his chest and the other his back, and he was thrown into prison, where he remained for several months. His trial was held in Constantinople, and he was condemned to death. When the noose was shown him, his face did not pale; he asked only to speak to the Pasha and the Prince. He was told it was useless; that neither could intervene, as the sentence had been handed down from Constantinople. Then Sheikh Beschir submitted to his fate. He was strangled, his corpse beheaded, and the body cut to pieces, and thrown to the dogs.

This execution took place in June of 1825. The prince's three brothers were then arrested; their tongues were cut out, their eyes gouged out, and they were exiled with their families, each to a

village far from the others. From then on, peace reigned in Lebanon, and the Shihabs (*Chehabs*) enjoyed power in peace, thanks to the active police force that the Emir established in his realm, and to the friendship of Abdullah Pasha, who was nevertheless aware of the close ties that bound the Grand Prince to the Viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali.

Such is the policy that Emir Bashir has pursued to this day, and everything indicates that he will continue to pursue it successfully amidst the new and critical situation in which Muhammad Ali's struggle against the Ottoman Empire has placed him. The Emir took no part in the war until Ibrahim Pasha, the victor of Acre, sent Abdullah Pasha, defeated and imprisoned, to his father in Egypt, and entered Syria. The Prince of Lebanon was then obliged to declare himself; and, according to the custom of Orientals, he saw the hand of God in the victory and sided with the victor. Nevertheless, he did so somewhat reluctantly, and seemingly using the pretext of coercion on the part of the Sublime Porte. It is likely that, if Ibrahim Pasha were to suffer setbacks, Emir Bashir would again turn to the Turks and help them crush the Arabs. Ibrahim, suspecting this two-faced strategy, is seeking to compromise the prince as much as he can; he has forced the latter to provide one of his sons and some of his best horsemen to accompany him to Homs; while his other sons, having descended from the mountains, are governing the principal cities of Syria militarily in the name of the Egyptians.

Emir Bashir's life hinges on Ibrahim's success or failure at Homs (*the Ottoman army was routed by Bashir's army, fighting on behalf of Ibrahim, at Homs, in July 1832, after these notes were written*); if Ibrahim is defeated, the Turks' reaction against the Christians of Lebanon and against the prince himself will be implacable. On the other hand, if Ibrahim remains master of Syria, he will not long tolerate an independent power and will try either to destroy it through political manoeuvring or to overthrow it forever by destroying the Shihab family. If Emir Bashir were younger and more active, he could resist these two aggressors and establish, for a long time, perhaps forever, his own rule and that of his sons over the most inaccessible, most populated, and richest part of Syria. The mountain people whom the Emir commands are brave, intelligent, and disciplined; the roads to central Lebanon are impassable; and the Maronites, who are becoming very numerous in Lebanon, would be devoted to the Emir out of a common adherence to Christianity, and through their hatred and fear of Turkish domination.

The only obstacle to the creation of a new power in these lands are religious difference between the Maronites, the Druze, and the Metualis, who populate the mountains under the Emir's authority in roughly equal numbers; the strongest bond of nationality is the community of religious thought, or rather, it has been so until now. Civilisation, as it advances, reduces religious thought to pure individualism, instead other common interests underpin nationality: since these interests are less vital than the interest of religion, nationality is gradually weakening; for what is stronger in human beings than their religious sentiment, their dogma, their innermost faith? It is the voice of the soul, the aspect of thought which forms the sum of all others: customs, laws, homeland — everything for a people is rooted in its religion. That, I believe, is why Lebanon will struggle to unite under a single, powerful form of government; that is why the Turkish empire is collapsing. One can find no sign of a shared existence, no symptom of potential nationality, except in those parts of the empire where tribes of the same faith are clustered together, among the Greeks, the Asiatics, the Armenians, the Bulgarians, and the Serbs; everywhere else, you see men, but no nation.

## The Druze

*October 3, 1832.*

Today I descended those lower slopes of Lebanon which incline from Deir El Qamar towards the Mediterranean, and am lodging in an isolated khan in the mountains. At five o'clock in the morning, we had mounted our horses in the courtyard of the Emir's palace. On leaving the palace gate, one first descends a path carved into the rock, which winds around the hillock of Beiteddine. To the right and left of these paths, the patches of land that support artificial terraces are planted with mulberry trees, admirably cultivated. The shade from these trees and rows of vines covers the ground everywhere, while numerous streams, directed by the Arab farmers, flow from the mountaintops, dividing into rivulets to water the bases of the trees, and the gardens. The gigantic shadow of the palace and terraces of Beiteddine looms over this entire scene, and pursues you to the foot of that hillock, whereupon you begin climbing another mountain that bears the city of Deir El Qamar on its summit. In a quarter of an hour's walk, we arrived.

## Deir El Qamar

Deir El Qamar is the capital of Emir Bashir and of the Druze; the city has a population of ten to twelve thousand. But, apart from an old building adorned with Moorish sculptures and high balconies quite similar to the remains of one of our medieval castles, Deir El Qamar is nothing like a city, much less a capital; it looks exactly like a small town in Savoy or Auvergne; like a large village, that is, in some remote province of France. Day was just breaking when we passed through; herds of mares and camels were departing the courtyards of the houses and spreading out into the squares and unpaved streets of the town.

In one square, a little larger than the others, a few black tents of the Zingari (*Romani*) people were pitched; men, women, and children, half-naked or wrapped in the immense white wool blanket that is their only clothing, were squatting around a fire, combing their hair or searching it for the insects that were lodged there. A few Arabs in the service of the Emir rode by in their magnificent attire, with superb weapons at their belts, and a lance twelve to fifteen feet long in their hand. Some were bringing news of Ibrahim's army to the Emir, while others were off to the coast to transmit the prince's orders to the detachments commanded by his sons, who were encamped on the plain.

Nothing is more imposing and richer than the costume and armour of these Druze warriors. Their immense turbans, over which brightly coloured shawls are wound in graceful rolls, cast a shadow on their tanned faces and dark eyes that adds even more to the majesty and wild energy of their features; long moustaches cover their lips and droop on either side of their mouths; a kind of short, red tunic is a uniform garment for all Druze and mountain dwellers: this tunic is, according to the importance and wealth of the wearer, woven of cotton and gold-thread, or simply of cotton and silk; elegant designs, in which the diversity of colours contrasts with the gold or silver of the fabric, gleam on the chest or back. Immense trousers with a thousand pleats cover the legs; the feet are shod with red morocco-leather boots, with yellow morocco-leather slippers over the boots; fur-lined jackets with hanging sleeves are draped over the shoulders. A silk or morocco-leather belt, similar to those of the Albanians, encircles the body with its numerous folds,

and serves to hold the rider's weapons. The hilts of two or three khanjars or yataghans, which are the daggers and short sabres of the Orientals, are seen to emerge from this belt and gleam against the chest; and, usually, the butts of two or three pistols inlaid with silver or gold complete the portable arsenal. The Arabs all also carry a spear with a shaft of thin, supple, hard wood, like a long reed. This spear is their main weapon. The staff is decorated with flowing tassels and silk cords; they usually hold it in their right hand, the metal end pointing skyward, with the shaft almost touching the ground; but when they urge their horses into a gallop, they brandish it horizontally above their heads; and in their military games, they throw it an enormous distance and retrieve it, bending low to the ground. Before throwing it, they impart an oscillating motion to its shaft, which greatly increases the force of the throw and launches it towards the target they designate. We encountered quite a large number of these horsemen during the day. Emir Bashir himself had allocated us a few as guides, and as a show of respect; all greeted us with extreme politeness, and stopped their horses to let us pass.

About two miles from Deir El Qamar, one encounters one of the most beautiful views of Lebanon imaginable. On one side deep gorges, into which one will shortly descend, suddenly open beneath one's feet. On the other, stands the pyramidal castle of Deir El Qamar atop its hill, draped in greenery, and traversed by torrential streams; while before one, the mountains, gradually descending to the sea, some dark, others bathed in light, unfold in a cascade of lower hills, their bases concealed either in the verdant edges of the olive groves of the plains of Sidon, or in cliffs of brick-coloured sand along the coast near Beirut. Here and there, the colour of these mountains, and the varied lines of their vast, descending slopes are punctuated and broken by the crowns of cedar, fir, or pine trees, while numerous villages gleam at their bases or on their summits.

The sea marks the boundary of this perspective; one can follow with the eye, as on an immense map or relief plan, the contours, indentations, and undulations of the coasts, capes, promontories, and gulfs of its shoreline, from Mount Carmel to Cape Batroun, a stretch of seventy-five miles or so. The air is so pure that one imagines reaching, in a few hours' descent, places one would not arrive at in three to four days' march. At this distance, the sea, at first glance, merges so completely with the sky that touches it at the horizon that one cannot initially distinguish the two elements, and the land seems to swim in a vast, double ocean. It is only by fixing one's gaze more attentively on the sea, and discovering the small white sails gleaming on its blue surface, that one can truly understand what one is seeing.

A light, more or less golden, mist floated at the edge of the waves, separating the sky from the water. At times, light mists, lifted from the mountain slopes by the morning breezes, detached themselves like white feathers some bird had released to the wind, and were carried out to sea, or evaporated in the rays of the sun that was beginning to burn us. We left this magnificent viewpoint, reluctantly, and began to descend by a path more perilous than any of those in the Alps. The slope was sheer, the path not two feet wide; unplumbed precipices bordered it on one side, walls of rock on the other; The bed of the path was paved with loose rocks, or stones so polished by the waters, by horseshoes and the hooves of camels that the creatures are forced to search, with care, for a place to plant their feet. Repeated passage over the same spots has eventually carved cavities in the stone, a few inches deep, into which their hooves fit; and it is only thanks to these cavities, which offer a point of resistance, that the animals can stand.

From time to time, one finds steps, two feet high, hewn into the rock, or rounded granite blocks that would be impassable, and which must be navigated via gaps barely as wide as one's horse's legs: such is the state of almost all the trails in this part of Lebanon. Occasionally, the mountain slopes widen or flatten out, and one rides more easily, over layers of yellow dust, sandstone, or topsoil. The country is populated by an inconceivable number of fine horses, and their use is commonplace. No Arab, however inaccessible his village or house may be, leaves it except on horseback; and one sees the inhabitants descending or ascending, carefree, pipe in mouth, over steep slopes that the deer of our mountains would have difficulty climbing.

After an hour and a half's descent, we glimpsed the bottom of the gorge we had to cross and follow. A river roared in its depths, still veiled by the mist above its waters and by the crowns of walnut, carob, plane, and Persian poplar trees that grew on the lower slopes of the ravine. Beautiful founts sprang forth, to the right of the road, from rocky caves carpeted with a thousand unknown climbing plants, or from the heart of grassy meadows sown with autumn flowers. Soon we saw a house among the trees on the riverbank, and we forded the river, or rather torrent. There we stopped to rest our horses, and to enjoy for a moment one of the most extraordinary sights we had encountered so far on our journey.

The gorge into which we had descended was entirely filled by the river's waters, which churned about several masses of rock that had tumbled into its bed. Here and there, islands of topsoil supported gigantic poplars that rose to a prodigious height and cast their pyramidal shadows over the mountainside where we had halted. On the left, the river's waters were confined between two granite walls which they seemed to have cleft apart in order to create a passage; these walls rose to four or five hundred feet and, drawing closer at their upper end, resembled an immense arch that time had caused to collapse upon itself. There, the tops of Italian pines were scattered like bouquets of wallflowers over the ruins of old walls, standing out in dark green against the vivid, raw blue of the sky. On the right, the gorge meandered for about a quarter of a mile between banks that were less steep and narrow. The river waters extending freely, embraced a multitude of small islands and verdant promontories; all these islands, all these tongues of land, were covered with the richest and most graceful vegetation. It was the first time I had seen poplars since the banks of the Rhône and the Saône. They cast a pale, shimmering canopy over the entire river valley; but as they are neither pruned nor planted by human hands, they grow there in clusters, their branches spreading freely with far more majesty, diversity of form, and grace than in our own country. Between these groves of trees and the clumps of rushes and tall reeds that also covered the islands, we could see the broken arches of an old bridge, built by some former emir of Lebanon, that had fallen centuries ago.

Beyond the arches of this ruined bridge, the gorge opened fully onto a vast internal landscape of valleys, plains, and hills dotted with villages inhabited by the Druze, all enveloped, like an amphitheatre, by a circular chain of high mountains: these hills were almost all green, and all clothed in pine forest. The villages, perched one above the other, seemed close enough to touch; but once we had traversed a few of them, we realised that the travelling distance between them was considerable, due to the difficulty of the paths and the necessity of descending and ascending the deep ravines that separate them. In some of these villages one can easily hear the voice of someone speaking in another, and yet it takes an hour to pass from the first to the second.

What added to the effect of this beautiful landscape were two vast monasteries planted, like fortresses, on the summit of two hills beyond the river (*Nahr El Kalb*), and which themselves resembled two blocks of granite blackened by time: one is inhabited by Maronites who dedicate themselves to the education of young Arabs destined for the priesthood. The other (*Couvent Saint-Joseph, Antoura*) was deserted, but had once belonged to the Lazarist congregation of Lebanon; it now served as a sanctuary and refuge for two young Jesuits sent there by their order, at the request of the Maronite bishop, to provide rules and models for the Arab teachers; they live there in complete solitude, in poverty, and in exemplary holiness. (I met them later.) One is learning Arabic and trying in vain to convert the Druze from the neighbouring villages: he is a man of great intelligence and wisdom; the other is practising medicine and travels the country distributing free remedies: both are loved and respected by the Druze and even by the Metualis. But they should anticipate scant benefit from their stay in Syria: the Maronite clergy are strongly attached to the Roman Catholic Church; moreover, they have their own traditions, independence, and discipline, which will not allow their community to be invaded by the Jesuits; they are the true spiritual authority, the governors of minds throughout Lebanon; they would soon have rivals in the form of active and restless European missions, a rivalry that would rightly concern them.

After resting for half an hour in this enchanting spot, we remounted our horses and began to climb the steep slope that rose before us. The path became increasingly rugged as it ascended the last mountain range of Lebanon that separated us from the Syrian coast. But as we climbed higher, the vast expanse of the immense basin we were leaving to our right became more imposing and expansive.

The river, which we had departed from after our halt, meandered through the middle of this gently undulating plain dotted with hills, and sometimes spread out into pools of bright blue water like the lakes of Switzerland. The dark hills, crowned by clumps of pines on their summits, constantly interrupted its course, dividing it before our eyes into a thousand luminous sections. From one level to the next, hills rising from the plain were heaped together, leaning en masse against one another, all covered in flowering heather, and bearing here and there, at wide intervals, broad-crowned trees that cast dark patches on their flanks. Great woods of cedar and fir descended from the lofty peaks, ending in clumps at the clearings around numerous Druze villages whose terraces, balconies, and pointed-arch windows we saw emerging from the heart of the woodland. The inhabitants, draped in beautiful scarlet cloaks their brows encircled by broad-pleated red turbans, climbed their terraces to watch us pass, adding, to the grandiose, strange, and picturesque effect of the landscape, the brilliance of their costumes and the majesty of their bearing. Everywhere, beautiful Turkish fountains flowed at the entrances and exits of these villages. The women and girls, fetching water in long, narrow vessels, gathered around the basins, lifting a corner of their veils to catch a glimpse of us. The population struck us as magnificent. The men, women, and children all radiated strength and health. The women were particularly beautiful. Their features generally bore the mark of pride and nobility, with not the slightest trace of anything uncivilised to be found therein.

We were greeted everywhere with politeness and grace. Hospitality was offered to us in all these hamlets. We accepted it nowhere, however, and continued climbing, steep slopes through fir woods for about three hours. We finally reached the last bare, white mountain ridge, and an immense view of the Syrian coast unfolded before us in a single glance. It was completely different

from the one we had seen for the past few days, and akin to the view of Naples as seen from the summit of Vesuvius, or the heights of Castellammare. The vast sea lay at our feet, boundless, with only a few clouds gathered above the distant waves. Beneath these clouds, one almost thought one could glimpse land, the island of Cyprus, which is one hundred and fifty miles out to sea; Mount Carmel was to the left, while, as far as the eye could see to the right, lay the endless coastline from Beirut to Tripoli, Syria, Latakia, and Alexandretta; finally, indistinctly against the golden evening mists, a few gleaming peaks of the Taurus Mountains: but this may have been an illusion, for the distance is enormous.

Immediately beneath our feet the descent began; and the view, after one's gaze had glided over the rocks and dry heather of the summit where we had halted, was softened somewhat, unfolding from summit to summit, first above the grey heads of rocky hills, then over the dark green crowns of pines, cedars, carob trees, and holm oaks, then, over gentler slopes, over the paler, yellower green of plane trees and sycamores. Finally, came the last grey hills, all velvety with the leaves of the olive groves. All faded and dimmed in the narrow plain that separates Lebanon from the sea. There, on the headlands, one could see old Moorish towers guarding the shore; and at the bottom of the gulfs, towns or large villages with their walls shining in the sun, coves carved between the stretches of sand, and boats beached on the shore, or under sail, leaving or returning to harbour. Sidon (*Saida*) and Beirut, particularly, surrounded by rich plains of olive, lemon, and mulberry trees, and adorned with their minarets, mosque domes, castles, and crenellated walls, emerged from this sea of lines and colours, drawing the eye to their two points jutting out into the waves. Beyond the plain of Beirut, Greater Lebanon, pierced by the course of the river, began to rise again, first yellow and gold like the columns of Paestum; then grey, dark, and dull; then green and black in the forested region; finally, raising snow-capped peaks, which seemed to melt into the transparency of the sky, where rays of light shone, amidst eternal serenity, upon layers of eternal whiteness. Naples, Sorrento, Rome, or Albano offer no comparable views.

After descending for about two hours, we found an isolated khan beneath magnificent plane trees, beside a spring. It is necessary to describe once and for all what is called a khan in Syria, and generally throughout the East: it is a hut whose walls are made of poorly joined stones, without mortar, allowing wind and rain to pass through. These stones are usually blackened by the smoke, from the hearth, which constantly filters through their gaps. The walls are about seven or eight feet high; they are covered with a few pieces of rough wood, and with the bark and main branches of a tree; the whole is shaded by dried bundles of leafy sticks that serve as a roof; the interior is unpaved, and, depending on the season, is a bed of dust or mud. One or two poles support the roof, and travellers hang their cloak or weapons from them. In one corner is a small hearth raised on rough stones; on this hearth a coal fire burns, constantly, and one or two copper coffee pots, always full of thick and mealy coffee, the usual refreshment and sole requirement of the Turks and Arabs.

There are usually two rooms similar to the one I described. One or two Arabs are allowed, for a fee paid to the Pasha, to provide this hospitality and to sell coffee and barley-flour cakes to the caravans. When one arrives at the door of one of these khans, one dismounts from one's camel or horse, and has the straw mats and Damascus carpets that are to serve as a bed untied: they are spread out in a corner of the smoke-filled house; one sits down, orders coffee, has a pipe or hookah lit, and waits while the slaves gather some dry wood to prepare a meal. This usually consists of two

or three cakes lightly cooked on a heated stone, and a few pieces of minced mutton with rice cooked in a copper pot. More often than not, one finds neither rice nor mutton for sale in the khan, and one must rest content with flat bread and the excellent, fresh water that is never lacking in the vicinity of the khans.

The servants, slaves, mukaris (*camel drivers*), and horses remain outside the khan. There is usually in the vicinity some renowned and ancient tree that serves as a landmark for the caravan from afar; it is most often an immense sycamore-fig tree (*ficus sycomorus*), a tree I have never seen in Europe. It is the size of the largest oaks and is longer-lived; its trunk is sometimes up to thirty or forty feet in circumference, often much more; its lower branches, which begin to open at fifteen to twenty feet above the ground, spread horizontally, over an immense span, while the upper branches group into less broad clumps, and from a distance present the shape of our beech trees. The shade from these trees, which Providence seems to have scattered here and there like welcoming clouds above the burning desert floor, extends a great distance from the trunk, and it is not uncommon to see some sixty camels, horses, and as many Arabs, camped during the heat of the day in the shelter of a single tree. But here, as everywhere, one witnesses the sad negligence of Orientals and their government. These trees, which should be carefully preserved, like natural inns, to supply shade for the caravans, are abandoned to the foolish imprudence of those they shelter; the Arabs light their fires at the foot, and the trunks of most of these beautiful trees are completely blackened and hollowed out by the flames from their hearths.

Our small caravan settled under one of those majestic sycamore fig trees, and we spent the night wrapped in our cloaks and lying on a straw mat in a corner of the khan.

*October 4, 1832.*

We left the khan this morning and, after a ride of several hours over the steep escarpments of Lebanon, arrived amidst the beautiful villages halfway up the slope. There, all the ruggedness of the mountains disappears, and we rode for two hours amidst the most delightful and well-tended hillside fields imaginable. The region resembles Tuscany. Retaining walls support earthen terraces everywhere, on which vines and trees intertwine, shading, without hindering, the blossoming of all kinds of crops. Villages, where everything suggests order, peace, work, and prosperity, are scattered across these hills; the houses, or rather the castles of the sheikhs, overlook them as our Gothic castles once overlooked our towns. Immense Maronite monasteries occupy the hilltops like fortresses. One sees the monks going to and fro, driving ploughs in the fields, or gathering mulberry leaves. The Arabs, without distinction of sex, were working peacefully in the enclosures, and watched us pass by, smiling at our European dress. The sheikh and his chief servants are usually seated on rugs at the gate of his castle, or under a large sycamore tree in the centre of the road. He smokes, and greets one by placing his hand on his heart, and saying: '*Saba al khair!* May the day be blessed for you, travellers!'

We finally reached the plain, which we crossed beneath a canopy of greenery formed by long reeds, palm trees, fig trees, vines, and mulberry trees. From time to time, an isolated house belonging to an Arab or Greek-Syrian farmer emerged from this leafy forest; children played amongst broad-tailed Syrian sheep in the doorway; beautiful young girls, their faces uncovered, carried jugs of water on their heads, and the father and mother worked away, at the foot of the mulberry trees, on beautiful silk fabrics in a thousand colours, hanging the threads from one tree

to another and weaving them as they walked beneath their shade. Neither Scotland, Saxony, Savoy, nor Switzerland, present the traveller with more scenes of life, happiness, and peace, than the foot of these mountains of Lebanon where one might have expected to encounter only barbarians.

## Return to Beirut

*October 5, 1832.*

I found my wife and child in good health, busily beautifying and decorating our winter residence. I shall spend a few days with them before leaving for Palestine and Egypt. Ibrahim Pasha, having won that decisive victory at Homs (*in the previous July*), is now advancing towards Caramania, and will cross the Taurus Mountains, driving back the Turks. There is no longer any concern about the peace and security of this country. I will travel with my mind at rest as regards what I hold most dear in life. Our new-found friends of the Beirut consulates, Joseph Hélouis-Jorelle, Giovanni Bianco, Pierre Laurella, John Farren and Peter Abbott, will provide, in my absence, for any eventualities that may arise.

I will finalise my caravan arrangements, and leave as soon as the first downpour has lowered the temperature of thirty degrees that as yet still rules the shores of Syria.

**The End of Part IV of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part V: Galilee and the Road to Jerusalem

## From Beirut, through Syria and Palestine, to Jerusalem

### Sidon

*October 8, 1832, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.*



'Sidon Looking Towards the Range of Lebanon (1858)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Artvee*

Mounted, with eighteen horses carrying baggage or simply following, we formed our caravan. We slept at a khan, three hours from Beirut, taking the same route as I described when visiting Lady Stanhope. The next day, we left at three in the morning, crossing the River Damour (*Nahr al Damour*), the ancient Tamyris, at five, oleanders in bloom along its banks. We followed the shoreline, foaming waves washing the horses' hooves, as far as Said, the ancient Sidon, still beautiful, though a shadow of the ruined city whose very name has been erased; it lacks all traces of its former grandeur. A circular jetty, formed of enormous rocks, encloses a harbour filled with sand, where a few fishermen and their children, their legs in the water, pushed a boat, without mast or sails, out to sea, the only maritime image I retain of that second queen of the seas. In Said, we dismounted at the French khan, an immense palace that supported our former trade with Syria, in which our consuls used to gather all those of French nationality to the French flag. The trade is lost, there are no French left; all that remains in Said, in that immense deserted khan, is the former, and most respectable, consular agent of France, Grégoire Giraudin, who has lived there for fifty years among his entirely Eastern family, and who receives us as one receives a fellow countryman, in a land where ancient hospitality has been wholly preserved.



'Citadel of Sidon' – David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We ate dinner, and snatched a few hours' sleep, amidst this excellent family; the sweetness of the hospitality thus received, being unexpected and lavish; water for washing our hands, was offered us by the sons of the house; the mother and wives of the two sons, standing, attended to the table. At four o'clock, mounted on horseback, we were escorted onwards by the sons and friends of the Giraudin family. Djerid (*javelin*) exercises, were performed by one of them, mounted on an Arabian steed. At two hours distance from Said, we offered our farewells and thanks. We rode for two more hours, and slept in our tents beside a charming spring by the sea, called *El Kantara*, where a gigantic tree shaded the entire caravan. A delightful garden sloped down to the sea. An immense caravan of camels was spread around us in the same field. Night in the tent; the neighing of horses, the cries of camels, smoke from the evening fires, and the transparent glow of the lamp through the striped canvas of the pavilion. My thoughts were of the quiet life at home, of family, of distant friends; thoughts that weighed on my brow, my head at rest, though heavy and burning, on the saddle that served as a pillow. In the morning, while the muezzins and slaves bridled the horses, a few Arabs pulled up the tent pegs; they shook the pole that served as a central column; it fell, and the wide stretch of canvas that had covered a whole nest of travellers slipped and tumbled to the ground, forming a little heap of cloth that the camel driver tucked under his arm, and then hung from the saddle of his mule; all that remained, in the empty place where we had recently slept, as if in a permanent dwelling, was a small abandoned fire that still smoked but soon died away in the sunlight: a true, striking, and vivid image of life, often employed in the Bible but one which struck me strongly every time it presented itself to my eyes.

## Tyre

We left El Kantara before daybreak. We climbed several arid, rock-strewn hills jutting out to sea like promontories. Then, from the summit of the last and highest of these, we gained a view of Tyre, on the end of its vast and barren hill. Between the sea and the last heights of Lebanon, which slope rapidly here, stretches a plain about twenty miles long and four or five miles wide: the plain was bare, yellow, and covered with thorny shrubs, grazed by the camels as the caravan passed. The land juts out like a peninsula, separated from the mainland by a causeway and covered with golden sand brought by the winds from Egypt. Tyre, now called Sur (*or Sour*) by the Arabs, is supported by the sharpest point of this promontory, and seems to rise from the very waves; from afar one might have thought it a fine, new, city, white walled and alive, mirrored in the sea: but it was no more than a beautiful shadow, which vanished as we drew near. A few hundred crumbling and almost deserted houses, around which the Arabs gather, at evening, the large flocks of sheep and black goats, with long drooping ears, which had paraded before us in the plain: that is Tyre today! It no longer has a port on the sea, and no longer maintains roads on land; the prophecies have long since been fulfilled concerning it (*see Isaiah, 23.1, and Jeremiah 25.11*).



'Port of Tyre' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We walked in silence, absorbed in contemplating the sad imperial dust we trod upon. We followed a path through the countryside near Tyre, between the city and the bare, grey hills of Lebanon encroaching on the plain. We reached the very edge of the city, and neared a mound of sand that now seems to provide its only rampart, until even that is swallowed whole. I thought of the prophecies and searched my memory for those eloquent threats the breath of the Divinity had inspired in Ezekiel (*for example, Ezekiel 28.21-24*). I could not recall his words, but found his

sentiment evoked by the deplorable reality before my eyes. A few of those lines of mine, jotted down at random when leaving France to visit the East, were the only ones that rose in my mind:



'Sur or Tsor, Ancient Tyre from the Isthmus' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

'Je n'ai pas entendu sous les cèdres antiques
Les cris des nations monter et retentir,
Ni vu du noir Liban les aigles prophétiques
Descendre, au doigt de Dieu, sur les palais de Tyr.'

'I have not yet heard, beneath the ancient cedars,
The cries of the Nations sounding, rising higher,
Nor seen the prophetic eagles of dark Lebanon
Descend, from God's hand, upon the roofs of Tyre.'

I had before me dark Lebanon; but imagination had deceived me, I told myself: since I saw neither the eagles nor vultures that, in fulfilment of the prophecy, were supposed to descend ceaselessly from the mountains to devour this corpse of a city, rejected by God and inimical to His people. As I was reflecting on this, there appeared, on our left, a group of large, strange, motionless figures atop a sheer rock that jutted out into the plain at that point, above the caravan route. They looked like five black stone statues, placed on the rock as if on a pedestal; but, as we approached, seeing the colossal figures exhibit a few almost imperceptible movements, we thought them five Bedouin Arabs, wearing their black goat-hair robes, watching us pass from the top of this mound. Finally, when we were only about fifty paces from the hillock, we saw one of the five figures spread its broad wings and beat them against its flanks with a sound like a sail unfurling in the wind, and

recognised five eagles of the largest breed I had ever seen in the Alps, or chained in the menageries of our cities. They chose not to fly off, unmoved by our approach: perched, like kings of the desert, on the edge of the rock, they seemed to regard Tyre as a prize that belonged to them alone, and to which they were about to return. They seemingly possessed it by divine right; instruments of a command they were executing, of a prophetic vengeance they were commissioned to accomplish against mankind, and in spite of mankind. I continued to contemplate this prophecy in action, this marvellous fulfilment of the divine threat, of which chance rendered us witnesses. Never had anything more supernatural or more vivid struck my eyes and mind; and it took a concerted effort of reason not to see, behind these five gigantic eagles, the great and terrible figure of the poet of vengeance, Ezekiel, rising above them, gazing and pointing his finger at the city that God had given them to devour, while the wind of divine wrath stirred the waves of his white beard, and the fire of heavenly anger shone in his prophetic eyes. We halted forty paces away: the eagles merely turned their heads disdainfully to consider us in turn; finally, two of us broke from the caravan and galloped, rifles in hand, to the very foot of the rock; they still chose not to flee. A few rifle shots sent them flapping away, heavily; but they returned of their own accord, and hovered for a long time over our heads without being hit by the bullets, as if saying to us: 'You can do us no harm, we are the eagles of God.'

I realised then that my poetic imagination had revealed to me the eagles of Tyre, though less grand, beautiful, and supernatural than they once were, and that there is in the *mens divinior ('divine soul' see Horace 'Satires: Book I, IV, line 43*) of poets, even the most obscure, something of that divinatory and prophetic instinct which speaks the truth unaware.

## Solomon's Pools

We arrived at noon, after a seven-hour march, at a place called Solomon's Pools, amidst the plain of Tyre (*at Ras el-Aïn, not those near Bethlehem*); many travellers have described them. They are three reservoirs of clear, flowing water that spring, as if by magic, from the low-lying, dry, and arid land, two miles from Tyre; each of these reservoirs, artificially raised some twenty feet above the level of the plain, is filled to the brim and constantly overflows; the water powers mill-wheels, and flows to Tyre through aqueducts, part ancient, part modern, producing a fine sight on the horizon. It is said that Solomon had these three pools built to reward Tyre and its king Hiram for the services he had received from its navy and its artists in the construction of the temple.

Hiram had gifted him marble and cedarwood from Lebanon. These immense cisterns are each at least sixty to eighty feet in circumference; their full depth is unknown, and one of them appears bottomless; no one has ever been able to discover by what mysterious conduit the mountain water reaches them. Upon examination, there is every reason to believe that they are vast artesian wells, invented long before their reinvention in modern times.

## Ras-El-Abiad (Cap Blanc)



'Ras-El-Abiad, Coast of Syria (1839)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Artvee*

We left Solomon's Pools at five o'clock; rode for two hours over the plain of Tyre; and arrived at nightfall at the foot of a high mountain plunging into the sea, forming Cap Blanc or Ras-El-Abiad; the moon was rising above the dark peaks of Lebanon, to our left, but not yet high enough to illuminate its slopes; its rays fell, leaving us in shadow, upon immense blocks of white rock from which the moonlight gleamed like flame on marble; sparkling foam broke on these blocks, set in the midst of the waves which leaped high enough to almost reach us. The dull, rhythmic sound of these waves beating against the cape rose on high, and with each blow the narrow ledge, suspended above the precipice, along which we rode, shook: in the distance, the sea shone like an immense sheet of silver and, here and there, a dark headland jutted out into the deep, or a vast cavern penetrated the jagged flanks of the mountain.



'Cape Blanco, Lebanon (1839)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Artvee*

The plain of Tyre stretched behind us; it could still be made out, indistinctly, due to the fringes of golden yellow sand that traced the contours between sea and land. The shadow of Tyre appeared at the end of its promontory; chance alone had kindled a light upon its ruins, which, from afar, one might have taken for a lighthouse; but it was a lighthouse of solitude and abandonment, guiding no vessel, reaching our eyes alone, and summoning only a pitying glance at the city's ruin.

This road along the precipice, with all the varied, sublime, solemn aspects of night, moonlight, waves and abysses, took us about an hour to navigate, one of the hours most vividly etched in memory that I have contemplated on God's Earth! It seemed a sublime gateway to our next day's entry to the land of miracles, the land of witness, still imprinted with the traces of the ancient and new communion between God and Mankind!

Descending from the summit of this cape, we were greeted by the same sight that had struck us on the ascent: precipices as deep, as echoing, as before, as white with foam, and as strewn with vast shards of raw, white rock, opened beneath our feet, and before our eyes; the sea broke there with the same resounding roar that had accompanied us all along the 'stormy coast of Syria', as the ancient Hebrew poems call it; the moon, higher in the sky, illuminated this scene, at once tumultuous and solitary, and the vast plain of Ptolemais (*Acre*) opened before us.

It was nine in the evening, in October; our horses, exhausted by a thirteen-hour journey, placed their shod hooves slowly and carefully among the sharp and shining rocks that form the only roads in Syria, irregular stone steps on which one would not dare risk any European mount: we ourselves, overwhelmed with weariness, and struck above all by the grandeur of the spectacle and the hurried memories of the day, walked silently on foot, holding our horses by the bridle; and casting

sometimes a glance at this sea which we would have to cross to see our own rivers and mountains once more, and sometimes at the long, black undulating peak of Mount Carmel, which was beginning to take shape on the farthest limits of the horizon.

We arrived at a kind of khan, that is to say, a half-ruined hovel, where a poor Arab cultivated a few fig trees and some gourds between the crevices of the rocks, near to a spring: the hovel had been occupied by camel drivers from Nablus, bringing wheat to Syria for Ibrahim's army; the spring had dried in the autumn heat. Nevertheless, we pitched our tents, on ground covered with loose, round stones; we tethered our horses to stakes, and drank, sparingly, a few drops of the fresh water that remained in our jars from Solomon's Pools. Beyond the plain of Tyre and the foothills of the mountain ranges, the sources of water are sparse; the wells are five or six hours apart, and often when one arrives, one finds nothing left in the bed of the spring but dried, burning-hot mud that still bears the imprint of the feet of the camels and goats that last drank there.

## Acre

On the 11th of October, we struck camp by the light of a thousand stars reflected in the waves spread at our feet; we descended, in about an hour, the last hills which form Cape Blanc or Ras-El-Abiad, and entered the plain of Acre, the ancient Ptolemais.



'St. Jean d'Acre (land view)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Library of Congress*

The siege of Acre by Ibrahim Pasha had recently reduced the city to a heap of ruins, beneath which ten to twelve thousand dead lay buried, along with thousands of camels. Ibrahim, victorious, and eager to secure his important conquest against some reversal of fortune, was busy rebuilding

the walls and houses of the city. Every day, hundreds of half-burned corpses were unearthed from the rubble; the putrid stench from the piles of bodies had corrupted the air of the entire plain. We passed by, as far as possible from the walls, and halted at noon at the Arab village of Eaux d'Acre, in an orchard of pomegranate, fig, and mulberry trees, near the Pasha's mills. At five o'clock, we set off again to camp beneath an olive grove at the foot of the first hills of Galilee.

On the 12th, we set off again at daybreak; we crossed a hill planted with olive trees and a few kerm-oaks, scattered in groups or growing in thickets and prey to the gnawing teeth of goats and camels. When we reached the other side of this hill, the Holy Land, the land of Canaan, lay before us. The impression it produced was grand, pleasing, and profound; this was not that bare, rocky, barren land, carpeted with low hills, that gaunt landscape offered up as the Promised Land, based on the word of a few biased writers or travellers, in their eagerness to write and arrive somewhere, who saw nothing of the immense and varied domains of the Twelve Tribes but the stony path that leads, between two sunrises, from Jaffa to Jerusalem. Deceived by their narratives, I had expected only what they described, that is to say, a land without expansiveness, without views, valleys, plains, or trees, and without water: a land dotted with a few white or grey mounds, amidst which thieving Arabs hid, in the shade of the ravines to plunder the passer-by; such, perhaps, is the road from Jerusalem to Jaffa. But here was Judea, as we saw it on the first day, from the hills bordering the plain of Acre; such as we found it to be on the far side of the hills of Zebulun, those of Nazareth, and at the foot of Mount Hermon or of Mount Carmel; such as we traversed it, in all its breadth and variety, from the heights overlooking Tyre and Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, and from Mount Tabor to the mountains of Samaria and Nablus, and from there to the walls of Zion (*Jerusalem*).

Here the plain of Zebulun first lies before us: we are situated between two slight undulations of land, scarcely worthy of the name of hills; the channel they leave between them, hollowed out before us, forms the path on which we ride; this path is marked by the hooves of camels, grinding its dust for four thousand years, or by the wide, deep holes that their feet, always placed in the same spot, have carved in the white, crumbly rock, ever the same from the Cape of Tyre to the first sands of the Libyan Desert. To the right and left, the rounded slopes of twin hills are shaded here and there, every twenty paces, by clumps of various evergreen shrubs; at a slightly greater distance, rise trees with gnarled trunks, sinewy and intertwined branches, and motionless, dark foliage; most are oaks of a particular species (*Palestine oaks, quercus calliprinos, the kerm-oak*) whose trunk is lighter and more slender than that of European oaks, and whose velvety, rounded leaves lack the serrations of the common oak leaf: carob trees, terebinths, and more rarely plane and sycamore trees, complete the cover of these hills. I was unable to name the other trees: some have the foliage of firs and cedars; others (and these are the most beautiful) resemble immense willows as regards the colour of their bark, the grace of their foliage, and the latter's tender, yellowish hue; but they surpass willows in extent, and height. The largest caravans can gather around their colossal trunks, and camp together, baggage and camels included, beneath their shade; in the wide and frequent spaces that these various trees leave bare on the hill slopes, banks of whitish rock, more often of a bluish grey, pierce the earth, and reveal themselves to the sunlight, like the vigorous muscles of a strong human frame, which are more prominently articulated in old age, and seem ready to pierce the skin that clothes them; but between these benches or blocks of rock, a dark, loose, deep soil is present, which could produce repeated crops of wheat and barley if it were only cultivated, or clumps of thorny scrub, wild pomegranates, Jericho roses (*Anastatica hierochuntica*), and enormous thistles whose stems rise to the height of a camel's head. Once one of these hills

has been described, one can imagine them all, down to their shape; and can picture their effect as mentioned in descriptions of the landscape of the Holy Land. We were passing between two of these hills, and beginning to descend slightly, leaving the sea and the plain of Acre behind us, when we glimpsed the first plain in the land of Canaan: it was the plain of Zebulun (*the Zvulun Valley*), the garden of the tribe of that name.



'St. Jean d'Acre (sea view)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Library of Congress*

## The Zvulun Valley (Plain of Zebulun)

To our right and left, the two hills we had just traversed parted gracefully and in a similar manner, like two fading waves gently merging, then parting harmoniously before the prow of a ship. The space between them, widening gradually, was like a shallow cove in the plain, between the mounts. This cove or gulf of flat, fertile land soon formed a wider valley. And where the two hills that still surrounded it finally subsided, this valley merged with and was absorbed into a slightly oval plain, whose two ends were shaded by two other rows of hills. This valley might be, judged by sight alone, about six miles wide and nine or so miles long.

From our vantage point at the foot of the hills of Acre, our gaze naturally descended, following the supple curves involuntarily, and penetrating with them into the narrowest coves they formed between the roots of the hills terminating them. To the left, the tall, golden, sculpted peaks of Lebanon projected their pyramids boldly into the dark blue of the morning sky: to the right, the hill we rode along rose imperceptibly as we moved away, as if to join the other hills forming groups at various elevations, some arid, others clothed with olive and fig trees and bearing at the summit

a Turkish village, whose white minaret contrasted with the dark colonnade of cypresses which almost everywhere envelop the mosques. But opposite, the view, in which the plain of Zebulun extending before us terminated on the horizon, revealed a perspective of hills, mountains, valleys, sky, vapour, light and shadows, ordered with such harmony of colour and line, blended with such felicitous composition, linked together with such graceful symmetry, and varied by such diverse effects, that my eye could not detach itself from it, and, finding nothing in my memories of the Alps, Italy or Greece, to which I could compare the magical ensemble, I exclaimed: 'It's a Poussin, or a Claude Lorrain!'

Nothing, indeed, can equal the grandiose sweetness of this view of Canaan, except the brush of those two painters to whom the divine genius of Nature revealed her beauty. This harmony of the grand and the gentle, the strong and the graceful, the picturesque and the fertile, can only be found in the imaginative landscapes of those two great masters, or in the inimitable nature of the beautiful country that lay before us, which the hand of the supreme artist himself had designed and coloured for the habitation of a people still pastoral and innocent. First, at the foot of the mountains, and a mile or so into the plain, a hillock, entirely detached from all the surrounding hills, rose as if from the earth, like a natural pedestal destined by Nature to support a fortified city. Its sides rose almost perpendicularly from the level of the plain to the top of this kind of earthen altar; they looked exactly like the ramparts of a fortress drawn and erected by human hands.

The summit itself, instead of being uneven and rounded, like most hilltops or mountaintops, was level and flat, as if ready to bear whatever would crown it when the people for whom it was intended arrived. Throughout the charming plains of the land of Canaan, I have since seen these same mounds in the form of quadrangular or oblong altars, evidently intended to protect the first enclosures of a weak and cautious nation; their purpose is so clearly indicated by their isolated and bizarre form that their sheer size alone prevents one thinking they were constructed by the people who covered them with their cities. But could such a small nation ever have erected so many enormous citadels that all Xerxes' armies would not have needed to add a single one? Whatever one's faith, one would have to be blind not to recognise a special, providential, or natural purpose in these fortresses erected at the entrances and exits to almost all the plains of Galilee and Judea.

Behind this hillock, on which the imagination easily reconstructs an ancient city with its walls, bastions, and towers, the first hills rose gradually from the plain, bearing, as grey and black patches on their slopes, groves of olive or oak trees. Between these hills and the higher, darker mountains they served as bases for, and which dominated them majestically, torrents doubtless foamed, or deep lakes evaporated in the first heat of the morning sun; for a white and bluish vapour spread through this empty space, and slightly concealed, as if to hide it better, a second range of mountains beneath its translucent curtain, pierced here and there by the beams of the dawn rays. Further and higher still, a third chain of mountains, entirely dark, rose in rounded and uneven crests, and gave to the whole sweet landscape that tint of majesty, strength, and gravity, which is to be found in every beautiful landscape as an element of it, or as a contrast to it. This third chain was broken at intervals, allowing the view and one's gaze to escape into a vast expanse of pale silver sky, strewn with a few slightly pink clouds; finally, behind this magnificent amphitheatre, two or three peaks of distant Lebanon rose like promontories jutting into the sky, receiving the first luminous rain of the sun's first rays suspended above them, and seeming so transparent that one thought one could see the light of the sky they concealed trembling through them. Add to this spectacle the serene

and warm vault of the firmament, the limpid colour of the light, and the firmness of the shadows that characterises an Asian atmosphere; scatter across the plain a ruined khan and immense lines of red cows, white camels, and black goats, slow moving in their search for water, that is rarely present, but limpid and delicious when it is; picture a few Arab horsemen, mounted on their light steeds, criss-crossing the plain, their silver weapons gleaming, their scarlet robes glowing; a few women from the neighbouring villages, dressed in their long sky-blue tunics, with a wide white belt whose ends trail on the ground, and a blue turban adorned with embroidered strips of Venetian sequins: add here and there, on the hillsides, a few Turkish and Arab hamlets, whose stone-coloured walls, and roofless houses, blend with the rocks of the hills themselves; allow a few clouds of azure smoke to rise from time to time between the olive trees and cypresses that surround these villages; and a few hollowed out stone troughs, the tombs of the patriarchs, granite column shafts, and sculpted capitals, to be found, here and there, around the founts, or in the way of your horse, and you will possess a most exact and faithful picture of the delightful plains of Zebulun, Nazareth, Sepphoris (*Tzipori, Saffuriya*) and Tabor. Such a country, repopulated with a new Jewish nation, cultivated and watered by intelligent hands, warmed by a nigh-on tropical sun, producing of itself all the plants necessary or attractive to human beings, from sugar canes and bananas to the vines and corn of temperate climates, the cedars and firs of the Alps; such a country, I say, would still be the Land of Promise today, if Providence were to return to it a people, with a policy of repose and liberty.

From the plain of Zebulun, climbing slight hillocks drier than the first, we reached the village of Sepphoris the ancient Saphora of Scripture, the ancient Diocesarea of the Romans, the largest city, in the time of Herod Agrippa, of Palestine after Jerusalem.

A large number of stone blocks, hollowed out for tombs, marked our path to the summit of the hillock where Sepphoris sat. Reaching the highest point, we saw a solitary granite column, still standing, marking the site of a temple. Beautiful carved capitals lay on the ground at the foot of the column, and immense fragments of hewn stone, taken from some grand Roman monument, were scattered everywhere, serving as boundaries for the Arab fields, up to about a mile from Sepphoris, where we stopped for our midday rest. An inexhaustible spring of water flows there for the inhabitants of two or three valleys; it is surrounded by orchards of fig and pomegranate trees. We sat in their shade and waited for more than an hour before we could water our caravan, so numerous were the herds of cows and camels that the Arab herders were driving from every side of the valley. Countless lines of black goats and cows criss-crossed the plain and the slopes of the hills that rise towards Nazareth.

I lay down, wrapped in my cloak, in the shade of a fig tree, a short distance from the fountain, and contemplated, for a good while, this scene from days gone by. Our horses, Turkish saddles on their backs, were scattered around us, their feet hobbled, their heads bowed, seeking the shade of their own manes that hung loose; our weapons, sabres, rifles, pistols, hung above our heads from the branches of the pomegranate and fig trees. Bedouin Arabs, covered in a single piece of black and white striped goatskin, were seated in a circle not far from us, and gazed at us with the eyes of vultures. The women of Sepphoris, dressed exactly as one imagined the wives of Abraham and Isaac to dress, in a blue tunic, tied about the waist, the billowing folds of a second, white tunic falling gracefully over the blue one, bore, on their heads adorned with blue turbans, empty urns laid on their sides, — or carried them away, upright and filled, on their heads, supporting them

with both hands like the caryatids of the Acropolis; other girls, in identical costume, washed at the fountain, and laughed among themselves while glancing at us; still others, dressed in richer robes, their heads adorned with bands of piastres or gold sequins, danced beneath a large pomegranate tree, some distance from the fountain and ourselves. Their dance, languid and slow, was simply a monotonous circling, occasionally punctuated by a few inartistic, but not ungraceful, steps. Woman was created graceful; custom and costume cannot alter the charm, of beauty, of love, in her nature, which envelops her and betrays her everywhere. These Arab women were not veiled like all those we had seen so far in the Orient, and their features, though with light tattoos, possessed a refinement and regularity that distinguished them from Turkish women. They continued to dance and sing throughout our stay, and seemed unoffended by the attention we paid to their dance, song, and attire. We were told they were gathered there awaiting the wedding gifts that an Arab youth had gone to Nazareth to buy for one of Zipporah's daughters, his fiancée. Indeed, we encountered him with the gifts on the road that same day: they consisted of a sieve to sift flour and separate it from the bran; a piece of cotton cloth; and a piece of richer fabric from which a dress for the bride would be made.

On that day, new impressions began to stir within me, entirely different from those that my journey had thus far inspired. I had travelled with my eyes, thoughts, and mind; I had not travelled with my soul and heart, as I now did, in journeying through a land of wonders, the land of Jehovah and Christ, the land whose names my childish lips had stammered a thousand times, whose images had first coloured my young and tender imagination; the land from which, later in life, the lessons and delights of my religion, the second soul out of our soul, had flowed for me! I felt within me as if something dead and cold was reviving, and warming me; I felt as one might feel when recognising, among a thousand unknown and foreign figures, that of one's mother, sister, or beloved; as one might feel when leaving the street to enter a temple: something contemplative, gentle, intimate, tender and comforting, which one experiences nowhere else.

The temple, for me, was this land of the Bible, of the Gospel, in which I had just taken my first steps! I prayed to God in silence, in my secret thoughts; I thanked Him for having allowed me to live long enough to lay my eyes on this sanctuary of the Holy Land: and from that day on, throughout the rest of my journey in Judea, Galilee, and Palestine, the poetic and tangible impressions I received from the sight and names of the places, were mingled for me with a more vivid feeling of respect, tenderness, and remembrance; my journey often became a prayer, and the two enthusiasms most natural to my soul, the enthusiasm for Nature and for its author, were found within me almost every morning as fresh and as vivid as if the many withering and desiccating years had not trampled and repressed them within my breast! I felt that I was a man still, appearing before the shade of the God of my youth!

## Nazareth

When visiting places consecrated by one of those mysterious events that has changed the face of the world, one experiences something similar to that experienced by the traveller who laboriously ascends the course of a vast river like the Nile or the Ganges, to discover and contemplate its hidden and unknown source: it seemed to me too, climbing the last hills that separated me from Nazareth, that I was going to contemplate, at its own mysterious source, the vast and fruitful religion which, for two thousand years, has forged a path through the world from

the summits of the mountains of Galilee, and has quenched the thirst of so many generations with its pure and life-giving stream! Here was the source, in a hollow of this rock that I trod under my feet; this hill, whose final steps I was climbing, had given birth from beneath its slopes to the waters of salvation, life, light, and the hopes of the world: it was here, a few steps from me, that the ideal human being had been born among mankind, to draw them, by his word and example, from the ocean of error and corruption in which all were about to be submerged. Considered philosophically, it was the starting point for the greatest series of events ever to shake the moral and political sphere, an event whose aftershock alone still generates movement and life in the sphere of the intellect! It was here that the greatest, the most just, the wisest, the most virtuous of all men emerged, from an obscure place full of misery, and ignorance; here was his cradle, here the theatre of his actions and touching sermons; from here he emerged, still young, with a few companions, themselves obscure and ignorant, in whom he instilled confidence through his genius, and the courage of his mission, and went knowingly to confront an order of ideas and institutions not strong enough to resist him, but strong enough to bring about his death! From this place, I say, he emerged to conquer death, and the universal empire represented by posterity! From here Christianity flowed, from an obscure source, an unnoticed puddle in a hollow of the hills of Nazareth, at which two sparrows could not have drunk, which a ray of sunlight could have dried, yet which today, like a vast spiritual ocean, has filled all the abysses of human wisdom to the brink, and bathed the past, present, and future in its inexhaustible waves!

Even had I not believed, at this moment, in the divinity of that event, my soul would still have been greatly shaken upon approaching the scene of its inception, and I would have uncovered my head and bowed my brow before the hidden and fateful will that had caused so many things to spring forth from such a weak and imperceptible beginning. But, if I consider the mystery of Christianity as a Christian, it was here, under a patch of blue sky, in the depths of a dark and narrow valley, in the shadow of a small hill whose ancient rocks still seemed cleft by the shudder of joy they experienced in bearing and giving birth to the Word in the form of a child, or by the shudder of pain they felt when the corpse of that Word was interred; this was the fatal and sacred point of the globe which God had chosen, amidst all eternity, to witness the descent to Earth of his truth, his justice and his love, incarnate in an Infant-God; this was where the divine breath blew at that hour upon a poor cottage, a dwelling representing humble labour, simplicity of spirit, and worldly misfortune; this was where it animated, in the womb of an innocent and pure virgin, a being sweet, tender and merciful as herself, a suffering, patient being, crying aloud like all Mankind, yet as powerful, supernatural, wise and strong as a god; this was where the God-Man walked amidst our ignorance, our weakness, our labour and our miseries, during the obscure years of his early life, and where he in some manner experienced life and practised his existence on Earth before teaching Mankind by his word, healing it by his wonders, and regenerating it by his death. It was here that Heaven opened, and launched upon the Earth that incarnate spirit, that fulminating Word, to consume iniquity and error until the end of time, to test, as in the fire of the crucible our virtues and our vices, and to light before the one and holy God that incense which must never be extinguished, the incense of the altar renewed, the fragrance of universal charity and truth.



'Nazareth (general view)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Pitts Theology Library, Emory University*

As I reflected, my head bowed and my brow burdened with a thousand other, even heavier thoughts, I glimpsed at my feet, at the bottom of a valley carved into the shape of an earthen basin or lake, the white houses of Nazareth gracefully clustered on both the sides and floor of this basin. The Greek church, the tall minaret of the Turkish mosque, and the long, wide walls of the Franciscan monastery was first visible; a few streets lined with smaller houses, but in an elegant, Oriental style, were scattered around these larger buildings, bustling with the sounds and activity of life. All around the valley or basin of Nazareth, clumps of tall, thorny prickly-pear cacti, fig trees stripped of their autumn foliage, and pomegranate trees with delicate, tender green and yellow leaves were scattered here and there, lending freshness and grace to the landscape, like wildflowers around a village altar. God alone knows what passed through my heart then; but, with a spontaneous and almost involuntary impulse, I found myself at my horse's feet, kneeling in the dust on the blue, powdery rock of the precipitous path we were descending.



'Fountain of the Virgin, Nazareth' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

I remained there for a few minutes of silent contemplation, in which the thoughts of my life as a sceptic and a Christian crowded my mind so intensely that it was impossible for me to discern a single one. These words alone escaped my lips: '*Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*' ('*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us', see John: 1.14*). I pronounced them with the same sublime, profound, and grateful feeling that they contain; and the place inspired them so naturally that I was struck, upon arriving that evening at the sanctuary of the Latin church (*the Basilica of the Annunciation*), to find them engraved in letters of gold on the marble table of the underground altar, in the house of Mary and Joseph. Then, bowing my head, reverently, toward the dust of the place that had given birth to Christ (*following a more modern theory, and not the tradition of the Gospels, Lamartine treats Nazareth rather than Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus*), I kissed it in silence; and moistened with a few tears of repentance, love, and hope this dust that has seen so many tears fall, this dust in which so many tears have dried, shed by so many seekers after truth and love.

We arrived at the Franciscan Monastery in Nazareth as the last rays of evening still gilded the high yellow walls of the church and monastery. A wide iron gate opened before us; our horses glided in, their hooves clattering on the gleaming flagstones of the monastery's outer courtyard. The gate closed behind us, and we dismounted before the very door of the church, where once stood the humble home of that mother who offered her breast to an immortal guest, who gave her milk to nurture a god. Both the superior and the guardian of the monastery were absent. A few Neapolitan and Spanish friars, busy winnowing the monastery's wheat below the gateway, received us rather coldly and led us into a wide corridor from which the friars' cells, and the rooms for visitors, opened. We waited a long while for the arrival of the parish priest of Nazareth, who showered us with courtesies, and had a room and bed prepared for each of us. Weary from the

day's journey, and our emotions, we threw ourselves onto our beds, postponing until morning our visit to the consecrated places, not wishing to spoil our overall impression with a hasty first glance at the holy sites, within whose walls we already dwelt.



'Convent of the Terra-Santa, Nazareth' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

I rose several times during the night, to raise my soul and voice to God, who had chosen in this place the one who was to carry his Word to the world.

The next day, an Italian priest arrived to lead us to the church, and the underground sanctuary that was once the home of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. The church (*demolished in 1954, and rebuilt*) is large, and has a high, three-storey nave. The upper storey houses the choir of the Fathers of the Holy Land, which connects to the monastery through a rear door. The lower storey is for the congregation; it connects to the choir and the high altar via a beautiful double staircase with gilded balustrades. From this part of the church, beneath the high altar, a short flight of steps leads to a small chapel with a marble altar illuminated by silver lamps, placed on the very spot where tradition holds that the Annunciation took place. This altar is erected beneath the vault, part natural and part man-made, of the rock against which the Holy House was undoubtedly built. Behind this first vault, two darker, subterranean chapels with altars, are said to have once served as a kitchen and a cellar for the Holy Family.



'Shrine of the Annunciation, Nazareth' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

Tradition, more or less accurate, more or less altered to suit the pious needs of popular belief, or by the natural desire of the monks, possessing such a precious site, to generate interest by means of supplementary details, may have added a degree of gratuitous invention to the powerful history of the place; but there is little doubt that the monastery, and especially the first church here, were originally built on the very spot occupied by the house of the divine heir of heaven and earth. His name spread like the light of a new dawn, shortly after his death and, while his mother and disciples were still alive, they devoted themselves to the religion of love and sorrow that remained to them in the absence of the divine Master, and must often have visited, and led Christian converts, to the places where they had seen the one whom they now worshipped live, speak, act, and die. Human piety could not have better preserved the tradition of a place dear to his memory than did the piety of the faithful and the martyrs. The authenticity of the major sites associated with the Redeemer may be attributed to the fervour of a nascent cult and the vigilance of an immortal one.

We fell to our knees upon these stones, beneath this vault, witness to the most incomprehensible mystery of divine charity towards humankind, and we prayed. The fervour of prayer is also a mystery, a bond between humankind and the Divinity: like modesty, it veils thought and conceals what belongs only to Heaven. We also visited the vast and comfortable monastery, a building like any other in France or Italy, where the Latin Fathers practise the ceremonies of their worship as freely, openly, and safely, as they could in Rome, the capital of Christianity. In this respect, Muslims have been much slandered. Religious tolerance, or rather, religious respect, is deeply ingrained in their creed. They are so religious themselves, and regard the freedom of their religious practices with such jealousy, that the religion of other men is the last thing they would

seek to infringe upon. They do sometimes feel a kind of horror for a religion whose symbol often offends their own, but only contempt and hatred for those who fail to pray to the Almighty in any language: such people they fail to understand, so ever-present is the thought of Allah in their minds, which is also the constant preoccupation of their souls. A score or so of Spanish and Italian Fathers occupy this monastery, absorbed in singing the praises of the Christ Child and the glories of his mother, on the very spot where the latter lived poor and unknown. One of them, who is called the priest of Nazareth, is specifically charged with the care of the town's Christian community, which numbers seven to eight hundred Catholic Christians, two thousand Greek schismatics, a few Maronites, and only about a thousand Muslims.

During the day, the Fathers led us to the Maronite churches, the ancient synagogue where the child Jesus went to learn the law, which he would one day purify, and the site of the workshop where Saint Joseph practised his humble trade as a carpenter. We noted with surprise and pleasure the marks of deference and respect that the inhabitants of Nazareth, even the Turks, everywhere show to the Fathers of the Holy Land. A bishop in the streets of a Catholic city would be neither more honoured nor more affectionately regarded than these religious men are here. A priest is rendered safer from persecution by the customs of the East than those of Europe; should he seek martyrdom, this is not the place to find that same.

## The Sea of Galilee

*October 14, 1832.*

I left at four in the morning for Mount Tabor, designated as the site of the Transfiguration, an unlikely location since at that time the summit of Tabor was occupied by a Roman fortress. The isolated position and elevation of this charming mountain, with its lush vegetation, rising from the Esdraelon plain (*the Jezreel Valley, or Marj ibn Amir*), led to its nomination, in the time of Saint Jerome, as the site for that sacred scene. A chapel was built on the summit, where pilgrims go to hear the Holy Sacrifice; no priest resides there: they visit from Nazareth (*the site is now occupied by the twentieth-century Church of the Transfiguration*). Arriving at the foot of Mount Tabor — a superb dome, perfectly rounded, and covered everywhere with vegetation and kerm-oaks — the guide wandered off. I sat alone under a beautiful oak-tree, roughly where Raphael places the disciples in his painting of the Transfiguration (*in the Pinacoteca Vaticana*), dazzled by the light from above, and waited for the father to celebrate Mass. We were announced from above by a pistol shot, so that we might kneel on the natural steps of this gigantic altar, before Him who erected it and spread the sparkling vault of heaven above.



'Mount Tabor from the Plain of Esdraelon' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

At noon, we set off for the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. Having crossed, by one o'clock, the low, rather shadowy hills that sit at the foot of Mount Tabor, we entered a vast plain twenty miles long and at least as wide. We passed a ruined khan amidst medieval architecture, and through several villages of poorer Arabs who cultivate the plain; each village has a well located some distance away, and a few fig and pomegranate trees planted not far from the well. These are the only traces of prosperity. The houses can only be distinguished on close approach. They are huts six to eight feet high, each a kind of mud cube kneaded with chopped straw, and with a flat roof. These roof terraces serve as courtyards: on it are all their furnishings, a blanket, and a mat. The women and children almost always remain there; the women are not veiled; their lips are dyed with blue, the rims of their eyelids the same colour, and a faint tattoo is described around their lips and on their cheeks. They dress in a single blue garment, tied with a white belt above their hips; all reveal the effects of misery and suffering. The men are covered in seamless cloaks of heavy fabric, woven with wavering black and white stripes; their legs, arms, and chests are bare.

After travelling across this yellowish, stony, but fertile plain for six hours, the ground suddenly fell away before our feet, and we gazed on the immense Jordan Valley, and the first azure glimmers of the beautiful Sea of Galilee, or Lake Gennesaret, as the ancients and the Gospel call it. Soon its whole extent unfolded before our eyes, surrounded as it is on all sides, except to the south, by an amphitheatre of tall black and grey mountains. At its southern end, immediately beneath our feet, it narrowed where a river emerged, that of the prophets, the river Jordan of the Gospels!



'Sea of Galilee at Genezareth looking Towards Bashan' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

The Jordan meanders from the lake, and slides into the low, marshy plain of Esdraelon, about fifty paces from its shore; then flows south, bubbling slightly, raising its first murmur, till it passes the ruined arches of a Roman bridge (*at Gesher, Jisr el-Majami, restored 2016*). It is there that we made our way, up a steep, stony slope, wishing to pay homage to its waters, held as sacred by two religions. After a few minutes, we were on its bank: we dismounted, and bathed our heads, feet, and hands in its gentle, warm, blue waters, much like the waters of the Rhône flowing from Lake Geneva. The Jordan, at this point, which must be roughly the middle of its north to south course (*flowing into and out of the Sea of Galilee*), would not be worthy of the name of river in a larger country; but it nevertheless far surpasses the Eurotas and the Cephissus, and all those rivers whose fabulous or historical names resound in our memory from youth onwards, presenting us with images of strength, rapidity, and abundance, which their reality dispels. The Jordan here was broader than a torrent: at the end of a rainless autumn flowing gently, in a bed about a hundred feet wide. The sheet of water, two or three feet deep, was clear, limpid, transparent, allowing me to count the pebbles in its bed, while its colour was one of those beautiful hues that renders all the deep shades of an Asian firmament — bluer even than the sky, like an image more beautiful than the object, like a mirror that tints what it reflects.

Twenty or thirty paces from its waters, the sandy beach, which is currently dry, is strewn with loose stones, rushes, and a few clumps of oleander still in bloom. This beach is at a depth of five to six feet below the level of the plain and testifies to the river's flow during a normal season of high water, at which time, in my opinion, the river must be eight to ten feet deep, and a hundred to a hundred and twenty feet wide. The beach is narrower, and lower in the plain; but there the river is more entrenched and deeper, and the place where we contemplated it is one of only four fords along its entire course. I drank the Jordan's water from the hollow of my hand; as so many

divine poets had drunk before me, like to the water that flowed over the innocent head of the Divine Victim! I found it perfectly sweet, pleasantly flavoured, and of great clarity. The habit one acquires on journeys to the East of drinking only water, and drinking often, makes the palate an excellent judge of the qualities of a new source. The water of the Jordan lacked only one quality: coolness. It was lukewarm; and though my lips and hands were hot from an eleven-hour ride, without shade, under a scorching sun, my hands, lips, and forehead felt a sensation of warmth on touching the river's water.

Like all travellers who, after much hardship, distance, and peril, visit this once-regal river in its desolate state, I filled a few bottles with its water to take to friends less fortunate than myself, and filled the holsters of my pistols with pebbles I gathered from its banks. If only I could also bear away a little of that holy and prophetic inspiration with which it once nourished the bards of its sacred shores, and above all, a little of that holiness, and purity of mind and heart, which it doubtless acquired by bathing the purest and holiest of the children of men! Then I remounted my horse. I circled some of the ruined pillars that supported the bridge or former aqueduct I mentioned earlier: I saw nothing but the decayed masonry common to all Roman constructions of that era; no marble, carving, or inscription, no arch remained, but ten pillars were still standing, and the foundations of four or five others could be distinguished; each arch would have been about ten feet wide, which agrees fairly well with the breadth of one hundred and twenty feet that I thought, by sight, to attribute to the Jordan at full flow.

However, what I have written here with regard to the width and depth of the Jordan is intended only to satisfy the curiosity of those who like to obtain just and accurate measurements of the image they carry in their minds, not to lend weapons to the enemies or defenders of the Christian faith — pitiful weapons on both sides. What does it matter whether the Jordan is a torrent or a river? Whether Judea is a heap of barren rocks or a delightful garden? Whether such a mountain is merely a hill, or such and such a kingdom was merely a province? People who argue and fight over such questions are as foolish as those who believe they have overturned a two-thousand-year-old belief after laboriously seeking to refute the Bible, and ridicule the prophecies. Would not one think, witnessing these mighty battles over a single word, misunderstood or misinterpreted by both sides, that religions are no more than exercises in geometry to be proven by rote or destroyed by argument; and that generations of believers and unbelievers have merely awaited the conclusion of the debate, to side, at once, with the superior logician or the most learned and ingenious antiquarian? These are sterile disputes that neither seduce nor convert anyone! Religions are not proven, demonstrated, established, or destroyed by logic: of all the mysteries of Nature and the human mind, they are the most mysterious and inexplicable; their bases are instinctual, not rational. Like the winds that blow from the east or the west, but whose cause and origin no one knows, they blow, God alone knows from where, God alone knows why, and God alone knows for how many centuries, over the countries of the Earth! They exist because they exist; one does not adopt them or discard them at will, on the word of this or that writer; they are part of the very heart, even more than of the mind. Who declares themselves a Christian or not because they have found such and such a peremptory answer in some book, or an undeniable objection in another? Every sensible person who is asked to account for their faith will answer: 'I am a Christian because the fibres of my heart are Christian, because my mother suckled me with Christian milk, because the sympathies of my soul and my mind support this doctrine, because I live by the spirit of my own day, regardless of what the future may bring.'

We could see two villages clinging to the steep banks of the Sea of Galilee — one a quarter of an hour's walk away, opposite us, on the other side of the Jordan; the other a thousand yards to our left, on the same bank of the river. We were ignorant as to which Arab tribes inhabited these villages, and had been warned to be on our guard for fear of surprise attack from the Jordanian Arabs, who rarely allow anyone to cross their plains and river with impunity. We were well-mounted and well-armed; and the rapid and unexpected conquest of Syria by Muhammad Ali had so struck all the Arabs, and imbued them with a dazed sense of fear and astonishment, that the moment was well chosen to attempt a bold foray into their territory: they knew not who we were, or why we marched with such confidence among them; and they might naturally assume that we were being closely followed by forces superior to those they could deploy against us. Their fear of reprisal, of swift revenge, thus ensured our safety on the road.

With this in mind, we boldly set up camp in the very heart of the last Arab village I mentioned; I know not its name: it is built (if one can call shapeless blocks of stone and mud buildings) on the very edge of the high shore overlooking the Sea of Galilee. While our Arabs pitched our tents, I descended the steep slope that leads to the lake; its water lapped at the shore in a murmur, and its edge was fringed with a light foam that vanished and reformed with each return of the swiftly moving waves, like those of a calm, deep sea, that come to rest on the sand at the end of a narrow gulf. I barely had time to bathe in its waters, the scene of so many events in that great still-modern moral poem of the Gospels, and to gather a few handfuls of shells for my friends in Europe. The sun had already set behind the high, black volcanic peaks of the Tiberias plateau, and some Arabs who had seen me descend alone and were wandering on the shore might have been tempted, potentially, by the opportunity. My rifle in hand, I ascended straight towards them. They looked at me and saluted, placing their hands on their hearts. I returned to the tents. We lay down on our mats, overcome with weariness, but with our hands on our weapons, ready to take a stand at the first alarm. Nothing, however, disturbed the silence, and peace of that lovely night, where we were lulled only by the soft, caressing sound of the waves of the sea of Jesus Christ lapping against the shore; by the wind that blew in harmonious gusts between the taut ropes of our tents; and by the pious thoughts and sacred memories that each of those sounds awakened within us.

Next day, at dawn, when we emerged from our tents, ready to visit and bathe again in the lake, we saw only the Arab women, combing their long black hair on the terraces of their cottages, a few shepherds busy milking cows and goats on our behalf, and the naked children of the village who played familiarly with our horses and dogs: a rooster crowed, a child cried whom its mother cradled in her arms, or breastfed, as in some peaceful hamlet in France or Switzerland. We congratulated ourselves on having risked a journey into such a feared and little-known part of Galilee, and had no doubt that the same peaceful welcome would have awaited us further on, if we wished to venture into Arabia: we had every means of safely crossing Samaria, and the land of Nablus, the ancient Shechem, through Monsieur Antoine Catafago (*the French consular agent*), who is all-powerful in this region, and who offered to have the journey endorsed by his many Arab friends, and our caravan accompanied by his own brother. Personal concerns obliged me to abandon this route, however, and return to the original one via Nazareth and Mount Carmel, where I hoped to find express messages and letters from Beirut.

We, therefore, remounted our horses, preparing to ride along the sacred shore of the beautiful Sea of Galilee, all the way to its northern end. The caravan departed silently from the village in

which we had slept and moved off along the western shore of the lake, a few steps from the water, over a beach of sand and pebbles, dotted here and there with clumps of oleander, and shrubs with light, serrated leaves bearing a flower similar to a lilac (*Vitus agnus-castus, the Arabian lilac*). To our left, a chain of steep, black, barren hills, furrowed with deep ravines and dotted here and there with immense, scattered volcanic stones, stretched along the entire shoreline we were about to traverse and, jutting out like a dark, bare promontory almost in the middle, concealed from us the city of Tiberias, and the end of the lake on the Lebanese side.

None of us raised a voice; all our thoughts were intimate, hurried, and profound, so loudly did sacred memories speak in the soul of each of us. As for myself, never has any place on earth spoken to my heart more strongly and exquisitely. I have always loved to explore the physical landscape of places inhabited by people I know or know of, whom I admire, love, or revere, among the living as well as the dead. The country a great person inhabited and cherished during their time on Earth has always seemed to me the surest and most eloquent testament to themself; a sort of material manifestation of their genius, a silent revelation of a part of their soul, a living and sensitive commentary on their life, actions, and thoughts. As a young man, I spent solitary and contemplative hours lying beneath the olive trees that shade Horace's gardens, overlooking the dazzling cascades of Tibur (*Tivoli; the estate and ruined villa near Licenza, partly incorporated in the former monastery of Sant' Antonio, has been attributed to Horace*); I often lay there in the evening, listening to the sound of the beautiful sea of Naples, beneath the drooping branches of the vines, near the place where Virgil wished his ashes to rest, because it was the most beautiful and serene spot on which his gaze had fallen. How many mornings and evenings did I later spend sitting at the foot of some beautiful chestnut tree, in that little valley of Les Charmettes (*near Chambéry*) to which the memory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau drew me, holding me there through my sympathy with his impressions, reveries, misfortunes, and genius! So, it has been with several other great writers or individuals whose name or writings resonated deeply within me. I wished to study them, to know them in the places that had given birth to, or inspired, them; for almost always an intelligent gaze reveals the secret and profound analogy between the homeland and the person, between the stage and the actor, between Nature and the genius that was formed and inspired by her. But it was no longer a great person or a great poet whose favourite abode I was visiting here; it was that of the one among many, the divine man, Nature and genius and virtue made flesh, divinity incarnate, whose traces I sought to adore on the very shore where he left the greatest imprint, on the very waves that carried him, on the hills where he sat, on the stones where he rested his head. He saw, with mortal eyes, this sea, these waves, these hills, these stones; or rather this sea, these waves, hills and stones witnessed his presence; he had trodden a hundred times this path over which I passed respectfully; his feet had raised the dust which flew from beneath mine: during the three years of his divine mission, he went back and forth constantly from Nazareth to Tiberias, from Jerusalem to Tiberias; he voyaged in the boats of the local fishermen over the Sea of Galilee, he calmed its storms; he rode the waves giving his hand to the apostle of little faith like me, a heavenly hand which I, more than that apostle, need amidst storms of opinion and thoughts more terrible!

Grand and mysterious scenes of the Gospel were enacted on and around this lake, and on the mountains that surround and overlook it. Here is Capernaum, where he chose his disciples from among the lowliest of men, to bear witness that the power of his doctrine lies in the doctrine itself, and not in its powerless organs. Here is Tiberias, where he appeared to Saint Peter and established in a few words the eternal hierarchy of his Church; here is the mountain (*the Mount of Beatitudes,*

*near Capernaum*) on whose slopes he delivered the beautiful Sermon on the Mount, pronouncing the new Beatitudes according to God; here is the place where he cried out: *'Misereor super turbam*'! (*'I feel compassion for the people!'*) and multiplied the number of loaves and fishes, just as his word gives birth to and amplifies the life of the soul; here is the gulf in which the miraculous catch of fish was made; here is, finally, the whole of the Gospels, with their touching parables, and their tender and delightful images which appear before one as they appeared to the listeners of the divine Master, when he pointed to the lamb, the sheepfold, the good shepherd, and the lilies of the valley. Here, finally, is the place that Christ preferred on this earth, the one he chose as the background to his mysterious drama; where, during his obscure early life of thirty years, he acknowledged his parents, and his friends according to the flesh; the place where Nature, to which he possessed the key, appeared to him in its most charming aspect; these were the mountains where he watched, as I have, the rising and setting of that sun which measured out his mortal days so swiftly; it was here that he came to rest, meditate, pray, and display his love of human beings, and of God.

*October 15, 1832.*

The Sea of Galilee, about three miles wide at the southern end, where we approached its shore, first widened, imperceptibly, up to the promontory which hid the town of Tiberias from us; there the mountains, which had confined it until then, opened out, suddenly, on either side of its wide northern expanse, a vast, almost circular basin, of about twenty miles or so in circumference.

This basin is not regular in its shape; the mountains do not extend to its waters everywhere: occasionally they recede some distance from the shore, leaving between themselves and the shore a small, low-lying plain, fertile and green like the plain of Gennesaret (*Kinneret, Tel Kinrot or Tell el-'Oreimeh*); sometimes they are cleft. and open to allow the blue waters to flow into gulfs carved at their feet, and darkened by their shadows. The hand of the most graceful painter could not draw more rounded, softer, and varied contours than those that the Creator's hand has given to these waters and mountains; seemingly preparing, long ago, the landscape of the Gospels for the work of grace, peace, reconciliation, and love that was to be accomplished there!

To the east, the mountains seem to form, from the peak of Mount Gilboa, glimpsed to the south, to the peaks of Mount Lebanon, visible to the north, a close-knit but undulating and flexible chain, whose dark links seem from time to time ready to loosen, and even break, here and there, to admit a stretch of sky. These mountains do not terminate at their summits in those sharp teeth, those storm-honed rocks that present blunt points to the lightning-strokes and winds, and always grant the aspect of lofty ranges an ancient, dreadful, and ruined air, which saddens the heart while elevating the mind. Instead, they gradually diminish to hillocks, more or less broad, more or less steep, some covered with a few scattered oaks; others with verdant scrub growing in a bare but fertile soil still showing the marks of varied cultivation; and still others coloured, by the evening or morning light that glides over their surface, a pale yellow, or a blue and violet hue richer than the artist's brush can capture.

Their flanks, though lacking true valleys, nevertheless do not present themselves as continuous ramparts; they are hollowed out, at intervals, by deep and wide ravines, as if the mountainside had collapsed under its own weight; while the natural interplay of light and shadow renders these ravines as luminous, or more often dark, patches that attract the eye and break the uniformity of contour and colour. Lower down, they slump upon themselves, and project here and there, in the

form of rounded hillocks or mounds, into the lake: a gentle and graceful transition between the summits and the waters that reflect them. Almost nowhere, on the eastern side, does the underlying rock pierce the layer of vegetation with which it is richly covered; and this Arcadia of Judea thus always combines, with the majesty and gravity of mountainous regions, an aspect of the varied fertility and abundance of the earth. If only 'the dew of Hermon' were still falling upon its breast (*see Psalm 133*). At the northern end of the lake, the mountain range slopes downward as it diminishes; one can make out from afar a plain that fades amidst the waters, and, at the edge of this plain, a white mass of foam that seems to roll from on high into the sea. It is the Jordan River, rushing from there into the lake, which it crosses without mingling with the latter's waters, to emerge calm, silent, and pure, at the place which I have described.

This entire northernmost stretch of the Sea of Galilee is bordered by a fringe of fields that appear cultivated; one can make out the yellowing stubble of the last harvest, and vast fields of rushes that the Arabs cultivate wherever there is a spring to water the roots. On the western side are the chains of volcanic mounds we had been following since daybreak. They stretch uniformly all the way to Tiberias. Avalanches of black stones, spewed forth from the still-visible mouths of a hundred extinct volcanic cones, constantly cascade down the steep slopes of this sombre and funereal shore. The only variations seen along our route lay in the bizarre shapes and strange colours of the high masses of hardened lava scattered around us, and from the debris of walls, ruined gateways, and fallen columns that our horses encountered at every step. The shores of the Sea of Galilee on this side of Judea were once, so to speak, a single city. The numerous ruins before us, and the multitude of towns, and the magnificence of the buildings that their mutilated fragments attest to, reminded me of the road that runs at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, from Castellammare to Portici. Just as there, the shores of the Sea of Galilee seemed to bear towns instead of crops and trees.

## Tiberias

After a two-hour ride, we reached the end of a promontory jutting out into the lake; and the city of Tiberias suddenly appeared before us, a living, shining apparition of the city of two thousand years ago. It covers the slope of a bare, black hill that drops steeply toward the lake, and is surrounded by a high, square wall, flanked by a score of crenellated towers. Only the tips of two white minarets rose above the walls and towers, while the rest of the city seems to hide from Arab eyes, behind those high walls, presenting to the view only its low vault of uniform grey roofs, and resembling the indented shell of a tortoise.



'Tiberias, from the Walls, Safet in the Distance' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We halted at the Turkish mineral baths of Hammath Tiberias. There is an isolated dome, surrounded by the superb ruins of the previous Roman or Hebrew baths. We settled ourselves in the bathhouse itself, a basin filled with running water, at a temperature of a hundred degrees Fahrenheit. I took a bath, then slept for an hour. I remounted. There was a storm on the lake, something which I had longed to see. The water was as green as the leaves of the rushes that surround it. The foam was livid and dazzling, the waves quite high and racing swiftly. They made a loud noise as they flowed across the volcanic pebbles, but there were no boats in distress, or in sight. There was not a single one on the lake. We entered Tiberias during a midday storm and rain, and I took refuge in the Latin church. It seems I had brought lightning to illuminate the deserted church, the first church of Christianity.



'City of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, Looking towards Hebron' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

Tiberias is not worth even a quick glance, even in its interior; a confused and muddy jumble of a few hundred houses, resembling Arab huts of mud and straw. We were greeted, in Italian and German, by several Polish or German Jews who, at the end of their lives, when they have nothing left to await but the uncertain hour of their death, come to spend their last moments in Tiberias, on the shores of this sea, at the very heart of the beloved land, to die beneath the light of its sun, and be buried in its soil, like Abraham and Jacob. The wish to sleep beside the graves of one's ancestors is ever a testament to the inextinguishable love of homeland. It is futile to deny it; there is a sympathy, an affinity between a person and the earth from which he or she was formed, and from which he or she sprang. It is good, it is sweet to return to its place the little heap of dust that was borrowed from it for a few brief years. Grant that I too may sleep, O Lord, in the earth, and amidst the dust, of my fathers!



'Town of Tiberias Looking Towards Lebanon' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

Nine hours of riding, without rest, brought us back to Nazareth via Cana (*Kafr Kanna*), the site of the Saviour's first miracle. The pretty Turkish village rests, gracefully, on the slopes on either side of a basin of fertile soil, surrounded by hills covered with prickly-pear cacti, oaks, and olive trees. Pomegranate trees, three palm trees, and fig trees stood around it. Women and flocks surrounded the troughs of the fountain. The house of Saint Bartholomew, the Apostle, is in the village. Next to it, is the house where the miracle of the water turned into wine took place (*see John 2.1-11*): it is in ruins and roofless. The monks still show the jars that contained the wine of the miracle, a piece of monastic embroidery like those that mar, everywhere, the simple and rich fabric of religious tradition.

After resting and refreshing ourselves for a while by the fountain of Cana, we set off again, in clear moonlight, towards Nazareth. We traversed some fairly well-cultivated plains, then a series of wooded hills that rose as they approached Nazareth. After a three and a half hours' ride, we arrived at the gates of the Latin monastery, where we were once again welcomed.



'Fountain at Cana' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

When I woke, I was surprised to hear a voice greeting me in Italian: it was that of the former French Vice-Consul at Acre, Antoine Catafago, a well-known and influential figure throughout Syria, where his role as an agent for the Europeans, his friendship with Abdullah, the Pasha of Acre, his trading network, and his wealth had made him famous and powerful. He was still the Austrian consul in Acre. His attire reflected his dual nature as both Arab and European. He was dressed in a red pelisse lined with ermine and wore an enormous three-cornered hat, a distinctive mark of French agents in the East. This hat dated back to the time of the Egyptian War; it was the religiously preserved garb of some brigadier-general of Bonaparte's army. It was only worn on official occasions, in audiences with the Pasha, or when a European passed through the country. It was as if one were showing his household gods to him. Monsieur Catafago was small and elderly, with the strong, piercing, and spirited features of the Arabs; his eyes, full of fire tempered by kindness and politeness, illuminated his face with a ray of superior intelligence. One could understand, at first glance, the influence such a man must have had over Arabs and Turks, who generally lack the principle of activity which sparkled in his eyes and was betrayed in Monsieur Catafago's movements and gestures.

He held a packet of letters for me in his hand, which he had just received from the coast of Syria by a courier in the service of Ibrahim Pasha, and a series of French newspapers which he receives directly. He had rightly thought that a French traveller would be surprised and delighted to find, in the middle of the desert, two thousand miles and more from his homeland, fresh news from Europe. I read the letters, which were full of concern for Julia's health. Monsieur Catafago departed, after inviting me to lunch in a pavilion he had built in Nazareth, where he spent the sweltering summer days alone; and I opened the newspapers. My own name was the first thing to catch my eye: it was a serialised article in the *Journal des Débats*, quoting verses I had sent to Sir

Walter Scott upon leaving France (*Scott had died the previous month*). I re-read the stanzas, whose sad and anxious tenor suited the scene to which chance had sent them; a scene of the greatest revolution of the human spirit, a scene where the spirit of God had so powerfully stirred men, and from which the idea of Christian renewal had taken flight, over the world, just as an idea, still a daughter of Christianity, had stirred the other shore of that sea from which my words had returned to me.

'Spectateur fatigué du grand spectacle humain,

Tu nous laisses pourtant dans un rude chemin;' etc.

'Weary spectator of the great human spectacle,

You leave us, still, on a harsh and rugged path;' etc.

I reread the verses as if they were by someone else, so completely had I erased them from memory. I was struck anew by the feeling that had inspired them elsewhere; a sense of the general instability of things, of vertigo, the universal dazedness of the human mind, which runs on too fast even to realise its own progress, but which ever possesses an instinct for some new, unknown goal, to which God leads it by the harsh, precipitous path of social upheaval. I also admired the marvellous power of those carriers of human ideas, journalism and the press, by which a thought that had come to me six months earlier, in a wood near Saint-Point, had returned to me like a daughter seeking her father, and mingled the sounds of a young, and already universal, language with ancient echoes from the stones of Nazareth.

*October 20, 1832.*

I lunched at Monsieur Catafago's pavilion, along with one of his brothers and a few Arabs. I then explored the area around Nazareth once more; and visited the rock in the mountain where, according to tradition, Jesus used to take meals with his first disciples. Monsieur Catafago entrusted me with letters for Acre, and for the *mültazim* (*the Ottoman tax-collector*) in Jerusalem.

*October 21, 1832.*

At six in the morning, we left Nazareth. All the Spanish and Italian friars of the monastery, gathered in the courtyard, crowding around our horses; some, offering good wishes and prayers for our journey, others, fresh provisions, excellent bread baked overnight, olives, and chocolate from Spain. I gave five hundred piastres to the superior to reward his hospitality. This did not prevent some of the young Spanish friars from whispering their requests in my ear, and furtively receiving a few handfuls of piastres to buy tobacco and other small monastic treats to distract them in their solitude. Travellers have painted a false and romanticised picture of these monasteries of the Holy Land. Nothing is less poetic or less religious, seen close-to. The underlying thought is grand and beautiful. Men tear themselves from the delights of Western civilisation to risk their very existence, or at least lead a life of deprivation and martyrdom, among the persecutors of their faith, in the very places where the mysteries of that religion have consecrated the land.

They fast, they keep vigil, they pray, amidst the blasphemous Turks and Arabs, so that a little Christian incense may still burn on every site where Christianity was born. They are the guardians of the sacred cradle and tomb; the Angel of Judgment will discover them alone there, like those holy women who kept watch and wept near the empty sepulchre. All this is, as I say, beautiful and grand in concept; but in reality, almost all of its grandeur must be tempered.

There is no persecution now, no martyrdom; all around these hospices, a Christian population is at the service and command of the monks in these monasteries. The Turks do not trouble them in the slightest; on the contrary, they protect them. They are a people who understand worship and prayer, in whatever language or form it is presented to them. They hate only atheism, and rightly so in my opinion, which they consider a degradation of human intelligence, a far greater insult to humanity itself than to God. These monasteries are, moreover, under the dreaded and inviolable protection of the Christian powers, represented by their consuls. Given a complaint from a superior, the Consul writes to the Pasha, and justice is served at once.

The monks I saw in the Holy Land, far from presenting the image of the endless martyrdom they are often portrayed as undergoing, seemed to me the happiest, most respected, and most feared inhabitants of those regions. They occupy fortified castles, similar to our old medieval fortresses; these dwellings are inviolable, surrounded by walls and closed by iron gates. The gates are opened only for the Catholic population of the surrounding area who attend services, receive a little pious instruction, and pay, out of respect for and devotion to, the monks, the communities' expenses. I have never walked, accompanied by one of the Fathers, through the streets of any Syrian city, without children and women coming to bow before the priest, while kissing his hand or the hem of his robe. Even the Turks, far from insulting them, seemed to share the respect they inspired in passing.

Who then are these monks? Generally, they are commoners from Spain and Italy, who entered a monastery in their homeland at a young age and, growing weary of monastic life, wished to vary it, by experiencing a new country at least, and so asked to be sent to the Holy Land. Their residence in the houses of their Order in the East usually lasts two or three years only. A vessel is sent to collect them, and returns with others. Those who learn Arabic and dedicate themselves to serving the Catholic population of the towns stay longer, often spending their entire lives here. Their occupation and life are that of our country priests; but they are shown greater veneration and devotion. Others remain confined within the monastery walls or, by way of pilgrimage, move from one house to another, sometimes spending time in Nazareth, or Bethlehem, or in Rome, or Jaffa, or the Monastery of Saint John in the Desert (*referring to John the Baptist; the monastery is near Ein Karem*). Their only occupations are church services, and walks in the gardens or on the monastery terraces. No books, no studies, no useful function. They are consumed by ennui; intrigues form within the monastery; the Spaniards speak ill of the Italians, the Italians of the Spaniards. We were little edified by the remarks made about one another by the monks of Nazareth. We found not one who could even hold a reasonable conversation on subjects that their vocation should have made most familiar to them. They had no knowledge of sacred antiquity, of the Fathers of the Church, or of the history of the places they inhabited. Everything has been reduced to various popular and ridiculous traditions that they pass on without examination, and which they repeat to travellers just as they have received them from the ignorant and credulous Christianised Arabs

local to them. They all long for the moment of their liberation and their return to Italy or Spain, and their sojourn here is of little benefit to themselves or the religion.

However, the monastery granaries are well-stocked; their cellars contain the finest wines this land produces, which they alone have the knowledge to create. Every two years, a ship arrives from Spain, bringing to the abbot the funds sent them by the Catholic powers — Spain, Portugal, and Italy. This sum, augmented by the pious alms of Christians in Egypt, Greece, Constantinople, and Syria, reportedly provides them with an annual income of three to four hundred thousand francs. This is divided among the various monasteries, according to the number of monks and the needs of each community. The buildings are well-maintained, and everything indicates comfort and even relative wealth in the houses I visited. I heard nothing scandalous concerning these monks housed in the Holy Land. Ignorance, idleness, boredom — these are the three plagues afflicting them that need to be, and could be, cured.

These men struck me as simple, and sincere, but fanatical and credulous. Some, even, in Nazareth, seemed to me like true saints, animated by the most ardent faith and the most active charity; humble, gentle, patient, willing servants of their brothers and strangers alike. I carry their faces full of peace and candour in my memory, and their hospitable deeds in my heart. I could name them; but what matters it to them whether or not their names travel the earth, provided that heaven knows them, even though their virtues remain buried in the shadows of the cloister where they take pleasure in hiding them?

*Same date, October 21st.*

## Mount Carmel

After leaving Nazareth, we skirted a mountain covered in fig trees and prickly-pear cactus. To the left a green, shady valley opened; a pretty country house, reminiscent of our European homes, sat alone on one of its slopes. It belongs to an Arab merchant from Acre. Europeans are in no danger in the vicinity of Nazareth; the population is almost entirely Christian, and at their service. After a two-hour ride, we reached a series of small valleys winding gracefully between hillocks covered in beautiful kerm-oak forests. These forests separate the plain from Haifa, and from Nazareth and the desert of Mount Tabor. Mount Carmel, a high mountain range that rises from the Jordan River and plunges steeply to the sea, began to take shape on our left. Its dark green line was highlighted against a deep blue sky, shimmering with hot vapour, like steam rising from a furnace. Its rugged slopes are covered with lush, robust vegetation. Everywhere there is a thicket of shrubs, here and there crowned by the slender crowns of oaks; grey rocks, sculpted by Nature into bizarre and colossal shapes, occasionally pierce this greenery and reflect the brilliant rays of the sun.

This was the view that stretched as far as the eye could see to our left; at our feet, the valleys we were following descended in gentle slopes and began to open onto the beautiful plain of Haifa. We climbed the last hillocks that separated us from it, and lost sight of it only for a moment before it was again visible. These hillocks, between Palestine and coastal Syria, provide one of the most serene and solemn landscapes I have ever beheld. Here and there, oak forests, left to their own devices, form vast clearings, covered with grass as velvety as in our western meadows; behind us, the summit of Mount Tabor rose like a majestic altar crowned with green garlands against a fiery

sky; further on, the blue peaks of the Gilboa Mountains and the hills of Samaria trembled on the vague horizon.



'Distant view of Sebaste, Ancient Samaria (1839)' – David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Artvee*

The Carmelite monastery cast its dark, heavily pleated curtain across one side of the stage, and the gaze, following its lines, reached the sea, which terminated everything, like the sky in beautiful landscape paintings. How many sites have I not chosen in my mind, on which, to build a house there, an agricultural fortress, and to found a colony with some friends from Europe, and a few hundred of those young people disinherited from any future in our overcrowded lands! The beauty of the place, the beauty of the sky, the prodigious fertility of the soil, the variety of produce that can be won from the land; the ease of obtaining workers at low cost; the proximity of two immense, fertile, irrigated and uncultivated plains, and of the sea for the export of goods; with defences that could easily be constructed against the Arabs of the Jordan valley, by erecting light fortifications at the exit of the gorges of these hills: all this made me choose this part of Syria for the agricultural and civilising enterprise that I intend to undertake (*Lamartine purchased land in 1849 but, unable to raise sufficient further capital for the venture rented it back to the Porte in 1852*).

*Same date, October 21st, in the evening.*

At midday we were caught in a storm. I have rarely seen one so dreadful. The clouds rose vertically, like towers, above Mount Carmel; soon they covered the entire long ridge of that mountain range. Mount Carmel, moments before so serene and radiant, was gradually plunged into rolling waves of darkness, split here and there by streaks of fiery light. The entire horizon seemed to draw nearer and narrow around us, in a moment. The thunder was unbroken despite the lightning; it sounded as a single, majestic, continuous, and deafening roll, like the sound of

waves crashing on the seashore during a fierce tempest. The lightning cascaded, in torrents of fire from the sky, upon the dark slopes of Mount Carmel; the oaks on its flanks and on the hills below, on one of which we had halted, bent like reeds; the wind, rushing from the gorges and clefts, would have knocked us over, had we not dismounted and taken shelter behind a rock, amidst the dry bed of a stream. Dry leaves, lifted by the storm, rolled over our heads in clouds, and branches from the trees rained down around us. I remembered the Bible and the wonders of Elijah, that prophet of extermination on his mountain: his cave was not far away (*see 1 Kings 18–19; the best-known Cave of Elijah, el-Khader, is on Mount Carmel, on Haifa's Allenby Road*).

The storm lasted a mere half-hour. We drank the rainwater that had collected in our horses' felt blankets. We rested for a few moments, at a point roughly halfway from Nazareth to Haifa, and then resumed our journey along the foot of Mount Carmel; the mountain on our left, a vast plain with a river on our right. Carmel, which we followed in this way for about four hours, presented the same austere and solemn aspect everywhere. It is a gigantic, almost sheer wall, covered everywhere with a layer of shrubs and fragrant herbs. Nowhere is the rock bare; some fragments, detached from the mountain, have slid down onto the plain. They are like citadels. Naturally formed hills provide a base and shelter for villages of Arab farmers. We encountered only one of these villages, about two hours before catching sight of the town of Haifa. The houses were low, windowless, and protected by earthworks from the rain. Above, the Arabs raise a second, verdant tier, of foliage supported by tree trunks, which they inhabit during the summer. These terraces were covered with men and women who watched us pass and shouted insults at us. The appearance of these people is fierce; yet none of them dared descend from the hill to insult us more directly.

## Haifa (Khaifa)

At seven o'clock, we were approaching Haifa, whose domes, minarets, and white walls, as in all the cities of the Orient, form a bright and cheerful aspect from a distance. Haifa rises at the foot of Mount Carmel, from a white sandy beach, by the sea. This city forms the end of an arc, of which Acre marks the other end. A gulf nine miles wide or so separates them: this gulf presents one of the most delightful shorelines on which the eyes of sailors can rest. Acre, its fortifications damaged by the cannons of Ibrahim Pasha and Napoleon, displaying the openwork dome of its beautiful ruined mosque, and with sailing vessels entering and leaving its port, drew the eye to one of the most important and illustrious fields of war: at the rear of the gulf, lay a vast cultivated plain; Mount Carmel casting its great shadow over this plain; then Haifa, like a sister city to Acre, embracing the other side of the gulf, and advancing its small pier into the sea, where a few Arab brigs bobbed in the breeze; and above Haifa, a forest of large olive trees; finally, higher still, a path carved into the rock, leading to the summit of Cape Carmel. There, two vast buildings crowned the mountain: one, the pleasure house of Abdullah, Pasha of Acre; the other, the Carmelite monastery, recently built with Christian alms and surmounted by a large tricolour flag, announcing to us its sanctuary and the protection of the French; a little below the monastery, immense caverns are carved into the granite of the mountain: these are the famous caves of the prophet Elijah. This was the landscape that struck us as we entered the narrow, dusty streets of Haifa. The astonished inhabitants watched our long caravan pass by with dread. We knew no one; we had no lodging, no offer of hospitality to accept.



'Caiaphas Looking Towards Mount Carmel' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

By chance, we met a young Piedmontese man who had been serving as vice-consul in Haifa since the capture and fall of Acre. Giovanni Bianco, the Sardinian consul in Syria, had written to him without our knowledge, asking him to take us in should we happen to pass through Haifa. He approached us, inquired about our names, and led us to the door of the small, dilapidated house where he lived with his mother and two younger sisters. We left our Arabs to camp on the seashore, with the horses, near the town and entered the home of Paolo Malagamba: that was the name of the young and amiable vice-consul, the only European remaining amidst this desolate battlefield since the complete destruction of Acre by Ibrahim's Egyptians.

A small courtyard and a wooden staircase led to a small terrace covered with palm leaves; behind this terrace, were two bare rooms surrounded only by a divan, the only indispensable piece of furniture for rich and poor alike in all the Orient; a few flower pots, on the terrace; an aviary populated with pretty grey doves, fed by Monsieur Malagamba's sisters; shelves around the walls, on which were arranged, in order, cups, pipes, liqueur glasses, silver cassolettes for perfumes, and wooden crucifixes inlaid with mother-of-pearl and made in Bethlehem: this was all the furniture in this poor house, where a neglected family represents, for a salary of a thousand piastres (about three hundred francs), one of the powers that be of Europe.

Madame Malagamba, the mother, received us with the customary ceremonies of the country. She presented us with perfumes, and scented waters; and we had scarcely sat down on the divan, wiping the sweat from our brows, when her daughters, two celestial apparitions, emerged from the next room and presented us with orange-blossom water and preserves, on trays of Chinese porcelain. Such is the power of beauty over the soul that, though parched with thirst, and weary from a twelve-hour ride, we would have remained in silent contemplation before these two young girls without raising a glass to our lips, had not the mother urged us with her insistence to accept

what her daughters offered. The whole Orient was there, just as I had dreamed of it in my youth, my mind filled with the enchanting images created by its storytellers and poets. One of the young girls was but a child; she was merely the graceful accompaniment to her sister, like those images that are simply reflections of another form. After offering us, with all the care imaginable, the simplest and most poetic services hospitality can provide, they also came to take their place, next to their mother, on the divan opposite us.

Such is the image I wished to capture in words, to preserve it in these notes as I see it in my mind; but though we possess within us the capacity to perceive beauty in all its nuances, all its delicacy, all its mysteries, yet we have only that vague and abstract word to describe the reality. Here is where painting triumphs: it can render with a few strokes, and preserve for centuries the ravishing impression of a woman's face, of which the poet can only say: '*She was beautiful*'. We must accept the poet's words; but they fail to capture the form.

The elder sister was seated on a rug, her legs folded beneath her, her elbow resting on her mother's knee, her face slightly tilted backwards. Sometimes she raised her blue eyes to express to her mother her naive astonishment at our appearance and our words, sometimes she looked back at us with graceful curiosity, then involuntarily lowered her eyes and hid them beneath her long, dark lashes, while a new blush coloured her cheeks, or a faint, barely suppressed smile touched her lips. Our unusual attire was new to her, and the strangeness of our customs caused her ever-renewed astonishment. Her mother gestured in vain for her to stifle her surprise, for fear of offending us: the simplicity and naiveté of her impressions shone, despite herself, on that sixteen-year-old face, and her soul was reflected in every expression of her features, rendered with such grace, with such transparency, that one could see the thought behind her expression before she herself was conscious of it. The play of sunlight, gliding through the shadows on limpid water, is less fluid and less transparent than that face. We could not tear our eyes away from it, and we were already soothed by the mere sight of it, which none of us will ever forget.

Mademoiselle Malagamba possesses the sort of beauty which can scarcely be found except in the Orient, when a perfect form, as in a Greek statue, the soul revealed in the gaze, as in the peoples of the South, and a simplicity of expression, as it exists only among primitive peoples; those three conditions of beauty are fulfilled by a single female figure, and harmonise in the face of a girl in the first flower of adolescence; when dreamy and wandering thought in the gaze gently illuminates, with moist rays, eyes that allow themselves to be read to the very soul's depths, because innocence suspects nothing from which it need veil itself; when the delicacy of the contours, the virginal purity of the lines, the elegance and suppleness of the form, reveal to the eye the voluptuous sensitivity of a being born to love, and so enchant the soul and the senses together that, while looking, one cannot tell whether one is feeling or admiring: then beauty is complete, and one experiences, in viewing it, that complete satisfaction of the senses and the heart, that harmony of enjoyment which is not what we usually term love, but which is what the intellect knows, and artistic genius captures, the love felt for a perfect work. One says to oneself: 'It is good.' and cannot tear oneself away from the place where one has just seated oneself with indifference, so much is beauty the light of the mind, and an invincible attraction for the heart.

Her Oriental costume added even more to her charms: her long, deep-blonde, slightly-golden hair was braided into a thousand plaits that fell over her bare shoulders; a chaotic mix of pearls, strung gold sequins, white flowers, and red blossoms was scattered over that hair, as if a hand,

laden with treasures from a casket, had opened at random above her head and indiscriminately let fall a shower of flowers and jewels. Everything suited her perfectly: nothing could mar that sixteen-year-old face. Her neck was bare, according to the custom of Arabian women; a muslin tunic embroidered with silver flowers was tied with a shawl around her waist; her arms were tucked into the flowing, open-to-the-elbow sleeves of a green cloth jacket, the two tails of which hung freely over her hips; while wide, pleated trousers completed her outfit. And her bare legs were embraced above the ankles by two bracelets of chased silver. One of these bracelets was adorned with small silver bells, whose jingling accompanied the movement of her feet. No poet has ever depicted such a ravishing apparition. Lord Byron's Haidée, in his poem *Don Juan*, possesses something of Mademoiselle Malagamba about her; but she is still far from that perfection of grace, innocence, sweet confusion, voluptuous languor, and radiant serenity, which were all blended in those still-childlike features. I have engraved her in my memory so that I may present her later, as the type of pure beauty and love, in a poem in which I wish to enshrine my impressions.

It would have made a fine subject for a painter, if there had been one among us, this travel scene: our rich and picturesque Turkish costumes; our weapons of every kind, scattered on the floor around us; our greyhounds lying at our feet; those three female figures seated opposite us on an Aleppo rug; their attitudes full of simplicity, exoticism, and abandon; the expressions on their faces as I told them about my travels, or as we compared our European customs with the forms of hospitality they offered us; the perfume censers burning in a corner, scenting the evening air; the antique shapes of the cups in which we were offered sherbet or flavoured drinks: all this at the heart of a dilapidated room, open to the sea, into which the branches of a palm tree, growing in the courtyard, entered through its wide, windowless openings. I regret not being able to convey the memory of this scene to my friends, as I retain it in my mind.

Madame Malagamba, the mother, was Greek, having been born on the island of Cyprus. There, at the age of fourteen, she married Pasquale Malagamba, a wealthy Frankish merchant who was also the consul in Larnaca. Misfortune and revolution overturned Monsieur Malagamba's fortunes; he then sought a minor position as a consular agent in Acre, where he died, leaving his wife and four children in abject and absolute poverty. His son, Paolo, a young man remarkable for his honesty and intelligence, was employed by several consuls and currently holds the position of consular agent for Sardinia in Haifa. It is on the meagre salary provided by this precarious job that he supports his mother and sisters.

Mademoiselle Malagamba's elder sister, whom we did not meet, as beautiful as she whom we so admired, had, we are told, inspired such passion in one of the young monks of the Haifa monastery, who had viewed her, opportunely, from the monastery terrace, that he had fled to an English ship, had embraced the Protestant faith so that he might ask for her hand in marriage, and had tried every means to abduct her by various means. He was still believed at that time to be hiding in some city on the Syrian coast ready to execute his plan; but the Turkish authorities were watching over the safety of this family; and if the monks, who exercise the most arbitrary and inflexible justice over the members of their order, succeed in discovering the fugitive, he will atone, in eternal captivity, for the foolish love that this fatal beauty had kindled in his heart.

Night was falling; we finally had to tear ourselves away from the enchantment of our reception and seek refuge at the monastery of Mount Carmel. Monsieur Malagamba had gone ahead to inform the holy Fathers of the numerous guests arriving. We rose, and were obliged to allow

Madame and Mademoiselle Malagamba to kiss our hands, so as to conform with the custom of the country, and we remounted our horses.

## Mount Carmel Monastery (Stella Maris)

Mount Carmel rises into view, a few minutes' walk from Haifa. We climbed it by a rather beautiful path, carved into the rock at the very tip of the cape. Each step we took revealed a new sight: the sea, the hills of Palestine, and the shores of Idumea. Halfway in our ascent, we met one of the Carmelite Fathers, who for forty years has lived in a small house that serves as a hospice for the poor in the town of Haifa. He ascends and descends the mountain twice a day to pray with his brothers. The gentle expression of serenity of soul, and joy of heart, that shone in all his features struck us. Such expressions of peaceful and unalterable happiness are never found except in those who lead simple, harsh lives and are possessed of a generous amount of resolve. The ladder of happiness is a descending one; one finds far more happiness in the humblest situations of life than in lofty positions. God gives some in inner happiness what He gives to others in splendour, renown, and fortune. I have experienced this many a time. Enter any drawing room, look for the guest whose face radiates the most inner contentment, and ask their name: they will invariably prove to be a stranger, poor and neglected by the world. Providence reveals itself everywhere.

At the gate of the beautiful monastery which now stands, entirely new (*it was finally completed in 1836, the previous building, damaged in 1799, having been razed in 1821*), and dazzlingly white, on the highest point of Cape Carmel, two of the Fathers were awaiting us. They were the only inhabitants of this vast and magnificent cenobitic retreat. We were welcomed by them as fellow countrymen and friends. They provided us with three cells, each furnished with a bed. Each contained a chair and a table also, rare in the East. Our Arabs settled, with the horses, in the vast inner courtyards of the monastery. We were served a supper of fresh fish, with vegetables grown among the mountain rocks. After our hardships, we spent a delightful evening sitting on the wide balconies overlooking the sea and the caves of the prophet Elijah. A serene moon floated on the waves, whose murmur and coolness reached us. We promised ourselves we would spend the following day in this sanctuary to rest our horses and replenish our supplies. We were about to enter a new land, where we would find neither towns nor villages, and rarely any springs of fresh water: we envisaged a five days' stretch of desert travel before us.

*October 22, 1832.*

A day of rest, spent at the monastery of Mount Carmel, and exploring the mountain sites and the caves of Elijah. The principal of these caves, evidently hewn by human hands from the hardest rock, is a chamber of prodigious height; it has no other view than the boundless sea, and the only sound heard is that of the waves continually breaking against the ridge of the cape. Tradition says that this was the school where Elijah taught the mysteries and high poetry. The site was admirably chosen, and the voice of the old prophet, forerunner of countless generations of prophets, must have resounded majestically in the hollowed-out heart of the mountain he traversed, amidst so many wonders, and to which he gave his name (*Mount Carmel is known in Arabic as Jabal Mar Elyas, Mount Saint Elias/Elijah*).

The story of Elijah is one of the most marvellous tales of sacred antiquity: he is the giant of sacred bards. Reading of his life and his terrible acts of vengeance, it seems that this man had a divine lightning-bolt for a soul, and that the element through which he was raised to Heaven was his native element. He is a fine lyrical or epic figure set amidst the ancient mysteries of Jewish civilisation. All in all, the age of the prophets, considered historically, is one of the least intelligible periods in the life of that wandering people. One can, however, glimpse, especially in the time of Elijah, the key to the singular organisation of the line of prophets. They evidently constituted a holy and learned class, always in opposition to the kings; sacred tribunes of the people, rousing or calming them with songs, parables, or threats; forming factions in Israel, as free speech and the press form them among us; fighting one another, first with the blades of their words, then with stoning or the sword; exterminating one another from the face of the earth, as we see Elijah exterminate hundreds; then succumbing themselves in turn, and giving way to other leaders of the people. Never has poetry, properly speaking, played such a great role in the political drama, in the destiny of civilisation. Reason or passion, depending on whether they were false or true prophets, spoke through their mouths, always in an energetic and harmonious language of images. These were not public speakers like those in Athens or Rome; the orator is too human! Here, only hymns and lamentations poured forth: the poet is divine.

What ardent, colourful, delirious flights of the imagination would a similar dominion over the sung word not produce in a like people? Is it any surprise that, apart from the profound religious meaning their poems contain, they provide so accomplished and inimitable a monument full of genius and grace? The poets' prize, then, was society itself. Their inspiration subjugated the people; they led the masses, at will, to crime or heroism; they made guilty kings tremble; they hurled ashes upon their royal brows, or, by awakening patriotism in the hearts of their fellow citizens, allowed them to triumph over their enemies; they reminded those citizens, reduced to exile and slavery, of the hills of Zion and the freedom of the children of God. I am astonished that, among all the great dramas that modern poetry has derived from Jewish history, it has not yet taken as its theme the marvellous drama of the prophets. It is a beautiful song in the history of the world.

*The same date. October 22nd, 1832*

I have just returned from a solitary walk on the fragrant slopes of Mount Carmel. I was seated beneath a strawberry tree, a little above the steep path that climbs towards the summit of the mountain, and ends at the monastery, gazing at the sea that separates me from so many things and so many beings I have known and loved, but which does not separate me from the memory of them. I reviewed my past life, I recalled similar hours spent on so many different shores and with such different thoughts; I wondered if it was truly I myself who was seated there on the isolated summit of Mount Carmel, a few leagues from Arabia and the desert, and, if so, why was I there, where was I going, when would I return, what hand was guiding me, and what was I knowingly, or unknowingly, seeking in my repeated journeys across the world? I struggled to piece together a self from the contrasting and unforeseen phases of my brief existence; but the impressions, only too vivid, lucid, and present, of all the beings I have loved and lost, resounded as one, and with profound anguish, in my heart, proving to me all too clearly that the unity I could not find in my life, was to be found entirely within; and I felt my eyes moisten as I looked back on the past, where

I could see already a half a dozen tombs, in which my happiness had already been buried half a dozen times.

At such times, according to my instinct, when my impressions grew too strong and were about to overwhelm my thoughts, I would raise them with religious fervour toward God, toward the infinite being who receives all, who accepts all, who gives all; and I would pray to Him, I would submit to His ever-beneficent will; I would say to Him: 'All is well, since you have willed it. Here am I one more; continue to guide me in your way and not mine; lead me wherever you wish, and as you wish, provided I may be allowed to feel myself guided by you; provided that you reveal yourself from time to time, in the depths of my night, by one of those rays out of the soul that reveal to us, like a flash of lightning, a fleeting, distant horizon beyond our profound darkness; provided I feel sustained by that immortal hope you left on earth, like a voice from those no longer here; provided I find them again, in you, and they recognise me, and we love each other in the ineffable unity we would form, you, and they, and I! That is enough for me to advance, to walk, to the end, this path that seems endless. But let not the path be too harsh, for feet already wounded!'

I rose, feeling lighter, and began to gather handfuls of fragrant herbs with which all Mount Carmel is perfumed. The Fathers of the monastery produce a kind of tea from them, more fragrant than the mint and sage in our gardens. I was distracted from my thoughts, and my herb-gathering, by the clatter from the hooves of two horses sounding from the polished rocks of the path. Two women, each wrapped from head to toe in a long white sheet, were seated on the creatures; a young man held the bridle of the first animal, and two Arabs walked behind, their heads laden with large baskets of reeds, covered with embroidered muslin napkins. Monsieur Malagamba, his mother, and his sister, were ascending to the monastery to offer me provisions that they had prepared for us during the night, as gifts for the journey. One of the baskets was filled with small loaves of bread, yellow as gold, and of exquisite flavour; a precious commodity in a land where bread is unknown. The other was filled with fruits of all kinds, several bottles of excellent wines from Cyprus and Lebanon, and those countless preserves, which are a delicacy of the Orient. I received the gift gratefully from those charming women, sent the Arabs to take the baskets to the monastery, and sat down to converse for a while on the subject of Madame Malagamba's misfortunes. The place was delightful: we were beneath a trio of large olive trees that shade one of the pools which the spring, that of the prophet Elijah, has carved out, in cascading from rock to rock down a small ravine on Mount Carmel. The Arabs had spread their donkeys' cloths on the grass surrounding the spring; and the two women, who had drawn their long veils over their shoulders, sat on this traveller's couch by the water's edge, in their richest and most splendid attire, forming a group worthy of a painter's eye. I myself was seated opposite them on a ledge of the rock from which the spring fell. Many tears welled in Madame Malagamba's eyes as she recounted to me the days of her prosperity, her descent into misfortune, her present miseries, her flight from Acre, and her maternal concerns about the future of her son and her charming daughters.

Mademoiselle Malagamba sat listening to this story with the quiet insouciance of early youth; she amused herself by arranging the flowers, amidst which she sat, into bouquets. Only, when her mother's voice faltered and tears fell from her eyes, her daughter would put her arm around her mother's neck and wipe away her tears with the silver-embroidered muslin handkerchief she held in her hand. Then, when her mother's smile returned, she would resume her childlike distraction

and begin once again to arrange the flowers of her bouquet. I promised these poor women that I would remember them and their hospitality, so greatly unexpected, upon my return to Europe, and would ask my friends in Turin to seek promotion for Haifa's young consular agent. Hope, though distant and uncertain, returned to Madame Malagamba's heart, and the conversation took a different turn.

We spoke of the customs of the country and the monotony of the lives of Arab women, whose habits, I commented, European women living in Arabia are also obliged to adopt. Yet Mademoiselle Malagamba and her mother had never known any other way of life, and were, on the contrary, astonished by what I told them about Europe. To live for one man, and with a single thought, within the confines of their apartments; to spend the day seated on a divan braiding their hair, gracefully arranging the many jewels with which they adorn themselves; to breathe the fresh mountain or sea air from a terrace, or through the latticework of a barred window; to stroll beneath the orange and pomegranate trees of a small garden; to dream by the edge of a pond enlivened by its murmuring fountain; to attend to the household; to make bread dough, sorbet, and jams with one's own hands; to spend the day, once a week, at the public baths in the company of all the young women of the town; and to sing a few verses of the Arab poets, while accompanying oneself on the guitar: such is the whole of life for women in the Orient. Society does not exist for them; thus, they have none of those artificial self-interested passions that society produces; they are entirely devoted to love when they are young and beautiful, and, later, entirely to domestic care and their children. Which form of civilisation is worth more?

As we were conversing, on random subjects, my dragoman, a young man born in Arabia and well-versed in Arabic literature, was seeking me near the monastery, and found me by the spring. He brought me another young Arab who had learned of my arrival in Haifa and had come from Acre to meet the Western poet. This young man, born in Lebanon and raised in Aleppo, was already famous for his poetic talent. I had often heard of him myself and had several of his poems translated for me. He brought me a few of them, the translations of which I will publish later. He sat with us by the fountain, and we talked for quite some time, with the help of the dragoman. However, the day was drawing to a close, and we had to part. 'Since we are both poets,' I said to him, 'and chance has brought us together from such opposite corners of the world in such a charming place, at such a beautiful hour, and in the presence of such perfect beauty, we should each dedicate, in our own language, a few verses to our meeting and the impressions this moment inspires in us.' He smiled; he drew from his belt his writing case and reed pen, which are no more absent from an Arab writer's possession than a sword from an armoured knight. We both stepped aside a few paces, so as to meditate awhile on our verses. He finished long before myself. Here are a few lines, from his poem and mine. The character of our two efforts will be recognisable; but I hardly need to point out how much all languages lose when translated into another.

'There is a flower, in the gardens of Haifa, the sun's rays seek amidst palm leaves.

The flower's eyes are soft as a gazelle's; like drops of seawater, bright, in a shell…

… It is found at the edge of a spring that flows, without a murmur, beside it.

Girl, tell me your father's name, and I'll tell you the name of that flower.'

Here are a few of those that I myself composed, which I immediately had my dragoman translate into Arabic:

'Fountain of mirrored blue light, when, on your green shore,

Lillah, while dreaming, seats herself midst the shadows…

… All is daylight and joy whenever her eyes shine there;

All is night, alas when her eyes are veiled!'

However, the young girl for whom we had just written our poems, in French, and literary Arabic, understood neither French nor Arabic, only a little Italian.

*October 23, 1832.*

At sunrise, refreshed and ready, we left the monastery of Mount Carmel, and its two excellent monks, and made our way along the steep path that descends from the cape to the sea. Beyond, we entered the wasteland; it lies between the Syrian Sea, whose shores here are generally flat, sandy, and indented with small gulfs, and the mountains that extend from Mount Carmel, which mountains slope away imperceptibly towards Galilee; they are black and bare; the rocks often piercing the remaining covering of earth and shrubs, and their aspect is sombre and bleak; they are clothed only in their garment of dazzling light and the majestic ideality of the past that surrounds them; here and there, the mountain chain, which continues for about twenty-five miles, is broken, and a shallow valley opens to the eye; on the floor or slope of one of these valleys, we clearly saw the remains of a fortified castle and a large Arab village extending beneath its walls. Smoke from the houses rose in the breeze along the flanks of Mount Carmel, and long lines of camels, black goats, and red cows stretched from the village into the plain we were crossing. A few Arabs on horseback, armed with lances and dressed only in their white woollen blankets, their legs and arms bare, marched at the head and flanks of these lines. Caravans of shepherds were leading their flocks to the only spring we have encountered in the last four hours. These springs were discovered and dug long ago by the inhabitants of the towns situated along the coast. The present-day Arabs abandoned the towns centuries ago; only the springs remain, and they make this journey of more than an hour, each day, to fetch water for their flocks. We rode all day amidst the remains of walls, and over mosaics on the sandy surface; the road is lined with ruins that attest to the splendour, and the density of population, of these shores in bygone times.

At daybreak, on the horizon before us, by the edge of the sea, an immense mound had been visible from which the sun's rays were reflected, and which seemed to grow, and rise from the waves, as we advanced. Approaching it, we saw that this mound was a jumbled mass of magnificent ruins belonging to different periods; we first distinguished an immense wall, remarkably similar, in its shape, colour, and the size of its stones, to a section of the Colosseum in Rome. This wall, of prodigious height, stood, crenellated and alone, atop a heap of other ruins, seemingly of Greek and Roman buildings. Soon, beyond this section of wall, we discovered the elegant, openwork remains, like stone lacework, of a Moorish construction, a church or a mosque, or perhaps each in turn; then a series of other standing fragments, beautifully preserved, of several other ancient structures. The sandy path our *mukaris* (*muleteers*) were following led us quite close to these curious ruins from the past, whose existence, name and date we were completely unaware of (*Lamartine appears to be describing Tel Shikmona, Tell es-Samak, close to Haifa*).

About half a mile from this group of monuments, the seashore rises and the sand gives way to rock; this rock has been hewn everywhere by human hands over an area of about a mile in circumference: it looks like a primitive city carved out of stone before humans learned the art of quarrying and building dwellings on the surface. It is indeed one of the subterranean cities mentioned in the earliest histories, or at least one of those vast necropolises, cities of the dead, carved in the earth or rock in every direction around the great cities of the living; but the shape of the rocks and the countless caverns hewn into their sides suggests, in my opinion, dwelling places. These caverns are vast, the entrances are high and numerous, and wide staircases lead to them; windows are also cut into the living rock to let light into these dwellings, and these doors and windows open onto streets hewn deep into the heart of the hill. We followed several of these deep, wide streets, where ruts marked the tracks of chariot wheels. A multitude of eagles and vultures, and countless flocks of starlings rose from the shadows of the hollowed-out rocks as we approached; climbing-shrubs, pellitory-of-the-wall flowers, and clumps of myrtle and fig have taken root in the dust of these stone streets and carpet these long avenues. In some places, the ancient inhabitants split the hillside completely, and pierced channels that allow water to flow through, and the eye to take in part of the gulf beyond the city. It is a landscape of an entirely new character, at once harsh and severe, like the rock, yet laughing and luminous as these aerial windows on the blue of the sea, and these forests of plants that have rooted themselves in cracks in the granite.

We rode for some time through these marvellous labyrinths, and finally arrived at the foot of the great wall and the Moorish monuments before us; there we paused for a moment to deliberate. The ruins have a bad reputation; they are often the hiding place of bands of thieving Arabs who plunder and massacre caravans. We had been warned at Haifa to avoid them, or to pass through them in close formation, without allowing any of our men to stray from the main body of the caravan. Curiosity won; we could not resist the desire to visit monuments of which ancient and modern history apparently knows nothing: we knew not if they were deserted or inhabited. Arriving at the foot of the walls that still surround them, we saw a breach through which we might enter. At the same moment, a group of Arabs on horseback appeared, lances in hand, on the sand that still separated us from the entrance, and charged us. We were surprised, but ready; we had our double-barrelled rifles loaded and cocked, and pistols at our belts. We advanced on the Arabs, they stopped short; I detached myself from the caravan, ordering our people to remain under arms; I advanced with my two companions and my dragoman; we negotiated; and the sheikh, with his

principal horsemen, escorted us personally to the breach, ordering the Arabs inside to respect us and allow us to examine the monuments. I deemed it prudent, however, to allow only a portion of my men to enter with us; the rest remained encamped within musket range of the mound, ready to come to our aid should we fall into an ambush. This precaution proved useful, for we found within the walls a population of two to three hundred Bedouin Arabs, including women and children. There was only one exit from these ruins, and we would have easily been captured or slaughtered, if these barbarians had not been kept in check by the force that remained outside, and which they might have supposed to be more considerable than it actually was: we had taken care not to show all of our men, while some of our mukaris had deliberately remained behind, encamped on a knoll where they could be seen.

As soon as we had traversed the breach, we found ourselves in a maze of paths winding around the collapsed remains of the great wall and other ancient buildings which revealed themselves one after another. These paths or streets had no regular layout: the hooves of Arabs, camels, and goats had traced them haphazardly among the rubble. The families of the tribe had built nothing themselves; they had simply taken advantage of all the hollows that the fall of the gigantic stones had created, here and there, to shelter themselves, some in the very shade of column shafts or capitals stopped in their fall by other debris; others, beneath pieces of black goat-hair cloth, stretched from one pillar to the other, thus forming a roof.

The sheikh himself, his wives, and his children, who presumably occupied the 'palace' of the village, had taken up lodgings at the entrance to the town, in the ruins of a Roman temple, on a very tall mound above the path we were traversing. Their house was formed by an immense block of carved stone that hung almost vertically, supported at one corner by other blocks tumbled haphazardly, as if frozen in their fall. This chaos of stones seemed truly to be on the verge of collapse, ready to crush the sheikh's wives and children, who poked out their heads above us from this artificial cavern. The women were not veiled; their only garment was a blue cotton shift, which left the breast bare and the legs exposed; this shift was cinched around their bodies with a leather belt. These women seemed beautiful to me, despite the rings piercing their nostrils and the bizarre tattoos furrowing their cheeks and throats. The children were naked, seated upon or straddling the hewn stone blocks that formed the terraces of these perilous dwellings; and a few black goats with long, drooping ears had climbed beside the children to the entrances of these caves, watching us pass or leaping over our heads as we crossed the deep path from one block to the next.

We saw a few camels lying here and there in the cool hollows formed by the gaps in the debris, raising their pensive, calm heads above the fallen sections of columns and capitals. With every step, the scene was new, drawing our attention more keenly. A painter would find a thousand unfamiliar and picturesque subjects in the ever-changing and unexpected scenes, wherein the tribe's dwellings are mingled and indistinguishable from the remains of theatres, baths, churches, and mosques that litter this corner of the shore. The less they had worked at creating a refuge in this chaos of an overturned city, and the more their dwellings were merely improvised by the bizarre chance of some building's collapse, the more poetic and striking the scene became. Women milked their goats on the amphitheatre's tiers; flocks of sheep leaped one by one from the pointed-arch window of an emir's palace or a Gothic church from the Crusader era. Squatting sheikhs smoked their pipes beneath the chiselled curve of a Romanesque arch, and camels were tethered to the Moorish columns of a harem gate. We dismounted to visit the main ruins in detail.

The Arabs gave us great difficulty when we expressed our desire to enter the grounds of the great temple, which stands at the edge of the ancient town, on a rock by the sea. We had to argue anew at every courtyard, and every wall that we had to cross to gain entry; we were even forced to resort to threats to compel them to give way. The women and children withdrew, hurling curses at us; the sheikh withdrew for a moment, and the other Arabs displayed every sign of displeasure in their faces and gestures; but the ill-disguised air of indecision and timidity that we also perceived in their manner encouraged us to insist, and we entered, half willingly, half by force, into the very interior of this last and most astonishing of monuments.

I cannot say what it once was; there is something of everything in its construction, its form, and its ornamentation; I am inclined to believe that it is an ancient temple which the Crusaders converted into a church when they possessed Caesarea and the surrounding shores, and which the Arabs later converted into a mosque. Time, which toys with the works and thoughts of men, is now reducing it to dust, and the camel's knee bends on flagstones where the knees of three or four religions have bowed in turn before different gods. The foundations of the building are evidently of Greek architecture from a decadent period; in the arches of the vaults, the architecture takes on the Moorish style; windows, originally Corinthian, have been converted, with great artistry and taste, into Moorish windows with pointed arches and slender paired columns; what remains of the vaulting is embroidered with arabesques of exquisite finish and delicacy. The building has eight sides, and each of the recesses created by this octagonal shape undoubtedly contained an altar, judging by the niches that decorate the section of the walls where these altars would have been placed. The central part of the monument was also occupied by a principal altar; this is easily discernible from the height of the ground in this area of the temple. Its elevation was doubtless created by the steps that surrounded the altar. The walls of this church are half-collapsed, offering glimpses of the sea and the reefs that border it; climbing plants hung, in clumps of foliage and flowers, from the tops of the jagged vaults, and birds with red collars, and flocks of little blue swallows, chirped in these airy thickets, or flitted along the ledges. Nature resumes her hymn wherever and whenever human beings have ended theirs.

Leaving this unknown temple, we rode through the village's narrow streets finding, at every turn, curious remnants and unexpected scenes, displaying a mixture of savage customs and the beautiful vestiges of bygone civilisations. We saw a great number of Arab women and girls engaged in various tasks of pastoral life in the small courtyards of their huts: some were weaving goat-hair cloth; others were grinding barley or cooking rice. They were generally very beautiful, tall, and strong, their complexions tanned by the sun, yet with an appearance of health and vigour. Their black hair was adorned with strings of silver coins; they wore earrings and necklaces decorated with the same ornamentation. They cried out in surprise as we passed by, and followed us to other houses. None of the Arabs offered us the slightest gift; nor did we feel it our duty to offer any ourselves. Cautiously we left the enclosure; no one from the tribe followed us, and we pitched our tents half a mile from the great wall, at the end of a small gulf also surrounded by ancient walls, which was once the port of this unknown city. The temperature was thirty-two degrees; we bathed in the sea, in the shade of an old pier that the waves have not yet completely washed away, while our sais (*grooms, servants*) pitched our tents, fed the horses some barley, and lit a fire against an archway that probably served as a gateway to the port.

The Arabs call this place by a name meaning '*cut stone*.' The crusaders, in their chronicles, called it Castel Peregrino (*Château Pèlerin, near Atlit*, *Castrum Perigrinorum, Castle of the Pilgrims*); but I could not discover the name of the intermediate town — Greek, Jewish, or Roman — to which the large remains that had attracted us belonged. The next day, we continued along the seashore to Caesarea, where we arrived around midday; that morning we had crossed a river that the Arabs call Zirka (*Wadi az-Zarka 'the Blue Stream', or Nahal Taninim, near Jisr az-Zarqa*), which is said to be Pliny's 'River of Crocodiles' (*'Taninim', the plural of 'tannin' is, in this context, Hebrew for crocodiles*).

## Caesarea Maritima

Caesarea (*Caesarea Maritima*), Herod the Great's ancient and splendid capital, no longer possesses a single inhabitant; its walls, rebuilt by Saint Louis (*Louis IX*) when on crusade (*the Seventh Crusade, in 1251*), are nevertheless intact and would still serve today as excellent fortifications for a modern city. We crossed the deep moat that surrounds them, by means of a stone bridge roughly in the centre of the enclosure, and entered the maze of stones, half-open arches, remains of buildings, and fragments of marble and porphyry, with which the site of the ancient city is strewn. We flushed three jackals from the rubble that rattled beneath our horses' hooves; we searched for a spring that had been indicated to us, and with difficulty found it at the eastern end of these ruins, and camped there.

Towards evening, a young Arab shepherd arrived with an innumerable herd of black cows, sheep, and goats; he spent about two hours drawing water, without pause, from the fount, for these animals, each patiently awaiting its turn and then withdrawing in an orderly fashion after drinking, as if it were being led. The child, completely naked, had a donkey for a mount; he was the last to emerge from the ruins of Caesarea and told us that he came this way every day, travelling about five miles, to lead the flocks of his tribe, settled in the mountains, to the watering place. This was the only encounter we had in Caesarea, in that city in which Herod the Great, according to Josephus, amassed all the marvels of Greek and Roman art, and where he excavated an artificial harbour that served as a shelter for his entire navy. Caesarea is the city where Saint Paul was imprisoned, and where, in defending himself and nascent Christianity, he delivered that beautiful speech preserved in the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Cornelius the centurion and Philip the Evangelist were from Caesarea, and it was also from the port of Caesarea that the apostles embarked to spread the Gospel to Greece and Italy.

We spent the evening wandering through the town's ruins, collecting fragments of sculpture, which we were then forced to leave in the square lacking the means to transport them. We spent a pleasant night sheltered by the Caesarea aqueduct.

The road continued through a sandy waste, covered in places with shrubs and even kerm-oak forests which served as hideouts for the Arabs. Amédée de Parseval fell asleep on horseback; the caravan was ahead of him; we realised he was lagging behind; two gunshots rang out in the distance: we galloped to his aid, firing our pistols ourselves to frighten the Arabs. Fortunately, he had not been attacked; he had merely fired two shots at gazelles crossing the plain. We arrived in the evening, without having found a single drop of water, near the Arab village of El-Mukhalid (*Umm Khalid, on the coast of what is now Netanya*). An immense sycamore tree, sprawling like a natural tent on the side of a bare, dusty hill, attracted us and provided shelter. Our Arabs went to the village to ask for directions to the spring; they were shown it; we all raced there. We drank, and bathed

our heads and arms; we returned to camp, where our cook had lit a fire at the foot of the tree. Its trunk was already charred by the successive fires of the thousands of caravans that have successively enjoyed its shade. All our tents and our horses were sheltered by its immense branches. The sheikh of El-Mukhalid came to bring me melons; he sat beneath my tent and asked for news of Ibrahim Pasha, and medicine for himself and his wives. I give him a few drops of cologne-water, and invited him to supper with us. He accepted. I found the greatest difficulty in dismissing him.

The night is scorching hot. I cannot bear the tent; I rise and go to sit by the spring, under an olive tree. The moon illuminates the entire chain of mountains of Galilee, which undulate gracefully on the horizon, about five miles from where we are camped. It is the most beautiful view that has ever met my eyes. Branches of Persian lilac, hanging in clusters in early spring, possess no fresher, or more nuanced a violet hue than these mountains as I gaze upon them. As the moon rises higher, their shade deepens and becomes more purple; their forms appear as fluid as great waves seen out at sea during a beautiful sunset. Moreover, all these mountains have a name and a story in the first tales our children read on their mother's lap. I know that Judea lies there, with its wonders and ruins; that Jerusalem sits behind one of these hills; that I am now separated from it by only a few hours' ride; that I am thus approaching one of the most desired objects of my long journey. I revel in this thought, as a human being will always rejoice whenever they reach one of the goals, however insignificant, which some passion or other has assigned them; I spend an hour or two engraving these lines, these colours, this transparent and pink sky, this solitude, this silence, in my memory. The nocturnal damp wets my coat; I return the tent and fall asleep.

I had barely been asleep an hour when I was awakened by a slight noise; I propped myself on my elbow and looked around. One corner of the tent curtain was drawn back to let in the night breeze; the moon shone brightly illuminating the interior; an enormous jackal was entering cautiously and gazing in my direction with fiery eyes; I seized my rifle, the movement startled it, and it galloped away. I fell asleep again. Awakened a second time, I saw the jackal at my feet, probing the folds of my coat with its muzzle and ready to bite my beautiful greyhound, who was sleeping on the same mat as me; a charming animal, who had not left my side for a day for eight years, and whom I would have wished to defend, being a part of my life, at peril of my own well-being. I had covered him with a fold of my cloak, and he slept so soundly that he heard nothing, felt nothing, and had no idea of the danger he was in: a second later, the jackal carried him off, and doubtless tore his throat out in its den. I cried out, my companions awoke; I was already outside the tent, and fired a shot; but the jackal was far away, and next day not a trace of its blood indicated my having achieved anything useful by way of vengeance.

We set off again as the first rays of sunlight whitened the Judean hills; we followed undulating slopes beyond sight of the sea; the heat tired us greatly, and the deepest silence reigned throughout our journey; at eleven o'clock we arrived, overcome with thirst and weariness, at the steep banks of a river whose dark waters flowed slowly between cliffs bordered by long reeds: one had to be close to the flow to see them. Herds of wild buffalo lay amidst the reeds and in the river, showing their heads above the water; motionless, they thus pass the burning hours of the day. They watched us without moving; we forded the river and reach an abandoned khan. This river is called today by the Arabs *Nahr-El-Arsouf*. Ancient Apollonia-Arsuf must have been located roughly here, unless

its location was determined by a second river which we crossed an hour later, and which is now called *Nahr-El-Petras*.

We lay down on our mats in the cool, dark cellars that were the only remaining vestiges of the old khan. We had barely seated ourselves around the plate of cold rice that the cook had served for lunch when an enormous snake, eight feet long and as thick as an arm, emerged from one of the holes in the old wall that sheltered us and slid between our legs. We rushed in flight toward the entrance of the underground passage; it was there before us and slowly disappeared, its tail vibrating like a bowstring, among the reeds that lined the riverbank. Its skin was a most beautiful dark blue. We were reluctant to return to our shelter, but the heat was so intense that we had no choice but to yield to it, and we fell asleep on our saddles, heedless of any similar visitors that might disturb our slumber.

At four in the afternoon, we remounted our horses. I spotted, on a small hill a short distance from the river, an Arab horseman, a rifle in his hand, accompanied by a young slave on foot. The Arab horseman seemed to be hunting: he stopped his horse frequently and watched us pass by with an air of uncertainty and concern. Suddenly, he spurred his mare into a gallop, approached me, and, addressing me in Italian, asked if I was the traveller currently touring Arabia, whose imminent arrival in Jaffa had been announced by the European consuls. I gave my name; he jumped down from his horse and tried to kiss my hand. 'I am the son of Monsieur François Damiani, the French vice-consul in Jaffa,' he told me. 'Having been informed of your arrival by letters brought from Sidon by an English ship, I have been here for several days hunting gazelles along the coast, so as to meet you and lead you to my father's house. Our name is Italian, our family is originally from Europe; since time immemorial, we have been established in Arabia: we are Arabs, but we have French hearts, and we would consider it a shame and an insult to our feelings if you were to accept the hospitality of any house other than ours. Remember that we were the first to reach you, and in the East, whoever first welcomes a stranger has the right to be his host. I warn you of this fact,' he added, 'because many other houses in Jaffa have been informed of your arrival by letters delivered to the same building, and will rush to greet you as soon as my slave informs the city of your approach.'

He had scarcely finished his speech before uttering a few words in Arabic to the young slave, who then mounted his master's mare and vanished, in the blink of an eye, behind the sand dunes that marked the horizon. I had one of my workhorses, which had been accompanying me unmounted, given to Monsieur Damiani, and we slowly set off for Jaffa, which was not yet in sight. After a two hours' ride, we saw, on the other side of a river we still had to cross, about thirty horsemen dressed in the richest costumes and bearing gleaming weapons, mounted on magnificent Arabian steeds, prancing along the riverbank. They urged their horses into the water, shouting and firing pistols to greet us: they were the sons, relatives, and friends of the leading citizens of Jaffa, on their way to meet us. Each of them approached me, paid me a compliment, to which I replied through my dragoman, or in Italian for those who could understand.

They gathered around us and, racing here and there over the sand, provided us with the spectacle of a *djerid* exhibition, in which the Arab horsemen display the vigour of their horses, and their skill with the javelin. We were approaching Jaffa (*now part of Tel Aviv-Jafo*), and the city was beginning to rise before us on a hill that juts out into the sea. The sight is magical when one approaches it from the northern side. The feet of the city are bathed at sunset by the sea, which

unfurls immense foaming waves against the reefs that form the enclosure of its port; on this northern side, the one by which we arrived, it is surrounded by delightful gardens, which seem to have emerged by enchantment from the desert, to crown and shade its ramparts: one walks under the high and fragrant canopy of a forest of palm trees, pomegranate trees laden with their red orbs, maritime cedars with lace-like foliage, orange trees, fig trees, and lemon trees, as large as European walnut trees, bending under the weight of their fruit and flowers; the air is akin to a perfume lifted and spread by the sea breeze; the ground is white with orange blossoms, and the wind sweeps them away like the dead leaves in autumn at home; at intervals, Turkish fountains, of mosaic-style in various colours of marble, with copper cups attached by chains, offer their clear water to passers-by, and are always surrounded by groups of women washing their feet, and drawing water in urns of antique shapes. The city's white minarets, crenellated terraces, and Moorish-style arched balconies, rise from the heart of the ocean of fragrant shrubs, silhouetted, towards the east, against the white sandy background provided by the immense desert that separates it from Egypt.

It was near one of these fountains that we suddenly came upon a third cavalcade, at the head of which, riding a white mare, was François Damiani the Elder, consular agent for several European nations and one of the most important figures in Jaffa. His grotesque attire made us smile: he was dressed in an old sky-blue caftan, lined with ermine and cinched with a crimson silk belt; his bare legs peeked out from wide, dirty muslin trousers, and he wore an immense three-cornered hat, smoothed by years of wear and soaked with sweat and dust, attesting to his many years of service during the Egyptian campaign. But the excellent welcome and patriarchal cordiality of the elderly vice-consul quenched the smiles on our lips and left room in our hearts only for the gratitude we felt. He was accompanied by several of his sons-in-law, children, and grandchildren, all on horseback like him. One of his grandsons, a child of twelve to fourteen, prancing around his grandfather on an Arabian mare without a bridle, was by far the most handsome child I have ever seen. Monsieur Damiani walked ahead of us, and led us, amidst a huge crowd pressed around our horses, to the door of his house, where our new friends greeted us and left us in the care of our host.

Monsieur Damiani's house is small, but admirably situated atop the city, and with a triple view, that directly overlooking the sea, a second view of the coast of Gaza and Ascalon towards Egypt, and a third of the Syrian shore towards the north. The rooms are surrounded and surmounted by open terraces where the sea breeze plays, and from which one can see, twenty five miles out to sea, the smallest sail crossing the Gulf of Damietta. These rooms have no windows; the climate renders them superfluous: the air always has the warmth of our finest spring days; a poorly fitted, flimsy screen is the only barrier one places between oneself and the sun. One shares these dwellings, created by human beings, with the birds of the sky: and in Monsieur Damiani's drawing room, on the wooden shelves that lined the room, hundreds of small swallows with red collars were perched amidst the Chinese porcelain, silver cups, and pipe stems that decorated the cornices. They fluttered all day above our heads, and during supper, they would suspend themselves from the copper branches of the lamp that lit the meal.

The family consisted of Monsieur Damiani, the father, a figure somewhere between patriarch and Italian merchant, but with the patriarch predominating; Madame Damiani, the mother, a beautiful Arab woman, the mother of twelve children, yet still retaining in her figure and complexion the radiance and freshness of Turkish beauty; several young girls, almost all

remarkably beautiful; and three sons, the eldest of whom we had already met. The other two were equally attentive and helpful to us. The women did not go to their apartments. They appeared only once, dressed in their finest attire and covered in their richest jewellery, and sat down to eat with us for the one meal; the rest of the time they were busy preparing our food in a small inner courtyard. We would catch glimpses of them as we entered and left the house. The young men, raised to demonstrate the respect that Eastern customs dictate sons show their fathers, never sat with us during the meals either. They stood behind their father, making sure that his guests lacked nothing.

No sooner had we entered the house than we received a visit from a large number of the locals, who came to congratulate us and offer their services. We drank coffee, pipes were brought, and the evening was spent in conversation on subjects interesting to us, provoked by our curiosity. The governor of Jaffa, to whom I had sent my interpreter to pay him my respects, soon came to visit us himself. He was a handsome young Arab, dressed in the richest attire, and whose manner and speech attested to a noble heart and exquisite elegance of character. I have rarely seen a more handsome face. His well-groomed black beard fell in lustrous waves and fanned out over his chest; his hand, whose fingers sparkled with enormous diamonds, constantly played in the flow of his beard, passing and repassing over it to soften and comb it. His gaze was proud, gentle, and open, like the gaze of all Turks in general. One senses that these men have nothing to hide; they are frank because they are strong: they are strong because they never rely merely on themselves or on vain cunning, but always on the idea of a God who guides all things, and on the Providence that they call Fate. Place a Turk among ten Europeans, and you will always recognise him by the elevation of his gaze, the gravity of thought imprinted on his features by habit, and the noble simplicity of his expression. The governor had received letters from Muhammad Ali and Ibrahim Pasha strongly recommending me to him. I have those letters. I handed him another from Ibrahim, which I was carrying with me. Here are its contents:

'I am informed that our friend (*here my name appeared*) has arrived from France with his family and several travelling companions, to visit the countries under my control and learn our laws and customs. My intention is that you, and all my governors of cities and provinces, the commanders of my fleets, and the generals and officers commanding my armies, show him every mark of friendship and render him all the services that my affection for him and his nation commands. You will provide him, if he so requests, with the lodgings, horses, and provisions he and his entourage may need; you will procure for him the means to visit all parts of our state that he wishes to see; you will grant him escorts as numerous as his safety, which you will personally guarantee, requires; and if he should encounter difficulties entering certain provinces under our rule due to the Arabs there, you will send troops to ensure his safe passage, etc.'

The governor held the letter to his forehead after reading it, and returned it to me. He asked me what he could do to obey his master's orders fully, and inquired about the places to which I wished to go. I mentioned Jerusalem and Judea. At these words, he, his officers, the Messieurs Damiani, and the Fathers of the Monastery of the Holy Land at Jaffa, who were present, cried out, and told me that it was impossible; that plague had recently broken out, with the most alarming intensity, in Jerusalem, in Bethlehem, and all along the route; that it was even in Ramla (*not to be confused with Ramallah*) the first town one had to pass through on the route to Jerusalem; that the Pasha had just quarantined everyone returning from Palestine; that even supposing I were reckless

enough to enter, and fortunate enough to escape the plague, I might not be able to return to Syria for several months; that, finally, the monasteries, where foreigners receive hospitality in the Holy Land, were all closed; that we would not be received in any, and that it was absolutely necessary to postpone to another time and a more favourable season this journey I was planning to the interior of Judea.

This news grieved me deeply, but did not shake my resolve. I replied to the governor that, although I was born into a different religion than his, I worshipped the sovereign will of Allah no less than he did; that his worship was called Fate, and mine Providence; but that these two different words expressed only the same thought: God is great! God is the lord of all! *Allahu Akbar*! That I had come such a distance, over so many seas, so many mountains, and so many plains, to visit the source from which Christianity had flowed into the world, to see the holy city of the Christians, and to compare the places with the history, that I had advanced too far to turn back, and leave to the uncertainty of times and events a project almost accomplished; that a man's life was but a drop of water in the sea, a grain of sand in the desert, and not worth counting; that besides, what was written was written, and that if Allah wanted to keep me from the plague in the midst of the plague-stricken of Judea, it was as easy for Him as keeping me from the wave in the midst of the storm, or from the bullets of the Arabs on the banks of the Jordan: that consequently I persisted in my desire to penetrate the interior, and even enter Jerusalem, whatever the peril; but that what I could decide for myself, I could not and would not decide for others, and that I left all my friends, all my servants, all the Arabs who accompanied me, free to follow me or to remain in Jaffa, according to their own thoughts on the matter.

The governor then protested against my simply submitting to the will of Allah, telling me that he would not allow me to expose myself alone to the dangers of the journey and the plague, and that he would select some courageous and disciplined soldiers from the troops garrisoned at Jaffa, and place them entirely under my command. These soldiers would guard my caravan during the march and my tents at night, protecting us from contact with the plague-stricken. He also immediately dispatched a messenger to the governor of Jerusalem, his friend, to inform him of my journey and commend me to him, and then he withdrew. My friends and I deliberated; even our servants were summoned to this council to discuss what each of us wished to do. After some hesitation, we all unanimously resolved to risk our fortunes and face the plague rather than renounce seeing Jerusalem. The departure was set for two days later. We lay down on the mats and sofas in Monsieur Damiani's room, and awoke to the chirping of countless swallows flitting about our heads throughout the apartment.

The day was spent paying visits to the governor and the superior of the Monastery of Terre-Sainte in Jaffa, a venerable Spanish monk who had lived in Jaffa since the time when the French arrived, and who confirmed to us the truth of the poisoning of the plague victims (*Bonaparte was accused of the crime after the siege of Acre in 1799, a crime which was denied*).

## Jaffa

Jaffa, or Yaffa, the ancient Joppa of Scripture, is one of the oldest and best known ports in the world. Pliny describes it as an antediluvian city (*see his Natural History V.20*). According to tradition, it was there that Andromeda was chained to the rock and exposed to the sea monster; it was there that Noah built the ark; it was to that city that the cedars of Mount Lebanon were

brought by order of Solomon to be used in the construction of the Temple (*see 2 Chronicles 2:16*). Jonah, the prophet, embarked there 862 years before Christ (*see Jonah 1-3*). Saint Peter resurrected Tabitha there (*Acts of the Apostles 9.36-41*). The city was fortified by Saint Louis during the Crusades. In 1799, Bonaparte stormed it and massacred the Turkish prisoners. It has a wretched harbour, suitable only for small boats, and a very dangerous roadstead, as we ourselves discovered on our second sea voyage. Jaffa has five to six thousand inhabitants: Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, Catholics, and Maronites. Each of these faiths has a church there. The Latin monastery is magnificent. They were still embellishing it when we passed through; but we received no hospitality from the monks: their vast apartments were not opened to us or to any of the foreigners whom we met in Jaffa. The rooms remained deserted, while pilgrims searched with difficulty for shelter in some miserable Turkish khan, or hospitality beneath the roof of some poor Jewish or Armenian inhabitant of Jaffa, and proved burdensome to their hosts.



'Jaffa' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

As soon as we left Jaffa's walls, we entered the great Egyptian desert. Having decided to travel to Cairo by this route, I sent a messenger to El-Arish (*in the Sinai*) to hire camels to cross the desert. The journey from Jaffa to Cairo can be made in twelve to fifteen days, but involves great hardship and difficulty. The orders of the governor of Jaffa, and the kindness of the city's leading citizens in their dealings with those of Gaza and El-Arish, had largely smoothed these difficulties for me.

The governor provided us with some cavalry and eight infantrymen, chosen from among the bravest and most civilised of the remaining soldiers in his Egyptian troop depot. They camped that very night at our gate. At daybreak, we mounted. At the city gate, on the Ramla side, we found a crowd of horsemen from all the nations inhabiting Jaffa. They rode around us and accompanied

us to a magnificent fountain, shaded by sycamores and palm trees, about an hour's walk away. There, they discharged their pistols in our honour and then returned to the city.

It is impossible to describe the novelty and magnificence of the vegetation that unfolds on both sides of the road on leaving Jaffa. To the right and left, there is a diverse forest of all kinds of fruit trees, and all the flowering shrubs of the Orient. This forest, divided into sections by hedges of myrtle, jasmine, and pomegranate trees, is watered by streams of water flowing from the beautiful Turkish fountains I mentioned earlier. In each of these enclosures, there is an open pavilion or tent, beneath which the family that owns them spends a few weeks in the spring or autumn. Three stakes and a piece of canvas form a country house for these fortunate families. The women sleep on mats and cushions inside the tent; the men sleep in the open air under the canopy of lemon and pomegranate trees. Melons, watermelons, and figs of thirty-two varieties, which shade these enchanted places, provide for their meals; only occasionally is a lamb, raised by the children, added to the feast, and it is sacrificed, as in biblical times, on solemn occasions. Jaffa is the place in all the Orient that a lover of nature and solitude should choose to spend the winter. The climate is the most delicate transition between the scorching deserts of Egypt and the autumn rains of the Syrian coast. If I were free to choose my abode, I would dwell at the foot of Lebanon — Sidon, Beirut, or Latakia — during the spring and autumn; on the heights of Lebanon during the summer heat, refreshed by the wind from the sea, the breezes that rise from the Valley of the Cedars, and the proximity of the snowfields; and in winter, in the gardens of Jaffa.

Jaffa has something about its land and sky that is more grandiose, more solemn, more colourful than any of the sites I have visited. The eye rests on a boundless sea, as blue as the sky; on the immense stretches of the Egyptian desert, where the horizon is broken, only occasionally, by the profile of a camel advancing with the undulations of a wave; and on the green and yellow tree-tops of the countless orange groves that crowd around the city. All the costumes of the inhabitants or travellers who enliven these roads are picturesque and strange. There are Bedouins from Jericho or Tiberias, clad in immense white woollen plaids; Armenians in long robes striped blue and white; Jews from all parts of the globe and in every kind of clothing imaginable, distinguished only by their long beards and by the nobility and majesty of their features: a sovereign people, ill-accustomed to their servitude, and in whose eyes one discovers the memory and certainty of a great destiny, behind the look of humiliation in their faces and the humility of their present fate; and Egyptian soldiers dressed in red jackets, quite like our French conscripts in their lively eyes and quick pace. One senses that the genius and energy of a great man has passed through them, animating them toward some unknown purpose. Then there are Turkish agas (*chiefs, leaders*), proudly riding desert horses, followed by Arabs and black slaves; poor families of Greek pilgrims sitting on street corners, eating boiled rice or barley from wooden bowls, saving their provisions to reach the holy city; and poor Jewish women, lightly-dressed and weighed down by the burden of enormous rag sacks, driving donkeys whose twin baskets contain children of all ages. But let me return to the journey.

We rode cheerfully, testing, from time to time, the pace of our horses which contrasted sharply with that of the Arabians ridden by the Messieurs Damiani, and the sons of the Vice-Consul of Sardinia. These latter two young men, sons of a wealthy Arab merchant from Ramla now living in Jaffa, had expressed the desire to accompany us to Ramla. That morning, they had sent their slaves to prepare their father's house and a supper for us. We were also followed by another person who

had voluntarily joined our caravan and who surprised us with the bizarre magnificence of his European attire. He was a young man of twenty to twenty-five, with a jovial and grotesque, yet refined and witty, face. He wore an immense yellow muslin turban, a green coat in the style of our court attire, with a high collar and wide tails, embroidered with broad gold braid along all the seams; tight-fitting white velvet trousers, and boots with turned-down cuffs, adorned with a pair of spurs with silver chains. He used a khanjar as a hunting knife, and a pair of pistols, inlaid with silver engravings, protruded from his belt and rapped against his chest.

Having left Italy in his childhood, he had been swept to Egypt by some twist of fate, and for some years now had been living in Jaffa or Ramla, practising his medical and other arts in the Judean mountains at the expense of the sheikhs and Bedouins, who had scarcely made his fortune. His conversation greatly amused us, and I would have liked to take him with me to Jerusalem and the Dead Sea mountains, which he seemed to know perfectly; but having lived in the East for several years, he had contracted the invincible terror that the Franks have there of the plague, and none of my offers succeeded in enticing him. 'In times of plague,' he told me, 'I am no longer a doctor; I know only one remedy: leave quickly enough, travel far enough, and stay there long enough that the disease fails to reach you.' He seemed to look upon us with pity, as if we were victims predestined to seek our deaths in Jerusalem; and of our large company, he expected to see very few upon his return. 'A few days ago,' he said, 'in Acre, a traveller returning from Bethlehem knocked on the door of the Franciscan friary. They opened it; there were seven friars there. Two days later, all the doors were walled up by order of the governor; the pilgrim and the seven friars had died within a space of twenty-four hours.'

## Ramla

Nonetheless, we soon saw the tower and minarets of Ramla, rising before us, from the middle of an olive grove whose trunks were as thick as those of our oldest oak trees. Ramla, has been claimed as the ancient Arimathea (*location uncertain*) of the New Testament; it contains approximately two thousand families. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, founded a Latin monastery there (*c1420*), which still exists. The Armenians and Greeks also have monasteries there to assist pilgrims from their nations travelling to the Holy Land. The old churches have been converted into mosques; in one of these mosques is the white marble tomb of the Mamluk Ayoud-Bey, who fled Egypt upon the arrival of the French and died in Ramla.



'Ramla, ancient Arimathea' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Library of Congress*

Upon entering the city, we inquired whether the plague had already taken its toll: two monks, recently arrived from Jerusalem, had died there that very day; the monastery was under quarantine. Our new friends from Jaffa led us to their house, located in the heart of the town. An Arab, a former coppersmith, it was said, but a kind and excellent man, lived in half of this house and served as a consular agent for some European nation; this entitled him to fly a European flag on his roof: the surest protection against the indignities exercised on strangers by the Turks and Arabs. An excellent supper awaited us: we had the pleasure of finding chairs, beds, tables, all the utensils of Europe, and we even received a supply of fresh bread, thanks to the kindness of our hosts. The next morning, we took leave of all our friends from Jaffa and Ramla, who chose not to accompany us further, and departed, escorted only by our Egyptian cavalry and infantry.

I established the order of march thus: two horsemen in front, about fifty paces ahead of the caravan, to keep away any Arab or Jewish pilgrims we might encounter (*who might be plague-carriers*), and to keep them at a distance from our men and horses; to the right and left, on our flanks, the foot soldiers: then ourselves riding in single file, maintaining order, with the baggage in the middle. A small squad of our best horsemen formed the rearguard, having been instructed not to leave any man or mule behind. At the sight of a suspicious group of Arabs, the caravan was to halt and adopt battle formation, while the horsemen, interpreters, and ourselves would reconnoitre. In this way, we had little to fear from the Bedouins or the plague; and I must say that this marching order was observed by our Egyptian soldiers, our Turkish cavalry, and our own Arabs with a scrupulous obedience and attentiveness that would do credit to the most disciplined corps in Europe. We maintained it for more than twenty-five days, and in the most precarious positions. I never had a single reprimand to give to anyone: it was to these measures that we owed our survival.

After sunset, we arrived at the edge of the plain of Ramla, near a spring carved into the rock, which watered a small field of squash plants. We were at the foot of the Judean mountains; a small valley, a hundred paces wide, opened to our right, into which we descended: this is where the dominion of the Arab brigands of these mountains begins. As night approached, we judged it prudent to establish our camp in this valley: we pitched our tents about two hundred paces from the spring. We set up an advance guard on a knoll overlooking the road to Jerusalem; and while supper was being prepared for us hunted partridges on the hills within sight of our tents; we killed some, and flushed out, from among the rocks, a multitude of small eagles that dwell there. They rose up, spinning and screaming above our heads, and returned towards us even after we had fired at them. All creatures are usually afraid of fire, and the explosion of weapons; only the eagles seem to disdain them and toy with danger, either ignoring or defying it.

From the summit of one of these hills, I admired the picturesque sight of our camp, with our Arab cavalry pickets on the knoll, our horses tethered here and there around our tents, our *mujahideen* (*fighting men*) sitting on the ground, busy cleaning our harnesses and weapons, and the smoke of our fire, rising from one of our canvas tents, its light blue column spreading and twisting in the breeze. How I would love this nomadic life under such a sky, if only one could have with one all those that one loves and misses! The whole earth belongs to pastoral and wandering people like the Arabs of Mesopotamia. There is more poetry in one of their days than in entire years of our city lives. By demanding too much from civilised life, human beings nail themselves to a single place; they cannot detach themselves therefrom without losing those countless superfluities the habitual use of which has rendered them needs. Our homes are our voluntary prisons. I wish life were an endless journey, like this one; and if I were not bound to Europe by my affections, I would continue it as long as strength and fortune allowed.

We were on the border between the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin. The well near which our tents were pitched is still called Job's Well. We set off before daybreak; for two hours we followed a narrow, barren, and rocky valley, notorious for the depredations of the Arabs. It is the most exposed place in the area to their raids: they can reach it through a multitude of small, winding valleys, hidden from view by the uninhabited hills; and lie in ambush behind rocks and bushes, pouncing unexpectedly on caravans. The notorious Abu Gosh, chief of the Arab tribes of these mountains, holds the key to the passes which lead to Jerusalem: he opens or closes them at will, and extorts money from travellers. His headquarters were some miles ahead, in the village of Qaryat al-'Inab (*modern Abu Gosh*). We expected at any moment to see his horsemen appear: we encountered no one, except a young aga, a relative of the governor of Jerusalem, mounted on a magnificent mare, and accompanied by seven or eight horsemen. He greeted us politely, and stepped aside, with his retinue, to let us pass, taking care not to touch our horses or our clothes.

## Abu Gosh (Qaryat al-'Inab)

About an hour before reaching Qaryat al-'Inab, the valley narrows further, and trees extend their branches over the trail. There is an old fountain there, and the remains of a ruined kiosk. For an hour, one climbs a steep and uneven path, carved into the rock, through the woods, and suddenly one sees the village and the church of Qaryat al-'Inab at its foot, on the slope of the hill. The magnificent crusader church (*Church of the Resurrection*), currently used as a mosque, appears to have been built during the time of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, under the Lusignans (*in the twelfth*

*century*). The village consists of forty to fifty rather large houses, clinging to the slope of two hills that embrace the valley. A few scattered fig trees and some vineyards suggested some form of cultivation: we saw flocks of sheep scattered around the houses; Arabs, wearing magnificent caftans, were smoking their pipes on the terrace of the main house, a hundred paces from the path by which we descended. A score or less of horses, saddled and bridled, were tethered in the courtyard of the house. As soon as the Arabs saw us, they came down from the terrace, mounted their horses, and advanced slowly towards us. We met in a large, uncultivated open space facing the village, which was shaded by five or six beautiful fig trees.

Here was the famous Abu Gosh and his family. He and his brother advanced alone to meet me; his entourage remained behind. I immediately halted mine as well, and approached with my interpreter. After the customary greetings and endless compliments that precede any conversation with Arabs, Abu Gosh asked me if I was not the Frankish emir whom his friend Lady Stanhope, the Queen of Palmyra, had placed under her protection, and had sent him, in my name, the magnificent jacket of cloth-of-gold which he was wearing, and which he showed me with pride and gratitude. I was unaware of this gift from Lady Stanhope, so obligingly given on my behalf, but I replied that I was indeed the foreigner whom this illustrious woman had entrusted to the generosity of her friends in Qaryat al-'Inab; that I was going to visit all of Palestine where Abu Gosh's rule was recognised, and that I begged him to give the necessary orders so that Lady Stanhope would have no reproach to make against him. At these words, he dismounted, as did his brother; he called some horsemen from his retinue, and ordered them to bring mats, carpets, and cushions, which were spread under the shade of a large fig tree in the very field where we were, and begged us with such earnest entreaties to dismount and seat ourselves on this rustic couch that it was impossible for us to refuse.

As the plague was raging in Qaryat al-'Inab, Abu Gosh, knowing that the Europeans were in quarantine, took care not to touch our clothes, and set up his couch and that of his brothers opposite us, at a certain distance. As for ourselves, we accepted only mats of straw and rushes, because they are believed not to transmit the contagion. Coffee and sherbet were brought. We had a rather long general conversation; then Abu Gosh asked me to command my entourage to move away a little, commanding his own to do likewise, so as to confide some secret information that I refrain from recording here. After talking like this for a few minutes, he summoned his brothers closer, while I summoned my friends likewise. 'Is my name known in Europe?' he asked me. 'Indeed.' I said, 'Some say you are a brigand, pillaging and massacring caravans, taking Franks into slavery, and are a fierce enemy of Christians; others assure us that you are a valiant and generous prince, suppressing the brigandage of the mountain Arabs, securing the roads, protecting the caravans, and a friend to all Franks worthy of your friendship.' 'And you,' he said, laughing, 'what will you say of me?' 'I will say what I have seen,' I replied, 'that you are as powerful and as hospitable as a Frankish prince, that you have been slandered, and that you deserve to have as friends all Europeans who, like me, have experienced your kindness and the protection of your sword.' Abu Gosh seemed delighted. He and his brother asked me many more questions about European customs, our clothes, and our weapons, which they greatly admired; and then we parted. As we were leaving, he ordered one of his nephews, and some of the horsemen to lead our caravan, and not to leave me for the entire time I stayed, whether in Jerusalem or in the surrounding area. I thanked him, and we departed.

In effect, Abu Gosh rules over approximately forty thousand Arabs in the Judean mountains, from Ramla to Jerusalem, and from Hebron to the mountains of Jericho. This dominion, perpetuated in his family for several generations, has no other basis than sheer power. In Arabia, the origin or legitimacy of power is not questioned; it is recognised, and people submit to it as long as it exists. One family was older, more numerous, richer, and braver than the others: the head of this family naturally became more influential over the tribe; the tribe itself, better governed, and more skilfully or more valiantly led in war, became dominant without serious challenge.

Such is the origin of all those supremacies of chief and tribe that one finds everywhere in Asia. Power is assumed and maintained as a natural thing; everything stems from the family, and, once the fact of this ascendancy is recognised and established by custom and habit, none dispute it; obedience becomes something filial and religious. It takes great events and immense misfortunes to overthrow a family; and this nobility is preserved for centuries, voluntarily, so to speak. One cannot truly understand the feudal system until one has visited these regions; one sees how, in the Middle Ages, all those families, those local powers that reigned over castles, villages, and provinces formed: it is the first stage of civilisation. As society progresses, minor powers are absorbed by major ones; municipalities arise to protect the rights of towns against the declining influence of the feudal houses. Great kingdoms emerge, which in turn revoke obsolete municipal privileges; then come further social phases, whose phenomena are countless and not yet fully understood.

We were now far from Abu Gosh and his band of organised brigands. His nephew was riding ahead of us on the road to Jerusalem. About a mile from Qaryat al-'Inab, he turned off the road and plunged to the right, onto a series of rocky paths that wound over mountains covered in myrtle and terebinth trees. We followed him. The news from Jerusalem that Abu Gosh had given us was such that there was currently no possibility of entering the city. The plague was worsening there every moment; sixty to eighty people were succumbing every day; all the hospices and convents were closed. We resolved to go first to the desert of Saint John the Baptist, about five miles from Jerusalem, in the most rugged mountains of Judea; to ask for a few days' shelter at the convent of the Latin monks who reside there, and then to act according to the circumstances. It was this solitary road that Abu Gosh's nephew had us follow.

After riding for about two hours along dreadful paths under a blazing sun, we found, on the mountainside, a small spring and the shade of a few olive trees: we halted there. The site was sublime: we overlooked the deep, dark Vale of Terebinth (*the Valley of Elah*), where David, with his sling, killed the Philistine giant, Goliath. The position of the two armies is so clearly obvious, as regards the contours of the valley, and the slope and layout of the land, that it is impossible for the eye to doubt. The dry streambed (*Nahal El Elah is a seasonal stream, a wadi*) from whose banks David selected the fatal stone, traced a whitish line down the centre of the narrow valley, marking, as in the biblical account, the separation of the two camps. I had neither Bible nor travel guide in hand, and no one to give me the key to the place or the ancient names of the valleys and mountains; but my childish imagination had so vividly and accurately conjured up the shape of the various places, the physical appearance of the various scenes in the Old and New Testaments, based on the accounts and engravings in the holy books, that I immediately recognised the Valley of Terebinth and the battlefield of Saul. When we arrived at the monastery, I had only to ask the Latin Fathers to confirm the accuracy of my predictions. My travelling companions could scarcely believe it.

The same thing had happened to me in Sepphoris, in the hills of Galilee. I had pointed to and named a hill surmounted by a ruined castle, as the probable birthplace of the Virgin. The next day, the same thing happened again at the Maccabean dwelling in Modi'in (*in the vicinity of modern Modi'in-Maccabim-Re'ut*): passing by the foot of a barren mountain topped with the remains of an aqueduct, I recognised the tomb of those last great citizens of the Jewish people, and I spoke the truth without knowing it. Human imagination is truer than we think; it does not always build with the stuff of dreams, but proceeds by an instinctive assimilation of objects and images that produces results more immediate and evident than does science and logic. Except for the valleys of Lebanon, the ruins of Baalbek, the shores of the Bosphorus at Constantinople, and the first glimpse of Damascus from the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, I have almost never encountered a place or a thing whose first sight was not like a memory. Have we lived twice, or perhaps a thousand times? Is our memory merely a tarnished mirror that the breath of God revives? Or do we have, in our imagination, the power to sense and see before we meet with the corresponding reality? Insoluble questions!

## Ein Kerem (Ain Karim)

At two in the afternoon, we descended the steep slopes of the Vale of Terebinth, we crossed the bed of the dry torrent, and climbed, via stairs carved into the rock, to the Arab village of Saint John the Baptist (*Ein Kerem/Ain Karim, now within Jerusalem*), which we saw in front of us. Arabs with fierce expressions stared at us from the terraces of their houses; women and children crowded around us in the narrow streets of the village; the monks, terrified by the commotion they could see from their rooftops, by the number of our horses and men, and of the plague we might be bringing them, refused to open the iron gates of the monastery. We retraced our steps and camped on a hill near the village; we cursed the hard-heartedness of the monks. I sent my dragoman to parley with them again, and address the reproaches to them that they deserved. Meanwhile, the entire population descended from the rooftops; the sheikhs surrounded us, mingling their savage cries with the neighing of our terrified horses; a horrible confusion reigned throughout our caravan; and we primed our rifles.

Abu Gosh's nephew, perched on the roof of a house near the monastery, addressed the monks and the people in turn. Finally, on the monks' yielding, we obtained entrance to the monastery: a small iron gate opened for us to pass through, stooping, one by one; we unloaded our horses, which we led through after us. Abu Gosh's nephew and his Arab horsemen remained outside, intending to encamp by the gate. The monks, pale and distraught, trembled at the thought of contact with us; we reassured them, giving them our word that we had not communicated with anyone since Jaffa, and that we would not enter Jerusalem as long as we remained lodged in their refuge. At this assurance, their faces regained their composure; we were ushered through the vast corridors of the monastery; each of us was led to a small cell furnished with a bed and a table, and decorated with a few Spanish engravings of pious subjects. Our soldiers, Arabs, and horses made camp in an uncultivated garden of the monastery; barley and straw were thrown over the walls; sheep and a calf, sent as gifts by Abu Gosh, were slaughtered for us in the street outside; and while my Arab cook, along with the serving brothers, prepared our meal in the monastery kitchen, each of us went to rest for a moment in the cell allocated, to be cooled by the mountain breeze, or contemplate the unfamiliar view surrounding the monastery.

The Monastery of Saint John in the Desert is a branch of the Latin Monastery of the Holy Land in Jerusalem. Those monks whose age, infirmities, or inclination towards a deeper retreat, make them more willing cenobites are sent to this house, which is large and beautiful, surrounded by gardens carved into the rock, courtyards, and wine presses used in producing the excellent wine of Jerusalem. There were about twenty monks there when we arrived; most were elderly Spaniards who had spent the greater part of their lives serving as parish priests, either in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, or other cities of Palestine. A few were novices who had arrived fairly recently from their monasteries in Spain. The ten or so days we spent with them left us with the finest impression of their character, their charity, and the purity of their lives. The superior, above all, is the most accomplished model of the Christian virtues: displaying simplicity, gentleness, humility, unwavering patience, ever-gracious obligingness, ever-timely zeal, tireless care for brothers and strangers alike, without regard for rank or wealth, a natural faith, both active and contemplative, and a serenity of temper, speech, and countenance that no adversity could ever disturb. He is one of those rare examples of what the perfection of the religious principle can produce in a human soul: the man exists only in visible form; the soul is already transformed into something superhuman, angelic, deified, something that shuns admiration, yet commands that same.

We were all equally struck, masters and servants, Christians and Arabs alike, by the contagious holiness of this excellent monk; his spirit seemed to have influenced all the Fathers and brethren of the monastery; for, to varying degrees, we admired a little of the superior's qualities in all, and that house of charity and peace has left me with an indelible memory. I have always found monastic life, in our age, to be profoundly repugnant to intellect and reason; but the life of the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist might have proven spiritual enough as to dispel even my aversion were it not an exception and, were it not for it being contrary to human nature, the family, and society, to seek to justify the existence of such institutions. Moreover, monasteries in the Holy Land serve a purpose; they are useful to society through the refuge they offer to pilgrims from the West, through the example of Christian virtues they can provide to peoples who are ignorant of those virtues; and finally, through the relationships they alone maintain between certain parts of the East and the Western nations.

The Fathers woke us towards evening to lead us to the refectory, where their servants and ours had prepared our meal. This meal, like every other in the monastery, consisted of omelettes, pieces of mutton on an iron skewer roasted over the fire, and rice pilaf. We were given, for the first time, excellent white wine from the surrounding vineyards: it is the only wine known in Judea. The Desert Fathers of Saint John the Baptist are the only ones who know how to produce it, and they supply it to all the monasteries in Palestine. I bought a small barrel, which I sent to Europe. During the meal, all the monks walked about the refectory, chatting with us in turn; the superior made sure that we lacked nothing, and often served us with his own hands, fetching liqueurs, chocolate, and all the sweets left over from the last shipment that had arrived from Spain, from the monastery cupboards. After supper, we ascended with them to the monastery terraces: this is where the monks' usually walk during times of plague, and they often remain secluded in this manner for several months of the year. 'Besides,' they said, 'this seclusion is less painful for us than you think; for it gives us the right to close our iron gates to the local Arabs, who constantly bother us with their visits and demands. When the quarantine is lifted, the monastery is always full of these insatiable men: we prefer the constraints induced by the plague to the necessity of seeing them.' I understood this after experiencing their attentions myself.

The Monastery of Saint John of the Desert sits atop a little hill surrounded on all sides by deep, dark valleys whose depths are hidden. The flanks of these valleys, facing the monastery windows on every side, are hewn almost vertically from the grey rock that forms their base. The cliffs are riddled with deep caverns, carved out by Nature and deepened by the hermits of early centuries, providing shelter for eagles and doves. Here and there, on slightly shallower slopes, one sees a few cultivated vines climbing the trunks of small fig trees, and cascading down the rocks. Such is the appearance of all such solitary sites here. A grey hue, speckled with yellow-green, covers the entire landscape; from the monastery roof, one plunges in every direction into bottomless abysses; a few poor houses of Muslim Arabs and Christians huddle on the rocks in the shadow of its buildings. The local Arabs were viewed as the fiercest and most treacherous of people. They recognised Abu Gosh's authority. The very name Abu Gosh made the monks pale. They could not understand what power of seduction or title to authority had induced that leader to welcome us thus, and grant us his own nephew as a guide; they suspected some superior diplomatic skill in this, and constantly sought my protection with that tyrant of tyrants.

We returned when night fell and spent the evening in the monastery corridor, in pleasant conversation with the excellent superior and the kind Spanish Fathers. They were strangers to recent events; no news from Europe had crossed these inaccessible mountains. It seemed impossible for them to grasp the latest situation in France (*the July Revolution of 1830 had led to the overthrow of Charles X, the French Bourbon monarch, and the ascent of his cousin Louis Philippe, Duke of Orléans).* 'Well,' they would say in conclusion to all our stories, 'as long as the King of France is still a Catholic, and France continues to protect the monasteries in the Holy Land, all is well.' They showed us their church, a charming little nave built on the spot where the forerunner of Christ was born, which was embellished with an organ, as well as several mediocre paintings of the Spanish school.

The next day, we could not resist the desire to cast a distant glance at Jerusalem. We settled terms with the monks; it was agreed that we would leave some of our people, horses, and baggage at the monastery; that we would only take with us the horsemen from Abu Gosh, the Egyptian soldiers, and those Arab servants who were indispensable for the care of our saddle-horses; that we would refrain from entering the city; that we would confine ourselves to circling it, avoiding contact with the inhabitants; and that in the event that, by accident or otherwise, such contact was to occur, we would no longer request to return to the monastery, but would withdraw our belongings and our entourage, and set up camp in the vicinity of Jerusalem. These conditions we accepted, and with no other guarantee given than our word, our truthfulness being taken on trust, we departed.

**The End of Part V of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part VI: Jerusalem, the Jordan and the Dead Sea

## Jerusalem

On October 28th, 1832, we set off at five in the morning from the desert of Saint John the Baptist. We waited on horseback for dawn in the monastery courtyard, enclosed by its high walls, so as not to communicate in the darkness with the plague-ridden Arabs and Turks from the village and from Bethlehem. At half past five, we were on our way; we climbed a mountainside strewn with enormous grey rocks, clustered together in blocks, as if a hammer had broken them. A few creeping vines, their leaves yellowed by autumn, trailed amidst small cleared plots of ground in the spaces between the rocks, and enormous stone towers, similar to those the *Song of Songs* (*4.4*) speaks of, rose above these vineyards, while fig trees, their tops are already stripped of leaves, hung from ledges above the vines, and dropped their black figs onto the stone. To our right, the desert of Saint John the Baptist, where his voice resounded, *Vox clamavit in deserto* (*John 1.23*), opened, like an immense abyss, between a handful of tall black mountains; and, in the space outlined by their stony summits, the horizon of the Egyptian sea, covered with a dark mist, opened before our eyes: to our left, and very close to us, was the ruin of an ancient tower or castle, on the tip of a very high hill which is in the process of being stripped bare, like everything around it: we could distinguish some other ruins, like the arches of an aqueduct, descending from this castle: on the slope of the mountain, some vines grew at their feet, and cast over their collapsed arches vaults of pale yellow greenery: one or two isolated terebinth trees grew in these ruins; this was *Modi'in*, the castle and the tomb of the last heroic men of sacred history, the Maccabees.



'Jerusalem' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We left these ruins, sparkling with the highest rays of the morning, behind. The sun's rays here are not blended, as in Europe, into a vague, confused light, a brilliant and universal radiance; rather they leapt from the top of the mountains that hid Jerusalem from us, like arrows of fire of various hues, merged at the centre, but diverging as they crossed the sky: some are a slightly silvery blue, others a matte white; some a tender pink, paling at their edges, others the colour of ardent fire, and as hot as the rays of a conflagration. Divided, and yet in harmonious accord, through their successive, graduated tints, they resemble a brilliant rainbow, whose arc had been broken in the firmament and was scattered through the air. This was the third time that the beautiful phenomenon of dawn or sunset had appeared to us in this form since we had entered the mountainous region of Galilee and Judea; it is dawn or dusk as the old masters depicted it, an image that would seem false to one who has not witnessed the reality.

As the day progressed, the distinct brilliance and the azure or fiery colour of each of these luminous bars diminished and blended into the general glow of the atmosphere; and the moon, which hung above our heads, still a fiery pink, faded, took on a pearly hue, and sank in the depths of the sky, like a silver disc sinking through deep water whose colour grows paler.

After climbing a second mountain, even higher and more barren than the first, the horizon suddenly opened to the right, revealing a vast expanse stretching between the last peaks of Judea, where we were, and the high mountain ranges of Arabia. This expanse was already bathed in the shimmering, vaporous light of morning. Beyond the lower hills beneath our feet, collapsed and broken into blocks of grey, crushed rock, the eye could see nothing but that dazzling expanse, so like a vast sea that the illusion was complete, and we thought we could discern those stretches of dull silver, interspersed with dark shadow, that the dawn light spreads on calm waters. On the shores of this illusory ocean, a few miles away and slightly to the left of view, the sun shone on a square tower, a tall minaret, and the broad yellow walls of several buildings crowning the summit of a low hill, the base of which was hidden from our view. But from the tips of other minarets, the crenellations of the higher walls, and the black and blue peaks of a few domes that pyramided behind the tower and the great minaret, we recognised a city descending the hillside, a city of which we could only see the highest part, and which could only be Jerusalem.

We had thought ourselves further from it, and each of us, without daring to ask the guide anything for fear of having the illusion shattered, silently enjoyed this first furtive glimpse of the city, where everything suggested the name Jerusalem. It was she! The city appeared a deep, matte yellow against the blue of the sky and the black of the Mount of Olives. We halted our horses to contemplate this mysterious and dazzling apparition. Every step we took, descending into the deep, dark valleys beneath our feet, would again conceal it from our sight: behind the high walls and lowered domes of Jerusalem, a high, broad hill rose in a second line, darker than the one that bore and hid the city: this second hill bordered and marked the horizon for us. The sun left the western flank in shadow, but its vertical rays skimming the summit, like a broad dome, seemed to make the translucent peak swim in the light, such that the indistinct boundary between earth and sky was discernible only by a few broad, black trees, planted on the highest raised point, through which the sun's rays passed.

It was the Mount of Olives; here were the very same olive trees (*according to tradition: olive trees are long-lived, those in the Garden of Gethsemane some dating to the twelfth century were themselves derived from ancient rootstock*), ancient witnesses of so many days writ on Earth and in Heaven, watered with

divine tears, blood and sweat, and with so many other sweated tears since that night that rendered them sacred. Other olive trees could be vaguely distinguished, forming dark patches on its slopes; then the walls of Jerusalem intercepted the horizon and hid the foot of the sacred mount.

Closer to us, and immediately before our eyes, lay nothing but a stony desert, serving as the avenue to this city of stone: an enormous, once-molten platform, a uniform shade of ash-grey, stretched without interruption from where we stood to the gates of Jerusalem. The hills rose and fell; narrow valleys wound and meandered among their roots. A few small valleys extended here and there, as if to deceive the human eye and even promise vegetation and life; but everything was stone, hills, valleys, and plain: a single layer of rock ten or twelve feet thick, with only enough space between the stones for a reptile to crawl through, or to break the leg of a camel that sank into them. If one imagines enormous walls of colossal stones like those of the Colosseum or the great Roman theatres, collapsed all at once and covering the earth on which they rest with their immense slabs, one will have an exact idea of this layer and of the nature of the rocks that everywhere cover the outermost ramparts of the desert city.



'Jerusalem from the South' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

The closer one gets, the more the stones rise and loom above, like eternal avalanches ready to engulf the passer-by. One's last steps before entering Jerusalem are taken amidst a motionless and funereal avenue of rocks which rise ten feet above the head of the traveller, and allow only a part of the sky above to be seen: we were in this last and gloomy avenue, we had been riding there for a quarter of an hour, when the rocks, suddenly parting to right and left, we found ourselves face to face with the walls of the city, which we had reached without suspecting it. Only an empty space of a few hundred paces stretched between the Bethlehem Gate (*the Al-Zararah Arch, or Star Street*) and ourselves: this space, arid and undulating like those glacis which surround the fortresses of

Europe from afar, and as desolate, opened to the right, and was hollowed out into a narrow valley, which descended gently. To the left it bore five old olive tree-trunks, half-collapsed on the ground under the weight of time, and scorched by the sun; trees as if petrified, like the barren fields from which they so painfully emerged.

The Bethlehem Gate, dominated by two towers crowned with Gothic battlements, but deserted and silent like the ancient gates of abandoned castles, stood open before us. We remained motionless for a few minutes, gazing. We burned with the desire to pass through, but the plague was at its height in the city: we had only been received at the Monastery of St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness on the most formal of promises not to enter the city. We refrained; and, turning left, descended slowly along the high walls, built on the side of a deep ravine or ditch, where we occasionally recognised the foundation stones of Herod's old city wall. At every turn we encountered Turkish cemeteries, whitewashed with funerary monuments surmounted by stone turbans: these cemeteries, whose solitudes were populated nightly by the plague-filled air, were here and there dotted with groups of Turkish and Arab women who came to mourn their husbands or fathers. A few tents were pitched among the graves, and seven or eight women, seated or kneeling, holding beautiful infants they were nursing in their arms, uttered, at intervals, rhythmic lamentations, songs, or funeral prayers whose religious melancholy blended wonderfully with the desolate scene before our eyes.

These women were not veiled; some were young and beautiful; They had beside them baskets full of artificial flowers, painted in bright colours, which they planted all around some particular tomb, watering them with tears. From time to time, they bent down toward the freshly-turned earth and sang a few verses of their lament to the dead man, seeming to speak to him in hushed tones; then, remaining silent, their ears pressed to the monument, they appeared to wait and listen for a reply. These groups of women and children, seated there and weeping all day long, were the only sign of life and human habitation that appeared to us during our circuit around the walls: otherwise, no noise sounded, no smoke rose; while a few doves, flying from the fig trees to the battlements, and from the battlements to the edges of the holy pools, displayed the only movement, and raised the only murmur, in this mute and empty enclosure.

Halfway down the descent that led us to the Kidron Valley, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, we saw a deep, open cave, not far from the city's moats, below a mound of yellowish rock. I did not seek to stop there; I wanted to see Jerusalem first, and nothing but Jerusalem, all of it, taken in at a single glance with its valleys and hills, Jehoshaphat and the Kidron Valley, its temple and its tomb, its ruins and its contours!



'Jerusalem from the North' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We then passed the Damascus Gate (*the Nablus Gate, or Gate of the Pillar*), a charming monument in Arab style, flanked by two towers; its opening was a wide, tall, and elegant pointed arch, and it was crenellated with arabesque battlements in the shape of stone turbans. Then we turned right along the angle of the city walls, which form a regular square on the north side; and having on our left the deep and dark valley of Gethsemane, whose bottom is occupied and filled by the dry Kidron Valley, we followed, as far as the Gate of Saint Stephen (*the Lion's Gate or Bab al-Asbat*), a narrow path adjoining the walls, interrupted by two beautiful pools, in one of which Christ healed the paralytic (*John 5.2-17*). This path is suspended on a narrow ledge overlooking the precipice of Gethsemane and the Valley of Jehoshaphat: at the Gate of Saint Stephen, it is interrupted in its progress along the steep terraces that once supported the Temple of Solomon, and now support the Mosque of Omar; and a steep, wide slope suddenly descends to the left, towards the bridge that crosses the Kidron Valley and leads to Gethsemane and the Garden of Olives.



'Gate of Damascus, Jerusalem' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We crossed this bridge and dismounted opposite a charming building of composite architecture, but of a severe and ancient character, which is as if buried deep within the valley of Gethsemane and occupies its entire width. This is the tomb supposedly dedicated to the Virgin, the mother of Christ; it belongs to the Armenians, whose monasteries were among the most ravaged by the plague. We therefore did not enter the sanctuary of the tomb itself; I simply knelt on the marble step of the courtyard preceding this lovely temple and invoked her, whose pious and tender devotion every mother teaches her child from an early age.



'Citadel of Jerusalem, without the Walls, Tower of David' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

As I rose, I saw behind me an acre of land, bordering on one side the high bank of the Kidron Valley, and on the other rising gently against the base of Mount Olives. A low, un-mortared stone wall surrounds this field, and eight olive trees, spaced thirty to forty paces apart, cover almost the entire area with their shade. These olive trees are among the largest of their kind that I have ever encountered: tradition traces their age back to the memorable date of the agony of Jesus, who chose them to conceal his divine anguish. Their appearance would, if need be, confirm the tradition that venerates them; their immense roots, the product of centuries, have lifted the earth and the stones that covered them, and, rising several feet above ground level, offer the pilgrim a natural seat where he can kneel or sit to gather the holy thoughts that descend from their silent crowns. A gnarled, fluted trunk, hollowed by age as if by deep wrinkles, rises in a broad column above each of these clusters of roots, and, as if weighed down and bowed by the burden of days, leans to the right or left, letting its vast, intertwined branches hang down, branches that the axe has pruned a hundred times to rejuvenate them. These old, heavy branches, which bend over the trunk, bear younger ones that rise a little towards the sky, from which spring a few one or two-year-old shoots, crowned with tufts of leaves and blackened with small blue olives that fall, like celestial relicts, upon the feet of the Christian traveller.

I moved away from the caravan, which had remained by the Virgin's tomb, and sat for a moment upon the roots of the oldest and most solitary of these olive trees; its shade hid the walls of Jerusalem from me; its broad trunk concealed me from the gaze of the shepherds, who were grazing black sheep on the slope of the Mount of Olives. Before me lay only the deep, jagged ravine of the Kidron Valley, and the crowns of a few other olive trees that in this place cover the

entire width of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. No sound rose from the dry streambed, no leaf stirred on the tree. I closed my eyes for a moment, and in my mind envisioned that night, the eve of the redemption of mankind, when the divine Messenger had drunk to the dregs the cup of agony, before receiving death at the hands of men, as the reward for his heavenly message.

I asked for a share of the salvation he had brought to the world at so high a price; I pictured the ocean of anguish that must have flooded the heart of the Son of Man when he beheld with a single glance all the miseries, the darkness, the bitterness, the vanities, the iniquities of human fate; when alone he wished to lift the burden of sin and misfortune under which all humanity bows, as it passes, groaning, through this narrow valley of tears; when he understood that one could only bring a new truth and consolation to humankind at the price of one's own life; when, recoiling, in terror, faced with the shadow of death that he already felt upon him, he said to his father, 'Let this cup pass from me!' (*Matthew 26.39*). Might not I, a wretched, ignorant, and weak man, also cry out, at the foot of the tree of human weakness: 'Lord, let all these cupsful of bitterness depart from me, to be poured by you into that cup already emptied for us all! He had the strength to drink it to the dregs. He knew you, he had seen you; he knew why he was about to drink that same; He knew what immortal life awaited him in the depths of his three-day tomb; but I, Lord, what do I know, except the suffering that breaks my heart, and the hope that he taught me?'

I rose and marvelled at how divinely predestined and chosen this place had been for the most sorrowful scene of the Divine Passion. It was a narrow, steep-sided, deep valley; closed to the north by dark, bare heights bearing the tombs of kings; shaded to the west by the shadow of the dark, gigantic walls of a city of iniquity; covered to the east by the peak of the Mount of Olives, and crossed by a torrent that rolled its bitter, yellowish waters over the broken rocks of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. A few steps away, a black, bare rock juts out like a promontory from the foot of the mountain, and, suspended above the Kidron Valley and the valley below, bears several ancient tombs of kings and patriarchs, hewn in a gigantic and bizarre architectural style, and rises, like the Bridge of Death, over the Valley of Lamentations.



'Entrance to the Tombs of the Kings, Jerusalem' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

At that time, no doubt, the flanks, today half-naked, of the Mount of Olives, were watered by the pools and the still-flowing streams of the Kidron Valley. Gardens of pomegranates, orange trees, and olive trees covered the narrow valley of Gethsemane with a thicker shade, a valley hollowed out, like a nest of sorrow, from the narrowest and darkest depths of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The man of shame, the man of sorrows, could hide there like a criminal, among the roots of trees, among the rocks of the stream, beneath the triple shadows of the city, the mountain, and the night. From there he could hear the footsteps of his mother and his disciples, who were passing in secret along the road, searching for their son and their master; the confused noises, the foolish acclamations of the city, rising above his head, rejoicing at having conquered truth and expelled justice; and the groaning of the Kidron Valley, which rolled its waters beneath his feet, and which would soon see his city overthrown and its springs shattered by the ruin of a nation later accused of being guilty and blind. Could Christ have chosen a better place for his tears? Could he have watered with sweat and blood a land more drenched in misery, more steeped in sorrow, more saturated with lamentation?

## The Mount of Olives

I remounted my horse, and, turning my head constantly to catch a wider glimpse of the valley and the city, climbed the Mount of Olives in a quarter of an hour: each step my horse took on the path leading upwards revealed to me another district, another of the buildings of Jerusalem. I reached the summit, crowned by a ruined mosque (*the Mosque of the Ascension, a Crusader chapel converted to a mosque by Saladin in 1198*) that covers the place where Christ ascended into heaven after

the Resurrection; I descended slightly to the right of this mosque and came upon two broken columns, lying on the ground at the foot of some olive trees, on a plateau overlooking Jerusalem, Zion, the valleys of Saint Saba leading to the Dead Sea, and the Dead Sea itself, shining between the mountain peaks and the immense horizon, furrowed with diverse summits, ending at the mountains of Arabia: there I sat. This was the scene before me:

The Mount of Olives, on whose summit I sit, descends steeply and rapidly into the deep abyss that separates it from Jerusalem and is called the Valley of Jehoshaphat. From the bottom of this dark and narrow valley, whose bare sides are speckled with black and white stones, funereal stones, with which they are almost everywhere paved, rises an immense and broad hill whose rapid incline resembles that of a tall, collapsed rampart; no tree can plant its roots there, not even filaments of moss cling to its slopes, so steep that the earth and stones constantly crumble away, and it presents to the eye only a surface of arid and dried dust, as if heaps of ashes have been cast down from the heights of the city. Toward the middle of this hill or natural rampart, stand high and strong walls of broad, unhewn stones, concealing their Roman and Hebrew foundations beneath the very ash that covers their base, and rising here fifty to a hundred, and there, further on, two to three hundred feet, above this earthen base. The walls are punctuated by three city gates, two of which are walled up, and the single opening before me seems as empty and deserted as if it were to grant access only to an uninhabited city.



'Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

The walls still rise above these gates, supporting a broad and expansive terrace that extends along two-thirds of Jerusalem's eastern side. This terrace is roughly a thousand feet long and five to six hundred feet wide; it is almost perfectly level, except at its centre where it dips gently, as if to remind the eye of the shallow valley that once separated Mount Zion from the city of Jerusalem.

This magnificent platform, undoubtedly prepared by Nature but evidently finished by human hands, was the sublime pedestal upon which Solomon's Temple stood; today it bears two Arab mosques: one, Qubbat as-Sahra (*the Dome of the Rock*), in the centre of the platform, on the very spot where the Temple must have stood; the other (*Al-Aqsa*, or *Quibli*), at the southeastern end of the terrace, abutting the city walls. Qubbat as-Sahra, an admirable example of Arab architecture, is an immense block of stone and marble, with eight sides, each adorned with seven pointed arches. Above this first architectural level is a flat roof, from which springs another, narrower arcade, culminating in a graceful copper-covered dome, once gilded. The mosque walls are covered in blue enamel; to the right and left extend wide walls ending in slender Moorish colonnades, corresponding to the mosque's eight gates. Beyond these arches, free of any other structure, the platforms continue and terminate, one at the northern edge of the city, the other at the southern walls. Tall cypress trees, scattered seemingly at random, a few olive trees, and graceful green shrubs, grow here and there between the mosques. The latter's elegant architecture, and the vibrant colour of their walls, are enhanced by their pyramidal shape and the sombre greenery that stand out against the facades of the city's temples and domes.

Beyond the two mosques and the site of the Temple, stretches all of Jerusalem, bursting forth, as it were, before us, the eye missing not a single roof or stone, like to the plan of a city in relief that an artist might lay out on a table. The city is not, as it was previously depicted to us, a formless and confused heap of ruins and ashes upon which a few Arab huts are thrown, or a few Bedouin tents pitched; nor, like Athens, a chaos of dust and crumbling walls, in which the traveller searches in vain for the shadows of buildings, the traces of streets, the vision of a city: but a living city shining with light and colour. It presents, nobly, to the eyes, its intact and crenellated wall; its blue mosque with white colonnades; its thousands of resplendent domes, on which the light of an autumn sun falls and rebounds amidst dazzling vapour; its house facades tinted, by time and by sunlight, with the yellow and gold colour of the buildings of Paestum or Rome; its old towers, guardians of its walls, which lack not a stone, nor a loophole, nor a battlement; and finally, in the midst of this ocean of houses and the cloud of small domes that cover them, a low black dome, broader than the others, dominated by another white dome: these are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and that of Calvary; they are confused together, and as if drowned, from here, by the immense maze of domes, buildings, and streets that surround them; and it is difficult to thus realise the location of Calvary and that of the Sepulchre, which, according to the Gospels should be located on a remote hill outside the walls, not in the centre of Jerusalem. The city, narrowed on the side of Zion, will undoubtedly have expanded on the north side to encompass, within its walls, the two sites that are both its shame and its glory: the site of the righteous man's Crucifixion, and the site of the Resurrection of the Divine Man.

Behold the city from atop the Mount of Olives! Nothing can be seen of the horizon behind it, neither to the west nor to the north. The line of its walls and towers, the spires of its many minarets, the arches of its gleaming domes, stand out starkly and harshly against the blue of an Eastern sky; and the city, thus borne and presented upon its broad and elevated plateau, seems still to shine with all the ancient splendour of the prophecies, or to await only a word to emerge, dazzling, from its seventeen successive ruins, and become '*the New Jerusalem rising from the heart of the desert, shining with light*!' (*see Racine 'Athalie' Act III, Scene 7, and the Book of Revelation/Apocalypse 21.2).*

Here is the most dazzling vision the eye can obtain of the city that no longer exists; for it seems still, here, as radiant as a city full of youth and life; yet, if one looks at it more closely, one feels that it is in fact nothing more than a beautiful phantom of the city of David and Solomon. No sound rises from its squares and streets; roads no longer lead to its gates from east or west, from south or north; there are only a few paths winding haphazardly among the rocks, where one encounters a few half-naked Arabs, mounted on their donkeys, a few camel drivers from Damascus, or a few women from Bethlehem or Jericho, carrying on their heads baskets of grapes from Engaddi (*Ein Gedi, on the western shore of the Dead Sea*), or baskets of doves, which they offer for sale in the morning, beneath the terebinth trees, outside the city gates.



'Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We sat in front of the main gates of Jerusalem all day; we walked around the walls, passing by all the other gates of the city. No one entered, no one left; not even a beggar sat at a gatepost, not a sentry appeared on the threshold; we saw nothing, we heard nothing; there was only, for twelve hours of the day, the same emptiness, the same silence, at the entrance to a city of thirty thousand souls, as if we had passed the gates of ruined Pompeii or Herculaneum! We saw only a quartet of funeral processions leave the Damascus Gate, silently making their way beside the walls toward the Turkish cemeteries; and, emerging from the Zion Gate when we passed, a poor Christian who had died of the plague that morning, being carried by four gravediggers to the Greek cemetery. They came close to us, laid the plague victim's body on the ground, wrapped in its grave-cloth, and silently began digging his final resting place almost beneath our horses' hooves. The earth around the city was freshly turned by similar burials, which the plague multiplied daily, and the only perceptible sound outside the walls of Jerusalem was the monotonous lament of Turkish women mourning their dead. Was the plague the sole cause of the bare roads and the profound

silence around and within Jerusalem? I suspect not since the Turks and Arabs do not seek to avoid God's scourges, convinced that they can reach them everywhere, and that no road escapes them. Sublime as is their reasoning it leads to disastrous consequences!

To the left of the Temple platform, and the walls of Jerusalem, the hill, on which the city rests, suddenly falls away, widens, and unfolds before the eye in gentle slopes, supported here and there by terraces of loose stones. This hill bears at its summit, a few hundred paces from Jerusalem, a mosque and a group of Turkish buildings rather like a European hamlet, crowned by its church and bell tower. This is Zion! Here are the palace and tomb of David! Here is the scene of his inspiration and delight, of his life, and his final resting place! A place doubly sacred to me, whose heart that divine bard has so often touched, and whose thoughts he has so often captivated. He is the foremost of the poets of feeling! He is the king of lyric poets! Never has the human soul resonated with such intimate, penetrating, and profound harmonies; Never has poetic thought risen on high so, or cried out with such truth; never has the soul of mankind poured forth, before mankind and God, such tender, sympathetic, and heart-rending expressions and sentiments. All the most secret lamentations of the human heart found their voice and music on the lips and harp of this man; and if one considers the distant era when such songs resounded on the earth; if one considers that the lyric poetry of the most cultivated nations sang then only of wine, love, blood, and the victories of the muses and steeds in the Games at Elis (*the Olympic Games*), one is seized with profound astonishment at the mystical words of the royal prophet, who speaks to the Creator as friend to friend, who understands and praises His wonders, who admires His justice, who implores His mercy, and seems an echo, in anticipation, of the poetry of the Gospels, repeating the gentle words of Christ before they were spoken. Prophet or not, neither the philosopher nor the Christian can deny the poet-king an inspiration that was given to no other man. Read Horace or Pindar after repeating a psalm! Speaking for myself, I can no longer bear to do so.

## Mount Zion

Had I lived in Jerusalem, I, a humble poet of an age of decadence and silence, would have chosen the place for my dwelling and my final rest precisely where David chose his, on Mount Zion. It offers the most beautiful view of Judea, Palestine, and Galilee. Jerusalem is to the left with the Temple Mount and its buildings, upon which the gaze of the king or the poet could rest without his being seen. Before him, fertile gardens, descending in gentle slopes, led to the level of the stream whose foam and voice he loved. Below, the valley opens and extends; fig trees, pomegranate trees, and olive trees shade it. On these rocks suspended over the flowing water; in these echoing caves, refreshed by the breath and the murmur of the waters; at the foot of these terebinth-trees, ancestors of the terebinth that shelters me, the sacred poet would doubtless walk awaiting the breath that inspired his supreme melodies. Would that he was to be found here again, to sing of the sorrows of my heart and those of the hearts of all people in this troubled age, as he sang of his own hopes in an age of youth and faith! But there is no longer any song in the hearts of human beings, the lyre remains mute, and we pass in silence between twin abysses of doubt, having neither loved, nor prayed, nor sung!

Let me return, though, to the subject of David's palace. I gaze into the ravine, verdant and watered by Jehoshaphat in his day. A wide opening in the eastern hills leads from slope to slope, from peak to peak, from undulation to undulation, down to the basin of the Dead Sea, reflecting

the evening rays in its heavy, dense waters, like a solid Venetian mirror granting a dull, leaden tint to what it reflects. It is not, as the mind imagined, a petrified lake on a sad, colourless horizon. From here, it is as if one of the most beautiful lakes of Switzerland or Italy is to be seen, its tranquil waters lying between the shadows of the high Arabian mountains, which stretch, like the Alps, as far as the eye can see beyond its waters, and the slender, pyramidal, conical, light, jagged, and sparkling peaks of the last mountains of Judea. Such is the view from Zion! — Let me move on.

There is another aspect of the contours of Jerusalem that I would wish to imprint on my memory; but lack both artist's brush and paint: the Valley of Jehoshaphat! A valley known to the traditions of three religions, the place in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike have agreed to place the terrible scene of the Last Judgment! A valley that has already witnessed on its banks the greatest scene of the Gospel drama: the tears, groans, and death of Christ! A valley through which all the prophets passed in turn, uttering a cry of sorrow and horror that seems to still echo there! A valley that must one day hear the great roar of the torrent of souls flowing before God, presenting themselves of their own accord to the fatal judgment!

*The same date. October 28th, 1832.*

We returned, having avoided violating the conditions of the pact concluded with the monks of the Monastery of Saint John in the Desert. We were received with a trust and charity that move us deeply; for if we had not been men of honour, if even one of our Arabs had escaped our supervision and mingled with those who were carrying the plague victims right in our midst, we would perhaps have brought death to the entire monastery.

*October 29, 1832.*

We left the desert of Saint John at five in the morning, with all our horses, escorts, the Arabs from Abu Gosh, and four horsemen sent by the governor of Jerusalem. We established our camp two rifle-shot lengths from the walls, next to the Turkish cemetery, which was entirely covered with small tents where women came to mourn. These tents are occupied by women, children and slaves, who bring baskets full of flowers which they plant each day around the tombs.

Our Nablus cavalrymen entered the city alone and went to inform the governor of our arrival. While they carried our message, we removed our shoes, boots, and cloth insoles, which might carry the plague, and put on morocco leather slippers. We rubbed ourselves with oil and garlic, a preservative I devised based on the well-known theory that the merchants and oil-bearers of Constantinople are less prone to contagion. After half an hour, we saw the governor's *kahya* (*steward*), the interpreter from the Latin monastery, five or six horsemen in splendid costumes carrying canes with gold and silver pommels, our own Nablus cavalrymen, and some young pages also on horseback emerging from the Bethlehem Gate. We went to meet them; they formed a guard of honour around us, and we entered via the gate. Three plague victims, who had died during the night, emerged at the same moment and the corpse-bearers briefly disputed our passage beneath that dark archway at the city entrance. Immediately after passing through the archway, we found ourselves at a crossroads lined with small, wretched houses and a few overgrown gardens, their walls crumbling around them.

We followed the widest path from this crossroads for a while; it led us through a few little streets, equally dark, narrow, and filthy. There, we saw only processions of men bearing the dead, who passed by hurriedly, or lined up against the walls, at the command and beneath the raised batons of the Governor's Janissaries. Here and there, a few bread and fruit vendors, covered in rags, sat on the thresholds of small shops, baskets on their knees, calling out their wares, as in our large-city market halls. From time to time, a veiled woman appeared at the barred wooden window of one of these houses; a child opened a low, dark door and ran to buy the family's daily provisions. These streets were everywhere obstructed with rubble, and heaped with filth, especially piles of cloth or blue-dyed cotton rags, which the wind swept about like dead leaves, and whose contact we could not avoid. It is mostly due to the filth and scraps of fabric with which the pavements of Eastern cities are covered, that the plague spreads so widely.

So far, in the streets of Jerusalem, we saw nothing that suggested the presence of a thriving nation; no sign of wealth, activity, or life. Outward appearances had deceived us, as they so often did in other cities of Greece or Syria. The most wretched village in the Alps or the Pyrenees, the most neglected alleyways of our suburbs, abandoned to the poorest of our working class, possess more cleanliness, luxury, and elegance than did the deserted streets of the Queen of Cities. We encountered only a few Bedouin horsemen, mounted on Arabian mares whose hooves slipped on, or sank into, the holes in the furrowed pavement. These men lack the noble and chivalrous air of the Arab sheikhs of Syria and Lebanon. They have ferocious countenances, the eyes of vultures, and the garb of brigands.

We wandered for some time through similar-looking streets, stopping from time to time when the interpreter from the Latin monastery pointed out a ruined Turkish house, an old, worm-eaten wooden door, or the remains of a Moorish window, to tell us: 'This was the house of Veronica; here, the gate of the Wandering Jew; there, the window of the Praetorium'; names that made only a distressing impression on us, contradicted as they were by the obviously modern appearance of the sites, and the glaring improbability of their arbitrary designations; pious frauds for which no one is particularly guilty, since they date back to who knows when, and have been repeated for centuries perhaps to pilgrims, whose ignorant credulity itself caused their invention. Finally, we were shown the roofs of the Latin Monastery, but could not enter. The monks were in quarantine; the monastery was closed due to the plague. Only a small house belonging to the monastery remained open to foreigners, under the direction of the priest, the curate of Jerusalem; it had only one or two rooms; they were occupied, so we avoided them. We were shown into a small square courtyard, enclosed on all sides by tall arches supporting raised terraces; it was the courtyard of the monastery.

The monks emerged onto the terraces and conversed with us for a few moments in Spanish and Italian. None of them spoke French; those we saw were almost all elderly men with gentle, venerable, faces and happy expressions. They welcomed us with cheerfulness and cordiality and seemed to regret, deeply, that the prevailing calamity prevented them from contact with guests as exposed as we were to catching and spreading the plague. We passed on news of Europe; they offered us the assistance that their country provides. A butcher slaughtered sheep for us in the courtyard. Fresh loaves of bread were lowered to us by rope from the terraces. We received from them, by the same means, a supply of crosses, rosaries, and other pious items, with which their

storerooms are always abundantly stocked; in return, we gave them alms and letters that their friends in Cyprus and Syria had entrusted to us.

Every object that passed from our hands to theirs was first subjected to rigorous fumigation, then plunged into a vessel of cold water, and finally hoisted to the top of the terrace in a copper basin suspended by a rope. These poor monks seem more terrified than we are of the danger that surrounds them. They have so often experienced how a slight lapse in observing the rules of good sanitation can wipe out an entire monastery in a few moments, that they observe them with rigorous fidelity. They cannot understand why we, willingly and cheerfully, threw ourselves into this ocean of contagion, a single drop of which made them pale. The priest of Jerusalem, on the contrary, forced by his position to risk the lives of his parishioners, sought to persuade us that there was no plague.

After half an hour of conversation with these monks, the bell called them to Mass. We thanked them; they wished us a safe journey; we sent back to our camp the provisions and food we had brought, and left the courtyard.

## The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

After riding along a few more streets similar to the ones I have just described, we found ourselves in a small square, opening to the north onto a glimpse of sky and the Mount of Olives; to our left, a few steps led us down into an open courtyard. The facade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre overlooks this courtyard. The church has been described so thoroughly and so well that I will not describe it again. It is, especially on the outside, a vast and beautiful monument of the Byzantine era; its architecture is dignified, solemn, grandiose, and rich for the time in which it was built; it is a worthy pavilion erected, due to the piety of mankind, over the tomb of the Son of Man. Comparing this church with all else that its era produced, one finds it superior. Hagia Sophia (*in Constantinople*), though far more colossal is far more barbaric in form: on the outside, it is nothing but a mountain of stone flanked by hills of stone; the Holy Sepulchre, on the contrary, is an airy and sculpted dome, of which the skilful and graceful carving of the doors, windows, capitals, and cornices adds to its mass the inestimable value of expert craftsmanship; in which stone has become lace so as to be worthy of adorning this monument erected to the greatest of human ideas; and where the very thought that erected it is inscribed in the details as in the whole of the edifice.




'Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

It is true that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is not as it was today when Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, had it built (*in the fourth century AD*); the kings of Jerusalem altered it and embellished it with the ornamentation of that semi-Western, semi-Moorish architecture, whose taste and models they had found in the East. But in its external features, its current state, with its Byzantine mass and Greek, Gothic and Arab decoration, even with the tears, the stigmata, of time and barbarians, that remain imprinted on its facade, does not conflict with the ideas one had of it, with the thought it expresses; one does not experience, at sight of it, the painful impression of a great idea poorly rendered, of a great memory profaned by human hands: on the contrary, one says to oneself, involuntarily: 'This is what I expected. Mankind has done its best. The monument is not worthy of the tomb, but it is worthy of the human race that wished to honour this great sepulchre', and one enters the vaulted and sombre vestibule of the nave, under the impact of that first and profound view.



'Chancel of the Church of St. Helena (Holy Sepulchre)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Library of Congress*

To the left, upon entering the vestibule that opens onto the nave's forecourt, in the recess of a wide, deep niche that once held statues, the Turks have set up their divan; they are the guardians of the Holy Sepulchre, which they alone have the right to open or keep closed. When I passed by, five or six venerable Turks, with long white beards, were squatting on this divan, which was covered with rich Aleppo carpets; coffee cups and pipes lay around them on these carpets; they greeted us with dignity and grace, and ordered one of the attendants to escort us to all areas of the church. I saw nothing in their faces, words, or gestures, to suggest the irreverence of which they are accused. They do not enter the church; they are seated at the door; they speak to Christians with the gravity and respect that the place and purpose of the visit demand. Having seized the sacred monument of the Christians through war, they did not destroy it, they did not scatter its ashes to the wind; they preserved it. They maintain order, a police force, full of silent reverence, that the Christian communities, which vie for its possession, are far from providing themselves. They ensure that this relic, sacred to all who bear the name of Christian, is preserved for all, so that each community may, in turn, enjoy the veneration it wishes to render to the holy tomb.



'Entrance to the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Princeton University Art Museum*

Without the Turks, this tomb, contested by Greeks and Catholics, and the countless offshoots of the Christian ideal, would already, a hundred times over, have been an object of conflict between those mutually hated, rival communities, and would have passed exclusively from one to the other in turn, access undoubtedly being denied to the enemies of whichever communion had triumphed. I see no basis for accusing and insulting the Turks as regards this. The supposed brutal intolerance of which the ignorant accuse them is refuted by the tolerance and respect they show for what other religions venerate and worship. Wherever Muslims see the idea of God in the thoughts of their brothers and sisters, they bow and show respect. They believe that the idea sanctifies the form. Theirs is the only tolerant sect. Let Christians reflect, and ask themselves in good faith, what they would have done if the fortunes of war had delivered Mecca and the Kaaba over to them. Would Muslims have felt safe then in journeying from all parts of Europe and Asia, to venerate, in peace, the preserved monuments of Islam?

At the end of the vestibule, we found ourselves beneath the church's broad dome. The centre of this dome, which local tradition considers to be the centre of the earth, is occupied by a small monument (*the Aedicule*) enclosed within the larger one, like a precious stone set within another. This inner monument is a rectangular edifice, adorned with a few pilasters, a cornice, and a marble cupola, all in poor taste and of a bizarre baroque design; it was constructed in 1810 (*following the fire of 1808*) by a Greek architect (*Kalfa Komnenos, from Mytilene*) at the expense of the Greek Church, which now owns it. Around this inner pavilion of the sepulchre the emptiness of the great outer dome reigns; one is able to move freely within the building, finding, from pillar to pillar, vast and deep chapels, each dedicated to one of the mysteries of Christ's Passion; they all contain some real or supposed depictions of the scenes of the Redemption; the part of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre not beneath the dome is reserved exclusively for the schismatic Greeks; a painted wooden partition, covered with paintings of the Greek school, divides this nave from the other.

Despite the bizarre profusion of bad paintings and ornaments of all kinds with which the walls and altar are burdened, its overall effect is solemn and religious; one senses that prayer, in all its forms, has pervaded this sanctuary, accumulating all that superstitious but fervent generations believed to be precious before God. A staircase carved into the rock leads from there to the summit of Calvary, where the three crosses were planted. Calvary, the tomb, and several other sites of the drama of redemption are thus gathered under the roof of a single, rather modest building. This seems hardly consistent with the Gospel accounts. One scarcely expects to find the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, carved into the rock outside the walls of Zion, fifty paces from Calvary, the site of the executions, and enclosed within the modern city walls. But such is the tradition, and it has prevailed. The mind hardly quibbles about a few paces difference between the historical likelihood and such a tradition: whether it was here or there, the fact remains that it was not far from the sites that are pointed out to one.



'Stone of Unction, Holy Sepulchre' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

After a moment of deep and silent meditation in each of these sacred places, reflecting on the events it evoked, we descended back into the church grounds and entered the inner sanctuary that serves as a stone curtain or enclosure for the tomb itself. It is divided into two smaller sanctuaries. In the first is the stone on which the angel sat when he answered the holy women, '*He is not here, for he is risen*,'(*Matthew 28.6*) The second and final sanctuary contains the sepulchre, still covered by a kind of white marble sarcophagus that completely surrounds and conceals from view the very substance of the original rock in which the sepulchre was hewn. Gold and silver lamps, perpetually fuelled, illuminate this chapel, and perfumes burn there night and day; the air is warm and fragrant. We entered one by one separately, without allowing any of the temple attendants to enter with us,

and separated from the first sanctuary by a crimson silk curtain. We did not want any gaze to disturb the solemnity of the place, nor the intimacy of the impressions it might inspire in each of us, according to our own thoughts and the measure and nature of our faith in the great event that this tomb commemorates; each of us remained there for about fifteen minutes, and none of us left with dry eyes.

Whatever form inner meditation, the reading of history, the passing years, and the vicissitudes of the human heart and mind may have given to the religious feeling in a person's soul; whether they have kept to the letter of Christianity, and the dogmas of their parents, or whether they pursue only a philosophical Christianity according to the spirit; whether Christ for them is a crucified God, or whether they see in him only the holiest of men deified by virtue, inspired by the supreme truth, and dying in order to bear witness to his Father; whether Jesus is in their eyes the Son of God or the Son of Man, the Divinity made human or humanity divinised, the fact remains that Christianity is the religion of their memories, their heart and imagination; that it has not been so weakened, amidst the storms of the century and of life, that the soul into which it was poured fails to retain the first feeling of it, or that the appearance of the places and visible monuments of their first worship fails to rejuvenate in them those first impressions, and shake that person with a solemn tremor. For the Christian or the philosopher, for the moralist or the historian, this tomb is the boundary that separates two worlds, the old world and the new world; it is the starting point of an idea that renewed the universe, of a form of civilisation that transformed everything, of a word that resounded throughout the globe: this tomb is the sepulchre of the old world and the cradle of the new world; no other stone on earth has been the foundation of so vast an edifice; no tomb has been so fruitful; no doctrine buried for three days, or three centuries, has so victoriously shattered the rock with which Mankind had sealed its sepulchre, or refuted death by so shining and perpetual a Resurrection!

I, in turn, being the last, entered the holy sepulchre, my mind filled with these immense ideas, my heart moved by more intimate impressions, which remain a secret between a man and his soul, between the thinking insect and the Creator. Those impressions are not written; they are exhaled amidst the smoke of pious lamps, the perfumes of censers, the vague and confused murmur of sighs; they fall like the tears that come to the eyes at the memory of the first names that we stammered in our childhood, of the father and mother who taught them to us, of the brothers, sisters, friends with whom we whispered them; all the pious impressions that have stirred our soul at all times of life, all the prayers that have risen from our heart and our lips in the name of him who taught us to pray to his Father and ours; all the joys and sorrows of thought, of which these prayers formed the language, awaken in the depths of the soul and, through their resounding turmoil, produce that dazzlement of the intellect, that tenderness of the heart, which seeks no words, but resolves itself in tearful eyes, a heavy heart, a bowed head, and a mouth that silently presses itself against the stone of a sepulchre.

I remained thus for a long time, praying to heaven, to the Father, there, in the very place where the most beautiful of prayers first ascended to heaven; praying for my own father here below, for my mother now in another world, for all those who are, or are no more, but with whom the invisible bond is never broken: since the communion of love exists always; the names of all the beings I have known, loved, and been loved by, passed from my lips to that stone of the holy sepulchre. Only afterwards did I pray on my own behalf; my prayer was ardent and fulsome; I

asked for truth and courage, before the tomb of him who bore the greatest of truths to our world, and died in the greatest act of devotion to that truth, a truth of which he was the embodiment. I shall forever remember the words I murmured in that hour of moral crisis. Perhaps my prayer was answered: a great light of reason and conviction spread through my mind, separating, more clearly, light from darkness, error from truth. There are moments in life when a person's thoughts, long vague and uncertain, adrift like waves without a shore, finally reach that shore, break upon themselves, and return in new forms. This was one of those moments for me. He who searches thoughts and hearts knows this, and perhaps I myself will understand it one day. It has proved a mystery in my life, one that will be revealed to me later.

*The same date. October 29th, 1832.*

## The Via Dolorosa

Leaving the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, we followed the Via Dolorosa, the itinerary of which Chateaubriand described in so poetic a way (*in his 'Itinéraire'*). Nothing of it was striking, nothing verifiable, nothing plausible; just modern-built edifices, presented everywhere, by everyone from monks to pilgrims, as undeniable vestiges of the various Stations of the Cross. The eye doubts all, and any confidence in these local traditions is destroyed in advance by our knowledge of the history of the early years of Christianity, when Jerusalem was altered stone by stone, and Christians were banished from the city for many years. Jerusalem, with the exception of its pools and the tombs of the kings, retains no monuments from any of those great eras: only a few sites are recognisable, such as the Temple mount, defined by its terraces, and now home to the immense and beautiful Qubbat al-Sakhrah, and Mount Zion, occupied by the Armenian Monastery and the Tomb of David; and even then, only with a historical treatise in hand and with a sharply critical eye can the date of most of these sites be assigned with any precision. Apart from the terrace walls overlooking the Valley of Jehoshaphat, no stone betrays its date by its form and colour; the dust everywhere may be ancient or modern. The mind wanders uncertainly across the city's horizon, unsure where to settle; but the whole city, defined by the circumscribed hill on which it stands, by the various valleys that surround it, and especially by the deep valley of the Kidron, is a monument that does not deceive the eye: it is indeed here that Zion was situated; a strange and unfortunate site for the capital of a great people: it is rather the natural fortress of a small tribe, driven from the land and taking refuge with their God, around their temple, on ground that none had an interest in contesting, on rocks that no roads could make accessible, amidst valleys without water, in a harsh and sterile climate, having for horizon only mountains calcined by the internal fire of volcanoes, the mountains of Arabia and Jericho, and a saline sea, without shore or navigable access, the Dead Sea!

Here is Judea, here is the site of a sect whose destiny it was to be proscribed in every era of their subsequent history, with whom even the possession of their capital, itself proscribed to them, was to become a matter of dispute; a site built, like an eagle's nest, on the summit of this cluster of hills: and yet the members of that sect carried with them the majestic idea of the Trinity, of one God in three persons (*see Matthew 28.19, and John 10.30*), and the truth of this elementary idea was enough to separate them from other sects, and to make them proud of their proscription, and confident in their providential doctrine.

*The same date. October 29th, 1832.*

After wandering through the various quarters of the city, all as bare, wretched, and dilapidated as those we had previously entered, we dismounted beside the famous mosque (*the Dome of the Rock, Qubbat al-Sakhrah*) which stands on the site of Solomon's Temple. The governor of Jerusalem has his seraglio in a building adjoining the mosque's gardens and walls. We went to offer him our thanks. The seraglio courtyard was surrounded by barred dungeons, in which the figures of bandits from Jericho and Samaria could be glimpsed, awaiting their release or the Pasha's sword. Horsemen lying at their horses' feet, desert sheikhs, and Arabs from Nablus, were grouped here and there on the staircases or in the sheds, waiting to enter the diwan. The governor, learning of our arrival, sent his son to invite us to meet him. This young man, about thirty years old, was the most handsome of Arabs, perhaps of any group of men, I have ever seen. Strength, grace, intelligence, and gentleness were blended with such harmony in his features, and shone together in his blue eyes with such captivating clarity, that we were all struck by his appearance.

He is a Samaritan. The governor of Jerusalem, his father (*Qasim Pasha al-Ahmad*), is the most powerful of the Arabs of Nablus. Persecuted by Abdullah, Pasha of Acre, and often at war with him during Turkish rule, he had been forced to take refuge, with his family, in the mountains beyond the Dead Sea; Ibrahim Pasha's victory over Abdullah had allowed him to return to his homeland. There he had regained his wealth and influence; He had driven his enemies from the country, and the Pasha of Egypt (*Ibrahim*), to compensate for the inadequacy of his Egyptian troops in Judea, had entrusted him with the government of Samaria and Jerusalem. He had no other troops than a few hundred horsemen from his tribe, with whom he maintained order, and Ibrahim's dominion over all the surrounding population.

We entered the diwan (*council chamber*), a large hall with no ornamentation other than a few carpets or mats, pipes, and coffee cups, on the floor. The governor, surrounded by a large number of slaves, armed Arabs, and a few secretaries kneeling and writing on their hands, was busy administering justice and issuing orders. He rose as we approached and came to meet us. He had the carpets, liable to spread the plague, removed from the diwan, and replaced them with Egyptian mats, which do not transmit the disease. We seated ourselves, and were presented with pipes and coffee. My dragoman offered the customary compliments on my behalf, and I myself thanked him for all the steps he had taken so that foreigners like us could visit, without danger, the places consecrated by their religion. He replied with an obliging smile that he was only doing his duty; that Ibrahim's friends were his friends; that he was responsible for our lives; that he was ready not only to do for me what he had done, but also to travel himself, if I so commanded, with his troops, and to accompany me wherever my curiosity or my religion inspired me to go, within the limits of his jurisdiction; for such was the Pasha's order. Then he inquired about us, and sought news of the war, and of the role the European powers were playing in Ibrahim's fortunes.

I replied in a way that satisfied his private thoughts: that Europe admired Ibrahim Pasha as a civilising agent; that, in this respect, it had a vested interest in his victories; that it was time for the East to share the benefits of better governance; that the Pasha of Egypt was the armed missionary of European civilisation in Arabia; that his bravery and the tactics he had borrowed from us rendered the Grand Vizier's defeat certain, the latter advancing to meet him in Caramania; that, in all likelihood, he would win a great victory there and march on Constantinople; that he would not

enter it, because the Europeans would not yet allow him to, but that he would make peace through their mediation and retain permanent sovereignty over Arabia and Syria.

This touched the heart of the old rebel of Nablus: his eyes hung on every word from my lips, and his son and friends leaned their heads over mine so as not to miss a word of this conversation, which for them was the omen of a long and peaceful reign in Samaria. Finding the governor so well-disposed towards me, I expressed my desire, not to enter the Dome of the Rock since I knew that such a step would be contrary to the customs of the country, but to contemplate its exterior. 'If you insist,' he replied, 'all will be open to you; but I would risk deeply angering the Muslims of the city: they are still ignorant; they believe that the presence of a Christian within the mosque would put them in great danger, since a prophecy claims that whatever a Christian asks of God within the walls of Qubbat as-Sakhra, he will obtain; and they have no doubt that a Christian would seek the ruin of the Prophet's religion and the extermination of all Muslims. For my part,' he added, 'I believe none of this: all men are brothers, although they worship, each in their own language, the common Father; He gives nothing to some at the expense of others; He makes His sun shine upon the worshippers of all the prophets; men know nothing, but God knows everything; *Allah Kerim!* God is beneficent!' And he inclined his head, smiling. 'God forbid,' I said to him, 'that I should abuse your hospitality and expose you to criticism, merely to satisfy a traveller's idle curiosity! If I were in the mosque of Qubbat as-Sakhra, I would not pray for the extermination of any group of people, but for the light and happiness of all the children of Allah.' At these words, we rose; he led us through a corridor to a window of his harem, which overlooked the outer courtyards of the mosque. It was not possible to view the whole area as well there as one may from the summit of the Mount of Olives: we saw only the walls of the dome, some Moorish porticoes in the most elegant architectural style, and the tops of the cypresses that grow in the inner gardens.

I took leave of the governor, informing him that my plan was to spend eight or ten days encamped near the city, and to depart the next day for the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, Jericho, and as far as the foothills of the mountains of Arabia Petraea; that I would return several times, as today, to the interior of Jerusalem, and that I only requested enough horsemen to guarantee our safety during the various excursions we intended to make in Judea. We left Jerusalem through the same Bethlehem Gate near which our tents had been pitched that day; and in the evening we completed our visit to all the notable or sacred sites around the city walls.

*The same date. October 29th, 1832.*

The evening was spent exploring the slopes that stretch south of Jerusalem, between David's Tomb and the Valley of Jehoshaphat. These slopes are the only side of the city that offers even a hint of vegetation. At sunset, I sat facing the Mount of Olives, four or five hundred paces above the Pool of Siloam, roughly where David's gardens once extended: Jehoshaphat lay at my feet; the high walls of the temple terraces were a little above me, to my left. I could see the tops of the beautiful cypress trees raising their pyramidal heads above the porticoes of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the canopies of the orange trees that cover the temple's beautiful fountain called the Fountain of the Orange Tree. This fountain reminds me of one of the most delightful Eastern traditions invented, passed down, and preserved by the Arabs. This is how they tell the story of Solomon choosing the Temple platform which lies beneath the mosque:

Jerusalem was ploughed land. Two brothers owned the area where the Temple was to stand; one of these brothers was married and had several children, the other lived alone; they farmed the site together, which they had inherited from their mother; when harvest-time came, the two brothers bound their sheaves and formed two equal heaps, which they left in the field. During the night, the unmarried brother had an idea; he said to himself: 'My brother has a wife and children to feed; it is not right that my share should be as large as his. Come, let me take some sheaves from my heap and secretly add them to his; he will not notice, and thus will not be able to refuse.' He then executed his idea. That same night, the other brother woke and said to his wife: 'My brother is young, he lives alone and without a wife, he has no one to help him with his work or to comfort him in his fatigue. It is not right that we should take as many sheaves from the common field as he does. Let us go, secretly, and transfer a number of sheaves to his heap. He will not notice, and so won't be able to refuse them.' And they did as he had suggested. The next day, each of the brothers went to the field, and was surprised to see that the two heaps still contained the same number of sheaves: neither could understand this prodigy; they acted in this manner for several nights in a row; but as each of them brought the same number of sheaves to his brother's heap, the two piles always remained equal in number, until one night, both having set themselves up as sentinels to investigate the cause of this miracle, they met, each carrying the sheaves they had intended for the other. Now, the place where so generous a thought had come to the two men simultaneously and repeatedly was considered thereby a location pleasing to God; and the people blessed it and chose to build the house of God there.

A tradition full of charm, that exudes the naive kindness of patriarchal customs! How simple, ancient, and natural is the inspiration that comes to men to consecrate to God a place where virtue has borne fruit on earth! I have heard hundreds of legends of this kind recounted among the Arabs. One breathes the air of the Bible in every part of the Orient.

The appearance of the Valley of Jehoshaphat (*the Kidron Valley*) conforms to the role assigned it in Christian tradition. It resembles a vast sepulchre, too small, however, for the throngs of humankind that were to accumulate there. Dominated on all sides by funerary monuments; nestled at its southern end in the rock of Siloam, riddled with sepulchral caverns like a funereal beehive; containing the tombs of Jehoshaphat and Absalom (*in fact they date to the first century AD*), pyramids hewn in the living rock, and shaded on one side by the dark hills of the Mons Offensionis (*the southern summit of the Mount of Olives, designated the 'Mount of Corruption', see 2 Kings 23.13*), on the other by the ramparts of the second Temple; it was a place naturally inspiring sacred awe, destined from an early time to become the gloomy theatre of a great city, in which the imagination of the prophets must have effortlessly placed their scenes of death, resurrection, and judgment. The Valley of Jehoshaphat might be imagined to be a mountainous cleft where the Kidron, a wide and black torrent with mournful waters, flows with lamentable murmurs; where broad gorges, open to the four winds, widen so as to allow the passage of four great rivers of the dead flowing from east and west, north and south; the immense terraces of the hills extending in an amphitheatre to provide room for the countless children of Adam, arriving to witness, each in their own way, the final denouement of the great drama of humanity.



'Absalom's Pillar, Valley of Jehoshaphat' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

Not at all. The Valley of Jehoshaphat is merely a natural ditch carved between two hills a few hundred feet high, on one of which Jerusalem stands, the other being the Mount of Olives. The walls of Jerusalem, if they were to collapse, would fill most of the vale; no gorge has its mouth there; the Kidron, which springs from the ground a few paces above the valley, is merely a torrent formed in winter by the runoff of rainwater dripping from the olive groves below the tombs of the kings, and is crossed by a bridge in the middle of the valley, opposite one of the gates of Jerusalem. The stream is only a few paces wide, and the valley, at that point, no wider than the stream. The stream's course, when the bed is dry of water, can be traced by a layer of white pebbles at the bottom of the gorge. The Valley of Jehoshaphat, in short, is exactly like one of those ditches dug at the foot of the high fortifications of a great city, into which the city's sewers pour their filth in winter, and in which a few poor inhabitants of the suburbs vie for a patch of land by the ramparts to grow a few vegetables, while abandoned goats and donkeys on the steep slopes, graze clumps of withered grass coated with filth and dust. Scatter the ground with tombstones belonging to all the world's sects, and you will have before your eyes the Valley of Judgment.

*The same date. October 29th, 1832.*

Here is the Pool of Siloam (*or Siloa*), fed by the valley's sole spring, the Gihon, the source that inspired kings and prophets; I don't know why so many travellers have found difficulty in identifying it, and still argue about its location. Here it lies, entirely filled with clear, sweet water,

adding a breath of freshness to the fiery, dusty air of the valley, with its twenty steps carved into the rock on whose summit stood the palace of David, and with its vault of stone blocks polished by centuries, their joints coated with damp mosses and everlasting ivy. The steps of its staircase, worn smooth by the feet of women who come from the village of Silhoa (*Silwan*) to fill their jugs, gleam like marble. I descended; I sat for a moment on those cool flagstones; I listened, so as to remember the place, to the gentle trickle of the spring; I washed my hands and my forehead in its waters; I recalled Milton's lines *('Paradise Lost' Book I, 10-12: 'or if Sion Hill/ delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed/ fast by the oracle of God'*), to invoke, in my turn, his powers of inspiration, so long silent.



'Lower Pool of Siloam, Valley of Jehoshaphat' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

This is the only place near the city of Jerusalem where the traveller can find a place to wet their fingers, quench their thirst, and rest their head in the cool shade provided by the rocks, and a few clumps of greenery. A handful of little gardens, planted with pomegranate trees and other shrubs by the Arabs of Silhoa, have created a cluster of pale greenery around the spring. The spring waters these gardens with its overflow. Here the Valley of Jehoshaphat ends. Below, a gently sloping plain leads the eye to the wide, deep gorges of the volcanic mountains of Jericho and Saint Sabbas (*founder of the Mar Saba monastery*), while the Dead Sea marks the horizon.

## The Banks of the Jordan

Beyond the plain of Jericho, a few leagues from the river's entry into the Dead Sea.



'Banks of the Jordan' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

I left Jerusalem yesterday, October 30th, at seven in the morning, with my entire caravan: six soldiers of Ibrahim Pasha, Abu Gosh's nephew, and four of his cavalrymen; and eight Arab horsemen from Nablus, sent by the governor of Jerusalem. We circled the city, descended to the bottom of the Valley of Jehoshaphat; ascended the Mount of Olives, left its southern summit to our right, and crossed, at its southern end, the mountain range that extends from the Mount of Olives. Having arrived at the village of Bethulia (?), still inhabited by a few Arab families, we recognised the remains of a Christian monument. There was a good spring. An Arab drew water for an hour to water our horses and fill the jars hanging from our mule saddles. No more water was available until Jericho, a ten-or twelve-hour ride.



'Descent from the Valley of the Jordan' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We left Bethulia at four o'clock in the afternoon. A two-hour descent followed along a wide, artificially sloped road, carved into the sheer mountainsides that stretched on without interruption. It was the only trace of a road I had seen in the East. It was the road to Jericho and the fertile plains watered by the Jordan River. It led to the possessions of the tribes of Israel, who had been allotted the entire course of that river, and the Tiberias plain as far as the vicinity of Tyre and the foothills of Lebanon. It led to Arabia, Mesopotamia, and from there to Persia and India, countries with which Solomon had established his extensive trade relations. It was undoubtedly he who created this route. It was also through these valleys that the Jewish people first passed, when they descended from Arabia Petraea, crossed the Jordan and came to seize their inheritance. (*Lamartine appears to be describing the ancient road from the heights of Jerusalem to Jericho, via the Ascent of Adummim Wadi Alqualt/Wadi al Quelt. The locations of the Biblical Bethulia, see the 'Book of Judith', and Lamartine's Bethulia are uncertain*.)

Beyond Bethulia, one encounters neither house nor cultivated land; the mountains are completely devoid of vegetation; all is rock or dust that the wind ploughs at will; a blackish ash-like hue covers all this land like a funeral shroud. From time to time, the mountains split apart from one another, into narrow, deep gorges: abysses where no path can be found, and where the eye sees only an eternal repetition of the scenes that immediately surround it. Almost all these mountains have a volcanic appearance; the stones carried down their slopes or onto the road by winter torrents resemble blocks of lava hardened and cracked by centuries. Here and there in the distance, on some hilltops, one even sees that slight yellowish and sulphurous tint perceived on Vesuvius or Etna; it is impossible to resist for long the impression of sadness and dread that this landscape inspires. It is an oppression of the heart and an affliction of the eyes. When one is on the summit of one of these hills, and the horizon opens for a moment to the gaze, one sees, as far

as the eye can see, only blackish mountain chains, conical or truncated peaks, piled one upon another and standing out against the raw blue of the firmament; it is a boundless labyrinth of mountainous avenues of every shape, torn, broken, split into gigantic pieces, linked together by chains of similar hills, with bottomless ravines where one hopes to hear at least the sound of a torrent, but where nothing stirs, where one discovers not a tree, not a blade of grass, not a flower, not even a patch of moss; only the ruins of a scorched world, the relics of Earth's seething, burning depths, of which the petrified bubbles have formed these waves of dust and stone.

At six o'clock, at the bottom of a ravine, we come across the walls of a ruined caravanserai, and a spring protected by a low wall adorned with verses from the Koran. The spring issues its water drop by drop into the stone basin; our Arabs press their lips to it in vain; we rest our horses for a moment in the shade of the caravanserai: we have been descending for so long we believe we are at the level of the plain of Jericho and the Dead Sea.

We set off again, already overwhelmed by the heat and fatigue of the day; our Arab horsemen flattered us with the hope of reaching Jericho in a few hours. However, daylight was fading by the minute, and twilight added its gloom to that of the gorges in which we found ourselves. After an hour's ride along the floor of this valley, we were again on the steep slopes of a new mountain range, which seemed to be the last before the descent to the plain of Jericho. Night completely obscured the horizon; we had enough light only to make out the bottomless precipices at our feet, into which the slightest misstep by our horses would send us tumbling. Our water jars were empty, and thirst was consuming us. One of the Samaritans told our dragoman that he knew of a spring nearby. We decided to halt where we were, if he could indeed find us some water. After waiting for half an hour, the Samaritan returned and said he had been unable to find the spring. We had to ride on; we still had four hours' journey ahead of us.

We place the Arabs of Nablus at the head of the caravan; each rider is ordered to follow step by step the one in front of him, without losing track; the deepest silence reigns throughout the entire group; the night has become so dark that it is impossible to see before one's horse; one follows one's companion by the sound of his mount's hooves. At every moment the entire caravan halts as the riders at the front probe the path, for fear of plunging into the abyss; we all dismount and proceed with greater caution; twenty times we are forced to stop as cries reach us from the head or tail of the caravan; a horse has tumbled, a man has fallen; we are often on the verge of stopping altogether and waiting, motionless, in our places, for the long, dark night to pass; but the head of the caravan moves forward, and we must walk on too.

After three hours of like anxiety, we heard loud cries and gunshots from the head of the caravan: we thought the Arabs of Jericho were attacking us; each of us prepared to fire indiscriminately; but, we soon realised, that it was the Neapolitans shouting with joy and firing their weapons because we had left the mountains; we did indeed feel the road level out a little beneath our feet. I remounted; My young Arabian stallion, sensing water nearby, resisted, and in the struggle plunged with me into a ravine; no one noticed, so dark was the night; I held on to the reins and, remounting, abandoned the animal to its instincts, unsure whether I was on a ledge or at the bottom of a ravine carved into the plain; it galloped off, neighing, and only stopped at the banks of a wide, shallow stream surrounded by thorny bushes; there, it drank. To my left, I heard the shouts and pistol shots of the Arabs who had just noticed my disappearance and were searching for me over the plain; I saw a fire glowing through the leaves of the bushes, I urged my horse in

that direction, and in a few minutes found myself at the door of my tent, pitched by the same stream; it was midnight. I ate a piece of bread soaked in water, and fell asleep without knowing where we were, or understanding by what miracle we had suddenly passed from this solitude without shade or water, to the banks of a stream which, by the light of our torches and the Arabs' fire, appeared like a stream in the Alps, with a curtain of willows and clumps of rushes and watercress.

If Tasso had, as Monsieur de Chateaubriand claims, been inspired by real places when writing his *Jerusalem Delivered* (and I confess that, as much as I admire Tasso, this is not what I would praise him for, since it is impossible to have understood the places less, or lied more about the local customs than he did; yet what do place and custom matter? Poetry lies not there but in the heart); if, I say, he had been so inspired, it would undoubtedly have been on the banks of this stream that he would have had Erminia arrive, fleeing on her steed, abandoned to its flight, and here that she would have met the Arcadian, not Arab, shepherd of whom Tasso gives us such a ravishing description (*see Canto VII of Tasso's 'Gerusalemme Liberata'*) .

We awoke, like her, to the chirping of a thousand birds flitting through the branches of the trees, and to the murmur of the water on its bed of pebbles. We left our tents to reconnoitre the site where night had overtaken us. The Judean mountains, which we had traversed the day before, lay to our east, a few miles from our camp; their chain, still barren and jagged, stretched as far as the eye could see to the south and north, and here and there we glimpsed vast gorges that opened onto the plain, and from which streams of nocturnal vapour flowed forth like broad rivers, spreading as sheets of fog over the undulating sands of the shores of Lake Asphaltites (*the hypersaline Dead Sea, with its free-floating bitumen*). To the west, a wide sandy desert separated us from the banks of the Jordan, which we could not distinguish from the Dead Sea, and the blue mountains of Arabia Petraea. These latter mountains, seen at that time and from that distance, seemed to me, from the play of shadows on their ridges and in their valleys, to be dotted with cultivated fields and shaded by immense forests; the whitish ravines that criss-crossed them mimicked, unmistakably, the fall and dazzling spray of a waterfall. However, this was not the case: when I approached them, I recognised that they presented, on a grander scale, only the same barren and desolate aspect as the mountains of Judea. Around us, everything was cheerful and fresh, though uncultivated; water animates everything, even the desert; and the light shrubs which were scattered, like artificial hedgerows, in groups of two or three along its edges, reminded me of the sweetest places in my homeland.

We mounted our horses; we were only an hour from Jericho, but saw neither walls nor smoke on the plain, and knew not quite which direction to take, when about thirty Bedouin horsemen, mounted on magnificent horses, appeared between two sand dunes and pranced towards us. It was the Sheikh and the leading citizens of Jericho who, informed of our approach by an Arab belonging to the governor of Jerusalem, were searching for us in the desert. We knew the Arabs of the Jericho desert only by their reputation for ferocity and brigandage throughout Syria, and at first knew not whether they approached as friends or enemies; but nothing in their conduct, during the several days they remained with us, betrayed any ill intent on their part. Subdued by terror at the name of Ibrahim, whose emissaries they believed us to be, they gave us all that their country could offer: the open desert, water from their springs, and a little barley and doura (*sorghum bicolor, Egyptian corn*) to feed our horses. I thanked the Sheikh and his friends for the escort they offered;

they joined our troop, and, racing here and there, over the sand-dunes, along our flanks, they appeared and disappeared with the swiftness of the wind. I noted one horse, admirable for its form and speed, ridden by the Sheikh's brother, and instructed my dragoman to obtain it for me at any price. But since such offers cannot be made directly without a kind of affront to the delicate feelings of the horse's owner, it took several days of negotiation before I found myself the possessor of that beautiful animal, which I intended for my daughter and which I did indeed give to her.

## Jericho

After an hour's ride, we found ourselves, without realising it, at the foot of the walls of Jericho: these walls were those of a veritable fortress, being twenty feet high and fifteen to twenty feet wide, made of bundles of thorns piled one on top of the other and arranged with admirable ingenuity to prevent the passage of people and livestock: fortifications that would not have crumbled at the sound of the trumpet (*see Joshua 6.1-21*), but might well have been set ablaze by the spark of a shepherd's fire, or Samson's foxes (*see Judges 15.3-5*). This fortress of dry thorns had two or three wide gates that were always open, beside which Arab sentinels doubtless kept watch during the night. As we passed the gates, we saw, on the broad roofs of various mud huts, all the women and children of the desert city, clustered in the most picturesque poses, pressing together and supporting one another to see us pass. These women, whose shoulders and legs were bare, wore only a shift of blue cotton cloth, held in place by a leather belt around their midriff, their arms and legs adorned with numerous gold and silver bracelets, their hair frizzed and flowing down their necks; some had braided and plaited it with piastres and sequins, in immense profusion, which fell like a breastplate over the chest and shoulders. Some were remarkably beautiful: they lacked the air of gentleness, timid modesty, and voluptuous languor of the Arab women of Syria; they were no longer women, but barbarous females, and revealed in their eyes and in their bearing the same fire, the same audacity, the same ferocity as the Bedouin men. Several Black African women were among them, who did not appear to be slaves: Bedouins wed Black-African or white women regardless of their skin-colour which does not affect their status. These women uttered wild cries and laughter as we passed; the men, on the contrary, seemed to disapprove of their indiscreet curiosity and showed us only gravity and respect.



'Jericho' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

Not far from the thorny walls, we passed near two or three sheikhs' houses, built of sun-dried mud; they were only a few feet high; the terrace covered with mats and carpets is the main apartment; the family remain there almost all the day and night. In front of the door is a wide bench of dried mud, where a rug is spread for the chief. He sits there first thing in the morning, surrounded by his principal slaves, and visited by his friends. The vapour from coffee cups and pipes rises constantly. A large courtyard, filled with horses, camels, goats, and cows, surrounds the house. There are always two or three fine mares, saddled and bridled, for the master's races.



'Encampment of Pilgrims, Jericho' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

We halted for only a short while near the Sheikh's mud palace, where he offered us water, coffee, and pipes, and had a calf and several sheep slaughtered for our caravan. We also received roasted doura (*durra*) beans, chickens, and watermelons as gifts. We set off again, preceded by the Sheikh and some twenty of the city's leading Arabs. We found some well-cultivated fields of corn and doura in the vicinity of Jericho. A few orange and pomegranate groves, and some beautiful palm trees also surround the scattered houses outside the city. Then everything becomes desert and sand again. This desert is an immense plain with several terraces that descend successively to the Jordan River, in regular steps, like the treads of a natural staircase. The eye sees only a flat plain; but after riding for an hour, one suddenly finds oneself at the edge of one of these terraces. One descends a steep slope; one progresses for another hour, then there is another descent, and so on. The ground is solid, white sand covered with a concrete, saline layer, undoubtedly produced by the mists of the Dead Sea, which, as they evaporate, leave this salt crust; there are neither stones nor soil, except near the riverbanks or the mountains; everywhere one views a vast horizon, and can distinguish from a great distance an Arab galloping across the plain. As this desert is the scene of their brigandage, their plundering and massacre of caravans travelling from Jerusalem to Damascus, or from Mesopotamia to Egypt, the Arabs have taken advantage of some hillocks formed by the shifting sands, and have also created artificial ones of their own to escape the caravans' gaze, and so observe them from a closer distance; they dig a hole in the sand at the top of these hillocks, and conceal themselves and their horses there. As soon as they spot their prey, they swoop down with the speed of falcons; they send men to warn their tribe, and all return together to the attack: this is their sole industry, their sole glory; their culture is one of murder and

plunder, and they attach as much esteem to their successes in these exploits as our conquerors attach to the conquest of a province. Their poets, for they have them, celebrate these barbarous scenes in verse, and pass down from generation to generation the honoured memory of their courage, and their crimes. The horses, in particular, have their share of glory in these tales; here is one story that the Sheikh's son told us along the way:

An Arab and his tribe had attacked the Damascus caravan in the desert; the victory was complete, and the Arabs were busy loading their rich spoils, when the horsemen of the Pasha of Acre, who were coming to meet the caravan, suddenly fell upon the victorious Arabs, killed a great number of them, took the others prisoner, and, having tied them with ropes, brought them to Acre to present to the Pasha. Abu-el-Marsh (that is the name of the Arab he was speaking of) had been shot in the arm during the battle; as his wound was not fatal, the Turks had tied him to a camel, and, having seized his horse, were taking both horse and rider along with them. On the evening on which they were to enter Acre, they camped with their prisoners in the mountains of Saphadt (*Safed/Tzfat/Zefat*); the wounded Arabs legs had been bound together with a leather strap, and he was lying near the tent where the Turks were sleeping. During the night, kept awake by the pain of his wound, he heard his horse neighing, among the other horses hobbled around the tents according to the custom of the Orientals; he recognised the sound, and, unable to resist the desire to speak once more to his life companion, he dragged himself painfully along the ground on his hands and knees, and reached his steed. 'My poor friend,' he said, 'what will you do among the Turks?' You will be imprisoned beneath the vaulting of a khan with the horses of an aga or a pasha; women and children will no longer give you camel-milk, and feed you barley or doura from the palm of the hand; you will no longer run, free as the winds of Egypt, in the desert, you will no longer cleave the waters of the Jordan with your chest, those waters that wet your mane as white as your foam: if I am a slave, may you at least remain free! Go, return to the tent you know; tell my wife that Abu-el-Marsh will not return, and thrust your head between the tent curtains to lick the hands of my little children.' As he spoke, Abu-el-Marsh gnawed through the goat-hair rope that serves as a hobble for Arabian horses, and the animal was free; but seeing his master wounded and roped at his feet, the faithful and intelligent steed understood by instinct what language could not convey: he lowered his head, sniffed his master, and, seizing him with his teeth by the leather belt he wore around his body, he galloped away, and bore him to his tent. Upon arriving, and depositing his master on the sand at the feet of his wife and children, the horse died of exhaustion; the whole tribe mourned him, the poets sang of him, and his name is constantly on the lips of the Arabs of Jericho.

We have scant idea of the degree of intelligence and attachment to which the habit of living with a family, being petted by the children, fed by the women, and reprimanded or encouraged by its master's voice, can raise the instincts of an Arabian horse. The type has been bred to be more intelligent and more domesticated than the breeds of our climate; the same is true of all the animals in Arabia. Nature or Heaven has given them more instinct, more kinship with mankind than among ourselves. They remember more clearly the time of Eden, when they were willingly subject to the dominion of the lords of Nature. I myself frequently saw, in Syria, birds taken in the morning by children rendered perfectly tame by evening, no longer needing a cage or a string on their legs to keep them with the family that adopts them, but flying freely among the orange and mulberry trees of the garden, and returning at the sound of a voice to perch of their own accord on the fingers of children, or on the heads of young girls.

The horse belonging to the Sheikh of Jericho, which I bought and rode, recognised me as its master within a few days: it refused to be ridden by anyone else, and would cross the entire caravan to come to me at the sound of my voice, though my language was a foreign tongue to him. Gentle and affectionate towards me, and accustomed to the care of my Arabs, he walked peacefully and wisely in his place in the caravan, as long as we only encountered Turks, Arabs dressed in Turkish style, or Syrians; but if he happened, even a year later, to see a Bedouin mounted on a desert horse, he suddenly became another animal: his eyes lit, his neck swelled, and his tail rose and beat his flanks like a whip; he reared up on his hocks, and walked like that for a long while bearing the weight of saddle and rider: he did not neigh, but uttered a warlike cry like that of a brazen trumpet, a cry such that all the horses were frightened by it, and stopped, pricking up their ears, to listen.

*October 31st, 1832.*

After a five hour ride, during which the river seemed to recede further and further from us, we reached the last plateau, at the foot of which it was supposed to flow; but though we were only two or three hundred paces away, we saw nothing but the plain and the desert before us, and not a trace of a valley or river. I think it was the illusion of there being only desert here, that led some travellers to say, and believe, that the Jordan River flowed in a muddy stream over a bed of pebbles, between sandy banks in the desert beyond Jericho. Those travellers could not have reached the river and, seeing from afar a vast sea of sand, could never have imagined that a cool, deep, shady, and delightful oasis lay nestled between the plateaus of this monotonous waste, adorning the Jordan's overflowing waters and murmuring bed with curtains of greenery that even the Thames might envy: yet such is the truth.

We were astonished and charmed when, having reached the edge of the last plateau, which suddenly fell away beneath our feet, and plunging into a steep gorge, we found before our eyes one of the most graceful valleys on which our gaze had ever rested. We raced there at the gallop, attracted by the novelty of the spectacle and by the allure of the freshness, moisture and shade, with which this valley was filled: everywhere there were lawns of the most beautiful green, where here and there grew clumps of flowering rushes, and bulbous plants whose large and brilliant corollas scattered stars of all colours across the lawns and beneath the bases of the trees; groves of shrubs with long flexible stems, falling like plumes all around their multiplied trunks; large Persian poplars with light foliage, not rising in pyramids like our clipped trees, but freely throwing out sinewy limbs in all directions as oak-trees do, and whose bark, smooth and white, shone in the tremulous rays of the morning sun; and groves of willows of every kind, among them large osiers (*salix viminalis*) so dense that it was impossible to penetrate them, so tightly did the trees, and many of the vines that snaked about their feet, and twined from one branch to another, form an inextricable network.

These groves stretched as far as the eye could see, on both sides and along both banks of the river. We were obliged to dismount, set up camp in one of the forest clearings, and reach on foot the Jordan River which we could hear but not see. We advanced with difficulty, sometimes through the thickets, sometimes through long grass, sometimes through the tall stalks of rushes; finally, we found a place where only grass bordered the water, and we dipped our feet and hands in the flow. It may be a hundred to a hundred and twenty feet wide there; its depth seemed considerable; its current is as swift as that of the Rhône at Geneva; its waters are a pale blue, slightly dulled by the

mix of grey earth it crosses and carves through. We heard enormous slopes collapsing into its course, from time to time. Its banks are sheer, yet it fills them to the base of the reeds and trees that conceal them. The trees, constantly undermined by the water, display roots that hang and trail; often falling of their own accord, these trees lack support from the crumbling earth beneath; their branches and leaves lean over the water and are steeped in it, stretching in arches of greenery from one bank to the other. From time to time, a tree is borne away, along with the portion of soil that supported it, and floats, in full leaf, downriver, torn vines clinging to its branches, the birds' nests submerged, the birds themselves still perching on its boughs: we watched several of them pass by, in fact, during the few hours we rested at this charming oasis. The groves follow every curve of the Jordan, weaving a perpetual garland of branches and leaves that dipping below the water, raise a gentle murmur from its flow. Countless birds inhabit these impenetrable groves.

The Arabs warned us not to walk without our weapons, and to advance with caution, because these thickets are the lair of Arabian lions (*panthera leo persica*), Arabian leopards (*panthera pardus nimr*), and caracals. We saw none; but we often heard, in the shadows of the thicket, roars and noises like those of large animals as they penetrated the depths of the woods.

For an hour or two, we explored the accessible parts of the banks of this beautiful river. In some places, the Arabs from the wild tribes of the mountains of Petra, at whose foot we were, had set fire to the woods, either to gain entry or to extract timber. A host of tree-trunks remained, charred only by the bark; but new shoots had sprung up around the scorched boles, and the climbing plants of this fertile soil had already so thoroughly entwined themselves around the dead trees and saplings that the woodland appeared more varied, without being any less extensive or luxuriant. We gathered a large supply of branches from the willows, poplars, and various long-stemmed trees with beautiful bark whose names I know not, to give as gifts to our friends in Europe; then we returned to the camp, which our Arabs had relocated during our excursion along the riverbank.



‘The approach to Petra, looking up to an ancient watchtower (1839)’ - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Artvee*

They had discovered a site even more gracious and suitable for pitching our tents than any of those we had just traversed: a meadow of grass as fine and dense as if grazed by a flock of sheep. Here and there, scattered across this meadow, a few broad-leaved shrubs, and clumps of plane and sycamore saplings cast patches of shade over the grass, sheltering us, and keeping the horses cool. The Jordan, whose course was only twenty paces away, had carved a small, shallow gulf in the middle of the clearing, and its waters swirled there at the foot of two or three large poplars. An accessible slope led down to the river, allowing us to bring our thirsty horses to drink, one by one, and to bathe ourselves. We pitched our two tents, and rested there for a day.

The following day, November 2nd, we continued our journey, heading towards the highest mountains of Arabia Petraea, leaving and rejoining the Jordan River, following its meandering course, while drawing closer to the Dead Sea. Not far from the river, in a place in the desert I cannot describe, lie the still imposing remains of a Crusader castle, apparently built to guard this route. This ruin is uninhabited, and might, on the contrary, serve as a refuge for Arabs lying in wait to plunder caravans. Amidst the waves of sand, it gives the impression of a ship’s carcass abandoned on the ocean.

## The Dead Sea

As we approached the Dead Sea, the undulations of the terrain lessened; the slope gradually inclined towards the shore; the sand became spongy, and the horses, sinking with every step, advanced with difficulty. When we finally saw the reflection of the waves, we could not contain our impatience: we galloped onwards to plunge into the waves, which lay before us, shining like

molten lead over the sand. The Sheikh of Jericho and his Arabs, who were still following us, thinking that we wanted to run the djerid with them, set off simultaneously in all directions across the plain; and, returning to us with shouts, brandished their long reed spears, as if they wanted to pierce us; then, halting their horses and rearing them on their haunches, they let us pass, and set off again only to return once more. I arrived first, thanks to the speed of my Turkoman horse; but, thirty or forty paces from the water, the bed of sand mixed with earth was so damp and so marshy that my horse sank up to its belly, and I feared I would be swallowed up. I retraced my steps and, dismounting, approached the shore on foot.



'The Dead Sea Looking Towards Moab' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

The Dead Sea has been described by several travellers. I noted neither its specific gravity nor the relative quantity of salt its waters contain (*see, for example, Chateaubriand's 'Itinéraire')*. It was not scholarship, or scientific analysis, that brought me there. It was simply on my route, and lay in the middle of a famous desert, while being famous itself due to the engulfment of the cities (*Sodom and Gomorrah, see Genesis 19.24-25*) that once stood where its motionless waters now stretch. Its shores are level on the eastern and western sides; to the north and south, the high mountains of Judea and Arabia frame it, descending almost to its waters. Those of Arabia, however, recede somewhat further, especially near the inflow of the Jordan, where we were situated at that moment. These shores are entirely deserted; the air is foul and unhealthy. We ourselves felt its influence during the several days we spent in that desert. A great heaviness in the head and a feverish feeling seized us all, and departed only upon our leaving its atmosphere. No islands are visible. However, at sunset, from the top of a sand dune, I thought I could make out two at the far end of the horizon, in the direction of Idumea (*likely areas of solidified sea-salt, near Ein Bokek*). The Arabs here know nothing of them. The sea is, in this part, at least thirty miles long, and they never venture to follow its shore

so far. No traveller has ever attempted a circumnavigation of the Dead Sea nor has it even been viewed from its southern end, nor its shores in Judea and Arabia. We are, I believe, the first who have been able to explore it freely on three sides; and if we had but had a little more time to spare, nothing would have prevented us from transporting fir planks from Lebanon, Jerusalem or Jaffa, building a longboat on the spot, and peacefully visiting all the coasts of this wonderful 'Mediterranean'.

The Arabs, who usually bar travellers from approaching its shores, and whose prejudices oppose anyone attempting to sail there, were so devoted to our every wish that they would have placed no obstacle in our way. I would certainly have taken to its waters, had I been able to foresee the welcome these Arabs gave us. But it was too late; we would have had to send word to Jerusalem, and bring carpenters to build such a boat: all this, including the voyage, would have taken us at least three weeks, and our time was limited. I therefore relinquished the idea, though with a degree of reluctance. Some traveller, in the same circumstances as myself, will easily be able to accomplish it, and shed light on this natural phenomenon, and on the geographical issues, the answers to which authors and scientists have been seeking for so long.

The Dead Sea is neither sad nor funereal, except in name. To the eye, it is a dazzling lake, its immense, silvery surface reflecting the light and sky like a Venetian mirror; mountains with beautiful contours cast their shadows upon its shores. It is said that there are neither fish in its depths nor birds on its banks. I know nothing of this; I saw neither petrels nor gulls, nor those beautiful white birds like sea doves (*shearwaters*), that float all day long on the waves of the Syrian Sea and accompany the caiques on the Bosphorus; but, a few hundred paces from the Dead Sea, I shot and killed birds resembling wild ducks, which rose from the marshy banks of the Jordan. If the sea's air were deadly to them, they would not come so close to brave its noxious vapours. Nor did I see those ruins of submerged cities that are said to be visible at a shallow depth beneath the waves. The Arabs who accompanied me claim that these are sometimes exposed to view.

I followed the shores of this sea for a long time, now on the Arabian side, where the Jordan River flows into the sea (there, the river is truly, as travellers describe it, a pool of dirty water in a bed of mud), sometimes on the Judean mountains side, where the shores rise and sometimes take the form of the gentle dunes of the ocean. The sheet of water presented the same appearance everywhere: brilliant, azure and immobile.

Humans have exercised well the faculty that God gave them in Genesis: to apply names to things. This sea is beautiful; it sparkles, it floods, with the reflection from its waters, the air above the immense stretch of desert it covers; it attracts the eye, it stirs the mind; but it is indeed dead; movement and sound are absent: its waters, too heavy for the wind to move, never unfurl in a sonorous swell, nor does a white belt of foam play upon the pebbles of its shores: it is a petrified sea. How did it form? Apparently, as the Bible says and probability suggests, a crater must have opened at the centre of the vast volcanic chains that extend from Jerusalem to Mesopotamia, and from Lebanon to Idumea, at a time when seven cities populated the plain. The cities must have been shaken by the earthquake: the Jordan, which, in all likelihood, already flowed across this plain to join the Red Sea, was suddenly halted in its course by volcanic extrusions erupting from the earth, and was plunged into the craters left by Sodom and Gomorrah, forming this sea containing salt, sulphur, and bitumen, the usual by-products of volcanic activity: such are the likely facts of the matter, which neither add to nor detract from the action of that sovereign and eternal will

which some call a miracle, and others call Nature: are not Nature and miracle one and the same? And is the universe anything other than an eternal and ever-present miracle?

*Same date. November 2nd 1832.*

We returned along the northern end of the Dead Sea, near the Valley of Saint Saba. The desert is much more pronounced in this area: it is furrowed by enormous waves of earth and sand, which one must constantly navigate around or cross. The line of our caravan undulated along the crests of these waves, like a fleet of ships in line, on a vast sea, its various vessels appearing and disappearing in the folds of a sandy ocean.

After three hours' journey, sometimes over small, level plains where we galloped, sometimes along the edge of deep sandy ravines where some of our horses took a tumble, we saw the smoke rising from the houses of Jericho. The Arabs broke away and sped towards the smoke. Only two remained to show us the way. As we approached Jericho, the leaders of the Arabs returned to meet us. We camped in the middle of a field shaded by a few palm trees, where a small river flowed. Our tents were soon pitched, and we found supper prepared, thanks to the gifts of all kinds that the Arabs had brought to our camp. The Arab who had been riding the fine horse I had wanted to take with me seemed to have admired the Turkoman horse I had ridden the day before. Our mutual conversation readily leading to the subject of our horses, he praised several of mine. I offered to exchange the Turkoman for his own; we debated all evening the additional payment I would make: nothing was decided. Every time I offered a fair price, he showed such great distress at parting with his horse that we retired to rest without reaching an agreement. The next day, at the time of departure, with all the horses already bridled and mounted, I made a few more overtures. He finally decided to ride my Turkoman himself, galloping across the plain: captivated by the animal's outstanding qualities, he sent his own horse to me via his son. I gave him nine hundred piastres, mounted the horse, and set off. The entire tribe seemed to watch with regret as the creature departed: the children cried out to him, the women pointed at him, the Sheikh kept returning to look at him, while making certain cabalistic signs that Arabs always take care to make over horses they buy or sell. The steed itself seemed to understand the separation, sadly lowering its head, shaded by a magnificent mane, gazing to right and left at the desert with a sorrowful and anxious eye. The eye of an Arabian horse is a language unto itself. Their beautiful eyes, the fiery pupils of which stand out against the broad, blood-marbled white of the eye-sockets, seem to express and comprehend everything.

I had stopped riding my favourite horse a few days before. According to Arab superstition, there are seventy good or bad signs in a horse's horoscope, a knowledge of which signs is possessed by almost all desert dwellers. The horse I speak of, whom I had called *Liban (Lebanon),* having bought him in those mountains, was a young and magnificent stallion, tall, strong, courageous, tireless, and intelligent, in whom I never detected the slightest flaw during the fifteen months I rode him; but he happened to have on his chest, one of those tufts of hair adorning his beautiful ash-grey coat that the Arabs consider an ominous sign. I had been warned about this when I bought him; but I had acquired him based on the simple reasoning, easily understood by them, that a bad omen for a Muslim was a good omen for a Christian. They offered no reply to that, and I rode Liban whenever I had to undertake longer or more difficult days of travel than usual. When

we approached a city or a tribe, the Arabs or Turks, who came to meet the caravan, struck by Liban's beauty and vigour, would initially compliment me and admire him with envious eyes. But after a few moments of admiration, the fatal sign, somewhat concealed by the silk collar and amulet that every horse always wears, would become apparent to them. The Arabs, approaching me, would change their expressions, assume a grave and sorrowful air, and signal me not to ride the horse. This was of little importance in Syria; but in Judea and among the desert tribes, I feared it would damage my standing and destroy the respect and prestige of obedience that surrounded us. So, I would avoid riding him, and he would be led behind me. I have no doubt that we owed a large part of the deference and awe that surrounded us to the beauty of the twelve or fifteen Arabian horses we rode or that followed us. A horse, in Arabia, is a man's fortune; it presupposes everything, it takes the place of all else: they formed a high opinion of a Frank who owned so many horses, as beautiful as those of their Sheikh and of the Pasha.

We returned to Jerusalem via the same valley we had crossed at night upon arrival. Before entering the first mountain gorge, on a beautiful, wide plateau overlooking the plain, we saw clear traces of ancient structures, and surmised that this was the true site of ancient Jericho. To build cities on the plains was a major advance in civilisation. One can never go wrong by searching for ancient cities on the heights.

It is in this gorge (*Wadi al Quilt*) that the scene of the assault and subsequent act of charity described in the moving parable of the Good Samaritan (*see Luke 10.30-37*) was set. It seems that, even in the time of the Gospels, these valleys had a bad reputation.

We had a tiring day, due to the monotony of our fourteen hours' ride, and the excessive heat of the sun reflected from the steep sides of the valleys; we failed to encounter anyone at all during those fourteen hours, except for an Arab shepherd grazing an innumerable flock of black goats on the ridge of a hill.

**The End of Part VI of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part VII: Return to Lebanon

## Solomon's Pools

*November 2, 1832, camped near Solomon's Pools, below the walls of Jerusalem.*

We wished to dedicate a day to prayer in this place, toward which all Christians turn just as Muslims turn toward Mecca. We asked the priest who served alone as parish priest in Jerusalem to commemorate, for our living and dead relatives, for our friends of all times and places, and finally for ourselves, the great and sorrowful sacrifice whereby this land was watered with the blood of the Righteous One, so that hope and charity might flourish here. We all attended, each with our own feelings, memories, sorrows, losses, desires, and various measures of piety and belief.

We chose as our temple and altar the cave of Gethsemane, in the hollow of the Valley of Jehoshaphat; it is in this cave at the foot of the Mount of Olives that Christ, according to tradition, sometimes withdrew to escape the persecution of his enemies, and the importunity of his disciples. It was there that he communed with his heavenly thoughts, and asked his Father that the bitter cup he himself had filled, as we all fill our own, might pass from his lips; it was there that he told his three friends, on the eve of his death, to rest apart and not fall asleep, and was obliged to wake them three times, so quick is the zeal of human charity to slumber; it was there, finally, that he spent those terrible hours of agony, an ineffable struggle between life and death, between divine will and human instinct, between soul and matter! It was there that he sweated blood and water, and, weary of fighting within himself, intellect failing to conquer and bring peace to his thoughts, he uttered those final words, that sum up all of humanity and all of God, those words that have become the wisdom of the wise, and that should be the epitaph of every life, and the unique inscription on the grave of all created things: 'My Father, thy will be done, and not mine!' (*Lamartine's amalgamation of Matthew 26.39 and 26.42.*)

The site of this cave, carved into the rock of the Kidron Valley, is, given the appearance of the place, probably one of the most authentic of the holy sites, among those that pious popular credulity has assigned to each of the scenes of the Gospel drama: this is indeed the valley of the shadow of death, the abyss hidden below the city walls, the deepest and most likely hollow in which Christ, then the most shunned of men, having all men as enemies since he came to attack their lies, must sometimes have sought shelter and communed with himself, meditating, praying, and suffering! The impure Kidron Valley stream flowed a few paces away. At that time, it was merely a sewer for Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives folds upon itself here to unite with the hills that bears the Tomb of the Kings, forming a kind of deep bend where masses of olive, terebinth, and fig trees — fruit trees that the poor still cultivate amidst the stony dust, around the great city — must have hidden the entrance to the cave. Moreover, this site was not disturbed and rendered unrecognisable by the ruins that buried the site of Jerusalem. Disciples who had watched and prayed with Christ were able to return and say, noting the details of the rockface and the trees: 'It was there!' A valley does not disappear as a street may, while the smallest stone may last longer than the most magnificent of temples.

The cave of Gethsemane, and the rock above it, are now enclosed by the walls of a small, locked chapel, the key to which remains in the hands of the Latin friars of Jerusalem. The cave,

and the seven olive trees in the neighbouring field, belong to them; the entrance, hewn from the rock, opens onto the courtyard of another pious sanctuary called the Tomb of the Virgin; this one belongs to the Greeks; the cave is tall and deep, and divided into two chambers connected by a kind of underground portico. There are several altars also hewn from the living rock; this sanctuary, provided by Nature, has not been disfigured by as many artificial ornaments as all the other sanctuaries of the Holy Sepulchre; the vault, the floor, and the walls are carved out of the rock itself, from which still oozes, like to the shedding of tears, the cavernous dampness of the earth that envelops it. Above each altar, only a single poor representation, life-size, and composed of flesh-coloured painted copper plate, depicting the scene of Christ's agony, with the angels presenting the chalice of death to him, has been affixed. If these poor images, which erase those that the pious imagination loves to create in the shadow of this empty grotto, were done away with; if tear-filled eyes were allowed to gaze freely, without sensory perception, on the inward images that fill the darkness, this grotto would be the most pristine and religious relic amidst the hills of Zion; but human beings must always spoil, to some degree, everything they touch.

Alas! If only they had merely altered and marred the visible stones and remnants of these sites! But what have they not done with the doctrines, the demonstrations of this religion of reason, simplicity, love, and humility, which the Son of Man once taught at the price of his blood? When God allows truth to descend upon earth, mankind begins by cursing and stoning the bringer of it, then they seize upon this truth which they were unable to kill, as they did him, because it is immortal; it is his bequest, it is their inheritance: but instead, like a precious stone stolen by evil-doers from a celestial pilgrim, they embed it among so many errors that it becomes unrecognisable, until daylight shines upon it, once more, and, separating the gem from its surroundings, after many centuries, the wise declare: 'Here is the true, and there the false: this is truth, that is error!' That is why all religions possess twin aspects whose association astonishes us; one is its popular aspect: legend, superstition, a coating of alloy into which centuries of ignorance and darkness have been mixed, marring the divine ideal; the other is its true aspect, a philosophical aspect, which is discovered by removing that tarnished coating applied by mankind, so that the jewel, revealed in the light of that eternal day which is the light of consciousness, reflects that light in all its purity, illuminating all minds and things with the light of truth and love, in the depths of which one sees and loves God, the *Evident Being*!

*The same date. November the 2nd, 1832.*

Not far from the cave of Gethsemane, a small patch of land is shaded still by seven olive trees, which popular tradition identifies as the very trees under which Jesus lay down and wept. These olive trees, in fact, do seem to bear on their trunks, and their immense roots, the marks of the eighteen centuries that have passed since that night (*almost exactly, at the time of Lamartine's visit, if the traditional year of AD33 for the Crucifixion, and associated events, is accepted*). Their trunks are enormous and, like those of all old olive trees, are formed of a great number of boles that have become part of the one tree, sharing the same bark, and forming a kind of cluster of intertwined columns. Their branches are almost withered, yet still bear a few olives. We gathered those that lay scattered on the ground beneath the trees; we, piously and discreetly, knocked some down, and filled our pockets with them to bring back as relics of this land to our friends.

I know how comforting it is for Christian souls to pray, rolling in their fingers an olive pit from those trees whose roots Jesus perhaps watered and fertilised with his tears when he himself prayed for the last time on Earth. If they are not the same trunks, they are probably offshoots of those sacred trees. But I have seen no proof that they are not indeed identical. I have travelled to all parts of the world where olive trees grow; they live for centuries, and nowhere have I found any to be larger, even though growing in rocky, arid soil. I have also seen, on the summit of Mount Lebanon, cedars that Arab tradition traces back to the time of Solomon. There is nothing impossible about this: Nature has granted certain plants greater longevity than empires; some oaks have witnessed the passing of many dynasties, and the acorn we trample underfoot, the olive pit I roll between my fingers, the cedar cone swept by the wind, will reproduce, and the resultant trees still cover the earth with their shade, when hundreds of human generations that will follow us have returned to the Earth the handful of dust they borrow therefrom. This is not a sign of divine contempt for what has been created. The relative importance of beings is not measured by their duration, but by the intensity of their existence. There is more life in an hour of thought, contemplation, prayer, and love than in an entire, purely physical, human existence. There is more life in an idea that traverses the world, and ascends to the heavens, in an immeasurable space of time, in a millionth of a second, than in the eighteen centuries of growth embodied in the olive trees I touch, or in the two thousand five hundred years' old roots of Solomon's cedars.

*The same date. November the 2nd, 1832.*

I lunched, seated on the steps of the Pool of Siloam. I wrote a few verses, tore the paper to pieces, and threw the scraps into the water. Words are a blunted blade. The most beautiful thoughts are those that cannot be penned. Every language proves insufficient, and every day the human heart finds in nuances of feeling, and the imagination finds in the impressions produced by visible Nature, things that the mouth cannot express, for lack of the right terms. The combination of the human heart and mind is a musician forced to play the music of the infinite on a keyboard with only a handful of keys. It is better to stay silent. Silence is beautiful poetry at certain times. The mind hears it, and God understands it: that is enough.



'Fountain of Siloam, Valley of Jehoshaphat' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

*The same date. November the 2nd, 1832.*

Ascending the Valley of Jehoshaphat, I passed by the tomb of Absalom. It is a block of rock hewn from the very rock of Mount Siloam, un-detached from the natural rock that serves as its base. It is about thirty feet high and twenty feet wide on each side. I say this at random, for I measured nothing: measurement is the architect's job. Its form is that of a cube with a Greek doorway in the middle, and a Corinthian cornice, supporting a pyramid at the top. There are no Roman or Greek decorations, lending it a strange, solemn, monumental, and novel appearance, like the Egyptian monuments.

The ancient Jewish people had no architecture of their own. They borrowed from Egypt, from Greece, but, I believe, above all from India: the key to everything lies in India; the generation of thought and the arts seems to me to originate there. India gave birth to Assyria, Chaldea, Mesopotamia, Syria, and the great desert cities, like Baalbek; then Egypt, then the islands, like Crete and Cyprus; then Etruria, then Rome; then night fell, and Christianity, nurtured first by Platonic philosophy, then amidst the barbaric ignorance of the Dark Ages, gave birth to our civilisation and our modern arts. Our civilisation is young, and we are barely past the age of adulthood. A new world in thought, social forms, and the arts will emerge, probably within a few centuries, from the vast ruin of the Middle Ages that we are witnessing. One senses that the moral world is bearing fruit, the emergence of which will take place amidst convulsions and pain; the written word, multiplied by the press, by extended discussion, criticism, and examination on every topic, by

summoning the power of all minds to reflect on every fact or point of dispute in the world, must irresistibly bring about an age of reason for all humanity. Revelation to all, by all; a reverberation of the divine light, which is reason and religion, reaching every part of humanity.

One could write a stimulating treatise on the history of the divine spirit during the different phases of humanity; on the history of Divinity in mankind; wherein one could show this religious principle acting first, during the earliest known ages of humanity, through instinct and blind impulse; then through the songs of the poets, *mens divinior*; then manifesting itself in the tablets of legislators, and the mysterious initiation ceremonies of the Indian, Egyptian, and Hebrew theocracies. When those mythological forms vanished from the human mind, having been abraded by time, and exhausted by human incredulity, one could show that same religious principle, disseminated and scattered throughout the great philosophical schools of Greece and Asia Minor, and the Pythagorean sects, searching in vain for universal symbols, until Christianity summarised all speculative and contested morality in these two great practical and indisputable precepts: worship of the one God; charity and friendship among all human beings.

*The same date. November the 2nd, 1832.*

A little above the commencement of the Kidron Valley, north of Jerusalem, we crossed some fields of reddish, more fertile soil, clothed with an olive grove. About five hundred paces from the city, we found ourselves at the edge of a deep quarry; we descended. To the left, a richly carved block of stone stretched across the entire width of the quarry, revealing, below, a narrow opening half-blocked by earth and fallen rocks. A man could scarcely squeeze through by crawling. We entered; but as we had neither lanterns nor torches, we left immediately without visiting the inner chambers: here were the tombs of the kings. The magnificently carved frieze, of the finest Greek craftsmanship, which adorns the outer rock, can be assigned by the nature of its decoration to the most flourishing period of the arts in Greece; However, it may date back to Solomon, for who can know what that great prince borrowed from the genius of India or Egypt?

*November 3, 1832.*

The plague, which is increasingly ravaging Jerusalem and the surrounding area, prevented us from entering Bethlehem, whose convent and sanctuary were closed. Nevertheless, we mounted our horses in the evening, and after crossing a plateau about three miles long that lies to the east of Jerusalem, we arrived at a hill a short distance from Bethlehem, from which the small town is clearly visible. We had scarcely dismounted when a large cavalcade of Bethlehem Arabs arrived and asked to be presented to me. After the customary greetings, they told me that they have been sent by the people of Bethlehem to ask me to reduce the tax that Ibrahim Pasha had imposed on their town; knowing, by repute and via the Arabs of Abu Gosh, their leader, that Ibrahim Pasha was my friend, and that he would certainly not refuse me if I requested leniency on their behalf.

Since the Bethlehem Arabs are the most detested people in these lands, always at war with their neighbours, always demanding ransom of the Latin monastery of Bethlehem, I replied gravely, while severely reproaching them for their acts of plunder, that I would consider their request and present it to the Pasha, but on the condition that they respected Europeans, pilgrims,

and especially the monasteries of Bethlehem and the Wilderness of Saint John; and that, if they indulged in the slightest violation of the homes of these poor religious men, Ibrahim's resolution would be to exterminate them to the last man, or drive them into the deserts of Arabia Petraea. I added (and this seemed to make a strong impression on them) that if Ibrahim Pasha's forces proved insufficient, the pashas of Europe were determined to visit themselves and bring them to heel. In the meantime, I urged them to pay the tribute. From that day until the day of my departure, despite all my attempts to dismiss them, I was constantly followed by a number of Bedouin sheikhs from Bethlehem, Hebron, and the Desert of Saint John, who continually begged for a reduction in the tribute. Back at the camp in the Valley of Solomon, beneath the walls of Zion, I received a visit from Abu Gosh, who arrived with his uncle and brother to inquire after our well-being. I give him coffee and a pipe, and we talked for an hour at the door of my tent, each seated beneath an olive tree.

*The same date. November the 3rd, 1832.*

A courier from Jaffa brought me letters from Europe and Beirut, and delivered them to me beneath the walls of Jerusalem. These letters reassured me about my daughter's health; but since she had added at the foot of her mother's letter that she absolutely did not wish me to go to Egypt at this time, I changed my route; I countermanded my arrangements for a camel caravan from El-Arish, and resolved to return to Beirut by way of the Syrian coast. We pitched our tents; I sent a present of five hundred piastres to the monastery, in addition to the fifteen hundred piastres I had paid for rosaries, relics, crucifixes, etc., and we took the road again to the wilderness of Saint John.

The general appearance of the area around Jerusalem can be described in a few words: mountains without shadows, valleys without water, land without greenery, rocks without sublimity or grandeur; a few blocks of grey stone piercing the cracked and crumbling earth; a fig tree, now and then, nearby; a gazelle or a jackal slipping furtively between the broken rocks; a few vines creeping over the grey or reddish ash of the soil; here and there, a cluster of pale olive trees casting a small patch of shadow on the steep slopes of a hill; on the horizon, a terebinth or a black carob tree standing, sad and alone, against the blue of the sky; and the grey walls and towers of the city's fortifications appearing in the distance on the crest of Zion; such is the land. A high sky, pure, clear, deep, where not a single cloud ever floats, nor is tinged with the purple of evening and morning. On the Arabian side, a wide chasm descends between the black mountains, leading the eye to the dazzling waters of the Dead Sea and the violet horizon of the peaks of the mountains of Moab. Not a breath of wind murmurs amidst the fortifications or between the dry branches of the olive trees; not a bird sings, not a cricket chirps, in the grassless furrows: a complete and eternal silence reigns in the city, on the roads, in the countryside.

Such was Jerusalem during all the days we spent beneath its walls. I heard nothing but the neighing of my horses, impatient in the sun around our camp, their hooves digging into the dusty ground; and from hour to hour the melancholy call of the muezzins from the minarets, or the rhythmic lamentations of the Turkish mourners, accompanying the plague victims in long lines to the various cemeteries surrounding the walls. Jerusalem, where one seeks to visit a tomb, is indeed itself the tomb of a people, but a tomb without cypress trees, without inscriptions, without monuments, whose stones have been shattered, and whose ashes seem to cloak the surrounding

barren earth in silent mourning. We cast our gaze upon it several times, as we left, from the top of every hill from which we could still glimpse the city; and finally we saw, for the last time, the crown of olive trees, which dominates the mount of that name and which hovers for a long time on the horizon after one has lost sight of the city, sink in the sky, and disappear like those crowns of pale flowers which are thrown into a sepulchre.

(*Lamartine was to return there once more after his daughter's death, though, as he said 'No longer alas, with the same sentiments; no longer to weep over the miseries of others, but to groan over my own miseries, and see its earth which had drunk so many, and absorbed so many, tears drink my own.'*)

Yesterday, I had pitched my tent in a rocky field, where a few gnarled or stunted olive tree trunks grew, below the walls of Jerusalem, a few hundred metres from the Tower of David, a little above the Pool of Siloam, where the waters still flow over the worn flagstones of its tunnel, not far from the tomb of the poet-king who so often sang its praise. The high, dark terraces that once supported Solomon's temple rose to my left, crowned by the three blue domes and the light, airy columns of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound (*Al-Haram al-Sharif*), which today hover over the ruins of the House of Jehovah.

The city of Jerusalem, ravaged by the plague, was flooded with the rays of a dazzling sun reflected from its thousand domes, its white marble, its yellow stone towers, its walls polished by centuries, and by the salty winds from the Dead Sea; no sound rose from its enclosure, mute like the bed of a dying person; its wide gates were open, and from time to time one could see the white turban and red cloak of an Arab soldier, the useless guardian of those abandoned gates: nothing entered, nothing emerged; only the morning air stirred the shimmering dust of the roads, and for a moment created the illusion of a passing caravan; but when the gust of wind died, whistling against the battlements of the Tower of David or the three palm trees of Caiaphas's house (*the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu*), the dust settled, and the wasteland reasserted itself, and neither camel nor mule's hooves resounded on the cobblestones of the road: only, every quarter of an hour, the two iron-shod doors of the gates of Jerusalem opened, and we saw the dead whom the plague had finally slain, each borne on a stretcher, by a pair of naked slaves, to the graveyards scattered all around us. Sometimes a long procession of Turks, Arabs, Armenians, and Jews marching and singing between the olive trees, accompanied the deceased, then returned slowly and silently to the city. More often, the dead were alone; and when the two slaves had dug a few palm fronds into the sand or earth of the hill and laid the plague victim in the final resting place, they would seat themselves on the very mound they had just created, divide the dead person's clothes between them, light their long pipes and, in silence, watch the smoke from their chibouks rise in light blue columns and dissipate gracefully in the clear, crisp, and transparent air of these autumn days.

At my feet, the Valley of Jehoshaphat stretched out like a vast sepulchre; furrowed by the dried-up Kidron Valley, a whitish gash, strewn with large pebbles, while the sides of the two hills that surround it were white with tombs and carved turbans, a common grave-adornment of the Ottomans: a little to the right, the Hill of Olives sloped down, and the view extended between the scattered chains of volcanic cones forming the bare mountains of Jericho and Saint Saba, like a luminous avenue, between uneven cypress peaks: the gaze was drawn there of its own accord, attracted by the azure and leaden gleam of the Dead Sea, which shone at the foot of those stepped mountains; while, behind, the blue chain of the mountains of Arabia Petraea bounded the horizon.

Though 'bounded' is not quite the word, for the mountains seemed transparent as crystal, and one saw, or thought one saw, beyond them a vague and indefinite horizon still extending onwards, swimming amidst the ambient vapours of the atmosphere tinged with purple and azure.

It was noon, the hour when the muezzin watches the sun from the highest gallery of the minaret, and chants the hour, and the prayer for all hours; a living, animated voice, aware of what it says and what it sings, superior, in my opinion, to the mindless voice of the bells of our cathedrals, if only it were audible as far away. My Arab servants had brought barley, in a goat-hair sack, to the horses tied here and there around my tent, their feet chained to iron rings: these beautiful, gentle animals were motionless, their heads bowed and shaded by long, flowing manes, their grey coats gleaming and steaming under the rays of a blazing sun. All our men had gathered in the shade of the largest olive tree.

They had spread their Damascus mats on the ground, and they smoked, telling each other stories of the desert, or singing verses by Antar (*Antarah ibn Shaddad al-Absi, the pre-Islamic poet. The medieval 'Romance of Antar', 'Sirat Antar ibn Shaddad', was originally a work of oral tradition, subsequently and continually enhanced*); Antar, the type of the wandering Arab, at once shepherd, warrior, and poet, encapsulated the whole desert in lines epic in form like Homer's, plaintive like Job's, amorous like that of Theocritus, philosophical like that of Solomon. His tale, which lulls or elevates the Arab imagination as much as the smoke of *tombac* (*unwashed tobacco leaf*) in a hookah, resounded in guttural tones amidst the lively group of my *sais*; and whenever the author's words struck, more exactly or more forcefully, the taut strings of these wild, but impressionable men's hearts, one heard a slight murmur from their lips; they joined their hands, raised them above their heads, and bowing cried out: '*Allah! Allah! Allah!*'

Later, the memory of those hours spent listening to those verses, which I could not understand, made me seek out fragments of popular Arabic poetry, and especially the heroic 'Romance of Antar'. I managed to obtain a number of such pieces, and had them translated by my dragoman (*probably Joseph-Antoine Mazoillier)* during the winter evenings I spent in Lebanon. I myself was beginning to understand a little Arabic, but not enough to read it; my interpreter translated sections of the poem into colloquial Italian, and I then translated them word for word into French. I have preserved these poetic essays, unknown to Europe. Poetry belongs to all places, all times, and all civilisations.

The Romance of Antar is the national poetry of the wandering Arab; here are the sacred words of their imaginings. Many another time I have seen groups of my Arab servants, squatting in the evening around the fire of our bivouac, craning their necks, listening intently, directing their fiery gaze towards one of their companions who was reciting passages from this admirable poem, while a cloud of smoke, rising from their pipes, formed above their heads like the fantastic atmosphere of dreams, and our horses, their heads bowed above them, seemed themselves attentive to the monotonous voice of their masters! I would sit not far from the circle, and listen too, though I did not understand; but I understood the sound, the interplay of faces, the tremors of the listeners; I knew it was poetry, and I imagined touching, dramatic, wonderful stories, which I recited to myself.

Listening to that melodious music, I became so engrossed that I thought I could comprehend the words, and that the poetry of the sung language had revealed to me, in utterance, the poetry of the written language. What can I say? I have never read poetry comparable to the poetry I discovered in the language of these Arabs, unintelligible to me. Imagination, as always, surpassing

the reality, I thought I now understood the primitive, patriarchal poetry of the desert; I saw anew the camel, the horse, the gazelle; I saw the oasis raising its yellow-green palm heads above the immense red sand dunes, the battles of the warriors, and the young Arab beauties abducted and recaptured amidst the fray, recognising their lovers in their liberators. Which reminds me that I have always found more pleasure in reading a foreign poet in translation, even a dead and flat prose translation, than the original itself: the most beautiful original always leaves something to be desired, while even a poor prose translation, indicating the thought, and the poetic motif, allows the imagination, embroidering the motif with words it assumes as readily as the idea, provides one with a complete pleasure, by re-creating the work of itself. Since infinity resides in thought, it assumes it in expression: the pleasure is thus infinite. To experience this pleasure, one must be, to a certain extent, a musician or a poet; but who is not?

Antar, both the hero and the poet of the wandering Arabs, is little known to us; we know less of his story; we do not even know the precise date of his existence. Some scholars claim that he lived in the sixth century AD (*current scholarship has settled on 525-608*). Local tradition places his life much earlier. Antar, according to this tradition borrowed in part from the Romance, was a black slave who won his freedom through his exploits and virtues, and won his mistress Abla through love and heroism.

The epic, unlike Homer's, is not written entirely in verse; it is in poetic prose of the purest and most classical Arabic, interspersed with verse. What is singular about this poem is that the prose portion of the narrative is infinitely superior to the lyrical fragments inserted within it. The poetic section smacks of affectation, pretension, and the style of a decadent literature; on the contrary, nothing is simpler, more natural, or more genuinely passionate than the recitative. Everything I have read of Arabic poetry, ancient or modern, participates more or less in this unfortunate pursuit of poetry by Antar: it consists, if not of wordplay, then at least of plays on ideas and images, designed more to amuse the mind than to touch the heart. It takes centuries for art to arrive at the simple and sublime expression of Nature. For the Arabs, verse is still merely an ingenious way of toying with their minds or feelings. I make an exception for a few religious poems written some thirty years ago by a Maronite bishop of Mount Lebanon (*perhaps Joseph VI Estefan, also Yusuf Istifan, Bishop of Antioch*): I will bring back a few fragments worthy of the places that inspired them, and of the sacred subjects to which this pious cenobite exclusively devoted his masculine genius. These religious poems are more solemn and more intimate than any I know of in Europe; something of Job's voice, Solomon's grandeur, and David's melancholy remain in them.

I regret that a skilled orientalist has not translated Antar in its entirety for us; it would be far better than the notes of a journey, for nothing reflects customs and manners so well as a poem; it would also rejuvenate our own powers of inspiration with the fresh colours that Antar drew from his solitude; it would, moreover, be as amusing as Ariosto, and as moving as Tasso. I cannot doubt that the Italian poetry of Ariosto and Tasso is akin to Arabic poetry: the same alliance of ideas that produced the Alhambra, Seville, Granada, and some of our cathedrals, produced Tasso's 'Gerusalemme' and the charming dramas of Ariosto, as well as his 'Orlando Furioso'. 'The Romance of Antar' is more interesting than the 'Arabian Nights' because it is less fantastical. All the interest lies in the human heart and in the true or plausible adventures of the hero and his lover. The English have an almost complete translation of this delightful poem (*'Antar, a Bedoueen Romance', translated by Terrick Hamilton, published 1819-20*); We possess only a few beautiful fragments

of it, scattered throughout our literary journals. The reader would barely be able to glimpse, through the imperfections of the fragments I have retrieved here, the admirable beauties of the original.

A few steps away, a young Turkish woman, seated on one of those small white stone monuments that dot all the hills around Jerusalem, was weeping for her husband. She looked barely nineteen or twenty, and I never saw such a ravishing image of grief. Her profile, which the veil that she had thrown back allowed me to glimpse, had the purity of line of the most beautiful heads in the Parthenon; but at the same time, the softness, the sweetness, and the graceful languor of Asian women — a beauty far more feminine, far more loving, far more captivating to the heart than the severe and masculine beauty of Greek statues; her hair, a bronzed and golden blonde like the copper of ancient figures, a colour highly prized in this sun-drenched land, of which she seemed a lasting reflection; her hair, loose from her head, fell around her and literally swept the ground; her breasts were entirely bare, according to the custom of the women of this part of Arabia; and when she bent down to kiss the stone turban, or press her ear to the tomb, her breasts touched the earth and left their imprint in the dust, like the imprint of the beautiful breasts of the corpse of 'Atala,' which the sand of the sepulchre still traced, as described in that admirable work by Monsieur de Chateaubriand.

She had strewn the tomb and the surrounding earth with all kinds of flowers; a beautiful damask carpet was spread beneath her knees; on the carpet were several vases of flowers, and a basket full of figs and barley cakes; for the woman must have spent the entire day weeping like this. A hole, dug in the earth, supposed to correspond to the ear of the dead man, served as her megaphone to that other world where the one she had come to visit slept. From time to time, she leaned toward this opening; she sang things interspersed with sobs, then she pressed her ear to it, as if waiting for a reply; then she would begin to sing again, still weeping. I tried to understand the words she murmured, which reached me; but my Arab dragoman could neither grasp them nor convey them. How I longed to know them! What secrets of love or sorrow! What sighs, animated by the whole life of two souls torn from one another, those confused words, drowned in tears, must have contained! Oh! If anything could ever waken a dead man, it was surely the words whispered by such a mouth!

A few steps away from this woman, under a piece of black cloth, supported by two reeds stuck in the ground, serving as a parasol, her two small children were playing midst three slaves from Abyssinia, squatting, like their mistress, on the sand which had been covered by a rug. These three women, all young and beautiful, with the slender figures and aquiline profiles Abyssinian women possess, were grouped in various poses, like three statues carved from a single block. One had her knee on the ground, and held on the other knee one of the children who stretched out his arms toward the side where his mother was weeping; a second had both legs folded beneath her and her two hands clasped, like Canova's 'Penitent Magdalen' (*the painting, now in private hands, of 1798-99, not the sculpture,*), on her blue linen apron; the third woman, leaning slightly over her two companions, and, swaying from side to side, cradled the smallest child against her barely-formed breasts, trying in vain to lull him to sleep. When the young widow's sobs reached the children, they began to weep; and the three Abyssinian slaves, after answering their mistress's sob with a cry, would begin to sing soothing melodies and children's songs from their own country to calm the pair.

It was a Sunday: two hundred paces from me, behind the tall and solid walls of Jerusalem, I could hear, in bursts, from the dark dome of the Greek monastery, the distant, faint echoes of the Vespers service. The hymns and psalms of David rose after three thousand years, chanted by foreign voices and in another language, on the same hills that had inspired them; and I saw on the terraces of the monastery the figures of elderly monks of the Holy Land moving to and fro, breviary in hand, murmuring those prayers already murmured for so many centuries in different languages and to different rhythms.

And I was here too, to sing of all these things; to study the centuries at the site of their cradle; to trace back to its source the future course of a civilisation, of a religion; to draw inspiration from the spirit of place and the hidden meaning of the stories and monuments, on these shores which were the starting point for the modern world, and to nourish, with greater knowledge and truer philosophy, the serious and thoughtful poetry of the era in which I myself live!

This scene, which chanced to unfold before my eyes, retained among my many travel memories, displayed to me the development of poetry in almost all its phases: the three Black African slaves lulling the children with the naive and carefree songs of their homeland, which formed the pastoral and instructive poetry of early nations; the young Turkish widow weeping for her husband, sighing her pain to the earth, expressed the elegiac and passionate phase of poetry, the poetry of the heart; the Arab soldiers and muezzins reciting warlike, amorous, and wonderful fragments from Antar, revealed the epic, warlike poetry of the nomadic peoples and invaders; the Greek monks chanting psalms on their solitary terraces, gave voice to the sacred and lyrical poetry of the ages of enthusiasm and religious renewal; and I myself, meditating in my tent musing on historical truths and ideas from all over the earth, embodied the poetry of philosophy and meditation, daughter of an era in which humanity studies and summarises its history and nature, even in the songs with entertain its leisure hours. All this, the poetry of the past and present; what then will the poetry of the future offer?

*November 4, 1832.*

We spent the evening and night in the wilderness of Saint John, taking leave of the excellent monks, the memory of whom will always be with us: the memory of their humble and perfect virtues remains in the soul, like the fragrance of a temple one has visited. We gave these good fathers alms barely sufficient to compensate them for the expense we had caused them; they considered the peril we had put them in as nothing; they begged me to commend them to the protection of the dreaded Abu Gosh, whom I was to see again at 'Jeremiah' (*Abu Gosh, the town, was traditionally the birthplace of the prophet Jeremiah*).

We left before daybreak, to avoid the nuisance of being pursued by the Bedouins, of Bethlehem and the wilderness of Saint John, who never tired of following me, and even began to threaten. At eight in the morning, we had crossed the high mountains crowned by the tomb of the Maccabees, and were seated under Jeremiah's fig trees, smoking pipes and drinking coffee with Abu Gosh, his uncle, and his brothers. Abu Gosh showered me with further marks of respect and kindness; he offered me a horse, which I refused, not wishing to offer him anything myself, since such a gift would have seemed an acknowledgment of the tribute he usually imposes on pilgrims, a tribute from which Ibrahim has freed them; I charged him with protecting the monks of Saint John, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. (*Lamartine later learned that Abu Gosh had indeed gone to deliver the monks from*

*the obsessive attentions of the desert Bedouins; as he said 'Abu Gosh probably had no idea, when I asked for his protection for the poor Frankish religious exiles in his mountains, that eight months later he would send someone to implore mine, for the release of his own brother taken prisoner to Damascus, and that I would be happy enough to be of use to him in turn.'*)

After drinking coffee and refreshing our horses, we set off again, escorted by the immense population of 'Jeremiah' (*Abu Gosh, the town*), and camped beyond Ramla in a magnificent olive grove surrounding the town. Overcome with fatigue, and lacking provisions, we sought hospitality from the monks of the Holy Land at their monastery (*the Armenian Monastery of Saint George*); they refused us as if we were plague carriers, which we might easily have been in their view. So, we went without supper and fell asleep to the sound of the breeze playing in the tops of the olive trees. It was here that the Virgin, Saint Joseph, and the Child spent the night, in the countryside, while fleeing to Egypt. The thought made my bed more seem comfortable.

We left Ramla at six in the morning; and lunched in Jaffa at Monsieur François Damiani's. The day was spent resting, and gathering provisions before returning to Beirut along the coast.

Nothing is more delightful than these caravan trips when the countryside is beautiful; when the well-rested horses pace lightly, at daybreak, over smooth, sandy ground; when sights follow one another without monotony; when, above all, the sea, bringing to one's face the fresh undulations of the air produced by its supple and regular waves, unfolds in green or blue at the feet of one's mount, and flings at one, now and then, powdery drops of foam: such is the pleasure we experienced while travelling along the charming coast that separates Haifa from Saint-Jean d'Acre.

The desert stretches of the plain of Zebulun are hidden, to the east, by tall clumps of reeds and the tops of palm trees that separate the shore from the land: one walks on a bed of fine, white sand, continually watered by the unfolding waves, spreading their white, ridged sheets of water; the gulf, enclosed to the south-west by the high point of Cape Carmel surmounted by its monastery, and to the north-east by the ragged white walls of Acre, resembles a vast lake, on which the smallest of boats can rock, with impunity, with the waves: but such is not the case. The Syrian coast, everywhere dangerous, is even more so in the Gulf of Haifa: ships that take refuge there, to avoid a storm, and drop anchor on the sea-bed formed of soft sand, are frequently driven ashore. Sad and picturesque wrecks attest to this all too evidently; the entire beach is lined with the carcasses of shipwrecked vessels half-buried in the sand; some still show their tall, shattered prows, in which seabirds make their nests; many show only their masts above the sand: these motionless, leafless trees resemble the crosses we plant above the ashes of those who are no more; some exhibit yards and rigging, marred by the sea's salt vapour, still hanging from the masts. The Arabs never touch the ruins of shipwrecked vessels; time and winter storms alone are left to accomplish the destruction of some, others the sand buries day by day.

There, as on almost all the rest of the Syrian coast, we could observe how the Arabs go about fishing. A man, holding a small, folded net above his head, ready to make his cast, walks a few paces into the sea, choosing an hour and place whereby the sun is behind him, illuminating the waves without blinding his eyes. He waits for the waves to arrive, as they pile high, rising, and crashing at his feet onto a reef or the sand. He casts a sharp, practised eye on each swelling wave, and if he sees that it is carrying fish along, he casts his net, at the very moment it breaks, and is about to carry away what it brought, in its ebb: the net falls, the wave recedes, and the fish remain.

A roughish sea is needed for this type of fishing to take place along the coast: when the sea is calm, the fisherman can locate nothing; the wave only becomes transparent when it rises high in the sunlight.

The foul stench of the battlefield announced that we were approaching Acre; we were now only a quarter of an hour from its walls. Acre is a heap of ruins; the domes of the mosques are riddled with holes, the crenellated walls show immense breaches, the towers have collapsed into the port. The city has just endured a year-long siege and was taken by storm by Ibrahim's forty thousand heroes.

In Europe, the politics of the East are poorly understood: they are assumed to possess some overall design, but are seen as driven by whims; by plans, but also by passion; by thoughts of the future, but also by today and tomorrow. Muhammad Ali's aggression has been seen as the result of a long, ambitious pre-meditated and gradually executed course of action; it was simply the power of fate, which, driving him onwards, step by step, led him almost involuntarily to shake his master's throne, and conquer half the empire: fresh opportunities may lead him even further.

This is how the quarrel arose: Abdullah, Pasha of Acre, an impetuous young man who had risen to the governorship of Acre through a favourable twist of fate, had rebelled against the Grand Seigneur; defeated, he had implored the protection of the Pasha of Egypt, who had bought his pardon from the Divan (*the Ottoman Imperial Council*). Abdullah, soon forgetting the gratitude he owed to the Pasha of Egypt, Muhammad, refused to honour certain conditions he had sworn to during his time of misfortune. Ibrahim advanced on him, in force; at Acre, he encountered unexpected resistance; his anger grew: he asked his master, Muhammad, for fresh troops; they arrived, only to be repelled once more. Muhammad Ali grew weary and summoned his son back with all his heart; Ibrahim's pride resisted: he wished to die beneath the walls of Acre, or subdue it for his father. Finally, sacrificing countless men, he breached the city gates. Abdullah ibn Ali, a prisoner, expected death; Ibrahim summoned him to his tent, hurled a few bitter insults at him, and sent him to Alexandria. Instead of the sword or the rope, Muhammad Ali sent him his horse, led him in triumph, seated him beside him on his divan, praised his bravery and loyalty to the Sultan, and bestowed upon him a palace, slaves, and immense revenues.

Abdullah deserved this treatment for his bravery: besieged in Acre with three thousand Ottomans, he had resisted for a year all the forces of Egypt, by land and sea; Ibrahim's fortune, like Napoleon's, had wavered before this obstacle; if the Grand Seigneur, whom Abdullah had pleaded with in vain, had sent the latter a few thousand men at the opportune moment, or had merely launched two or three of those fine frigates that lie uselessly at anchor off the caiques of the Bosphorus, it would have been the end of Ibrahim: he would have returned to Egypt convinced of the impotence of his wrath. But the Porte remained true to its system of fatalism; it allowed the ruin of its Pasha to unfold: the Syrian bulwark was overthrown, and the Divan awoke only too late. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali wrote to his general to return; But Ibrahim, courageous and adventurous, wished to test the weakness of the Sultan, and his own destiny: he advanced.

(*The following note Lamartine added later*) Resounding and hard-fought victories, at Homs (*July 1832*) in Syria, and Konya (*December 1832*) in Asia Minor, made him absolute master of Arabia, Syria, and all those kingdoms of Pontus, Bithynia, and Cappadocia which are now Caramania. The Sublime Porte could still cut off his retreat and, landing troops to his rear, retake the cities and provinces in which he was unable to leave sufficiently large garrisons; a corps of six thousand men,

thrown by the Porte into the passes of the Taurus Mountains and Syria, rendering Ibrahim and his army their prey, trapped him, despite his victories.

The Turkish fleet was infinitely larger than Ibrahim's; or rather, the Porte had an immense and magnificent fleet, while Ibrahim had only two or three frigates. But from the very beginning of the campaign, Halil Rifat Pasha, a young man of refined manners, a favourite of the Grand Seigneur, and appointed by him Grand Admiral (*Kapudan-Pasha*), had yielded the waves in the face of Ibrahim's weaker force. I saw him with my own eyes leave the harbour of Rhodes and take refuge in that of Marmoris on the coast of Caramania, at the head of the Gulf of Macri (*Gulf of Fethiye*). Once he and his ships were in this port, whose channel is prodigiously narrow, Ibrahim, with a couple of vessels, could have prevented him from leaving, though, indeed, the latter never chose to do so, and all winter, while the military operations on the Syrian coast were at their most critical, Ibrahim's ships were the only ones to appear at sea, transporting reinforcements and munitions to him without hindrance. And yet Halil Pasha was neither a traitor nor without valour: but such is the fate of a people who remain inert when all around them is in motion. The fortune of nations lies in their spirit; the spirit of the Ottomans is wavering before that of the last of its Pashas.

We now know the rest of this campaign, which is reminiscent of Alexander's; Ibrahim is undoubtedly a hero, and Muhammad Ali a great man; but the entire fate of their empire rests on their two heads; without them, there will no longer be an Egypt, no longer an Arab empire; there will be no more 'Maccabees' for Islam, and the East will return to the West by that invincible law which transfers power to wherever there is light. (*The end of Lamartine's later note.*)

*The same date. November the 4th, 1832.*

The sands bordering the Gulf of Acre were becoming increasingly fetid. We now came across the bones of men, horses, and camels, washed on shore, cleansed by the sea foam, and whitening in the sun. With every step, these heaped remains multiplied before our eyes. Soon the entire coastal strip, between the sea and the cliffs, seemed covered with them, and the sound of our horses' hooves constantly roused packs of wild dogs, hideous jackals, and birds of prey, which had been busy, for two months past, gnawing at the remains of the horrible feast Ibrahim and Abdullah's cannons had provided them. Some dragged along, as they fled, the limbs of unburied corpses, others horses' legs to which the skin still clung; eagles, perched on the bony heads of camels, rose at our approach with angry cries, returning to hover, despite our gunfire, over their gruesome prey. The tall grasses, the rushes, the shrubs along the shore were likewise strewn with the remains of men and animals. Yet these was not all the result of war. Typhus, which had been ravaging Acre for several months, was killing those whom the siege had spared; fifteen hundred men or less remained of a city of perhaps fifteen thousand souls, and every day new corpses were hurled from the walls or into the sea, corpses that the waves cast up at the end of the gulf, or that jackals dug from the ground.

We reached the eastern gate of that wretched city. The air was no longer breathable; we did not enter, but turning right, along the crumbling walls where a few slaves were working, we crossed the battlefield in its entirety, from the city walls to the country house of the former pashas of Acre, built in the middle of the plain and an hour or two from the sea. Approaching this magnificent house, flanked by elegant kiosks, in Indian architectural style, we saw long lines of raised earth, somewhat taller than those of furrows ploughed in our fertile soil at home. These lines were each

a mile or so long and about as wide; their crests rose a foot or two above the ground: this was the site of Ibrahim's camp, and the grave of the fifteen thousand men of his buried in these sepulchral trenches. We rode for a long time with difficulty over this ground, which barely covered the many victims of the ambition and caprice shown by those we term heroes.

We urged our horses forward, their hooves constantly striking against the remains, and shattering the bones that the jackals had unearthed; and rode on to make camp about an hour from that dreadful place, in a charming spot on the plain, well-served by running water, shaded by orange and lemon trees, and sheltered from the air of Acre, the fumes having pursued us. These gardens, an oasis amidst the bare plain of Acre, had been planted by the penultimate pasha (*Sulayman Pasha al-Adil*), successor to the famous Djezzar Pasha. A few poor Arabs, sheltering in huts of earth and mud, provided us with oranges, eggs, and chickens; we slept there.

The next day, Jean-Vaast de Laroyère could barely rise from his mat and mount his horse; all his limbs, numb with pain, failed to achieve the slightest movement. He felt the first symptoms of typhus, which his medical knowledge had taught him to distinguish better than we could. But the place offered us neither shelter nor resources to care for a sick man, so we hastened to leave before the illness worsened, and we went to sleep twenty-five miles away, on the plain of Tyre, on the banks of a river shaded by immense reeds, and not far from an isolated ruin that seemed to have belonged to the time of the Crusaders. The movement and the warmth revived Monsieur de Laroyère. We put him to bed in the tent, and went to hunt ducks and wild geese, which rose like clouds from the reeds on the riverbank. These birds fed our entire caravan that day.

The following day, we met a Turkish aga on the seashore, in a delightful spot shaded by maritime cedars and magnificent plane trees. He was returning from Mecca with a large retinue of men and horses. We settled down under a tree near the spring, not far from another tree where the aga was having lunch. His slaves were walking his horses. I was struck by the perfect form and the lightness of one young, purebred Arabian stallion. I instructed my dragoman to enter into negotiations with the aga. We sent him some of our travel provisions and a pair of percussion pistols as gifts; in turn, he presented us with a Persian yataghan. I had my horses led past him, so as to steer the conversation naturally toward the subject. I succeeded, but the difficulty lay in proposing that he sell me his. My dragoman told him that one of our travelling companions was so ill that he couldn't find a horse with a gentle enough gait to carry him. The aga then said he possessed one whom one could ride at the gallop while drinking coffee without a drop falling from the cup. This was precisely the beautiful animal I had admired, and so ardently desired to possess for my wife. After a convoluted discussion, we finally reached agreement, and I took the horse, which I named *El Kantara*, in memory of the place and the fount where I had purchased him. I mounted immediately to complete the day's ride: I had never ridden such a light-footed mount. One felt neither the elastic movement of his shoulders, nor the tread of his hooves on the stones, nor the slightest pressure of his mouth on the bit. With his short, slender neck, his feet lifting like a gazelle's, one felt as if one were riding a bird whose wings supported its imperceptible gait. He also ran better than any Arabian horse I had ever tried. His coat was pearly grey. I gave him to my wife, who refused to ride any other horse for the rest of our stay in the Orient. I will always miss that accomplished horse. He was born in Khorasan and was only five years old.

In the evening, we arrived at Solomon's Pools (*at Ras el-Aïn near Tyre, not those near Bethlehem*); the next day, early, we entered Said, the ancient Sidon, escorted by the local Franks and by the

sons of Grégoire Giraudin, our excellent vice-consul in Said. We also found Antoine Catafago in Said, whom we had known in Nazareth, along with his family. He had just built a house at Said, and was busy with the preparations for the wedding of one of his daughters. Ancient Sidon no longer offering any vestige of its former grandeur, we devoted ourselves entirely to the kind attentions of Monsieur Giraudin and to the pleasure of discussing Europe and the Orient with that interesting, elderly man. Having become a patriarch in the land of patriarchs, he presented, in himself and amidst his family, the image of all the patriarchal virtues, whose customs and manners he recalled in his own life.

Typhus, with all its symptoms, was evident in the worsening illness of Monsieur de Laroyère. No longer able to rise to mount his horse, we chartered a boat at Said to transport him by sea to Beirut; I set off again with the rest of the caravan. I sent a letter to Lady Stanhope, to thank her for the kind steps she has taken on my behalf with Abu Gosh, and to ask her to seize any opportunity that might arise to announce my imminent arrival to the Arabs of the Beqaa Valley, Baalbek and the deserts of Palmyra.

*November 3, 1832.*

I slept in an abandoned and dilapidated ancient ruin, by the sea; I wrote a few verses during the night on the pages of my Bible. I rejoiced at nearing Beirut after a successful journey. I met an Arab horseman on the road carrying a letter from my wife.

All is well, Julia is in excellent health; I am expected to spend a few days at the monastery of Aintoura in Lebanon, with the Catholic patriarch, who came to offer his invitation.

At four in the afternoon, a dreadful storm; a layer of cloud descends suddenly on the mountains to our right; the sound of the storm, which causes the heavy cloud to ebb and flow against the peaks of Lebanon which in turn tear it apart, mingles with the sound of the sea, which itself resembles in appearance a plain of snow stirred by a furious wind. The rain does not fall, as in the West, in more or less rapid drops, but in continuous, heavy streams that strike and weigh down on man and steed like the hand of a tempest. Daylight has vanished; our horses walk through torrents over loose stones and are at any moment on the verge of being swept into the sea. When the sky clears and reappears, we find ourselves on the edge of the Fakhr al-Din pine plateau, a mile or so from the city.

Home means something to animals as much as to human beings; those of my horses who recognise this place, having often borne us here, though weary from seven hundred miles and more of travel, neigh, prick up their ears, and rear in delight, on the sand. I let the caravan pass slowly beneath the pines; I urge Liban into a gallop, and I arrive, my heart trembling with worry and joy, in my wife's arms. Julia is playing in a neighbouring house with the daughters of the mountain prince who has become governor of Beirut during my absence: she sees me run down from the terrace; I hear her running herself, saying: 'Where is he? Is it really him?' She enters, she throws herself into my arms, she covers me with caresses, then she races around the room, her beautiful eyes shining with tears of joy, raising her arms and repeating: 'Oh! How happy I am! How happy I am!' and returns to sit on my lap and kiss me again. Two young Jesuit priests from Lebanon, visiting my wife, are in the room; I cannot speak a polite word to them for a long while: they themselves are speechless before this naive and passionate expression of tenderness of soul

from a child to its father. Before the celestial radiance that happiness adds to the beauty of that radiant face, they stand rooted to the spot, struck silent with admiration. Our friends and our entourage arrive, and fill the mulberry fields with our horses and tents.

Several days of rest and happiness are spent receiving visits from our friends in Beirut. The sons of Emir Bashir, who have descended from the mountains, by order of Ibrahim, to occupy the country which threatens to rise up in favour of the Turks, are camped in the valley of Nahr-el-Kalb, about an hour from my home.

*November 7, 1832.*

The Sardinian consul, Giovanni Bianco, who has been acquainted with these princes for many years, invited us to a dinner he was giving for them. They arrived dressed in magnificent kaftans, woven entirely of gold thread; their turbans were also made of the richest cashmere fabrics. The eldest prince, who commands his father's army, carried a dagger whose hilt was entirely encrusted with priceless diamonds. Their entourage was large and unusual: amidst a great number of Muslims and Black African slaves, there was a poet whose role was quite similar to that of a Medieval bard; his duties consist of singing the virtues and exploits of his master, composing stories for him when summoned to amuse, and standing behind him during meals to improvise verses — political toasts in his honour, or in honour of those guests the prince wishes to distinguish. There was also a Maronite Catholic chaplain or confessor who never leaves his side, even at the table, and to whom alone entrance to the harem is permitted: he is a monk with a jovial and warlike countenance, performing a role similar to that of a regimental chaplain in our army. The chaplain, because of his ecclesiastical role, sits at the table; the poet remains standing.

These princes, and especially the eldest, seemed in no way embarrassed by our customs, nor by the presence of European women. They conversed with us in turn, with the same grace of manner, the same aptness, the same freedom of spirit, as if they had been raised in the most elegant court in Europe. Eastern civilisation is always on a par with our own, because it is older, and originally purer and more perfect. To an unprejudiced eye, there is no comparison between the nobility, decorum, and austere grace of Arab, Turkish, Indian, and Persian manners, and our own. One senses in our countries that the young have barely emerged from a harsh, crude, and incomplete age: while one senses in theirs that they are the children of good families, people who are heirs to ancient wisdom and virtue. Their nobility, which is simply the result of a lineage founded in primitive virtue, is written on their foreheads and imprinted in all their customs; moreover, there is no such thing as the common folk among them. Moral civilisation, the only one I consider of importance, is everywhere at the same level. The pastor and the emir are from the same family, speak the same language, adhere to the same customs, and participate in the same wisdom, the same grandeur of tradition, which is the atmosphere of a noble people.

At dessert, wines from Cyprus and Lebanon flowed freely; the Christian Arabs and the family of Emir Bashir, who are Christian or believe themselves to be so, drank wine without demur, on this occasion. Toasts were made to the victory of Ibrahim, to the liberation of Lebanon, and to the friendship between the Franks and the Arabs; then, finally, the prince offered a toast to the ladies present at the celebration. His bard then began to improvise, at the prince's command, and sang, in recitative and at full volume, Arabic verses, the approximate meaning of which is as follows:

'Let us drink the juice of Eden, which intoxicates and gladdens the heart of both slave and prince. It is the fruit of those vines that Noah himself planted when the dove, instead of an olive branch, brought him a vine shoot from heaven. By the power of this wine, the poet becomes for a moment a prince, and the prince becomes a poet.

Let us drink in honour of these young and beautiful Frankish women who come from the land where every woman is a queen. The eyes of a Syrian woman are gentle, but they are veiled. In the eyes of Western girls there is more intoxication than in the translucent cup I drink from.

For a Muslim, drinking wine and gazing at women's faces is a double sin; for an Arab, it is a double pleasure, and a double blessing of God.'

The chaplain himself seemed delighted by these verses, and sang the bard's refrains, laughing and emptying his glass; the prince offered us an invitation to a falcon hunt, a customary spectacle and pastime of all the princes and sheikhs of Syria. It was from there that the Crusaders carried the custom to Europe.

*November 9, 1832.*

The weather, apart from a few gusts of wind at sea and some mid-day thunderstorms, is as fine as the month of May in France. As soon as the rains begin, a springlike freshness arrives; the walls of the terraces supporting the cultivated slopes of Lebanon and the fertile hills around Beirut have become so covered in vegetation in just a few days that the earth is entirely hidden beneath moss, grass, vines, and flowers. Green barley carpets all the fields, which were nothing but dust when we arrived. The mulberry trees, their second leaves emerging, form impenetrable forests around the houses; and here and there, one glimpses the roofs of more distant houses scattered across the plain, emerging from this sea of green, and Greek and Syrian women in their rich and vibrant dress, taking the air like queens, on the roofs of their garden pavilions. Small paths sunken in the sand lead from house to house, from one hill to another, through these gardens that stretch without break from the sea to the foot of mount Lebanon.

Following them, one suddenly finds, on the threshold of these little houses, the most delightful scenes of patriarchal life: women and girls squatting under the mulberry or fig tree at their door, embroidering rich woollen carpets in striking, vibrant colours; others, attaching the ends of silk thread to distant boughs, unwinding them as they walk slowly, singing, from tree to tree; the men, on the contrary, walking backward from tree to tree, are busily weaving silk fabrics, throwing the shuttle that a comrade returns to them. Children lie in rush cradles or on mats in the shade; some clamber amidst the branches of orange trees. The large Syrian sheep, with immense, trailing tails too heavy to move, are lying in holes dug expressly in the fresh earth in front of the door; one or two beautiful goats with long, drooping ears like those of our hunting dogs, and sometimes a cow, complete the rural scene. The master's horse is always there too, decked in its magnificent harness, ready to be ridden; it is part of the family, and seems to take an interest in everything that is done around it, and everything that is said, its face alive like that of a human face. When a stranger appears and speaks to it, the horse pricks its ears, raises its lips, wrinkles its nostrils, stretches its head to the wind, and sniffs the stranger caressing it; those gentle, but deep and thoughtful, eyes shine, like two coals, beneath the beautiful, long mane covering its brow.

The Greek, Syrian, and Arab farming families who live in these houses at the foot of Mount Lebanon are neither savage nor barbaric; more educated than the countryfolk of our provinces, all know how to read, and all understand both Arabic and Greek; they are gentle, peaceful, hard-working, and sober; occupied all week with their work on the land or silk-weaving, they relax on Sunday by attending, with their families, the long and spectacular services of the Greek or Syriac cult; they then return home to eat a somewhat more elaborate meal than on ordinary days. The women and girls, adorned in their richest clothes, their hair braided and dressed with orange blossoms, wallflowers, and carnations, remain seated on mats at the door of the house with their neighbours and friends. It is impossible for me to describe with the pen the groups, admirable in their picturesqueness, richness of costume, and stunning beauty that these women form in the countryside. Every day I see faces of young women and girls of an artistic beauty that Raphael himself could not have imagined, even in his dreams. Theirs is far more than an Italian or Greek beauty; they possess a purity of form, a delicacy of contour — in short, everything that Greek and Roman art bequeathed to us that is most accomplished. But their appearance is rendered even more intoxicating by a primitive and simple naivety of expression, a serene and voluptuous languor, a celestial light that the gaze from their blue eyes, framed by dark lashes, casts upon their features, and by a subtlety in the smile, a harmony of proportion, a vibrant whiteness of skin, an indescribable transparency of complexion, a metallic sheen to the hair, a grace of movement, an exoticism of attitude, and a pearly and vibrant sound to the voice, which makes these young Syrian women like houris of paradise to the sight.

These admirable and variedly beautiful women are frequently encountered; I can scarcely walk an hour in the countryside without meeting several going to the fountains, or returning with their 'Etruscan' urns on their shoulders, their bare legs circled by silver bracelets. The men and young boys, on Sundays, sit, relaxed and at ease, on mats spread out at the foot of some large sycamore tree, not far from a fount; they remain there motionless all day, telling fantastic stories, drinking, from time to time, a cup of coffee or of fresh water; others climb the hillsides, and one sees them there gathered peacefully beneath the vines or olive trees, seemingly enjoying with delight the view of the sea overlooked by these hills, the limpidity of the sky, the song of the birds, and all those instinctive pleasures of pure and simple human beings, which our populace has lost to the noisy intoxication of the tavern or the fumes of the orgy. Never were more beautiful scenes of Nature populated and animated by purer and more beautiful impressions. Nature here is truly a perpetual hymn to the goodness of the Creator, and no false note, no spectacle of misery or vice, disturbs, for the outsider, the ravishing harmony of this hymn: men, women, birds, animals, trees, mountains, sea, sky, climate, all is beautiful, all is pure, all is splendid and sacred.

*November 10, 1832.*

This morning, I went for an early ride, accompanied by Julia, on the hill the Greeks call Hagios Dimitrios, a couple of miles from Beirut, towards Mount Lebanon, following the curve of the sea north-east. Two of my Arabs accompanied us, one to guide us, the other to hold onto Julia's horse, and restrain it, if it became too spirited. When the paths became too steep, we left our mounts for a while, and explored on foot the natural and man-made terraces that form verdant tiers across the entire hill of Hagios Dimitrios.

In my childhood, I often pictured the earthly paradise, the Eden, that all nations cherish in their collective memory, either as a beautiful dream, or as a tradition regarding a more perfect time and place. I followed Milton's delightful descriptions of the enchanted abode of our first parents; but here, as in all things, Nature infinitely surpasses the imagination. God did not grant mankind dreams as beautiful as his creations. I had dreamed of Eden; I could now say that I had seen it.

After we had ridden for half an hour, beneath the arches of prickly-pear cacti that line all the paths of the plain, we began to ascend along narrower, steeper paths, all leading to successive plateaus, from which views of the countryside, the sea, and Mount Lebanon continually unfold. These plateaus, of moderate width, are surrounded by forest trees unknown to our climate, and whose nomenclature I unfortunately do not know; but their trunks, the shape of their branches, the novel and alien forms of their conical, dishevelled, pyramidal, or wing-like crowns, give these borders of vegetation a grace and a novelty of appearance strongly identified with Asia. Their foliage, too, is of every shape and colour, from the dark green of the cypress to the grey-green of the olive, and the yellows of lemon and orange trees; from the broad leaves of the Chinese mulberry, each enough to shield a child's brow from the sun, to the delicate fronds of the tea-tree, the pomegranate, and countless other shrubs whose leaves resemble parsley, casting light draperies of vegetal lace between the horizon and oneself. Along these wooded borders runs a fringe of greenery, covered in flowers, which they shade. The interiors of these plateaus are sown with barley, and at some corner or other, two or three palm-tree crowns, or the dark, rounded dome of a colossal carob tree mark the spot where an Arab farmer has built his hut, surrounded by a few grapevines, a ditch, defended by green palisades of fig trees laden with their spiky fruit, and a small orange grove sown with carnations and wallflowers to adorn his daughters' hair.

When by chance the path led us to the door of these houses sunken, like human nests, amidst these seas of greenery, we saw neither surprise, nor moodiness, nor anger on the faces of its happy and good inhabitants. They greeted us, smiling at Julia's beauty, with the pious greeting of the Orient: '*Saba el Kaïr*, may the day be blessed for you.' Some asked us to stop beneath their palm trees; they brought, according to their means, either a mat or a rug, and offered us fruit, milk, or flowers from their gardens. We sometimes accepted, and promised to visit again and bring them something from Europe, in turn. But their politeness and hospitality were in no way self-serving. They love the Franks, who know how to cure all illnesses, who understand the virtues of all plants, and who worship the same God as they do.

We climbed from one plateau to another: the same scenes, the same enclosures of trees, the same mosaic of vegetation over the surrounding land; only, from plateau to plateau, the magnificent view widened, the lower plateaus stretching out like a chequerboard in every colour, where hedges of shrubs, close together, and grouped by optical illusion, formed woods and dark patches beneath our feet. We followed these plateaus from hill to hill, descending from time to time into the valleys that separated them: valleys a thousand times more shaded, and even more delightful than the hills; all veiled by the curtains of trees on the terraces that overlook them, all enveloped in these waves of fragrant vegetation, yet all yielding, at their mouths, a narrow glimpse of the plain and the sea. As the plains disappeared due to the elevation of these valleys, they seemed to open immediately onto the beaches; their trees were silhouetted in black against the blue of the waves, and we sometimes amused ourselves, sitting at the foot of a palm tree, watching the sails of the ships, which were in reality ten to twelve miles from us, glide slowly behind a row of trees

as if they sailed a lake, of which these valleys were the immediate shore. We finally arrived, by sheer chance, at the most complete and enchanting of these landscapes. I intend to return there often.

It is an upper valley, open from east to west, nestled in the folds of the last chain of hills that juts out over the deep valley through which the Nahr-Beirut flows. Indescribably prodigious vegetation carpets its floor and sides: although on both sides the walls are solid rock, they are so covered with lichens of every kind, so oozing with the moisture that seeps into them, drop by drop, so covered with clusters of heather, ferns, fragrant herbs, vines, ivy, and shrubs rooted in imperceptible crevices, that it is impossible to suspect that it is bare rock alone that allows such growth. It forms a thick carpet a foot or two thick; a dense velvet of vegetation, nuanced with hues and colours, strewn everywhere with bouquets of flowers unknown to me, of a thousand shapes, a thousand scents, which sometimes rest motionless like the flowers painted on a fabric screen in our dining rooms; sometimes, when the sea breeze happens to glide over them, they move with the shrubs, and the grasses, from which they rise like the silken tufts of hair of an animal's coat stroked against its natural lie, and their leaves shimmer with undulating hues, resembling a river of greenery cascading in fragrant waves. From them rise bursts of intoxicating scents, multitudes of insects with colourful wings, and countless birds flying to perch in the neighbouring trees; the air is filled with the birds' calls as they answer one another, with the buzzing of swarms of wasps and bees, and that muffled murmur of the earth in spring, which one might, perhaps rightly, mistake for a palpable noise produced by the thousands of plants clothing its surface. The nocturnal dew hangs from every leaf, glistens on every blade of grass, and refreshes the floor of this little valley as the sun rises, and casts its rays over the tops of the tall trees, and over the rocks, that envelop it.

We lunched there, on a shelf of stone, beside a cave in which two gazelles had taken refuge at the sound of our footsteps. We were careful not to disturb the sanctuary of these charming animals, which are to these deserts what the lamb is to our meadows, or what tame doves are to the roofs or courtyards of our houses.

The entire valley was draped in the same shifting curtain of foliage, moss, and vegetation; we could scarcely help exclaiming at every step: I cannot remember ever seeing so much life in Nature, crammed into and overflowing so small a space. We followed the valley's entire length, sitting down from time to time where the shade was coolest, and rustling the grasses here and there with our hands to make the dewdrops, misted fragrances, and clouds of insects, which rose from its depths shower forth, like spurts of golden dust.

How great God is! How deep and infinite must be the source from which all this life, beauty, and bounty flows! If there is so much to see, to admire, to marvel at, to be immersed in within a single small corner of Nature's realm, what will it be like when the veil of worlds is lifted for us, and we contemplate the entirety of His endless work? It is impossible to see, and think on, without being flooded with an inner truth in which the idea of God is mirrored. All of Nature is strewn with sparkling fragments of this glass in which God is reflected!

As we approached the western mouth of the valley, our view of the sky widened; the walls lowered in height, the slope inclined gently beneath our feet; the snow-capped peaks of Lebanon rose against the sky shimmering with warm vapours. The gaze descended from those eternal snows to dark patches of pine, cypress, or cedar, then to deep ravines where the shade still slumbered; and finally, to gilded stony summits at whose foot lay the upland villages of the Maronites and the

Druze. The view ended in a border of olive groves withering away at the edge of the plain. The plain itself, stretching between the hills where we stood and the foothills of Upper Lebanon, appeared to be a few miles wide. It was winding, and we could only take in four or five miles of its length; the rest was hidden from us by hills covered in dark pine forests.

The Nahr-Beirut, or Beirut River, which springs forth a few miles from one of the deepest and rockiest gorges in Lebanon, divides the plain in two. It flows gracefully between its banks, sometimes confined within rush-lined shores resembling sugar fields, sometimes overflowing onto verdant meadows or beneath mastic trees, and forming, here and there, what look like small, sparkling lakes scattered across the plain. Its banks are covered everywhere with vegetation, and we could make out donkeys, horses, goats, black buffalo, and white cows, scattered in herds along the river, their Arab shepherds fording the river on the backs of their camels. Further on, above the first cliffs of the mountain, one could see Maronite monks, dressed in their black hooded robes, silently driving the plough beneath the olive trees in their fields. The monastery bell could be heard, calling them, from time to time, to prayer. Then they would halt their oxen, lean the pole against the plough handle, and, kneeling for a few minutes, let their team rest, while they themselves took breath, and prayed for a moment.

Advancing further, and commencing our descent towards the river, we caught a sudden glimpse of the sea, which the valley walls had hidden from us until then, and of the wide estuary where the Nahr-Beirut joined it. Not far from this mouth, an all but ruined Roman bridge (*since demolished*), with tall arches but lacking parapets, spans the river; a long caravan from Damascus, heading for Aleppo, was passing over it at that very moment; we watched as, one by one, men on dromedaries, and others on horses, emerged from the reeds that shaded the bridge abutments, slowly climbed to the summit of the arches, and were silhouetted for a moment against the blue of the sea, along with their mounts and their striking, and bizarre costumes. Then they descended from the summit of the ruins and disappeared, along with a long line of donkeys and camels, beneath the clumps of reeds, oleanders, and plane trees that shaded the other bank of the river. A little further on, the caravan reappeared on the sandy shore where the high waves sent their fringes of foam almost to the hooves of the mounts. Immense, sheer rocks on a promontory finally hid them and, extending into the sea, delineated the horizon on that side. At the mouth of the river, the sea was dual-toned; blue and green offshore, sparkling with shimmering diamonds; yellow and dull, where the river waters battled the waves, staining them with golden sand, which they ceaselessly carry into this harbour. Seventeen vessels, anchored in the gulf, rolled and pitched heavily on the great waves that constantly furrow it, their masts rising and falling like long reeds in the wind. Some of these masts were bare like winter trees; others, the spread sails drying in the sun, resembled the great white birds of these seas, which glide past without a single tremor of their wings. The gulf, brighter than the sky that covered it, partially reflected the snows of Mount Lebanon, where crenellated monasteries adorned the projecting peaks. A few fishing boats, under full sail, passed shoreward seeking shelter in the river.

The valley beneath our feet, the slopes leading down to the plain, the river beneath the pyramidal arches, the sea-coves in the rocks, the immense block of Mount Lebanon with the countless details of its structure; its snowy peaks ascending, like silver cones, into the airy heights, where the eye sought them as it does the stars; the imperceptible sounds of insects around us, the songs of a thousand birds in the trees, the bellowing of buffaloes, the well-nigh human complaints

of the camels in their caravans; the dull and periodic thrumming of the wide waves breaking on the sand at the mouth of the river; the endless horizon of the Mediterranean; the meandering, green line of the bed of the Nahr-Beirut to our right; the gigantic crenellated wall of Mount Lebanon opposite; the radiant and serene dome of the sky notched only by the peaks of the mountains, or by the conical heads of the great trees; the warmth, the fragrance of the air, in which everything seemed to float, as if reflected in the clear water of a Swiss lake: all these aspects, sounds, shadows, all this light, all these impressions formed, of this scene, the most sublime and graceful landscape with which my eyes had ever been intoxicated. And what was it not for Julia! She was completely moved, radiant, trembling with awe and inner delight; while I loved to etch such sights in the child's imagination. God is depicted there better than in the lines of a catechism: he is depicted there in features worthy of him; the sovereign beauty, the immense goodness of Nature perfected, reveal him, as he truly is, to the soul of the child; this physical and material beauty translates there to a feeling of moral beauty. The artist is shown statues of Greece to inspire in him an instinct for beauty: the young soul must be shown great and beautiful scenes from Nature, so that the image it forms of its Creator may be worthy of it and of him.

We remounted our horses at the foot of the hill, on the plain, by the river; we crossed the bridge, and climbed a few of the wooded hills of Lebanon, until we reached the first monastery, which stood like a fortress on a granite pedestal. The monks knew me from Arab report and received me there. I toured the cells, the refectory, and the chapels. The monks, returning from work, were busy in the vast courtyard unharnessing oxen and buffaloes: this courtyard resembled that of a large farm; it was cluttered with livestock, manure, poultry, ploughs and all the implements of rustic life. The work was done quietly, without loud cries, but without any affectation of silence, as if by men guided by a natural decency, but not bound by a strict and inflexible rule. The faces of these men were gentle, serene, exuding peace and contentment: the appearance of a community of farmers.

When the bell rang for their meal, they entered the refectory, not all together, but one by one, or two by two, depending on whether they had finished their work earlier or later. This meal consisted, as every day, of two or three flatbreads, the flour kneaded and dried, rather than baked, on a shelf of heated stone; water; and half a dozen olives preserved in oil. Sometimes a little cheese or soured milk was added. This was all the food these cenobites ate: which they did standing or sitting on the ground. The furniture of our lands is unknown there. After joining them for dinner, eating a piece of flatbread ourselves and drinking a glass of excellent Lebanese wine that the superior had brought, we visited a few of the cells: they were all alike: a small room of five or six square feet, with a rush mat and a rug all the furniture, and images of saints nailed to the wall, an Arabic Bible, and a few Syriac manuscripts the only adornments. A long interior thatched gallery served as a corridor to all these rooms.

The view from the monastery windows, and from almost all of these monasteries, is magnificent: the first slopes of Mount Lebanon before us, the plain and the Beirut River, the airy domes of the pine forests outlined against the red horizon of the sandy desert; then the sea framed everywhere by headlands, gulfs, coves, and rocks, white sails crossing it in every direction: this is the view constantly before the eyes of these monks. They presented us with several baskets of dried fruit and some wineskins, which were loaded onto donkeys, and we departed, to return to Beirut by another route. I will speak of them later.

We descended steep steps, hewn from the detached blocks of the soft, yellow sandstone that covers all the foreground of Lebanon. The path wound through these blocks; in the stony crevices, a few shrubs and grasses had taken root. There were magnificent flowers, like the tulips in our gardens, but infinitely larger. We flushed out several gazelles and a few jackals, which take shelter in the hollows formed by these rocks. A large number of partridges, quails and woodcocks flew away at the sound of our horses' hooves.

Having reached the plain, we found ourselves once again surrounded by vineyards, barley fields, and date palms. We crossed around half of the plain amidst this lush vegetation and soon came to the foot of a broad hill covered with a forest of Italian pines, with wide clearings in the distance, where we could see herds of camels and goats. This hill concealed the Nahr-Beirut River from us, the southern stretch of which we intended to cross. We descended beneath the tall canopies of the beautiful umbrella pines, and after riding for about fifteen minutes in their shade, we suddenly heard loud shouts, the noise of a multitude of men, women, and children rushing toward us, the roll of drums, and the sounds of the bagpipes and fife. In an instant, we were surrounded by five or six hundred Arabs of a strange appearance. The chiefs, dressed in magnificent but filthy and tattered costumes, advanced toward us at the head of their band; they bowed and offered us compliments, seemingly very respectful ones, which we however were unable to understand. Their gestures and shouts, accompanied by the gestures and shouts of the entire tribe, helped us to interpret their words. They were urging us, almost forcing us, to follow them into the heart of the forest, where their camp was pitched: they were members of one of the Kurdish tribes, who arrive from the provinces neighbouring Persia to spend the winter, sometimes in the plains of Mesopotamia, near Damascus, sometimes in those of Syria, bringing their families and flocks with them. They seize on a deserted wood, plain, or hill, and settle there for five or six months. Far more barbarous than the Arabs, their invasions and proximity are generally feared: these are the armed Bohemians of the East.

Surrounded by this crowd of men, women, and children, we walked for a few minutes to the sounds of that wild music and the shouts of the multitude, who watched us with a curiosity that was half amused, half ferocious. We soon found ourselves in the midst of their camp, before the tent-opening of one of the tribe's sheikhs. They had us dismount, entrusted our horses, which they greatly admired, to the care of some young Kurds, and brought us Caramanian carpets, on which we sat, at the foot of a tree. The sheikh's slaves offered us pipes and coffee; the women of the tent brought camel milk for Julia. The sight of this camp of nomadic barbarians, in the middle of a dark pine forest, deserves to be described.

The forest in this area was sparse and interspersed with large clearings. At the foot of each tree, a family had pitched its tent: these were, for the most part, nothing more than a piece of black canvas, made of goat hair, tied to the tree trunk by a rope, and, on the other side, supported by two stakes driven into the ground; the canvas often failed to enclose the space occupied by the family completely; but only a small flap hung down on the side facing the wind or the sun, sheltering the tent floor and the hearth. There was an absence of furnishings, only a few dark earthenware jars lying on their sides, from which the women drew water; also, a few goatskin water carriers; sabres and long rifles hanging in bundles from the tree branches; mats, rugs, and some men's and women's clothing scattered here and there on the ground. Some of these Arabs possessed a few square chests of red-painted wood, decorated with designs formed of gilt-headed

nails, to hold their belongings. I saw only a trio of horses in the entire tribe. Most families possessed only a camel, lying down near their tent, chewing the cud, its tall, intelligent head raised and stretched toward the tent opening; a few fine-looking goats with long black hair and drooping ears; some sheep and buffaloes; almost all had one or two magnificent greyhounds also, large and white-coated These dogs, contrary to the usual custom of the Muslims, were sleek and well cared for: they seemed to recognise their owners, from which I presume that these tribes use them for hunting.

The sheikhs seemed to wield absolute authority, and the slightest sign from them restored the order and silence that the tumult of our arrival had disturbed. A few children, out of curiosity, committed some slight indiscretions regarding us, and were immediately seized by the men nearby and chased away to another part of the camp. The men were generally tall, strong, handsome, and well-built; their clothes suggested not poverty, but neglect. Several wore jackets of silk embroidered with gold or silver threads, and blue silk coats lined with rich fur. Their weapons were also remarkable for the silver engravings and inlays with which they were adorned.

The women were neither secluded nor veiled; they were half-naked even, especially the girls between ten and fifteen years old. Their entire lower garment consisted of trousers with wide pleats, which left their legs and feet bare; they all wore silver bracelets above their ankles. Their upper bodies were covered with a shirt of cotton or silk cloth, cinched with a belt, leaving the breast and neck uncovered. Their hair, generally very dark, was braided into long plaits that hung down to their heels which were adorned with coins strung there. Their loins and throats were armoured also with a network of strung piastres, which jingled with every step they took, like the scales of a snake. These women were neither tall, fair-skinned, modest, nor graceful, like the Syrian Arabs, nor did they have the fierce and fearful look of the Bedouin women; they were generally small, thin, with sun-tanned complexions, but were cheerful, active, playful, and agile, dancing and singing to the sounds of their music, which never ceased its lively and animated tunes. They showed no embarrassment at our gaze, no modesty regarding their scanty clothing before the men of the tribe: the men themselves seemed to exercise scant authority over them; the women simply laughed at our indiscreet curiosity, and gently and jokingly brushed us aside. Some of the young girls were extremely pretty and striking; their dark eyes were dyed with henna at the edges of their eyelids, which rendered their gaze far more vibrant. Their legs and hands were also mahogany in hue; their ivory-white teeth, accentuated by their blue-tattooed lips and sun-kissed skin, gave their faces and laughter a wild, but not ferocious, character; they resembled the young women of Provence or Naples, but with higher foreheads, a freer bearing, more open smiles, and more natural manners. Their image remains deeply etched in my memory, for one rarely sees faces possessing such character twice.

There was a circle of perhaps two hundred people from the tribe around us. When we had sufficiently observed their camp, their visages, and their activities, we signalled that we wished to remount. Our horses were immediately brought for us. As they were frightened by the strange sights, the shouts of the crowd, and the sounds of the drums, the sheikh had Julia taken up by two of his wives, who carried her to the edge of the forest. The entire tribe accompanied us there. We mounted, and they offered us a goat and a young camel as gifts. We refused, and instead gave them a handful of Turkish piastres, which the young women divided among themselves to add to their

necklaces, and two gold 'El-Ghazi' coins (*Ottoman gold coins, bearing the title 'El-Ghazi', 'the conqueror'*) for the sheikh's wives.

A short distance from the forest, we reached the river again; which we forded. Under the oleanders that line its banks, we met another hundred or so young girls from the Kurdish tribe, who were returning from Beirut, where they had gone to buy earthenware jars, and some pieces of cloth, for a bride from their tribe: they had halted there and a group were dancing in the shade, each of them holding in her hand one of the household items or an adornment for their companion; they followed us for a long time, making wild cries, and clinging to Julia's dress and the manes of our horses, to obtain a few coins; we threw some to them; they fled, and all rushed into the river to return to the camp.

After crossing the Nahr-Beirut and the other half of the cultivated plain, shaded by young palm and pine trees, we entered the red sandhills that stretch east of Beirut, between the sea and the river valley. It is a piece of the Egyptian desert at the foot of Mount Lebanon and surrounded by magnificent oases. The sand is reddish like ochre and as fine as impalpable dust. The Arabs say that this red sand is not borne on the wind nor accumulated by the waves, but spewed forth by an underground torrent that connects with the deserts of Gaza and El-Arish. They claim that there are springs of sand, just as there are springs of water. To confirm their opinion, they point to the colour and form of the sand on the seashore, which indeed bears no resemblance to that of this desert. The colour is as distinct as that of a granite or marble quarry.

At all events, this sand, whether vomited up by underground rivers or scattered there by the fierce winds of winter, unfolds in sheets up to forty miles in circumference, and raises mountains or carves valleys that change shape with every storm; one has barely walked for a while in these undulating labyrinths, before one no longer knows where one is; the sandhills hide the horizon on all sides; no path remains on the surface of these waves; horses and camels pass over them leaving no more trace than a boat leaves on the water; while the slightest breeze erases everything; some of these dunes were so unstable that our horses could scarcely climb them, and we advanced only cautiously, for fear of being swallowed up by the mudflats, frequent amidst that sea of sand; one finds no trace of vegetation there, except for a few large bulbs of plants that roll about from time to time under the horses' hooves. The impression one has of these shifting solitudes is sad and bleak: it is like a stormy sky, soundless but with a deathly countenance. When the simoom, the desert wind, rises, these hills undulate like the waves of an ocean, and, folding silently back upon their deep valleys, swallow the camels belonging to the caravans. The dunes advance a few paces each year onto the cultivated land surrounding them, and you see on their crests the heads of withered palm or fig trees above the surface, like ship's masts swallowed by the waves: we heard no sound but the distant dull and heavy fall of the sea's waves breaking against the reefs, a few miles away. The setting sun tinged the crest of these mountains with red dust of a colour like that of molten iron emerging from a furnace; while its rays, gliding into these valleys, flooded them with fire, like the corridors of a burning building.

From time to time, finding ourselves at the top of a hill, we would discover the white peaks of Lebanon before us, or the sea with its edge of foam bordering the long, winding coasts of the Gulf of Sidon; then we would plunge deep into the sandy ravines, where all we could see was the sky above us. I was following Julia, who often turned back to me, her beautiful face flushed with emotion and weariness, and I read in her eyes, whose gaze seemed to question me, her mingled

impressions of terror, enthusiasm, and pleasure. The sound of the sea grew louder, announcing the shore; we suddenly found ourselves on the heights above, sheer before our horses' hooves, and towering at least two hundred feet above the Mediterranean. The ground, solid and resonant under our feet, though still covered with a thin layer of white sand, indicated the underlying rock rising above the waves of sand: indeed, similar stony cliffs border all the shores of Syria. We had arrived by chance at one of the points on this coast where the struggle between land and water presents the strangest spectacle to the eye: the repeated shock of the waves or earthquakes in this place have detached immense hills of living rock from the continuous block of coast, which, launched into the sea have settled there, worn, polished, and licked by the waves for centuries, and have affected the most bizarre shapes.

Before us, at a distance of about a hundred feet, was one of those standing rocks, rising from the sea, its crest above the level of the shore; the waves, striking it ceaselessly, had finally forced an opening, forming a gigantic arch, like the opening of a triumphal monument. The inner walls of this arch were as polished and gleaming as Carrara marble; the receding waves revealed these stony walls, glistening with foam that fell back with the departing water; then, as the waves returned, they would plunge, with a thunderous roar, into the arch, filling it to the vault; and, compressed by the impact, would burst forth in torrents of fresh foam that rose like furious tongues to the top of the rock, from whence they fell back in watery and sandy veils. Our horses shuddered with horror at each of these returns of the wave, and we could not tear our eyes away from this war of the two elements.

For half an hour of our ride, the coast was flooded with these magnificent natural displays: there were crenellated towers covered with tern's nests, and rough bridges joining the reefs to the shore, beneath which, as we passed, we could hear the roar of the subterranean waves. In certain places, the crashing breakers pierced the rocks, from which jets of sea foam gushed beneath our feet; the water rose a few feet from the stone in immense columns, then murmured back into the depths as the waves receded. The sea was rough at this time; it reached the shore in broad, tall blue hills, that rose in transparent crests as they approached the rocks, and struck against them with such a roar that the shore trembled in the distance, and we thought we saw the marine arch before us waver.

After the silent and terrible solitudes we had just crossed, the boundless aspect of that immense sea, devoid of vessels, at the evening hour when the first shadows begin to darken its depths; those vast breaks in the coastline, with the tumultuous sound of waves rolling over enormous rocks, like the feet of a gigantic bird stirring grains of sand; the blows of the sea breeze on our foreheads, and over the manes of our horses; the deep subterranean echoes that multiplied the muffled roar of the storm: all this struck our two souls with such diverse, solemn, and strong impressions that we could no longer speak, while tears of emotion shone in Julia's eyes.

We returned silently to the red sandy waste; we crossed its narrowest part, approaching the hills of Beirut, and found ourselves, at sunset, beneath the great pine forest planted by Emir Fakhr-el-Din. There, Julia, regaining her voice, turned to me and said, with rapture: 'Have I not just had the most beautiful ride imaginable? Oh! How great God is! And how good He is to me,' she added, 'in choosing me to behold such beautiful scenes so young!'

It was night when we dismounted at the door of our house; we planned other excursions for the remaining days before my trip to Damascus.

## The People of Lebanon

### The Maronites

The origins of the Maronites, of whom I have spoken, are plunged in darkness. History, so incomplete and fanciful as regards the first centuries of our era, casts doubt on the various sources of their institutions. They possess a few books, unchecked and therefore lacking critical assessment; however, since one should always rely on what a people knows of itself rather than on the idle speculations of the traveller, here is what emerges from their own histories. A hermit saint, named Maron, lived around the year 400AD. Theodoric and Saint Chrysostom mention the sect. Maron lived in the desert, and his followers, having spread throughout the various regions of Syria, built several monasteries there; the principal one was near Apamea (*modern Qala'at al-Mudiq, south of Antioch*), on the fertile banks of the Orontes River. All the Syriac Christians, who were not as yet infected with the Monothelite heresy, took refuge around these monasteries, and from this circumstance received the name Maronites. Volney (*Constantin-François Chassebœuf de La Giraudais, Comte de Volney*), who lived among them for a few months, gathered the most complete information about their origin; it is similar to that which I myself gathered from local tradition.

In any case, the Maronites today form a people governed by the purest theocracy that has withstood the test of time; a theocracy which, constantly threatened by Muslim tyranny, has been forced to remain moderate and protective, and has allowed the principle of civil liberty to germinate and flourish among the people. The Maronite sect, which, according to Volney, numbered one hundred and twenty thousand in 1784, now numbers more than two hundred thousand and is growing daily. Its territory covers a thousand square miles; but has only arbitrary borders; it extends along the slopes of Mount Lebanon, into the valleys and plains that surround it, as the Maronites establish new villages. The town of Zahlé, at the mouth of the Beqaa valley, opposite Baalbek, the population of which had barely twelve hundred souls or less twenty years ago, now has between ten and twelve thousand, a number which increases every day.

The Maronites are subject to Emir Bashir, and form, with the Druze and the Metuali, a kind of despotic confederation under the rule of that emir. Although the members of these three sects differ in origin, religion, and customs, and almost never inhabit the same villages, a shared interest in defending their common liberty and the strong political hand of Emir Bashir bind them together. Their numerous settlements cover the area between Latakia and Acre on the one side, and Damascus and Beirut on the other. I will speak further of the Druze and the Metuali.

The Maronites occupy the central valleys and highest ranges of the main part of Mount Lebanon, from the vicinity of Beirut to Tripoli in the north. The slopes of these mountains, which descend towards the sea, are fertile, watered by numerous rivers and inexhaustible waterfalls; they harvest silk, oil, barley and wheat there; the heights are almost inaccessible, and the bare rock pierces the flanks of these mountains everywhere; but the tireless activity of this people, who had no safe haven for their religion except behind these peaks and precipices, has rendered the stony slopes themselves fertile: they have formed, level by level, up to the summit ridges, and their eternal snow, terraces walled with blocks of free stone; to these terraces they brought topsoil that the waters send, in small amounts, into the ravines, and they crushed the stone itself rendering it fertile

by mixing it with this soil, thereby making all of Mount Lebanon a garden covered with mulberry trees, fig trees, olive trees and cereal crops.

Travellers can scarcely believe their eyes when, after climbing for days on end over the sheer faces of the mountains, which are nothing but solid blocks of rock, they suddenly find, nestled in the depths of a high gorge or on a high mountain plateau, some beautiful village built of white stone, populated by a large and wealthy community, with a Moorish castle at its centre, a monastery in the distance, a torrent foaming at the foot, and all around a landscape of vegetation and greenery in which pines, chestnut trees, and mulberry trees shade vineyards or fields of wheat or oats. These villages are sometimes perched one on top of the other, almost perpendicularly; one can throw a stone from one to another; calls from one reach the next; and yet the steepness of the mountain requires so many twists and turns to trace the paths that it takes an hour or two to travel from one hamlet to another nearby.

In each of these villages one finds a sheikh, a kind of feudal lord who administers and executes justice. But this administration of justice, dispensed summarily and within the sheikhs' limited police powers, is neither absolute nor final. The higher administration belongs to the Emir and his council. Justice falls partly under the Emir's jurisdiction and partly under that of the bishops. There is thus a conflict of jurisdiction between the Emir and the ecclesiastical authorities. The Maronite patriarch alone retains the final say in all cases where civil law conflicts with religious law, such as those involving marriage, dispensation, or divorce.

The prince is obliged to maintain the utmost discretion in his dealings with the patriarch and the bishops, for the clergy's authority over minds is immense and undisputed. This clergy consists of the patriarch, elected by the bishops and confirmed by the pope, and a papal legate sent from Rome and residing at the monastery of Aintoura or that of Qannoubine, as well as the bishops, the superiors of the monasteries, and the parish priests. Although the Roman Catholic Church has strictly maintained the law of priestly celibacy in Europe, and several of its writers affect to see a dogma in this regulation of its discipline, it has been forced to yield on this point in the East; and, although they remain fervent and devoted Catholics, parish priests among the Maronites may marry. This right to marry does not extend to monks living in community, nor to the bishops. Only the secular clergy and parish priests exercise this privilege. The seclusion in which Arab women live, the simplicity of this people's patriarchal customs, and custom, offset any prejudice towards this practice of the Maronite clergy; and, far from having harmed, as some claim, the purity of priestly morals, the respect of the people for the minister of religion, or the precept of confession, it can truly be said that in no country in Europe is the clergy purer, more exclusively confined to its pious ministries, more venerated, or more powerful in its sway over the people than here. If one wishes to have before one's eyes all that the imagination conceives of the age of pure and nascent Christianity; if one wishes to witness the simplicity and fervour of the early faith, purity of morals, selflessness in the administration of charity, priestly influence without abuse, authority without domination, poverty without beggary, dignity without pride, prayer, vigils, sobriety, chastity, and the benefits of manual labour, one must visit the Maronite communities. The most rigid philosopher will not find a single reform necessary as regards the public and private lives of these priests, who have remained models of the faith, advisors, and servants to the people.

There are approximately two hundred Maronite monasteries of various orders scattered throughout Lebanon. These monasteries are home to between twenty and twenty-five thousand

monks. These monks are neither rich, nor beggars, nor oppressors, nor leeches on the people: they are communities of simple, hard-working men who, wishing to dedicate themselves to a life of prayer and freedom of spirit, renounce the cares of raising a family and devote themselves to God and the land, in one of these retreats. Their life, as I described earlier, is that of hard-working countrymen. They tend to the livestock or silkworms, they quarry rock, they build the retaining walls of their fields with their own hands, they dig, they plough, they harvest. The monasteries own little land and only take in as many monks as they can support.

I lived for a while among these people, I frequented several of the monasteries, and never heard of any scandal whatsoever caused by these monks. There is not a murmur against them; each monastery is but a humble farm whose servants are volunteers and receive, as their only wages, shelter, a hermit's diet, and the prayers of their church. Useful work is so much the law of man, so much the condition of happiness and virtue here below, that I have not seen a single one of these hermits who did not bear on his features the marks of peace of soul, contentment, and health. The bishops have absolute authority over the monasteries located within their jurisdictions. These jurisdictions are very restricted: each large village has its own bishop.

The Maronite people, whether descended from the Arabs or the Syrians, share in all the virtues of their clergy and form a distinct people in the entire East; one might almost say a 'European' colony cast by chance into the midst of the desert tribes. They have an Arab appearance however: the men are tall and handsome, with open and proud gazes, gentle, intelligent smiles, blue eyes, aquiline noses, blond beards, a noble bearing, deep and guttural voices, refined manners without vulgarity, splendid attire, and gleaming weapons.

When you traverse a village and see the sheikh sitting at the gate of his crenellated manor, his fine horses hobbled in his courtyard, and the village leaders dressed in their rich fur coats, with red silk belts adorned with yataghans and kandjars with silver sheaths, and wearing immense turbans made of various coloured fabrics, a wide panel of purple silk falling over their shoulders, you would think them a nation of kings. They love Europeans as brothers; they are bound to us by the bond of shared religion, the strongest of all; they believe that we protect them, through our consuls and ambassadors, against the Turks; they welcome our travellers, missionaries, and the young interpreters who come to learn Arabic, into their villages, as one welcomes distant relatives of the family; the traveller, the missionary, the young interpreter, become the beloved guest of the whole country. They are lodged in the monastery or the sheikh's house, and provided, abundantly, with everything that the country produces; the men are invited to hunt with falcons, and confidently introduced into the society of women; they are spoken to with respect; bonds of friendship are formed that never break, and of which the heads of the family preserve the memory for their children.

I have no doubt that if this people were better known, if the magnificent country they inhabit were more often visited, many Europeans would go and settle among the Maronites: the beauty of location, the admirable perfection of climate, the modest prices of all things, the similarity of religion, the customary hospitality, degree of safety and guarantee of individual tranquillity, all contribute to a desire to live among these people: as for myself, if a man could uproot himself completely; if he did not have to live where Providence has assigned his cradle and his grave, so as to serve and love his compatriots; if involuntary exile were ever to open before me, I could find nowhere sweeter to live out that exile than in one of these peaceful Maronite villages, at the foot

or on the slopes of Mount Lebanon, in the midst of the simple, religious, and benevolent population, with their view of the sea and the high snows, and beneath the palm and orange trees of one of the gardens of these monasteries. The most admirable of police forces, a product of religion and custom far more than any legislation, keeps order throughout the entire Maronite country; you can travel there alone and without a guide, day or night, without fear of theft or violence; crime is almost unknown; the foreigner is sacred to the Muslim Arab, but even more so to the Christian Arab; the door is open to travellers at all hours; they kill a goat or a kid to honour them, and abandon their rush mats to make room for them.

In every village there is a church or chapel where Catholic worship is conducted in the Syriac form and language. At the Gospel reading, the priest turns to face the congregation and reads the day's Gospel passage in Arabic. Religions, which outlast nations, preserve their sacred language when the people have lost theirs.

The Maronites are brave and naturally warlike, like all mountain peoples; they arm, to the number of thirty to forty thousand men, at the call of Emir Bashir, either to defend the inaccessible mountain passes or to descend into the plains and see Damascus or the cities of Syria tremble. The Turks never dare to penetrate Lebanon when these peoples are at peace with one another; the Pashas of Acre and Damascus have only ever visited when internal disputes summoned them to the aid of one side or the other. I may be mistaken, but I believe that a great destiny is reserved for this Maronite people, untouched and primitive in their customs, religion, and courage; a people who possess the traditional virtues of the patriarchs, guaranteed property rights, a degree of liberty, and a vibrant patriotism, who, through similarity of religion and the ties of trade and worship, are becoming increasingly imbued with Western civilisation. While everything around perishes from impotence or age, these people alone seem to grow younger and regain strength. As Syria becomes depopulated, they will descend from the mountains, found trading cities on the seashore, cultivate the fertile plains that today belong only to the gazelles and the jackals, and establish a new dominion in those lands where old dominions are expiring.

If a leader of vision were to rise, today, among them, either from the ranks of the all-powerful clergy or from one of those families of emirs or sheikhs whom they venerate; if that leader were to understand the future and form an alliance with one of the powers of Europe, they would easily repeat the wonders of Muhammad Ali, Pasha of Egypt, and leave behind the true seed of an Arabian empire. Europe has a vested interest in seeing this wish fulfilled: it would establish a ready-made colony on these beautiful shores; and Syria, by repopulating itself with an industrious Christian nation, would enrich the Mediterranean with its languishing trade, open the route to India, drive back the nomadic and barbarian tribes of the desert, and revive the East: there is more future here than in Egypt. Egypt has only one man; Lebanon has a people.

## The Druze

The Druze, who, along with the Metaulis and the Maronites, form the main population of Lebanon, were long considered a European colony left behind in the East by the Crusaders. Nothing could be further from the truth. What is most enduring among peoples is religion and language: the Druze have their own and speak Arabic; they are therefore not descended from a Frankish and Christian people. What is most likely is that they are, like the Maronites, an Arab desert tribe who, having refused to adopt the religion of the Prophet and persecuted by the new

believers, took refuge in the inaccessible solitudes of Upper Lebanon to defend their gods and their freedom. They prospered; often having the upper hand over the tribes who inhabit Syria with them, while the history of their principal leader, Emir Fakhr-al-Din II, whom we French call Fakardin, made them famous, even in Europe.

It was at the beginning of the seventeenth century that this prince appeared in history. Appointed governor of the Druze, he gained the confidence of the Sublime Porte; he repelled the fierce tribes of Baalbek, liberated Tyre and Acre from the incursions of the Bedouin Arabs, drove the Aga from Beirut, and established his capital in that city. In vain did the Pashas of Aleppo and Damascus threaten him or denounce him to the Divan; he bribed his judges and triumphed, by cunning or force, over all his enemies. However, the Porte, repeatedly warned of the Druze advances, resolved to fight them and prepared a formidable expedition. Emir Fakhr al-Din wished to delay. He had formed alliances and concluded trade treaties with the princes of Italy: he himself went to solicit the aid that these princes had promised him. He left the government to his son Ali, embarked at Beirut, and took refuge at the Medici court in Florence (*in 1613*).

The arrival of a Muslim prince in Europe aroused interest. Rumours spread that Emir Fakhr-al-Din was a descendant of the princes of the House of Lorraine; that the Druze traced their origins to the companions of a Count of Dreux who remained in Lebanon after the Crusades. The historian Benjamin of Tudela mentions the Druze as existing before the Crusades: however, the shrewd adventurer himself propagated this opinion to interest the sovereigns of Europe in his plight. After five years in Florence, Emir Fakhr-al-Din returned to Syria. His son Ali had repelled the Turks and preserved intact the provinces conquered by his father, to whom he relinquished command. The Emir, corrupted by the arts and pleasures of Florence, forgot that his rule depended on inspiring respect and terror in his enemies. In Beirut, he built magnificent palaces, adorned, like the palaces of Italy, with statues and paintings that offended the prejudices of the Orientals. His subjects grew embittered; Sultan Murad IV became irritated and again sent the Pasha of Damascus with a powerful army against Fakhr al-Din. While the Pasha sailed down from Lebanon, a Turkish fleet blockaded the port of Beirut. Ali, the emir's eldest son and governor of Safed, was killed fighting the Pasha of Damascus's army. Fakhr al-Din sent his second son (*Husayn*) aboard the flagship, to plead for peace. The admiral held the son prisoner and refused all negotiations. The dismayed Emir fled and, with a small number of devoted friends, took refuge in the inaccessible fortress of Niha. The Turks, after a fruitless siege of the mountain caves for a whole year, withdrew. Fakhr al-Din was free and returned to his mountain; but, betrayed by some of his companions, he was handed over to the Turks and taken to Constantinople. Prostrate at Murad's feet, the prince initially showed him generosity and kindness, granting him a palace and slaves. But shortly afterward, due to Murad's suspicions, the brave and unfortunate Fakhr-al-Din was strangled (*in 1635*).

The Turks, who in their policy are content to sideline an enemy who overshadows them, but otherwise respect the customs of the people and the traditional legitimacy of their noble families, allowed the descendants of Fakhr-al-Din to reign. It is only about a hundred years since the last descendant of that famous emir left the sceptre of Lebanon to another family, the Shihab, originally from Mecca, and whose current leader, the old emir Bashir Shihab II, governs these lands today.

The Druze religion is a mystery no traveller has ever been able to unravel. I have known several Europeans who have lived for many years among this people, and who have confessed their

ignorance in that regard. Lady Stanhope herself, who is an exception because of her habitual residence among the Arabs of this tribe, and because of the devotion she inspires in these men whose language she speaks and whose customs she follows, told me that, for her too, the religion of the Druze was still a mystery. Most travellers who have written about them claim that this faith is merely a schism within Islam. I am convinced that these travellers are mistaken. One certain fact is that the Druze religion allows them to adopt all the mores of the peoples with whom they interact; from this arose the opinion that they are schismatic Muslims. This I do not believe to be the case, while they are also said to worship the calf, idolatrously; though this is not an established fact. They have institutions like the peoples of antiquity. They are divided into two castes, the *Akkals*, or '*those who know*', and the *Djahels*, or '*those who do not*'; and, depending on which of these two castes a Druze belongs to, they practise a specific form of worship. Moses, Muhammad, and Jesus are names they venerate. They assemble once a week, each in the place consecrated to the degree of initiation they have attained, and perform their rites. Guards ensure, during the ceremonies, that no outsider approaches the initiates. Death instantly punishes the reckless.

Women are admitted to these mysteries. The priests, or akkals, are married; they have a priestly hierarchy. The head of the akkals, or the high priest of the Druze, resides in the village of Mtein. After the death of a Druze, people gather around the tomb and receive testimonies about the deceased's life. If these testimonies are favourable, the akkal cries out: 'May the Almighty have mercy on you!' If the testimonies are unfavourable, the priest and those present remain silent. The people, in general, believe in the transmigration of souls: if a male Druze's life was pure, he will live again as one favoured by fortune, brave, and loved by his compatriots; if he was vile or cowardly, he will return in the form of a camel or a dog.

There are many schools for children; the akkals run them. The pupils learn to read from the Koran. Sometimes, when the Druze are few in number in a village and schools are lacking, they allow their children to be educated alongside those of the Christians; when they later initiate them into their own mysterious rites, they erase all traces of Christianity from their minds. Women are admitted to the priesthood like men; divorce is frequent; adultery can be redeemed; hospitality is sacred, and no threat or promise would ever force a Druze to hand over, even to the prince, a guest who had placed his trust in him. At the time of the naval Battle of Navarino (*in 1827*), Europeans living in Syrian cities, fearing Turkish vengeance, withdrew for several months to the Druze villages, where they lived in perfect safety. 'All men are brothers' is their moral precept, like that of the Gospels; and they observe that precept better than we do ourselves. Our words are evangelical, but our laws are pagan.

In my opinion, the origins of the Druze as a people are lost in the mists of time; they trace their roots back to the most remote antiquity. Physically, they bear a strong resemblance in their physiognomy to the Jewish people, and their claimed worship of the calf leads me to believe that they either descend from those peoples of Arabia Petraea who incited the Jews to that manner of idolatry, or that they are of Samaritan origin. Now accustomed to a kind of fraternity with the Maronite Christians, and detesting the yoke of the Muslims, and being numerous, wealthy, disciplined, and fond of agriculture and commerce, they will readily integrate with the Maronite people and advance in civilisation at the same pace, provided their religious rites are respected.

## The Metualis

The Metualis, who make up about a third of the population of Lower Lebanon, are Muslims of the Shia sect of Ali (*Ali ibn Abi Talib*), the dominant sect in Persia; the Turks, on the other hand, are of the sect of Omar (*Umar ibn al-Khattab*): this schism occurred within Islam in the tenth year of the Hijra (*632AD*); the followers of Ali curse Omar as the usurper of the Caliphate; Imam Hussain (*Muhammad's grandson*) and Ali are their saints; like the Persians, they neither eat nor drink with followers of a religion other than their own, and break any glass or dish that has been used by a foreigner; they consider themselves defiled if their clothes touch ours: however, as they are generally weak and despised in Syria, they adapt to the times, and I had several in my service who did not strictly observe these intolerant rules. Their origin is known; they were masters of Baalbek around the sixteenth century; their tribe, expanding in size, first spread over the slopes of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, around the Beqaa desert; they later crossed it and mingled with the Druze in that area of the mountains that lies between Tyre and Sidon. Emir Yusuf, worried by their proximity, armed the Druze against them and drove them back towards Safed and the mountains of Galilee; Daher el-Umar, Pasha of Acre, welcomed them and made an alliance with them in 1760; they were already numerous enough to provide him with ten thousand horsemen. At that time, they seized the ruins of Tyre, by then a mere village by the sea, now called Sur; They fought valiantly against the Druze, and completely defeated the army of Emir Yusuf, which numbered twenty-five thousand men; they themselves were only five hundred, but rage and vengeance made them heroes, and the internal quarrels which divided the Druze between Emir Mansur Shihab and Emir Yusuf contributed to the successes of the Metualis; they abandoned Daher, Pasha of Acre, and their abandonment caused his downfall and death: Djezzar-Pasha, his successor, took cruel revenge on them.

Since 1777, Djezzar-Pasha (*Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar*), ruler of Said (*Sidon*) and Acre, had worked tirelessly to destroy the Metualis: persecution forced them to reconcile with the Druze; they rejoined the party of Emir Yusuf, and, although reduced to seven or eight hundred fighting-men, they accomplished more in this campaign, for the common cause, than the twenty thousand Druze and Maronites gathered at Deir El Qamar; alone, they seized the fortress of Smar Jebeil, and eight hundred Arnauts (*Albanians*) were put to the sword; driven from Baalbek (*Heliopolis*) the following year after a desperate resistance, and numbering five to six hundred families, they took refuge among the Druze and Maronites; they later returned to that valley, and still occupy the magnificent ruins of Heliopolis today; but the greater part of their nation remained on the slopes and in the valleys of Lebanon, near Tyre. The principality of Baalbek was not long ago the subject of a bitter struggle between two brothers of the Shiite Harfush family, Jahjah and Cassem; they successively dispossessed each other of that heap of ruins, and lost more than eighty members of their own family in that war. Emir Jahjah reigned over Baalbek till his death in 1812, leaving its rule to his brother Amin.

## The Ansaries (Alawites)

Volney provided the most insightful information on the Alawite sect, which occupies the western part of the Lebanon mountain range and the plains of Latakia. I have little to add. Idolaters like the Druze (*neither sect are in fact idolaters, Alawism being an offshoot of Shia Islam*), they, like

them, shroud their religious rites in the darkness of initiation, but are more barbaric. I will only concern myself with that part of their history which dates back to the year 1807.

At that time, a group of Alawites, having feigned a quarrel with their chief, left their territory in the mountains and sought asylum and protection from the emir of Masyaf. The emir, eagerly taking advantage of such a favourable opportunity to weaken his enemies by dividing them, welcomed the Alawites, along with their Sheikh Mahmoud, within the walls of Masyaf, and extended his hospitality by displacing some of the inhabitants to make room for the fugitives. For several months, all was peaceful; but one day, when most of the Ismailis of Masyaf had left their city to work in the fields, the Alawites, at a given signal, attacked the emir and his son, stabbed them, seized the castle, massacred all the Ismailis in the city, and set it on fire. The next day, a large number of Alawites joined the perpetrators of this abominable plot, a plot whose secret had been kept by the entire group in Masyaf for four or five months. Approximately three hundred Ismailis perished. The rest took refuge in Hama, Homs, or Tripoli.

The pious practices and customs of the Alawites led Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (*the Swiss traveller and Orientalist*) to believe they were a tribe displaced from Hindustan. What is certain is that they were established in Syria long before the Ottoman conquest; some of them are still said to be idolaters. The dog cult, which appears to have been popular among the ancient Syrians and to have given its name to the Dog River, *Nahr El Kalb*, near ancient Berytus (*Beirut*), is said to have been preserved among some Alawite families. The sect is in decline and could easily be driven out or enslaved by the Druze and the Maronites.

## The Aintoura Monastery

*November 18, 1832.*

I have just returned from an excursion to the Aintoura Monastery, one of the most beautiful and famous in Lebanon. Leaving Beirut, one rides for an hour along the shore, beneath a canopy of trees of every kind and shape. Most are fruit trees: fig trees, pomegranate trees, orange trees, aloes, and sycamore fig trees (*Ficus sycomorus*), a gigantic tree whose countless fruits, like small figs, grow not at the tips of the branches but attached to the trunk and limbs like moss. After crossing the Beirut River, on the Roman bridge I described earlier, one follows the sandy coastline, formed by an arm of Lebanon jutting into the sea, which leads towards Cape Batroun; this arm is simply a rocky promontory into which, in ancient times, a coastal road was carved, offering a magnificent view. The sides of the rock are covered in several places with Greek, Latin, and Syriac inscriptions, and with figures carved into the rock itself, whose symbols and meanings are lost. It is likely that they relate to the cult of Adonis, practised long ago in these parts; according to tradition, there were temples, and funerary ceremonies were performed dedicated to Adonis, near the place where he perished. It is believed that this was on the banks of the river at the point where we had crossed.

Descending from this high and picturesque ledge, the landscape suddenly changes character. The eye is drawn to a narrow, deep gorge, entirely filled by another river, the Nahr El Kalb, the Dog River. It flows silently between two perpendicular rock faces, two or three hundred feet high. In some places, it fills the entire valley; in others, it leaves only a narrow margin between its waters and the cliffs. This margin is covered with trees, sugarcane, reeds, and vines, which form a thick, green canopy over the banks and sometimes over the entire riverbed. A ruined khan is sited on

the rock at the water's edge, opposite a bridge with a slender arch, which one crosses with trepidation. In the sides of the rocks that form this valley, the patient Arabs have carved paths, formed of stone steps, which hang almost vertically above the river, and which must nevertheless be ascended and descended on horseback. We abandoned ourselves to instinct, and the hooves of our horses; but it was impossible not to close one's eyes in certain sections, so as not to observe with trepidation the height of the steps, the smoothness of the stones, the incline of the path, and the depth of the precipice. It was here that the last papal legate to the Maronites, was thrown over the edge to his death, a few years ago, due to his horse stumbling.

At the end of this path, one finds oneself on a series of high plateaus covered with crops, vineyards, and small Maronite villages. On a little hill, one can see a pretty new house ahead, built in the Italian style, with a portico, terraces, and balustrades. This is the residence that Monsignor Giovanni Pietro Losanna, Bishop of Abydos and current legate of the Holy See in Syria, has had built for himself as a winter residence. In the summer, he lives at the Qannoubine Monastery, the patriarch's residence and the ecclesiastical capital of the Maronites. This monastery, much higher on the mountain, is almost inaccessible, and buried in snow during the winter.

Monsignor Losanna, a man of elegant manners, Roman sophistication, refined intellect, and profound erudition, possessing a firm and quick mind, was happily chosen by the Roman Curia to represent Catholic policy and cultivate Catholic influence among the high Maronite clergy. He would be perfectly suited to represent them in Vienna or Paris, being the epitome of one of those Roman prelates, heirs to the great and noble diplomatic tradition of that city, where mere force is nothing, and personal skill and dignity everything. Monsignor Losanna is from Piedmont; he will not remain long in this remote place, as Rome will doubtless employ him more usefully in a more turbulent arena. He is one of those men whose good fortune is well-earned, and written in advance on his active and intelligent brow. He rightly affects, among these peoples, an Oriental luxury and a solemnity of dress and manner without which the people of Asia recognise neither sanctity nor power.

He had donned Arab attire; his immense, meticulously-combed beard cascaded in golden waves over his purple robe, and his pure-bred Arabian mare, gleaming and docile, rivalled the finest mares of the desert sheikhs. We soon saw him approaching, followed by a large retinue, prancing along the precipitous stony path over which we advanced only with caution. After the customary initial compliments, he led us to his charming villa, where refreshments awaited us, and soon after accompanied us to the monastery of Aintoura, in which he was temporarily residing. Two young Lazarist priests, having arrived from France after the July Revolution of 1830, now occupy this vast and beautiful monastery, originally built by the Jesuits, alone. The Jesuits have tried several times to establish their mission and influence among the Arabs; they have never succeeded, and appear destined for no greater success today.

The reason is simple: at present, the religion of the people of the East does not determine its politics; completely separate from the civil powers that be, it neither possesses influence nor prompts action within the State; the State is nominally Muslim; Catholicism is freely tolerated, but has no human means of dominating discourse; yet it is primarily through human means that the Jesuit system has sought to act and does act religiously. This country is not suited to them. Lebanese religion is divided into orthodox or schismatic denominations, whose beliefs are part of the hereditary tradition within families. Irreconcilable repulsion and hatred exist between the

various Christian denominations, far more so than between Turks and Christians. Conversions are impossible where changing denominations would be a disgrace, a stigma that would brand the individual, and would often be punished by a tribe, a village, a family, with death.

As for the Muslims, conversion is unheard of. Their religion is a practical deism, whose morality is in principle the same as that of Christianity, minus the dogma of Divinity embodied in a man. The dogma of Islam is simply the belief in divine inspiration, manifested in a prophet wiser, and more favoured by celestial revelation, than the rest of his fellows. Later, some miraculous events were added to the story of Muhammad's mission, but these legendary miracles are not the core of Islamic religion and are not accepted by enlightened Turks. All religions have their legends, their absurd traditions, their popular aspect; the philosophical side of Islam is free of these crude admixtures: it consists of nothing but resignation to the will of Allah, and charity towards humankind. I have seen a great number of deeply religious Turks and Arabs who accepted of their religion only what is reasonable and humane. It is a practical and contemplative theism. Such men are rarely converted: it is easier to descend from the dogma of miracles to their simpler dogma than the reverse.

The Jesuits' intervention encountered another drawback among the Maronites. By the very nature of their institutions, factions had been easily created, pious groupings within the clergy and the general population; they inspired, by the zealous fervour they displayed, either enthusiasm or hatred. The air around them was never lukewarm: the Maronite high clergy, though simple and good-natured, scarcely looked favourably upon the establishment among them of yet another religious body that might wrest a portion of the Catholic population from their spiritual dominion.

The Jesuits are no longer present in Syria, except that, in recent years, two young priests have arrived, one French, the other German, whom a Maronite bishop has brought to Lebanon to teach at the Maronite school he has founded (*the Collège Saint Joseph, at Aintoura*). I met these two excellent young men, both full of faith and consumed by selfless zeal. They spared no effort to spread Christian ideas among the Druze, their neighbours; but the effect of their efforts was limited to secretly baptising, without the parents' knowledge, little children among the families they had infiltrated on the pretext of offering medical advice. They seemed quite unwilling to submit to the fairly unenlightened educational practices of the Maronite bishops, and I believe they will return to Europe without having succeeded in instilling in the Maronites a taste for higher learning. The French priest was quite worthy of teaching in Rome and Paris.

The Aintoura monastery passed to the Lazarists after the Jesuit order was dissolved. The two young priests, who lodged there, often came to visit us in Beirut. We found their company as pleasant as it was unexpected: they were kind, simple, modest, solely occupied with rigorous and lofty studies, well-versed in all things European, and participants in the intellectual current that sweeps us along. Their universal and learned conversation charmed us all the more because opportunities for such conversation are rare in these remote places. When we spent an evening with them, discussing the political events in our country, the intellectual groups that were dissolving and reforming in France, the writers vying for the press, the orators who were seizing their opportunity to conquer the podium, and the various doctrines regarding the future, or those of the Saint-Simonians, we might have imagined ourselves only a few miles from the Rue du Bac, conversing with men who would leave Paris in the morning and return that evening. These two Lazarists were at once models of holiness and simple, pious fervour. One of them was very ill: the

harsh Lebanese mountain air had affected his chest and was shortening his life. He had only to send word to his superiors to be recalled to France; but did not wish to bear the burden of writing to them himself. He consulted Monsieur de Laroyère, our companion, and asked him if, in his capacity as a physician, he could offer a formal and professional opinion that the air of Syria was deadly to his constitution. Monsieur de Laroyère, whose conscience is as severely scrupulous as is that of the young priest, did not dare to express his thoughts so explicitly, and so the good cleric has remained silent.

These clergymen, living in this vast monastery where they have only one Arab to serve them, received us with the cordiality that the names of their homelands inspire in those who meet far from them. We spent two days with them. Each of us had a fairly large cell with a bed and chairs, furniture unusual in these mountains. The monastery is situated in the hollow of a valley, at the foot of a pine forest; but this valley itself, halfway up Mount Lebanon, offers, through a gorge, an unobstructed view of the coasts and the Syrian Sea; the rest of the horizon is composed of peaks and spires of grey rock, crowned with villages or large Maronite monasteries. A few fir trees, orange trees, and fig trees grow, here and there, in rocky shelters, and near streams and springs: it is a site worthy of Naples or the Gulf of Genoa.

The Aintoura monastery is next to a Maronite women's convent (*the Visitation Convent, 'Deir el Zyara'*), whose nuns belong to the leading families of Lebanon. From the windows of our cells, we could see those of these young Syrian women, who seemed deeply concerned by the arrival of a group of foreigners in their neighbourhood. These women's convents have no social purpose here. Volney, in his '*Travels in Syria*', speaks of this convent at Aintoura, where a woman named Hindia, it is said, committed horrific atrocities against her novices. The name and story of this Hindia are still widely known in the mountains. Imprisoned for many years by order of the Maronite patriarch, her repentance and good conduct obtained her freedom. She died recently, renowned for her holiness among some Christians of her sect. She was a woman driven by fanaticism, originating in pure wilfulness or the power of her imagination, who succeeded in imposing her fanaticism on a number of simple and credulous minds. This Arab land is a land of wonders; everything germinates here, and any credulous or fanatical person can become a prophet in turn: Lady Stanhope's status provides further proof of this. The predisposition to credit miracles stems from two causes: a highly developed religious sentiment, and an imbalance between imagination and reason. Phantoms only appear at night; all ignorant people believe in the miraculous.

The terrace of the Aintoura monastery, where we strolled for part of the day, is shaded by magnificent orange trees, previously mentioned by Volney as the most beautiful and the oldest in Syria: they have not withered; like the fifty-year-old walnut trees in our countries, they clothe the garden and the roof of the convent in their dense and fragrant shade, and bear etched on their trunks the names of Volney and of various English travellers who, like ourselves, spent some moments at their feet.

The mountain group in which Aintoura is located is known as the Keserwan, or Castravan range: this region extends from the Nahr Ibrahim to the Nahr El Kalb. It is, properly speaking, the land of the Maronites: this area belongs to them; it is only here that their privileges extend, although, day by day, they are spreading into the land of the Druze, bringing their laws and customs with them. The principal product of these mountains is silk. The miri, or land tax, is fixed according to the number of mulberry trees each person owns. The Turks demand one or two miris a year

from Emir Bashir as tribute, and the Emir often collects several more for himself: nevertheless, despite the Maronites' complaints about the excessive taxes, these are not comparable to the amounts levied in France or England. It is not the rate but the arbitrary and irregular nature of a tax that oppresses a nation. If taxation in the Ottoman areas were legal and fixed, it would not be felt; but where taxation is not determined by law, there is no security in ownership, or else ownership is uncertain and languishes: the wealth of a people lies in a sound regime of property ownership.

Each village sheikh distributes the tax and allocates a portion to himself. In essence, though, the people are happy. The rulers fear the people, and dare not establish themselves within the province; their religion is free and honoured; their monasteries and churches cover the summits of the hills and their bells, which are cherished as the voice of liberty and independence, ring out prayers night and day in the valleys; the province is governed by its own leaders, appointed, through custom or inheritance, from among its principal families; a rigorous but just police force maintains order and security in the villages; ownership of property is secure, and transmissible from father to son. Trade is active, their morals perfectly simple and pure. I have seen no population in the world bearing in their features a greater appearance of health, nobility, and civilisation than these folk of Lebanon. The education of the people, though limited to reading, writing, arithmetic, and catechism, is universal, and gives the Maronites a legitimate ascendancy over the other Syrian populations. I can only compare them to the folk of Saxony or Scotland.

We returned to Beirut along the coast. The mountains bordering the shore are covered with monasteries built in the style of medieval Florentine villas. A village is perched on every hill, crowned with a forest of umbrella pines, and traversed by a stream plunging, in a brilliant cascade, into the ravine below. Small fishing harbours dot this jagged coastline, filled with little boats tethered to the breakwaters or the rocks. Beautiful fields of vines, barley, and mulberry trees slope down from the villages to the sea. The steeples of monasteries and churches rise above the dark green of fig trees or cypresses; a white sandy beach separates the foot of the mountains from the waves, which are clear and blue like river-water. Here are five miles of land that would deceive the traveller's eye, if one forgets one is eighteen hundred miles from the heart of Europe: one might think oneself on the shores of Lake Geneva, between Lausanne and Vevey, or on the enchanting banks of the Saône, between Mâcon and Lyon; only the setting of Aintoura is more majestic, and when one raises one's eyes, one sees the snow-capped peaks of Sannine, cleaving the sky like tongues of flame…

## Translator's Note: The Death of Julia

Lamartine's journal pauses at this point, and was not resumed until the end of March 1833. Julia, his only daughter, succumbed, suddenly, to the tuberculosis which afflicted her, and died in Beirut, on the 7th of December 1832, aged ten, after a final bout of illness, even though her health, which had deteriorated in France, seemed to have been restored by the Lebanese climate. Her body was repatriated to France, and she was buried at Saint Point, the family home. Lamartine wrote a poem some fourteen months after her death, in tribute to her, mourning her loss, and expressing his profound grief, entitled 'Gethsemane'.

**The End of Part VII of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part VIII: Baalbek and Damascus

## Sights and Reflections in Syria

On March the 18th, 1833, I left Beirut for Baalbek and Damascus; the caravan consisted of twenty-six horses, and eight or ten Arabs on foot as servants and escort (*note that Lamartine's wife Marianne accompanied him on the trip*).

Leaving Beirut, one ascends along sunken paths through red sand, the borders festooned with all the flowers of Asia-Minor, all the shapes and scents of spring: prickly-pear cacti, thorny shrubs with clusters of golden-yellow flowers, like the broom of our mountains, vines hanging from tree to tree, and beautiful carob trees; trees with dark green and bronze leaves, with intertwined branches, and trunks with polished, lustrous brown bark, the most beautiful tree in these climes. After about half an hour, one arrives at the summit of the peninsula that forms the Beirut cape; it ends in a rounded promontory in the sea, while its base is formed by a beautiful, wide plain, crossed by the Nahr-Beirut. This plain, irrigated, cultivated, and planted everywhere with beautiful palm trees, green mulberry trees, and pines with broad, bushy crowns, fades away below the first slopes of Mount Lebanon.

At the highest point of the Beirut plain, there is a magnificent view of the promenade at Beirut created by Fakhr-el-Din, or Fakardin; it is there that Turkish, Arab, and European horsemen go to exercise their mounts and run the djerid (*javelin*); it is there that I myself used to go every day to spend a few hours on horseback, sometimes galloping over the desert sands that dominate the blue and immense horizon of the Syrian sea, sometimes, at a walking pace, dreaming beneath the avenues of young pines that cover part of the promenade. It is the most beautiful place I know in the world: gigantic pines, whose sturdy trunks, slightly bowed by the sea breeze, bearing broad, rounded crowns like parasols, are planted in groups of two or three, or scattered individually, twenty paces apart, on golden sand pierced here and there by a light green down of grass and anemones. They were planted by Fakhr-el-Din, whose marvellous adventures spread his fame throughout Europe; they still bear his name. Every day I watched with sorrow as a more modern hero uprooted these trees that another great man had planted. Ibrahim-Pasha had some of them cut down for his navy; but enough remains to signal the promontory in the distance to the eye of the navigator, and the admiration of anyone enamoured of the most beautiful scenes of Nature.

It is from here that one has, in my opinion, the most splendid view of Mount Lebanon: one is at its feet, but far enough away, however, that its shadow is not upon you, and that the eye can embrace it in all its height, plunge into the darkness of its gorges, discern the foam of its torrents, and play freely around the first conical hills with which it is flanked, and which each bears a Maronite monastery, above a cluster of pines, cedars or black cypresses. The Sannine, the highest and most pyramidal peak of Lebanon, dominates all the lower peaks, and forms, with its almost eternal snow, the majestic, golden, violet, pink background of the mountainous horizon, which rears into the firmament, not as a solid body, but vaporously, as a transparent mist, through which one believes one can distinguish further regions of sky; a delightful phenomenon of the mountains of Asia-Minor, which I have seen nowhere else, and which I enjoy every night without being aware.

To the south-west, Mount Lebanon gradually slopes down to the promontory of Said, formerly Sidon; its peaks now bear snow only here and there, on two or three summits more distant and

higher than the rest of the Lebanese range: they follow, like the wall of a ruined city, sometimes rising, sometimes falling, the line of the plain and the sea, and fade into the mist in the south, towards the mountains of Galilee, on the shores of the Sea of Gennesaret, also known as Lake Tiberias. To the north, you can view the stretch of sea extending, like a still lake, into the plain, half-hidden by the lovely green hill of San Dimitrios, the most beautiful hill in Syria. In this lake, whose junction with the rest of the sea is invisible, a few ships were still at anchor, bobbing gracefully on the waves, whose foam wet the mastic trees, oleanders, and prickly-pears. From the harbour, a bridge, first built by the Romans and later restored by Fakhr-el-Din, spans the Beirut River, which flows across the plain, spreading life and greenery, before entering the harbour nearby.

The ride there was the last I ever took with Julia. She was mounted for the first time on the desert horse that I had brought for her from the Dead Sea, and whose bridle was held by an Arab servant. We were alone; the day, though it was November, was full of dazzling light, warmth, and greenery. Never had I seen my lovely child so completely enraptured by Nature, by being in motion, by the joy of being, seeing and feeling: she turned to me every moment with some exclamation or other; and when we had rounded the hill of San Dimitri, crossed the plain, and reached the pine-trees, where we halted: she said: 'Is this not the longest, most beautiful, most delightful ride I have ever taken in my life?'

Alas, yes! And it was the last! A fortnight later, I was riding alone, my eyes filled with tears, beneath those same trees, with nothing left but the ravishing image, in my heart, of the most celestial creature that heaven had ever granted me to see, to love, and to mourn — I no longer live — Nature is no longer animated for me by all that made me feel it doubly alive in the soul of my child. I still gaze at Nature, it still delights my eyes, but it no longer stirs my heart; or if it does do so, unconsciously, for minutes, for instants, my heart immediately retreats, broken, chilled, to the desolate abyss of sadness and bitterness to which the will of God, through its many irreparable losses, has consigned it.

To the west, the eye is first drawn to gentle hills of red sand, like the embers of a fire, from which rises a pinkish-white vapour, like the glow from a burning furnace; then, following the horizon, the gaze passes over this desert and arrives at the deep blue line of the sea, which marks the end of all, and merges in the distance with the sky in a mist that blurs the boundary between them. All these hills, the plain, the slopes of the mountains, bear countless pretty, isolated cottages, each with its own mulberry orchard, its gigantic pine, and its fig trees; and here and there, in more compact and striking groups, beautiful villages, or clusters of monasteries, set on their rocky pedestals, and reflecting the yellow rays of the rising sun far over the sea. Nigh on three hundred of these monasteries are scattered across all the ridges, promontories, and gorges of Lebanon: it is the most religious country in the world, and perhaps the only country where the existence of the monastic system has not yet led to the abuses that have destroyed it elsewhere. These monks, poor and useful, live by the work of their hands. Strictly speaking, they are merely pious farmers, asking nothing of the government or the people but the plot of land they cultivate, and their contemplative solitude. Their very existence amidst Muslim lands explains, perfectly, the creation of these first havens of nascent suffering, and persecuted Christianity, and the prodigious proliferation of such sanctuaries of religious freedom during times of barbarity and persecution. Therein lies the reason for their existence; therein lies the survival of the Maronite sect: thus, these

monks have remained what they must once have been everywhere, and now, except in exceptional circumstances, can be nowhere else.

Though the current state of society and religion still encompasses monastic orders, they are no longer those that arose in past eras, to serve other desires and needs: each age engenders its own social and religious forms; the needs of today are different from the needs of the early Christian centuries. Modern monastic orders perform but two roles more effectively than governments and individuals can: that of educating the people, and that of alleviating their physical suffering. Schools and hospitals are the only two places left for them to occupy amidst the affairs of the present world; but, to occupy the first of these places, one must first participate in the enlightenment one wishes to spread; one must be more educated and more truly moral than the population one wishes to educate and improve.

Let me return to the subject of Lebanon. We began our ascent, then, via rocky paths, of yellowish sandstone slightly tinged with pink, which from afar gives Mount Lebanon that pink and violet colouration that enchants the eye. Nothing remarkable was visible until two-thirds of the way up the mountain, where the summit of a promontory juts out over a deep valley. One of the most beautiful glimpses that one can have of the work of God is the valley of Hammana: it is beneath your feet; it begins with a deep, black gorge, carved almost like a cave in the highest rocks below the snows of the highest summits of Mount Lebanon: at first, it is distinguished only by the torrent of foam that descends from the mountains, carving through darkness, a living luminous furrow: the gorge then widens imperceptibly from level to level, as its torrent falls from cascade to cascade; then, suddenly turning westward, in a graceful and supple arc, like a stream flowing into a river, or becoming a river, the gorge enters a wider valley and becomes a valley itself. It widens to a breadth of a mile or so between two mountain ranges. It plunges gently and regularly toward the sea. It carves out, or throws up, hills, depending on the rocky obstacles it encounters along its course. Amidst these hills, are villages separated by ravines, and immense plateaus surrounded by dark fir trees, on whose cultivated terraces stand beautiful monasteries. Into these ravines, it pours all the waters of its thousand cascades, in sparkling, roaring foam. The flanks of the two walls of Mount Lebanon that enclose it are themselves covered with beautiful groups of fir trees, monasteries, and elevated villages, whose blue smoke drifts over their precipices.

At the hour when we reached this valley the sun was setting over the sea, and its rays, leaving the gorges and ravines in mysterious darkness, only grazed the monastery walls, the roofs of the villages, the tops of the fir trees, and the highest rocks of the mountain peaks; the waters, being great, fell from the ledges of the twin mountain slopes, and gushed forth in foam from every crevice in the rocks, encircling with two broad arms of silvery snow the beautiful platform that supports the villages, monasteries, and fir woods. The sound of their flow, like that of organ pipes in a cathedral, resounded from everywhere, and deafened the ear. I have rarely felt so deeply the particular beauty of mountain views; a sad, solemn, and gentle beauty, of a completely different nature to the beauty of the sea or the plains; a beauty that compresses the heart, instead of expanding it, and that seems to share in the religious sentiment engendered by misfortune, that of melancholy contemplation, instead of the religious feeling born of happiness, that of openness, love, and joy.

At every step, along the slopes of the ledge we were following, waterfalls plunged over the head of the passer-by, or slid into the crevices of the living rock they had carved; gutters of this

sublime roof of the mountains, ceaselessly filtering water down its slopes. The weather was misty; the wind roared in the fir-trees, and brought, from time to time, dustings of snow, pierced and coloured by the fleeting rays of the March sun. I remember the novel and picturesque effect of our caravan's passage over one of the ravines cut by these waterfalls. The solid slope of Mount Lebanon was suddenly seen to be hollowed out everywhere, like a deep cove of the sea between the cliffs. A torrent, restrained by a few granite blocks, filled this gash in the mountain with its rapid, churning and noisy waters; the spray from the waterfall, some yards above, floated in the air over the two promontories of arid, grey earth that surrounded the cove, and which, suddenly sloping sharply down, descended to the bed of the torrent to be crossed: a narrow ledge, cut into the side of one of these promontories, was the only means of descent to its passage.

One could only ride in single file along this ledge. I was one of the last of the caravan. The long line of horses, baggage, and travellers descended in succession into the depths of this chasm, turning and disappearing completely into the darkness of the mist rising from the waters, then reappearing gradually on the other side, on the farther ledge of the passage; first, clothed and veiled in a dim, pale, yellowish vapour like fumes of sulphur; then in a white, airy vapour akin to the silvery foam of the waters; and finally, brightly coloured by the sun's rays, which began to illuminate the line more fully as horses and travellers ascended the opposite slope: it was as if Dante's Inferno had been brought to life before our very eyes, in one of the most terrifying circles that even his imagination might have conceived. But what is a poet when set before Nature? Who can claim powers of invention to compare with God's own?

The village of Hammana, a Druze village in which we were to spend the night, already shone brightly at the upper opening of the valley that bears its name. Perched on a peak of sharp, jagged rocks that touch the eternal snow, it is dominated by the sheikh's house in the middle of the village, itself perched on a higher peak. Two deep torrents, carving the rocks and obstructed by boulders that break their spray, almost encircle the village on either side; the rider crosses on a bridge formed of a few fir trunks piled high with earth, and without parapets, and then climbs up to the houses. These, like all the houses in Lebanon and Syria, present, from a distance, an appearance of regularity, picturesqueness, and architectural style that at first glance deceives the eye, causing them to resemble groups of Italian villas with their terraced roofs and balconies adorned with balustrades. But the sheikh's castle in Hammana surpassed in elegance, grace, and nobility whatever of its kind I had seen since the palace of Emir Bashir at Deir el-Qamar. It can only be compared to one of our most marvellous Gothic castles of the Middle Ages, at least as the ruins allow us to imagine them, or as paintings depict them. Pointed windows adorned with balconies, a tall wide doorway surmounted by a pointed arch, which projects like a portico above the threshold; two stone benches carved with arabesques, attached to the two doorposts; fronted by seven or eight circular stone steps descending in a flight to a wide terrace shaded by two or three immense sycamore trees, where water still flows in a marble fountain: such was the scene.

Seven or eight armed Druze, clad in noble and brilliantly coloured costumes, wearing gigantic turbans and adopting a martial pose, seemingly to await the order of their chief; one or two Black African men dressed in blue jackets; some young slaves or pages sitting and playing on the flight of steps; and finally, higher up, beneath the very arch of the great gate, the sheikh himself seated, pipe in hand, dressed in a scarlet fur coat, watching us pass by while striking an attitude of power

and repose: such were the characters. Add to these two young and beautiful women, one leaning on the ledge of a high window of the building, the other standing on a balcony above the door.

We slept at Hammana in a room that had been prepared for us a few days earlier. We rose before sunrise and climbed the last peak of Mount Lebanon. The ascent took an hour and a half; we were finally amidst the snow, and so, across an elevated plain, subtly varied by the undulations of the hills, akin to the upper reaches of the Alps, we followed the gorge that leads to the far side of Mount Lebanon. After two hours of arduous riding, through two or three feet of snow, we saw, firstly, the high, snow-covered peaks of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, then their arid and bare slopes, and finally the beautiful and wide plain of the Beqaa, extending to the Baalbek Valley which lies to the east. This plain begins in the north, in the form of the wastes of Homs and Hama, and only ends in the southwest at the mountains of Galilee near Safed; there it leaves a narrow passage for the Jordan River which flows into the Sea of Galilee. It is one of the most beautiful and fertile plains in the world, but it is sparsely cultivated: since it is constantly infested by wandering Arabs, the inhabitants of Baalbek, and of Zahlé and the other villages in Lebanon, hardly dare to farm it. It is watered by a great number of torrents, and inexhaustible springs, and when we saw it, it presented to the eye more the appearance of a marsh or a poorly drained lake than an area suitable for farmland.

In four hours, we descended to the town of Zahlé, where the Greek bishop, born in Aleppo, received us and offered us some rooms. We set off again on the 19th of March, to cross the Beqaa plain, and then spend the night in Baalbek.

## Baalbek

Leaving Zahlé, a pretty little Christian town at the foot of Mount Lebanon, on the edge of the plain, opposite the Anti-Lebanon Mountains in the east, one first follows the banks of the Litani River, heading north. One passes a ruined building, upon whose remains the Turks have erected a Dervish tekke and a mosque of grandiose and picturesque aspect. According to Arab tradition, here is the tomb of Noah, whose ark touched the summit of Mount Sannine, and who dwelt in the beautiful valley of Baalbek, where he died and was buried. The remains of a few arches and ancient structures, from Greek or Roman times, support the tradition since one sees from them that, at least, the place has always been consecrated to some great memory; the stones are a witness to history. We passed by, not without our thoughts turning to those ancient days when the children of the patriarch (*Noah*), those new men born of a single man, inhabited those primitive places, and founded a civilisation and constructed buildings whose nature remains problematic to us.

We spent seven hours traversing the plain leading to Baalbek in the north-east. At the Litani crossing, the river dividing the plain, our Arab escorts tried to force us to turn south and camp in a Turkish village seven miles or more from Baalbek. My dragoman could not get them to obey, and I was forced to urge my horse into a gallop across the river to compel the two caravan leaders to follow us. I advanced on them, riding crop in hand; they dropped from their horses at the mere threat, and then accompanied us, murmuring.

As we approached the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, the plain became more elevated, drier and stonier. Anemones and snowdrops were as numerous as the pebbles beneath our feet. We

glimpsed an immense mass standing out in black against the whitish slopes of the Anti-Lebanon. It was Baalbek; but we could make little of it. Finally, we arrived at the first ruin. It was a small octagonal temple (*the Temple of Venus/the Circular Temple*) supported by columns of red Egyptian granite, the taller ones clearly rounded, some with a volute on their capital others with no trace of a volute, which, in my opinion, were transported, cut, and erected in very recent times to support the dome of a Turkish mosque or the roof of a santon's (*saint's or ascetic's*) tomb: it must date from the time of Fakhr-el-Din (*the temple itself is a third century AD Roman structure*). The materials used are beautiful; there is still, in the work on the cornice and the vault, the trace of some artistic sensibility; but these materials are clearly fragments of ruins, reassembled by a later and weaker hand, and in an already-corrupted taste. This temple is a quarter of an hour's ride from Baalbek.



'Circular Temple at Baalbec' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

Eager to see what remotest antiquity had bequeathed to us of the beautiful, grand, and mysterious, we quickened the pace of our weary horses, whose hooves were beginning to strike here and there against blocks of marble, fragments of columns, and overturned capitals; all the field-walls surrounding Baalbek are built from these remnants: antiquarians would find an enigma in every stone. Some signs of cultivation were beginning to reappear, and large walnut trees, the first I had seen again in Syria, rose between Baalbek and ourselves, even growing among the temple ruins, which their branches still hid from us. The ruins finally appeared: not, strictly speaking, of a temple, a building, a ruined edifice, more a mound of architecture rising suddenly from the plain, some distance from the true hills of the Anti-Lebanon.

Our horses trudged through the rubble, amidst the ruined Arab village called Baalbek. We skirted one side of the mound of ancient ruins, upon which rose a forest of graceful columns, gilded, by the setting sun, to a golden, matte-yellow hue reminiscent of the marble of the

Parthenon, or the travertine (*limestone*) stones of the Colosseum in Rome. Among these columns, some, forming an elegant and extended row, still bore their intact capitals and richly sculpted cornices. They line the marble walls that enclose the sanctuaries; others rested intact against these walls which support them, like trees whose roots have collapsed, but whose trunks are still healthy and vigorous; others still, in greater numbers, are scattered here and there, immense pieces of marble or stone, on the slopes of the hill, in the deep ditches that surround it, and even in the bed of the river that flows at its foot. At the summit of this stone mountain-plateau, six columns of a more gigantic size rise in isolation, not far from a lower building, and still bear their colossal cornices. We shall see later what they signify, isolated in this way from the other buildings. Continuing along the base of the monuments, the columns and their architectural features end, and one sees nothing but gigantic walls, built of enormous stones, and almost all bearing the marks of sculpture; remains from another era, re-used in the distant past when the now ruined temple was erected. (*Lamartine is describing the lower level ruins of the Temple of Jupiter.*)

We went no further that day; the path veered away from the ruins and led us, amidst more ruins and over arches resounding with the hooves of our horses, to a small house built among the rubble: it was the palace of the Bishop of Baalbek (*Athanasius Obeid, the Melkite Greek Catholic bishop*), who, clad in his purple fur coat and surrounded by a few Arab peasants, came to meet us and led us to his humble door. The humblest peasant's cottage in Burgundy or Auvergne owns to greater luxury and elegance than the palace of the Bishop of Baalbek: a hovel without windows or a door, poorly constructed, and whose roof, partially collapsed, allows rain to stream down onto a mud floor, such is his palace. At the rear of the courtyard, however, a clean, new wall, built of travertine blocks, with a door and a pointed window, in Moorish style, its ogives formed of admirably sculpted stones, caught my eye: it was the church of Baalbek (*built by Athanasius Obeid in 1830*), the 'cathedral' of this city, where other gods had splendid sanctuaries; it is the chapel where the few Arab Christians who live on these ruins of so many cults come to worship, in a purer form, this same Divinity the thought of whom has exercised the minds of men of all centuries, and led them to heap so many stones, and engender so many ideas.

We laid our cloaks down below the bishop's hospitable roof; tied our horses to a stake on the vast lawn that stretches between the priest's house and the ruins; lit a brushwood fire to dry our clothes, wet from the day's rain; and ate supper in the bishop's small courtyard, at a table made of a few temple stones, while, from the neighbouring chapel, the litanies of evening prayer sounded a plaintive chant, and the bishop's deep, resonant voice murmured pious prayers to his flock, consisting of a few Arab shepherds and a group of women. When these desert folk emerged from the church and gathered round to gaze at us, we saw only friendly faces, and benevolent glances. We heard only obliging and affectionate words, those touching greetings, those prolonged and naive vows of primitive peoples, who have not yet made a vain formula of personal greetings, but rather have concentrated into a small number of words applicable to various encounters, at morning, noon, or night, all that hospitality could wish for its guests, all that one traveller could wish another by day, or night, on departure, or return. We were Christians — that was enough for them: shared religions are the most powerful bond between peoples — a mutually-held idea is more powerful than a common homeland; and the Christians of the East, amidst the Islamic world that surrounds them, threatens them, and often persecutes them, still see in the Christians of the West their present protectors and future liberators! It is time, in my opinion, to bring modern civilisation back to the places from which ancient civilisation sprang. Nothing is easier than to

open to the fertile peoples of Lebanon our inexhaustible sources of population, industry, and prosperity; and to accomplish this transformation, all that is needed is to guarantee them security and property rights.

The Turkish population are healthy, sound, and moral; their religion is neither as superstitious nor as exclusive as it is portrayed; but their passive resignation, their abuse of faith in the tangible reign of Providence, stifles the human faculties by entrusting everything to Allah. God does not act for humankind; we are charged with acting in our own cause. He is a spectator and judge of human action. Islam has assumed the divine role; it has constituted itself an inactive spectator of divine action; it folds its arms in the face of humanity, and humanity perishes willingly from this inaction. Apart from this, justice must be done to the cult of Muhammad: it is basically a philosophical cult, which imposes only two great duties on humankind: prayer and charity. These two grand ideas are indeed the two highest truths of any religion. Islamic worship can enter, effortlessly and easily, into a system of religious and civil freedom, and form one of the elements of a large social community in Asia; it is moral, patient, resigned, charitable, and tolerant by nature. All these qualities make it suitable for needful integration in the countries it currently inhabits, where it must be helped to become enlightened, not exterminated; it is accustomed to living in peace and harmony with Christian worship, which it has allowed to exist and operate freely even within its holiest cities, such as Damascus and Jerusalem; empire matters little to it: provided it has prayer, justice, and peace, that is enough. Within European civilisation, worldly, political, and ambitious though we may be, it can readily be granted its place in the mosque, its place in the shade or the sunlight.

Alexander conquered Asia with thirty thousand Greek and Macedonian soldiers; Ibrahim will overthrow the Ottoman empire with thirty or forty thousand Egyptians, who know only how to load a weapon and march in step. A European adventurer, with five or six thousand European soldiers, could easily overthrow Ibrahim and conquer the Near and Middle East, from Smyrna to Basra, and from Cairo to Baghdad, by advancing step by step; by using the Maronites of Lebanon as the linchpins of his operation; by organising things behind him as he advances; and by making the Christians of the East his means of action, administration, and recruitment. Even the desert Arabs will be his, if he can pay them: they have no other worship than money, their divinities will always be gold and the sword. Given their cupidity, they can be restrained long enough for their submission to, eventually, become inevitable; they will yield to it themselves. After that, their tents may be pushed further into the desert, which is their only homeland; they will be drawn little by little to a gentler civilisation, currently lacking a nearby example.

We rose with the sun, whose first rays, striking the temples of Baalbek, granted those mysterious ruins a gleam of that eternal youth which Nature knows how to restore at will, even to what time has seemingly destroyed. After a short lunch, we went to touch with our hands what we had only seen before; we slowly approached the artificial hill, to take in with our eyes the different masses of architecture that compose it; and soon arrived at the northern side, within the very shadow of the gigantic walls which, there, envelop the ruins: a beautiful stream, overflowing its granite bed, ran beneath our horses' feet, and formed, here and there, small lakes of clear, flowing water that murmured and foamed around the enormous stones fallen from the top of the walls, and the sculptures buried in the streambed. We crossed the Baalbek torrent by means of the bridges that time has created there, and climbed, through a narrow and steep breach, to the terrace

that encircled these walls: with every step, with every stone our hands touched, every stone our eyes measured, our admiration and astonishment drew from us exclamations of surprise and wonder. Each of the stones of this enclosure wall is at least nine or ten feet long, and five or six feet wide, and equally as high. These blocks, enormous products of the work of human hands, rest one upon another without mortar, and almost all of them bear traces of sculpture from an Indian or Egyptian period.



'The Temple of Baalbec (1839)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Artvee*

One sees, at first glance, that these fallen or demolished stones originally served a completely different purpose than forming a terrace and enclosure wall, and that they were the precious materials used to form primitive monuments, while being used later to enclose the monuments of Greek and Roman times. It was a common practice, I believe even a religious one, among the ancients, when a sacred building was destroyed by war or by time, or when more advanced arts sought to renew and perfect it, to use the materials of the original monuments for the purposes of restoration and fresh construction, so as to prevent stones touched by the shadow of the gods from being profaned by vulgar use; perhaps out of respect also for their ancestors, and so that the work of different eras would not be buried under the earth, but would still bear witness to the piety of men and their progress in the plastic arts: this is the case as regards the Parthenon, where the walls of the Acropolis, rebuilt by Pericles, contain the worked materials of the Temple of Athene. Many modern travellers have been misled, through their lack of knowledge of this pious custom of the ancients, and have mistaken segments of buildings constructed in this way since earliest antiquity for seemingly barbaric work of the Turks or the Crusaders. Some of the stones in the walls at Baalbek were from twenty to thirty feet long, and seven to eight feet high.



'Baalbec / Ruins of Baalbec (May 5, 1839)' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Wellcome Collection*

Having reached the crest of the breach, our eyes knew not where to rest: everywhere there were marble doorways of prodigious height and width; windows and niches lined with the most admirable sculptures; arches adorned with exquisite ornamentation; fragments of cornices, entablatures, and capitals, scattered in the dust beneath our feet; coffered vaults above our heads; all was mystery, confusion, and disorder; artistic masterpieces, remnants of past ages, inexplicable marvels were all around us. We had scarcely cast an admiring glance to one side before a fresh wonder drew our attention to the other: each tentative interpretation of the form or religious meaning of the monuments was destroyed by succeeding impressions. We were lost in a labyrinth of conjecture. One cannot reconstruct in one's mind the sacred buildings of a time or a people whose religion and customs one does not fully understand. Time hides its secrets, leaving human science its enigmas, and toying with and deceiving the latter. We soon abandoned any attempt to construct a system that might explain these ruins; we resigned ourselves to looking and admiring, understanding nothing more than the colossal power of human genius, and the strength of religious thought, which had been able to move such masses, and accomplish so many masterpieces.

We were still separated from the second area of ruins by interior structures that obscured our view of the temples. We were, in all likelihood, only in the priests' quarters, or on the grounds of some private chapels, dedicated to unknown uses. We traversed these monumental structures, much richer than the enclosure walls. The second section lay before our eyes. An immense, elongated square platform presented itself, much wider, longer, and even more ornate than the first we had just left, its level often interrupted by remnants of higher pavements, which seemingly belonged to roofless or razed temples, where the Sun, once worshipped at Baalbek, shone upon the altar celebrating its presence.

All around this platform ran a series of chapels adorned with admirably sculpted niches, friezes, cornices, and coffers, works of the most accomplished craftsmanship, but of an already corrupted age of the arts: one senses the imprint of the styles, overloaded with ornamentation, of the decadent periods of the Greeks and Romans. But to experience this impression, one must already have an eye trained by the contemplation of the pure monuments of Athens or Rome: any other eye would be captivated by the splendour of the forms and the refinements of ornamentation. The only flaw here was excessive richness: the stone is crushed under its own luxurious decorations, and marble lacework covers the walls. There remain, almost intact, nine or ten such chapels that seem to have always existed thus, open to the rectangular platform they enclose, and where the mysteries of the cult of Baal were doubtless performed in broad daylight. I will not attempt to describe the thousand astonishing and admirable details that each of these temples, each of these stones, offers to the eye of the spectator. I am neither sculptor nor architect; I do not even know the names that stone assumes in this or that place, or in this or that form. I would speak but poorly in an unknown language; but the universal language that beauty speaks even to the ignorant eye, that the ancient and mysterious speaks to the mind and soul of the philosopher, I understand; and I never recognised it as strongly as in the chaos of marble, architectural forms, and mysteries which clutter that marvellous courtyard.

And yet this was nothing compared to what we were about to discover. By multiplying in one's mind the remains of the Temple of Jupiter Stator in Rome, the Colosseum, and the Parthenon, one might be able to envisage the architecture before us; nothing could be more wondrous than the sight of this vast agglomeration of monuments, the product of great wealth and effort, occupying a single enclosure, in a unique place in the middle of the desert, and amidst the ruins of an almost unknown city.

We slowly tore ourselves away from this spectacle, and rode south-westwards, where the tops of those six gigantic columns (*the remains of the upper Temple of Jupiter*) rose like a beacon above this horizon of debris. To reach them, we were obliged to navigate among fresh outer walls, elevated forecourts, pedestals, and altar foundations that everywhere obstructed the space between ourselves and these columns. We finally arrived at their base. Silence is our only language when what we experience surpasses the measure of our customary impressions. We remained speechless as we contemplated these six columns, attempting to measure with our eyes their diameter and height, and take in the admirable sculpture of their architraves and cornices. They are seven feet in diameter, and more than seventy feet high; they are composed of only two or three blocks, so perfectly set one upon another that one can scarcely discern the joints; the material is a stone of a slightly golden yellow, somewhere between the brilliance of marble and the matte finish of travertine. The sun struck them on only one side, and we sat for a moment in their shade. Large birds, like eagles, startled by the sound of our footsteps, wheeled above the capitals where they make their nests, and, returning to rest on the stone acanthus leaves of the cornices, pecked at them with their beaks and beat their wings, like animated ornaments attached to these marvellous remains. The line of columns, which some travellers have mistaken for the remains of an avenue, a hundred and four feet long and fifty-six feet wide, once leading to the temple, appear to me clearly to have been the exterior decoration of that same temple. Upon careful examination of the smaller temple that stands entire, nearby, one recognises that it was built according to the same design. What seems probable to me is that after the first temple was destroyed by an earthquake, the second was built on the same model; that some of the materials preserved from the first temple

were even used in its construction; that its proportions, too gigantic for a declining era, were simply reduced in size; that the columns, broken by their fall, were replaced; and that those spared by time were left standing as a sacred reminder of the ancient monument. If it were otherwise, other fragments of large columns would remain around the six that survive. Everything indicates, on the contrary, that the area surrounding them was empty and cleared of debris from the earliest times, and that a rich courtyard was still used for the ceremonies of a cult centred on them.

Opposite us, to the south-west, stood another temple (*the Temple of Bacchus*) situated on the edge of the platform, about forty paces away. It is the most complete and magnificent monument in Baalbek, and I dare say in the whole world. If one were to straighten one or two columns of the peristyle, which have rolled down the side of the platform, their tops still resting on the intact walls of the temple; if one were to replace some of the enormous coffers that have fallen from the roof into the vestibule; if one were to raise one or two sculpted blocks from the inner doorway, and if the altar, reconstructed from the debris scattered across the courtyard, were to be restored to its original form and position, one could well-nigh summon the gods, and resurrect the priests and the people. They would recognise their temple, as complete, as intact, as gleaming with polished stone and brilliant light, as on the day it left its builders' hands.

This temple is smaller in scale than the one represented by the six colossal columns. It is surrounded by a portico supported by Corinthian columns; each of these columns is about five feet in diameter and forty-five feet in height; each column is composed of three superimposed blocks; they are nine feet apart and equidistant from the inner wall of the temple; above the column capitals extends a rich architrave and an admirably sculpted cornice. The roof of this peristyle is formed of large, concave blocks of stone, hewn with a chisel into coffers, each representing the figure of a god, goddess, or hero: I recognised a Ganymede being carried off by Jupiter's eagle. Some of these blocks had fallen to the ground at the foot of the columns; we measured them; they are sixteen feet wide and about five feet thick: the roof tiles of the monument! The inner door of the temple, formed of equally enormous blocks, is twenty-two feet wide; we could not measure its height because other blocks have collapsed there and half-filled it. The appearance of the sculpted stones that make up the faces of this door, and its disproportion with the remains of the building, leads me to presume that it is the doorway of the great collapsed temple, subsequently inserted into this later one; the mysterious sculptures that decorate it are, in my opinion, from a completely different period than the Antonine, and of infinitely less pure workmanship: an eagle, holding a caduceus in its talons, spreads its wings over the opening; from its beak escape festoons of ribbons or chains, which are supported at their ends by two representations of Fame.



'Ruins of the Eastern Portico of the Temple of Baalbec' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

The interior of the monument is decorated with pillars and niches of the richest and most elaborate sculpture; We carried away some of the fragments that were scattered around the forecourt. There are niches perfectly intact, seemingly straight from the sculptor's workshop. Not far from the temple entrance, we found immense openings and underground staircases that led to lower structures whose purpose remains unknown; everything there is equally vast and magnificent: these were undoubtedly the residences of the pontiffs, the colleges of priests, the halls of initiation, perhaps also royal dwellings; they received light from above, or through the sides of the platform to which these chambers open. Fearing to lose our way in these labyrinths, we visited only a small part of them; they seem to extend over the entire extent of this mound. The temple I have just described is located at the southwest end of the monumental hill of Baalbek; it forms the very corner of the platform. Upon leaving the peristyle, we found ourselves on the edge of the precipice; we were able to measure the cyclopean stones that form the pedestal of this group of monuments: the pedestal is about thirty feet above the level of the plain of Baalbek; it is built of stones, the dimensions of which are so prodigious that, if they were not attested to by trustworthy travellers, people today would consider them highly improbable; the Arabs themselves, daily witnesses to these wonders, attribute them not to the power of human beings, but to that of genies or supernatural powers.

When one considers that these hewn granite blocks are, in some cases, up to fifty-six feet long by fifteen or sixteen feet wide, and of unknown thickness, and that these enormous masses are piled one on top of the other twenty or thirty feet from the ground; that they were taken from distant quarries, brought here, and hoisted to that height to form the paving of the temples, one is stunned at such a feat of human strength; modern science cannot explain the means employed to raise them, and one should not be surprised if people resort to a supernatural explanation. These

marvellous stones are clearly not from the later age of the temples; they were a mystery to the ancients as they are to us; they are from an unknown period, perhaps antediluvian; they have likely supported many temples dedicated to successive and diverse cults. To the naked eye, one can recognise five or six generations of monuments, belonging to different periods, on the hill supporting the ruins of Baalbek.

Some Arab travellers and writers attribute these primitive constructions to Solomon, three thousand years before our time. He is said to have built Tadmor (*see 2 Chronicles 8:4, identified with Palmyra*), and Baalbek in the desert. The story of Solomon delights the imagination of Orientals; but this supposition, at least concerning the gigantic constructions of Heliopolis (*Baalbek*), is by no means plausible. How could a king of Israel, who even lacked a seaport less than twenty-five miles from his mountains, who was obliged to borrow the navy of Hiram, king of Tyre, to bring him cedars from Lebanon, have extended his dominion beyond Damascus and as far as Baalbek? How could a prince who, wishing to erect the Temple of Temples, the house of the one God, in his capital, used only fragile materials, which could not withstand time nor leave any lasting trace, have erected, a hundred and sixty miles or more from his realm, in the unknown wastes, monuments built of imperishable materials? Would he not rather have employed his wealth and power in Jerusalem? And what remains in Jerusalem to indicate monuments similar to those of Baalbek? Nothing: it cannot therefore be Solomon who built the earlier Baalbek. I believe rather that these gigantic stones were moved either by those first men whom all primitive histories call giants, or by antediluvian men.

It is said that, not far from here, in a valley of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, human bones of immense size have been discovered: this rumour has such credence among the neighbouring Arabs that the British Consul-General in Syria, John Farren, a man of great learning, intends to visit these mysterious burial sites without delay. Eastern tradition, and even the monument erected over the so-called tomb of Noah, a short distance from Baalbek, assign this abode to the patriarch. The first men to emerge from him may well have long retained the stature and strength that humanity possessed before the total or partial submersion of land during the Flood; these monuments may be their work. Even supposing that the human species has never exceeded its present proportions, the power of human intellect may have altered: who is to say that earlier minds had not invented more perfect mechanical processes for moving, like grains of dust, these masses that an army of a hundred thousand men could not shake today? In any case, some of these stones from Baalbek, which are up to sixty-two feet long and twenty feet wide by fifteen feet deep, are the most prodigious masses that humanity has ever moved. The largest stones of the Egyptian pyramids do not exceed eighteen feet, and are merely exceptional blocks placed, for the purpose of achieving solidity, amidst certain parts of those edifices.

Turning the northern corner of the platform, the walls supporting it are equally well preserved; but the sheer mass of the materials composing them is less astonishing. The stones, however, are generally twenty to thirty feet long by eight to ten feet wide. These walls, much more ancient than the upper temples, are of a grey hue and pierced here and there with holes at their corners. These openings are lined with swallows' nests, and from them hang tufts of shrubs and wallflowers. The sombre, grave colouration of the basal-stones contrasts with the splendid, golden hue of the temple walls and the rows of columns at the summit. At sunset, when the sun's rays play among the pillars and cascade in waves of fire over the volutes and acanthus leaves of the capitals, the temples gleam

like pure gold on a bronze pedestal. We descended through a breach formed at the southern corner of the platform. There, some columns of the smaller temple had rolled, along with their architraves, into the torrent that flows along the Cyclopean walls. These enormous column fragments, scattered haphazardly in the streambed and on the steep slope of the ditch, have remained and will doubtless remain forever where time has shaken them; a few walnut trees and other trees have sprouted among these blocks, covering them with their branches and embracing them with their broad roots. The most gigantic trees look like reeds that sprouted yesterday beside these column trunks, twenty feet in circumference, and these pieces of acanthus ornamentation, a single one of which covers half the streambed.

Not far from there, to the north, an immense opening in the side of the platform lay before us. We descended into it. The daylight that entered from both ends illuminated it sufficiently: we followed its entire length of five hundred feet; it extends beneath the whole expanse of the temples; it is about thirty feet high, and the walls of the vault are formed of blocks whose mass astonished us, even after those we had just contemplated. These blocks of travertine stone, hewn with chisels, vary in size; but most are between ten and twenty feet long; the vault is semicircular, the stones joined without mortar. We were unable to divine its purpose. At the western end, this vault has an even higher and wider opening, extending onto the platform of the small temples we had visited first. There we found ourselves back in broad daylight, the stream flowing among countless fragments of architecture rolled from the platforms, and beautiful walnut trees growing in the stony dust. The other ancient buildings of Baalbek, scattered before us across the plain, attracted our gaze; but nothing there had the power to interest us after what we had just seen. In passing, we cast a cursory glance at four temples that would still be marvels in Rome, and which here resemble the works of dwarfs. These temples, some octagonal in shape and very elegantly ornamented, others square with peristyles of Egyptian granite columns, and even columns of porphyry, seem to me to be from the Roman period. One of them served as a church in the early days of Christianity; Christian symbols can still be seen; it is now uncovered and ruined; the Arabs raid it whenever they need a stone to support their roof, or a trough to water their camels.

A messenger from the Emir of the Arabs of Baalbek was seeking us, and found us there. He came, on behalf of that prince, to wish us a safe arrival and to ask us to attend the djerid races, at a tournament he would be holding in our honour the following morning on the plain below the temples. We thanked him and gave our acceptance, and I sent my dragoman, accompanied by some of my Janissaries, to pay a visit to the Emir on my behalf. We returned to the bishop's house supposedly to rest after our day's sightseeing; but no sooner had we eaten a piece of flatbread and the mutton with rice prepared by our guides than we were off wandering, at random, without a guide, around the hill and its ruins or among the temples, whose layout we had established that morning. Each of us became attached to some ruin or viewpoint they discovered, and called from afar to their travel companions to come and enjoy it with them; but one could scarcely tear oneself away from one object to attach oneself to another, and we ended up abandoning ourselves, each individually, to our chance discoveries.

The evening shadows, descending slowly from the mountains of Baalbek, and burying the columns and ruins one by one in their darkness, added a further layer of mystery, and even more picturesque effects, to this magical and mysterious work of mankind and time. There, one felt what one was oneself when compared to the mass and eternity of the monuments: a swallow nesting

for a season in the crevices of the stones, without knowing for whom or by whom they were assembled. The ideas that moved these masses, that accumulated these blocks, are unknown to us; the stony dust we tread upon knows as much as we do, and can tell us nothing; and, in a few centuries, the generations who come to visit the remains of our own monuments of today, will likewise ask themselves, in their turn, without being able to answer, why they were built and adorned. The works of man endure longer than his thoughts; motion is the law of the human mind; permanence is a dream born of pride or ignorance. God is a goal that constantly moves further away, the nearer humanity approaches; we forever advance, yet never arrive. The great divine figure, which Humankind has sought, since its infancy, to fix definitively in imagination and imprison in temples, expands, grows ever larger, surpasses our narrow thoughts and our edifices limited in scope, and leaves the empty temples and crumbling altars, summoning us to seek it, and find it, where it manifests itself more profoundly, in thought, intellect, virtue, Nature, and the infinite!

*March 20th, in the evening.*

Happy are they who have wings to soar over past centuries, to land without experiencing vertigo on these marvellous monuments of mankind, to plumb from those summits the depths of thought, of human destiny, to measure with their eye the path of the human spirit, ascending step by step amidst the twilight of philosophies, religions, and successive forms of rule; gaining height, like navigators on a sea without visible shores, and so divining at what point in time they themselves live, and to what manifestation of truth and divinity God calls the generation to which they belong!

*Baalbek, March 21st, 1833.*

Last night I went alone to the temple hill, by moonlight, to think, grieve, and pray. God knows how I wept, and will weep as long as a memory, a tear, remains! After praying for myself and for those who have departed from me, I prayed for all humankind. The great overturned temple of humanity, upon whose ruins I sat, inspired such strong and ardent feelings that they expressed themselves, almost of their own accord, in verse, the natural language of my thoughts whenever they overwhelm me. I wrote a poem this morning, in the very place and among the stones where I experienced those feelings last night.

The temples had made us forget the djerid tournament that the Prince of Baalbek wished to give; we spent the entire morning exploring them again. At four o'clock, some Arabs came to warn us that the horsemen were on the plain above the temples, but that, impatient with our delay, they were about to withdraw; that the prince thought this spectacle unpleasing to us, since we delayed our attendance, and asked us to visit his seraglio when we had satisfied our here; and that he was preparing another entertainment for us at his home. This display of tolerance from the chief of a fierce tribe of the most feared Arabs in this desert astonished us. In general, the Arabs and the Turks themselves do not allow foreigners to visit the ruins of ancient monuments alone; they believe that these ruins contain immense treasures guarded by genies or demons, and that Europeans know the magic words that reveal them. As they do not want these treasures removed, they are extremely vigilant as regards the presence of Franks in these regions: here, on the contrary, we were completely left to our own devices. We even lacked an Arab guide, and the children of

the tribe had kept their distance out of respect. I know not the reason for this respectful deference from the Emir of Baalbek; perhaps he took us for emissaries of Ibrahim Pasha. The fact is that we are too few in number to inspire fear in an entire tribe of five or six hundred men accustomed to combat and living by plunder; and yet they dare neither approach us, nor question us, nor oppose any of our actions; we could stay a month in the temples, excavate them, and carry off the most precious fragments of their sculptures, without anyone objecting. I deeply regret here, as at the Dead Sea, not having known beforehand the disposition of these tribes towards us: I would have brought workers and pack camels, and enriched science and our museums.

Leaving the temples, we visited the Emir's palace. A stretch of deserted, but less significant, ruins separate the hill of the great temples, or the acropolis of Baalbek, from the new Baalbek, inhabited by Arabs. The latter is nothing but a heap of hovels, damaged a hundred times by ceaseless war; the population huddles as best it can in the hollows between mounds of debris; a few tree branches and pieces of thatch cover these dwellings, whose doors and windows are often fashioned from the most notable fragments acquired from the ancient ruins.

The area occupied by the ruins of the modern city is immense; it stretches as far as the eye can see, whitening the pair of low hills that undulate above the great plain: the effect is bleak and harsh. These modern ruins are reminiscent of those of Athens, which I had seen a year before. The stark matte-white of fallen walls and scattered stones displays none of the majesty or golden hue of truly ancient ruins; it resembles a vast beach covered with sea foam. The emir's palace is a rather large courtyard, surrounded by huts of various shapes; the whole thing is quite similar to the courtyard of a wretched farm in one of our poorest provinces. The gate was guarded by a number of armed Arabs; the crowd pressed forward to enter; the guards made way for us and ushered us in. The courtyard was already filled with tribal chiefs and a great multitude of others. The emir and his family, along with the principal sheikhs, dressed in magnificent but tattered caftans and fur coats, were seated on a raised platform above the crowd, against the main building. Behind them were a number of servants, armed men, and Black African slaves. The emir and his entourage rose as we approached; we were helped in ascending some enormous steps, made of irregular blocks that served as stairs to the platform, and, after the customary compliments, the emir had us sit on the divan beside him; the pipe was brought to me, and the entertainment began.

A musical accompaniment of drums, tambourines, high-pitched fifes, and triangles struck with an iron rod signalled the start of the performance: four or five actors, dressed in the most grotesque manner, some as men, others as women, advanced to the centre of the courtyard and performed the most bizarre and lascivious dances that these barbarians could conceive. These monotonous dances lasted for more than an hour, interspersed from time to time with a few words, gestures, and changes of costume, which seemed to indicate a dramatic intention; but only one thing was intelligible: the horrible and disgusting depravity of public morals, indicated by the dancers' movements. I averted my eyes; the Emir himself seemed to blush at the scandalous lasciviousness of his people and, like me, made gestures of contempt. but the cries and transports of the rest of the spectators always arose at the moment when the filthiest obscenities were revealed in the figures of the dance, thus rewarding the actors.

They danced like this until, overcome with fatigue and drenched in sweat, they could no longer bear the ever-increasing rhythmic speed; they collapsed to the ground, and were borne away. The women did not attend this spectacle; but the Emir's women, whose harem overlooked the

courtyard, enjoyed it from their chambers, and we saw them, behind the wooden grilles, crowding at the windows to watch the dancers. The Emir's slaves brought us sorbets and preserves of every kind, as well as exquisite drinks made of iced pomegranate juice and orange blossom, served in crystal cups; other slaves presented us with muslin napkins embroidered with gold thread to wipe our lips. Coffee was also served several times, and the pipes were constantly replenished.

I conversed with the Emir for half an hour; He struck me as a man of good sense and wit, and far above the coarse pleasures of his people which might have given a false impression of his own morals: a man of about fifty years of age, handsome, with the most dignified and noble manners, and of the most solemn politeness; all things that the humblest of Arabs possess as a gift of the climate, or as the legacy of an ancient civilisation. His clothing and weapons were of the greatest magnificence. His horses, of admirable quality, were scattered in the courtyards and along the road; he offered me one of the finest; he questioned me with the most delicate discretion about Europe, about Ibrahim, and about the purpose of my journey through the desert. I replied with an affected reserve, which led him to believe that I had indeed a completely different aim than simply to view columns and ruins. He offered me his entire tribe to accompany me to Damascus, across the unfamiliar range of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, which I intended to cross. I accepted only a few horsemen to serve as guides and for protection, and I withdrew, accompanied by all the sheikhs, who followed us on horseback to the gate of the Greek bishop. I gave the order to depart the following day, and we spent the evening conversing with the venerable host whose company we were about to leave. A few hundred piastres, which I left him as alms for his flock, compensated for the hospitality we had received. He kindly agreed to send to Beirut a camel laden with some fragments of sculpture that I wished to take to Europe; he faithfully carried out this task, and upon my return to Syria, I found these precious fragments had arrived there before me.

*March 22nd, 1833.*

We left Baalbek at four in the morning; the caravan consisted of our usual number of mukaris, Arabs, servants, escorts, and eight horsemen from Baalbek who rode a few hundred paces ahead of the caravan. Day was just beginning to break as we crossed the first hill rising towards the Anti-Lebanon range. The entire hill is riddled with vast and deep quarries, from which had emerged the prodigious monuments we had recently beheld. The sun was beginning to gild the summits of the latter, which shone behind us on the plain like blocks of gold; we could scarcely tear our gaze from them; and stopped twenty times before they were completely out of sight; they disappeared, finally and forever, below the hills, and beyond the desert we saw only the black and snowy peaks of the mountains of Tripoli and Latakia, melting into the sky.

The low hills we first crossed were entirely bare and almost deserted. The soil was generally poor and barren; where cultivated, the earth was red. There were pretty valleys with gentle, undulating slopes, where a plough could move freely. We encountered neither travellers, villages, nor inhabitants until about midday. We rested in our tents at the entrance to a deep gorge where a stream, now dry, had flowed. We discovered a spring beneath a rock: the water was plentiful and delicious; and we filled the jars hanging from our saddles. After two hours of rest, we set off again.

We followed a steep, winding path along the side of a high, bare mountain for about two hours. The valley, which deepened further to our right, was criss-crossed by a wide, dry riverbed. A mountain of grey rock, completely barren, rose on the other side like a perpendicular wall. We

began our descent again toward the other end of this gorge. Two of our horses, laden with baggage, tumbled into the depths. The mattresses and rugs, the load they carried, cushioned their fall; and we managed to extract them. We camped at the end of the gorge, near an excellent spring. The night was spent in the midst of this untouched labyrinth of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. The snowfields were only fifty paces above our heads. Our Arabs lit a brush fire beneath a cavern-roof, ten paces from the mound where our tent was pitched. The firelight pierced the canvas and illuminated the inside of the tent, where we sheltered from the cold. The horses, though covered with their felt blankets, whinnied with discomfort. All night long we heard the horsemen from Baalbek and the Egyptian soldiers groaning under their cloaks. I myself, though covered with a cloak and a thick woollen blanket, could scarcely bear the bite of the icy Alpine air.

We mounted our horses at seven in the morning, beneath a blazing sun that made us successively shed our coats and caftans. At eight, we traversed a high plateau, passing by a large Arab village, the houses of which were spacious and the courtyards filled with cattle and poultry, as in Europe. We did not halt. The people are enemies of those of Baalbek, and the Arabs of Syria. They are well-nigh independent tribes, more closely related to the populations of Damascus and Mesopotamia. They appear wealthier and hard-working. All the plains around this village were cultivated. We saw men, women, and children in the fields. They were ploughing with oxen. We encountered sheiks, richly mounted and equipped, on their way to Damascus, or returning from there: their countenances were harsh and fierce; they gave us dark looks and passed by without a greeting. The children shouted insults at us. In a second village, two hours from the first, we manage to buy some chickens and a little rice for the caravan's dinner. We camped at six in the evening in a field high above a mountain gorge that sloped down to a river we could see glistening in the distance. A small stream rushed down the gorge, at which we watered our horses. The landscape was still harsh. Before us, at the mouth of the gorge, rose rocky peaks grouped in pyramids, towering into the sky. There was no vegetation on these peaks. The grey or black colour of the rock contrasted with the dazzling clarity of the firmament into which they rose.

*March 23rd 1833.*

We mounted again at six in the morning. A superb day was spent journeying without a halt, between steep mountains separated only by narrow gorges, down which torrents of melting snow rushed. Not a tree, not a blade of moss could be seen on the flanks of these mountains. Their bizarre, jagged, and shattered shapes resembled human monuments. One of them rose immense and sheer on all sides, like a pyramid: it might have been be two miles and more in extent. It was impossible to see how it could ever have been climbed. No trace of paths or steps was visible: and yet all its sides were hollowed out with caverns of all sizes, and by human hands. There were a multitude of cells, large and small, whose doors were carved into various shapes. Some of these caves, whose openings rose above our heads, revealed small terraces of bare rock in front of their entrances. One saw the remains of chapels or temples, and columns still standing on the rock: it looked like an abandoned human beehive. The Arabs say that it was the Christians of Damascus who carved these caverns. I do indeed think that this is one of those Thebaids where the first Christians took refuge in times of cenobitic monasticism or persecution. Saint Paul had founded a large church in Damascus; and this church, long flourishing, suffered the phases and persecutions of all the other churches of the East.

The mountainside (*Lamartine appears to be describing a site similar to that of Maaloula*), which we passed by on our left, was soon behind us. We descended rapidly, over almost impassable precipices, toward a more open and wider valley. A charming river fills it. Vegetation is seen once more, on its banks: willows, poplars, immense trees with bizarrely bent branches and dark foliage, grow in the rocky crevices that line the river. We followed the enchanting river-bank for an hour, always descending, but imperceptibly. The river accompanied us, murmuring and foaming beneath our horses' hooves. The high mountains, which form the gorge from which the river descends, receded, its course curving past broad, wooded hillocks, bathed in the rays of the setting sun. This is my first glimpse of Mesopotamia: we saw more and more of the succession of wide valleys that will open onto the great desert plain stretching from Damascus to Baghdad.

The valley we were in meandered gently and widened further. To the right and left of the river, we begin to see signs of cultivation, and hear the distant lowing of herds. Apricot orchards, the trees as large as walnut trees, lined the road. Soon, to our great surprise, we saw hedges, as in Europe, separating the orchards and the gardens planted with vegetables and flowering fruit trees. Wooden gates or fences opened here and there onto these beautiful orchards. The road there is wide, level, and well-maintained, like those near a large French city. None of us were aware of the existence of this delightful oasis, nestled in the inaccessible mountains of the Anti-Lebanon. We were clearly approaching a town or village, its name unknown to us. An Arab horseman we met said we were near a large village called *Al Zabadani*. We could already see smoke rising above the tops of the tall trees that dotted the valley. We entered the village streets; they were wide and straight, with stone pavements on either side. The houses lining them were large, surrounded by courtyards full of livestock, and perfectly watered and cultivated gardens. Women and children came to the doorways to see us pass, and greeted us with open, smiling faces. We inquired whether there was a caravanserai where we could find shelter for the night. We were told no: because Zabadani is not on any established road, caravans never pass through.

After wandering for a long time through the village streets, we arrived at a large square by the river. There, a house larger than the others, preceded by a terrace and surrounded by trees, marked the sheikh's residence. I introduced myself, with my dragoman's aid, and sought lodgings for the night. The slaves went to inform the sheikh; he himself rushed over: he was a venerable old man with a white beard and an open, gracious countenance. He offered me his entire house with an eager and gracious hospitality that I have scarcely encountered elsewhere. Immediately, his numerous slaves and the leading inhabitants of the village took our horses, led them to a large barn, unsaddled them, and brought heaps of barley and straw. The sheikh asked his women to leave their quarters and first ushered us into his divan, where we were served coffee and sherbet, and then gave us access to all the rooms in his house. He asked if I wished his slaves to prepare a meal for us. I begged him to allow my cook to spare them that trouble, and to procure only a calf and a few sheep to replenish our supplies, which had been depleted since Baalbek. In a few minutes, the calf and sheep were brought and slaughtered by the village butcher; and while our servants prepared supper, the sheikh introduced us to the leading inhabitants of the country, his relatives and friends.

He even asked my permission to have his wives presented to Madame de Lamartine (*this is the first mention of the fact that Marianne was accompanying him on the Damascus trip*). They were very eager, he said, to see a woman from Europe, and to admire her clothes and jewellery. Indeed, the sheikh's

wives, passed veiled across the room where we were sitting and entered my wife's apartment. There were three of them: one, already elderly, who seemed to be the mother of the other two. The two younger women were remarkably beautiful and appeared full of respect, deference, and affection for the eldest. My wife offered them a few small gifts, and they gave her some in return. During this interview, the venerable sheikh of Zabadani had led us onto a terrace he had built near his house, and on the riverbank. Pillars, planted in the riverbed itself, support a carpeted floor; a divan surrounded it, and an immense tree, like those I had already seen by the roadside, shaded the terrace and the entire width of the river. It is here that the sheikh, as all Turks like to do, spends his leisure time, enjoying the murmur and coolness of the river's foaming waters beneath him, in the tree's shade, and to the song of the thousand birds inhabiting its branches. A wooden bridge led from the house to this suspended terrace. It is one of the most beautiful sites I have beheld in my travels. The view includes the last dark, rounded ridges of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, which tower above in pyramids of black rock, or snow-capped peaks; and the river with its foaming waves, flowing between the uneven treetops of the varied belts of forest that border its course, to be lost amidst the sloping plains of Mesopotamia, which enter, like gulfs of greenery, the sinuous mountain range.

Supper being ready, I asked the sheikh if he would be so kind as to share it with us. He readily agreed, and appeared quite amused by the European manner of dining. He had never seen any of the utensils on our tables. He drank no wine, and we did not urge him to try. A Muslim's conscience is as strict as ours. To make a Turk sin against the law imposed upon him by his religion has always seemed to me as reprehensible, as absurd, as tempting a Christian to do the like. We spoke at length about Europe, and about our customs, of which he seemed a great admirer. He told us about his method of administering his village. His family had governed this privileged district of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains for centuries, and the improvements in property, agriculture, policing, and cleanliness that we had admired while crossing the territory of Zabadani were due to this excellent line of sheikhs. It is the same throughout the Orient. Everything is an exception and an anomaly. Good, like evil, is perpetuated endlessly there. We were able to judge, by this enchanting village, what these provinces would be like if restored to their natural fertility.

The sheikh greatly admired my weapons, especially a pair of percussion pistols, and poorly disguised the pleasure he would have in possessing them. But I could not give them to him: they were my fighting pistols, which I wished to keep until my return to Europe. I presented him with a gold watch for his wife. He received this gift with all the polite resistance we in Europe would show to accepting a similar one, and even affected to be completely satisfied, although I could not doubt his preference for the pair of pistols. A quantity of cushions and rugs were brought to us for sleeping; we spread them out on the divan where he himself usually slept, and we fell asleep to the sound of the river murmuring beneath our bed.

The next day (*March 24th*), we set off at daybreak and traversed the other half of the village of Zabadani, which was even more beautiful than the half we had viewed the day before. The sheikh arranged for us to be escorted to Damascus by some mounted men from his tribe. We dismissed the horsemen of the Emir of Baalbek there, as they would not be safe in the territory of Damascus. We rode for an hour along tracks bordered by hedgerows, as wide as those in France, and perfectly maintained. A canopy of apricot and pear trees covered the road; to the right and left stretched endless orchards, then cultivated fields filled with people and livestock. All these orchards were

watered by streams that flowed down from the mountains to our left. The mountains were covered with snow on their peaks. The plain was immense, and nothing limited it in our eyes but the forests of blossoming trees. After riding for three hours through a landscape akin to the most delightful parts of England or Lombardy, with nothing to remind us of the desert and its barbarity, we entered a barren, harsher land. Vegetation and cultivation had almost entirely disappeared. Rocky hills, barely covered with yellowish moss, stretched out before us, bordered by higher, equally barren, grey mountains. We rested in our tents at the foot of these mountains, far from any habitation. We spent the night there beside a deep, and narrow torrent that roared like endless thunder in its rocky gorge, a spate of muddy water and snowmelt.

We were mounted by six o'clock. It was the last day of our outward journey. I dressed in complete Turkish costume so as not to be recognised as a Frank in the vicinity of Damascus, my wife dressing in the clothing of Arab women, with a long white linen veil encircling her from head to toe. Our Arab companions also dressed more scrupulously, pointed out the mountains we still had to cross, and shouted: *'Scham! Scham!'* which is the Arabic name for Damascus (*Dimashq, or ash-Sham which means the Levant or historical Syria, also Madinat al-Yasmīn, the City of Jasmine*).

The fanatical nature of the population of Damascus, and the surrounding area, demands these precautions from any Franks who venture to visit the city. Alone among the Eastern peoples, the Damascenes increasingly harbour religious hatred, and display a horror of European names and dress. They alone have refused to admit the consuls or even the consular agents of the Christian powers to the city. Damascus is a holy, fanatical, and free city: nothing must defile it.

Despite threats from the Sublime Porte, despite the even more dreaded intervention of Ibrahim Pasha, and a garrison of twelve thousand Egyptian and foreign soldiers, the population of Damascus has stubbornly refused the British Consul General in Syria access to its walls. Two terrible uprisings broke out in the city at the mere rumour of the consul's approach. Had he not turned back, he would have been torn to pieces. The situation remains unchanged; the arrival of a European in Frankish dress would signal a new uprising, and we were not without concern that news of our march might have reached Damascus and thereby expose us to serious danger. We had taken every possible precaution. We are all dressed in full, and most strict costume. Only one European, who has himself adopted Arab customs and dress, and who is considered an Armenian merchant, has, for years now, risked living in the city, in order to be of service to trade along the Syrian coast and to the travellers whose destiny drives them to these inhospitable lands. He is Jean-Baptiste Beaudin, consular agent for France and all of Europe. Formerly an agent for Lady Stanhope, whom he accompanied on her first journeys to Baalbek and Palmyra; later employed by the French government for the acquisition of horses in the desert, Monsieur Baudin speaks Arabic like an Arab and has forged friendly and commercial relationships with all the nomadic tribes of the deserts surrounding Damascus. He is married to an Arab woman of European descent. He has lived in Damascus for ten years, and, despite the numerous relationships he has formed, his life has been threatened several times by the fanaticism of the city's inhabitants. Twice he was forced to flee to escape certain death. He has built himself a house in Zahlé, the little Christian town on the slopes of Mount Lebanon, and it is there that he takes refuge during times of popular unrest.

Monsieur Baudin, whose life is constantly in peril in Damascus, and who is, in that great capital, the only means of communication, the sole link in European politics and commerce, receives from the French government, as his sole reward for his immense services, a paltry salary of 1,500 francs;

while consuls, surrounded by all the security and luxuries of life in other Levantine trading posts, receive honourable and generous remuneration. I cannot understand why the European governments, in displaying both indifference and injustice, and the French government in particular, neglect and so disinherit a young, intelligent, honest, helpful, courageous, and active man who renders and would render the greatest service to his country. They will lose his service!

I had met Jean-Baptiste Baudin in Syria the previous year, and I had discussed my trip to Damascus with him. Having been informed of my departure and my imminent arrival, I sent an Arab this morning to inform him of the time at which I would be in the vicinity of the city, and to ask him to send me a guide to direct my steps and my movements.

At nine in the morning (*of March 25th*), we skirted a mountain adorned with country houses and gardens belonging to the inhabitants of Damascus. A beautiful bridge crossed a torrent at the foot of the mountain. We saw numerous lines of camels carrying stones for new buildings; everything indicated the approach to a great capital. An hour later, we glimpsed, atop a rise, a small, isolated mosque, the dwelling of a solitary Muslim. A fountain flowed beside the mosque, and copper cups, chained to the fountain's base, allowed travellers to quench their thirst. We paused for a moment in this spot, in the shade of a sycamore tree; already the road was crowded with travellers, peasants, and Arab soldiers. We remounted our horses and, after climbing a few hundred paces, entered a deep defile, hemmed in on the left by a perpendicular wall of schist above our heads; on the right, by a rocky ledge thirty to forty feet high. The descent was rapid, and the hooves of our horses slid on the loose stones.

I was walking at the head of the caravan, a few steps behind the Arabs of Zabadani; suddenly they stopped, and shouted with joy, showing me an opening at the edge of the road; I approached, and saw, via the cleft in the rock, the most magnificent and strangest view that ever astonished the human eye: Damascus and the boundless desert were visible a few hundred feet below. My gaze fell first upon the city, which, surrounded by ramparts of yellow and black marble, flanked by countless square towers at intervals, crowned with sculpted crenellations, dominated by its forest of minarets of all shapes, and criss-crossed by the seven branches of its river (*the Barada, historically named the Abana*) and countless streams, extended as far as the eye could see amidst a labyrinth of flowering gardens. Throwing out immense arms here and there into the vast plain, everywhere shaded, everywhere pressed upon by groves, to an extent of twenty-five miles in circumference, of apricot trees, sycamores, and other trees of every shape and verdancy, it seemed lost from time to time beneath this canopy, then reappeared further on in wide stretches of housing, suburbs, and villages; a labyrinth of gardens, orchards, palaces, streams, where one's sight grew dazed, and relinquished one enchantment only to find another.

We no longer advanced; pressed together at the narrow opening of the rock, pierced like a window, we contemplated, sometimes with exclamations, sometimes in silence, the magical spectacle that unfolded immediately and in its entirety before our eyes, at this end of a trail, destined to run through many a stony place and arid solitude, which merely formed the commencement of another desert, bounded only by Baghdad and Basra, and taking forty days to cross. Finally, we set off again; the rocky parapet that had hidden the plain and the city from us gradually lowered in height, and soon allowed us to enjoy the entire horizon fully; we were now only five hundred paces from the walls defending the suburbs. These walls, surrounded by charming kiosks and country houses displaying the most Oriental of architectural forms, shine like

a golden enclosure around Damascus; the square towers that flank and surmount them are inlaid with arabesques pierced by pointed arches with columns as slender as paired reeds, and embroidered with turban-shaped crenellations; the walls are faced with yellow and black stone or marble, the segments alternating with elegant symmetry; the tops of the cypresses and other large trees that rise from the gardens and the interior of the city soar above the walls and towers, and crown them with dark greenery; the countless domes of the mosques and palaces of a city of eighty thousand souls reflected the rays of the setting sun, and the bright blue waters of the seven river-branches glittered and vanished, in turn, among the streets and gardens. The horizon, behind the city, was boundless like the sea; it merged with the purple edges of a fiery sky, still ablaze with the glow of the sands of the great desert; On the right, the broad, high ridges of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains receded like immense waves of shadow, one after the other, sometimes jutting out like promontories into the plain, sometimes opening like deep gulfs into which the plain stretched, along with its forests and large villages, some of which have as many as a thousand inhabitants. The branches of rivers, and two large lakes shone there, against the darkness of the overall green hue in which Damascus seemed almost engulfed; to our left, the plain was more expansive, and it was only at a distance of thirty to forty miles away that one's eye rediscovered mountain peaks, white with snow, which shone amidst the blue of the sky, like clouds over the ocean.

The city is entirely surrounded by a forest of fruit orchards, in which the vines intertwine as in Naples, and are garlanded among the fig, apricot, pear, and cherry trees; below these trees, the rich, fertile, and continuously irrigated soil is carpeted with barley, wheat, corn, and all the legumes that this area produces; small white houses, here and there, pierce the greenery of these orchards, and serve as dwellings for the gardener, or as places of recreation for the owner's family. The gardens are populated by horses, sheep, camels, turtledoves, everything that animates the natural scene; they are, generally, one or two acres in size, and separated from each other by walls of sun-dried earth, or by beautiful living hedges; a multitude of paths, shaded and bordered by streams of running water, traverse these gardens, cross from one suburb to another, or lead to a city gate; they extend to a radius of seventy to seventy-five miles around Damascus.

We had been riding in silence for some time through the initial labyrinth of orchards, anxious on not seeing the guide we had been promised; we halted: finally, he appeared; he was a poor Armenian, badly-dressed and wearing a black turban, like those the Christians of Damascus are obliged to wear; he approached the caravan without affectation, spoke a word or two, gave a signal; and, instead of entering the city suburb by the gate before us, we followed him along the walls, which we almost circumnavigated, through the maze of gardens and kiosks, and entered, instead, by an almost deserted gate, near the Armenian quarter.

Monsieur Baudin's house, in which he had kindly prepared lodgings for us, is located in that district. We encountered no refusal at the city gate; after passing through, we rode for a long time along high walls with barred windows; the other side of the street was occupied by a deep canal, its flowing water powering the wheels of several mills. At the end of this street, we were stopped, and an argument arose between our Arabs and the soldiers guarding a second, inner gate, for every district has a separate one. I wished to remain unknown, and our caravan to be taken for that of Syrian merchants; but as the argument dragged on and grew increasingly noisy, and a crowd began to gather, I spurred my horse and advanced to the head of the caravan. Here was the guardhouse of the Egyptian troops, who, having noticed two hunting rifles that my Arab servants had

concealed, ineffectually, beneath my horses' blankets, were refusing to allow us through; an order from Sharif-Bey, the current governor of Damascus, forbade the introduction of weapons into the city, in which an insurrection and massacre of the Egyptian troops, some night, was feared. Fortunately, I had a recently penned letter from Ibrahim Pasha in my possession; I retrieved it and handed it to the officer commanding the post; he read it, brought it to his forehead and lips, and ushered us in with profuse apologies and flattering compliments.

We wandered for some time through a dark labyrinth of dirty, narrow alleyways; small, low houses, whose mud walls seemed ready to collapse on us, lined the streets; through the latticework windows, we saw charming Armenian girls who, at the sound of our long line of horses, ran to watch us pass, and offered us words of greeting and friendship. We finally stopped at a small, low, narrow doorway in a street where a horse could barely pass; we dismounted, crossed a dark, sunken corridor, and found ourselves, as if by magic, in a marble-paved courtyard, shaded by sycamore trees, refreshed by two Moorish fountains, and surrounded by marble porticoes and richly decorated salons: we had arrived at Monsieur Baudin's house, which like all the Christian houses of Damascus, is a hovel on the outside, a delightful palace within. The tyranny of the fanatical mob forces these unfortunate people to hide their wealth and well-being behind a facade indicating misery and deprivation. Our luggage was unloaded at the gate, the courtyard was filled with our belongings, tents, and saddles, and our horses were led to the bazaar's stalls.

Monsieur Baudin showed each of us to a lovely apartment furnished in the Oriental style, and we recovered on his sofas, and at his welcoming table, from the fatigues of such a long journey. A man known and loved, whom one meets amidst an alien crowd in a foreign country, represent an entire homeland; we experienced this fact at Monsieur Baudin's; and the sweet hours spent talking about Europe and Asia in the evening by the light of his lamp, to the sound of the fountain in his courtyard, have remained in my memory and in my heart as one of the most delightful moments of my travels.

Monsieur Baudin is one of those rare men whom Nature has created with qualities to suit every role: a clear, quick intellect, an upright and steadfast heart, and tireless energy. Whether in Europe or Asia, Paris or Damascus, on land or at sea, he adapts to all, and displays happiness and serenity everywhere, since his soul is resigned, like that of an Arab, to the great rule that forms the basis of Christianity and Islam, namely submission to the will of God; and also because he has within him that ingenious activity of mind which is the second soul of the European. His language, his face, his manners take on all the forms that occasion demands. Viewing him during the day, discussing France and our shifting politics, one would have taken him for someone arrived from Paris yesterday and about to return there tomorrow; seeing him in the evening, reclining on his divan between a merchant from Basra and a Turkish pilgrim from Baghdad, smoking a pipe or a hookah, lazily running the amber beads of his Islamic rosary (*misbaha*) through his fingers, a turban on his forehead, slippers on his feet, uttering a word every fifteen minutes or so regarding the price of coffee or furs, one might mistake him for a slave trader or a pilgrim returning from Mecca. Only a person who has travelled extensively, and adapted their thoughts and manner of living twenty times, is truly complete.

The narrow and uniform habits that a person acquires in their regular life, amidst the monotony of their homeland are moulds that constrain and diminish all: thought, philosophy, religion, and character — everything is greater, truer, and more just, in one who has seen Nature

and society from multiple angles. Travel provides a proper perspective on the material and intellectual world. To journey in search of wisdom was a major design among the ancients; the concept is not well-understood by us: they did not travel merely to seek unfamiliar dogmas and the teachings of the philosophers, but to see and judge everything. For my part, I am constantly struck by the narrow and petty way in which we view things, institutions, and peoples; and if my mind has expanded, if my vision has broadened, if I have learned to tolerate all by empathising with all, I owe it solely to the fact that I have frequently changed the scenes around me, and my own point of view has altered. To study the centuries through their history, human beings through travel, and God through Nature — that is truly to learn. We study everything through our wretched books, and compare everything to our petty local customs: and who made our customs and our books? Men as petty as ourselves. Let us open the book of books: let us live, see, travel: the world is a book, each step of which represents the turning of a page; he who has read only a single page, what does he know?

## Damascus

*March 24th, 1833.*

Dressed in the most austere Arab attire, I toured the main districts of Damascus this morning, accompanied only by Monsieur Baudin for fear that a large gathering of unfamiliar faces might draw attention. We spent some time, at first, walking through the dark, dirty, and winding streets of the Armenian quarter. It resembles one of the most wretched villages in our provinces. The houses are built of mud; they have a few small, sparse, barred windows facing the street, their shutters painted red. They are low, and their low doorways are like stable doors. A pile of rubbish, and a muddy pool of water, front almost every doorway. We did, however, enter some of the houses of the principal Armenian merchants, and I was struck by the richness and elegance of these dwellings inside.

After passing the door and crossing a dark corridor, one finds oneself in a courtyard adorned with superb marble fountains and shaded by one or two sycamore trees or Persian willows (*salix aegyptiaca*). The courtyard is paved with large slabs of polished stone or marble, and vines cover the walls. The walls, in turn, are faced with white and black marble. Half a dozen doors, their jambs also of marble and carved with arabesques, lead to as many rooms or salons, where the men and women of the family gather. These salons are vast and vaulted. They are pierced by a large number of small, very high windows, to allow the outside air to circulate freely throughout. Almost all rooms consist of two levels: a lower one where the servants and slaves sit; and a second, raised level, a few steps above, separated from the first by a balustrade of marble or exquisitely carved cedarwood. Generally, one or sometimes two fountains emitting jets of water murmur in the centre or corners of the room. The edges are adorned with vases of flowers; swallows or doves freely come to perch on the basins and drink. The walls of the room are marble up to a certain height. Above, they are covered with stucco and painted with arabesques in a thousand colours, often with extremely ornate gilded mouldings. The furnishings consist of magnificent Persian or Baghdad carpets that cover the marble or cedarwood floor everywhere, and a large quantity of cushions or silk mattresses, scattered throughout the apartment, serving as seats or backrests for family members. A divan covered in precious fabrics and infinitely finer carpets dominates the rear

and sides of the room. Women and children are usually found squatting or reclining there, occupied with various household tasks. The cradles of infants are on the floor, amidst the carpets and cushions. The master of the house always has one of these rooms to himself; it is here that he receives visitors. He is usually found seated on his divan, his long-handled writing desk placed on the floor beside him, a sheet of paper resting on his knee or left hand, writing or calculating all day long, for commerce is the sole occupation and talent of the inhabitants of Damascus.

Everywhere we went, in order to return the visits that we had received the day before, the owner of the house received us with grace and cordiality; he had pipes, coffee, and sherbet brought to us, and led us into the drawing room where the women were gathered. Whatever idea I may have had of the beauty of Syrian women, whatever image the beauty of the women of Rome and Athens may have left in my mind, the sight of the Armenian women and girls of Damascus surpassed everything. Almost everywhere we found faces that no European brush has ever traced, eyes where the serene light of the soul takes on a dark azure hue, and casts rays of moist velvet that I had never before seen shine in a woman's eyes; features of such exquisite delicacy and purity that the lightest and most delicate hand could not imitate them, the skin so translucent and, at the same time, so vividly tinted that the most delicate shades of rose petals cannot match their pale freshness; their teeth, their smiles, the natural grace of their forms and movements, the clear, resonant, silvery timbre of their voices — all is in harmony as regards these admirable apparitions. They converse graciously, with a modest restraint, yet without embarrassment, and as if accustomed to the admiration they inspire. They seem also to retain their beauty for a long while amidst this preserving climate, and life of quiet domesticity and leisure, in which the artificial passions of society abrade neither soul nor body.

In almost every house I have visited, I have found the mother as beautiful as her daughters, though the girls appeared to be already fifteen or sixteen years old. Girls often marry at the age of twelve or thirteen. The costumes of these women are the most elegant and noble I have yet seen in the Orient: their heads are uncovered, their braided hair, adorned with flowers, circling their foreheads several times, and falling in long plaits on either side of their necks and over their bare shoulders; festoons of gold coins and rows of pearls mingle in their hair; a small cap of chased gold sits atop the head; and their breasts are almost bare. They wear a short jacket with wide, open sleeves, made of silk brocaded with silver or gold, and wide white trousers falling in pleats to the ankles. Their bare feet are shod in yellow morocco leather slippers. A long silk gown of a brilliant colour, falling from their shoulders, open at the breasts and in front of the trousers, is held only around the hips by a belt whose ends reach the ground.

I could scarcely tear my eyes away from these ravishing women. Our visits and conversations have extended everywhere, and I always found them as charming as they were beautiful. The customs of Europe, the costumes and habits of Western women, were generally the subject of conversation; they seem to envy nothing in the lives of our women; and when one converses with these charming creatures, when one finds in their conversations and manners the grace, perfect naturalness, kindness, serenity, and that peace of mind and heart which are so well preserved in family life, one wonders what they could possibly envy in our society women, who know everything except what brings happiness within a family, and who squander in a few years, in the turmoil of our societies, their souls, their beauty, and their lives. These women sometimes visit each other; they are not even entirely separated from the company of men; but this society is

limited to a few young relatives or friends of the house, from among whom, by consulting their inclinations and family relationships, a fiancé is chosen for them very early on. The fiancé then visits from time to time to enjoy, like a son, the delights of the house.

I met, there, a leader of the Armenians of Damascus, a very distinguished and learned man; Ibrahim has placed him, as the head of his nation, on the municipal council that currently governs the city. Although he has never left Damascus, he possesses the most accurate and well-reasoned notions about the political state of Europe, about France in particular, about the general direction of human thought in our time, about the transformation of modern governments, and about the probable future of civilisation. I have not met in Europe a man whose observations on these matters were more accurate or insightful: it is all the more astonishing given that he knows only Latin and Greek, and has never been able to read those Western works or newspapers where such questions are explained in a way accessible even to those who repeat them without understanding them. Nor has he ever had the opportunity to converse with distinguished men from our part of the world. Damascus is a place with no connection to Europe. He has grasped everything through geographical maps and a few major historical and political events that have resonated even there, and which his natural and thoughtful genius has interpreted with marvellous sagacity.

I was charmed by the man; I spent part of the morning talking with him: he will come this evening and every day. He foresees, as I do, what Providence seems to be preparing for the East and the West, through the inevitable convergence of these two parts of the world, mutually providing each other with space, movement, life, and light. He has a fourteen-year-old daughter who is the most beautiful person I have ever seen; her mother, still young, is charming as well. He introduced me to his twelve-year-old son, whose education occupies him greatly. 'You should send him to Europe,' I said, 'and let him receive the education that you regret not having receiving yourself. I could oversee it.' 'Alas!' he replied, 'I think about it constantly, yet have often thought that if the state of the East fails to change, what service will I have rendered my son by elevating him, as regards knowledge, too far above his contemporaries, and the country in which he must live? What will he do in Damascus, on his return, with the enlightenment, customs, and taste for liberty enjoyed in Europe? If one must be a slave, it is better never to have been anything but a slave.'

After these various visits, we left the Armenian quarter, separated from the next by a gate that closes every evening. I found myself in a wider and more beautiful street; it is lined with the palaces of the principal Agas of Damascus; they are the nobility of the country. The facades of these palaces, facing onto the street, resemble long prison or alms-house walls, of grey mud. There are few or no windows; occasionally a large door opens onto a courtyard; and a great number of squires, servants, and Black African slaves are seen reclining in the shade of the door. I visited two of these Agas, friends of Monsieur Baudin; the interiors of their palaces were magnificent. They contained a vast courtyard, adorned with superb fountains, and planted with trees that provide shade; the salons are even more beautiful and more richly decorated than those of the Armenians. Several of these salons have cost up to one hundred thousand piastres to adorn; Europe has nothing more magnificent; everything is in the Arab style. Some of these palaces have eight or ten salons of this kind. The Agas of Damascus are generally descendants or sons of pashas who have used the treasures acquired by their fathers to enrich their residences. It is Roman nepotism in another form. These Agas are numerous, and they occupy the principal positions in the city, under

the Pashas sent by the Grand Seigneur. They have vast land-holdings in the villages surrounding Damascus. Their luxuries consist of palaces, gardens, horses, and women. At a sign from the Pasha, their heads roll, and their wealth, palaces, gardens, women, and horses pass to some new favourite of fortune. Such a form of rule naturally encourages indulgence coupled with resignation: both voluptuousness and fatalism are the inevitable results of Oriental despotism.

The two Agas I visited received me with the utmost courtesy. The brutal fanaticism of the common people of Damascus does not extend so far. The Agas know I am a European traveller; they believe me to be a secret ambassador, come to gather information for the kings of Europe about the quarrel between the Turks and Ibrahim. I expressed to one of them my desire to see his finest horses and to buy one, if he would agree to sell. He immediately had his son and his squire lead me to a vast stable, where he keeps thirty or forty of the most magnificent creatures from the desert around Palmyra. I had seen none so beautiful displayed before me: these creatures were generally very tall in height, with dark grey or grey-white coats, manes like black silk, prominent, dark brown eyes of admirable steadiness and acuteness, broad, flat shoulders, and swan-like necks. As soon as the horses saw me enter and heard a foreign language spoken, they turned their heads toward me, quivered, neighed, and expressed astonishment and fear with sidelong, startled glances of their eyes, and a wrinkling of their nostrils, which gave their beautiful heads the most intelligent and extraordinary expression. I have already had occasion to observe how much quicker and more developed the minds of animals are in Syria than in Europe. An assembly of believers, surprised in the mosque by a Christian, could not have better expressed indignation and terror in their postures and expressions than these horses did on seeing a stranger's face, and hearing an unknown tongue. I stroked some of them, and studied them all. I then led them out into the courtyard. I knew not which to choose, as they were almost all remarkable for their perfection: finally, I decided on a young, three-year-old white stallion, which seemed to me the jewel of all the desert horses. The price was negotiated between Monsieur Baudin and the Aga, and fixed at six thousand piastres, which I paid to him. The horse had arrived from Palmyra not long ago, and the Arab who had sold it to the Aga had received five thousand piastres and a magnificent cloak of silk and gold. The animal, like all Arabian horses, wore a record of its genealogy around its neck, enclosed in a fur pouch, and several amulets to protect it from the evil eye.

I wandered through the bazaars of Damascus. The Grand Bazaar is about a mile or so long. These bazaars are long streets, the houses of which are topped by very tall roofs, lined with shops, stalls, stores, and cafés; the shops are narrow and shallow; the merchants sit on their heels in front of the shops, pipe in mouth, or a hookah beside them. The stores are filled with all kinds of merchandise, and especially with fabrics from India, which flow into Damascus via the caravans from Baghdad. Barbers invite the passers-by to have their hair trimmed; their stalls are always full of customers. A crowd, as large as that in the galleries of the Palais-Royal, circulates all day long in the bazaar. But the sight of this crowd is infinitely more picturesque.

The Agas dress in long crimson silk coats lined with marten-fur, sabres and daggers adorned with diamonds hanging from their belts. They are followed by half a dozen courtiers, servants or slaves, who walk, silently, behind them, carrying their pipes and their hookahs: they sit, for part of the day, on the outdoor sofas of cafés built along the banks of the streams that traverse the city; beautiful plane trees shade the sofas: here, they smoke and chat with their friends, and this is the only place of communication, apart from the mosque, for the inhabitants of Damascus. Here,

almost in silence, the frequent revolutions that bloody this capital are prepared. The silent ferment simmers for a long time, then erupts at an unexpected moment. The people rush to arms under the leadership of some faction, commanded by one of the Agas, and the government passes, for a time, into the hands of the victor. The vanquished are put to death, or flee to the deserts of Baalbek and Palmyra, where independent tribes give them refuge.

The officers and soldiers of the Pasha of Egypt, dressed almost in European style, drag their sabres along the pavements of the bazaar. I encountered several who approached us speaking Italian; they are on their guard in Damascus; the people view them with horror; a riot could break out any night. Sharif-Bey (*Muhammad Sharif Pasha al-Kabir*), one of the most capable men in Muhammad Ali's army, commands them and is temporarily governing the city. He has formed a camp of ten thousand men outside the walls, on the banks of the river, and has garrisoned the castle; he himself resides in the seraglio. News of the slightest setback for Ibrahim in Syria would be the signal for a general uprising and fierce conflict in Damascus. The thirty thousand Armenian Christians who live in the city are terrified and would be massacred if the Turks prevailed. The Muslims are angered by the equality that Ibrahim Pasha has established between them and the Christians. Some of the latter are abusing this moment of tolerance and insulting their enemies by violating their customs, which augments and embitters their fanaticism. Monsieur Baudin is ready, at the first notice, to take refuge in Zahlé.

The Arabs of the great desert and those of Palmyra throng the city and wander the bazaars. Their only clothing is a large white woollen blanket, which they drape around themselves, appearing like ancient statues. Their complexions are tanned, their beards black, and their eyes fierce. They form groups in front of the tobacconists' shops, and in front of the saddlers and armourers. Their horses, always saddled and bridled, are hobbled in the streets and squares. They despise the Egyptians and the Turks, but, in the event of an uprising, would march against Ibrahim's troops. He has only been able to keep them a day's march from Damascus; he himself advanced with artillery against them as he passed through the city. They are now his enemies. I will speak at greater length about these unfamiliar peoples of the great Euphrates desert.

Each type of trade and industry has its own separate quarter in the bazaars. There are the armourers, whose shops are far from offering the magnificent and renowned weapons that Damascus once supplied to the Levantine trade. These admirable sword manufactories, if they ever existed in Damascus, have completely fallen into oblivion: only swords of a common type are made there, and one only finds antique, now almost priceless, weapons in the armourers' shops. I searched in vain for a sword and a dagger of ancient type. These swords now come only from Khorasan, a province of Persia, and are no longer being made even there; a certain number still in existence change hands like precious relics, and are of inestimable value. The blade of the one I was given cost the Pasha five thousand piastres. The Turks and the Arabs, who value these blades more than diamonds, would sacrifice anything in the world for such a weapon; their eyes sparkle with enthusiasm and veneration when they see mine, and they hold it to their foreheads, as if they were worshipping so perfect an instrument of death.

The jewellers have no skill or taste in setting their precious stones or pearls, in my opinion; yet they possess immense collections of this kind. All the wealth of the Orientals is movable, and meant to be buried or carried. There are a great many of these goldsmiths; they display little: everything is kept in small caskets which they open when asked for a piece of jewellery.

Saddlers are the most numerous and ingenious craftsmen in these bazaars: nothing in Europe equals the taste, grace, and opulence of the luxury harnesses they make for the horses of the Arab chieftains or the agas of the country. The saddles are covered in velvet and silk brocaded with gold and pearls. The red morocco-leather collars, which fall in fringes over the horse's chest, are also adorned with silver and gold tassels and clusters of pearls. The bridles, infinitely more elegant than ours, are also all made of morocco-leather in various colours and decorated with silk and gold tassels. All these items are, compared to those in Europe, very inexpensive. I bought two of the most magnificent bridles for one hundred and twenty piastres for the pair (about fifty francs).

The food vendors are the ones whose shops offer the most orderliness, elegance, cleanliness, and visual appeal. The fronts of their shops are adorned with a multitude of baskets filled with vegetables, dried fruits, and legumes whose names I know not, but which have admirable shapes and glossy colours, and which gleam like small pebbles emerging from water. Loaves of bread, of every size and quality, are displayed in front of the shops; there is an innumerable variety of these made for different times of day and different meals: they are warmed, like flatbreads, and of perfect flavour. Nowhere have I seen such perfect bread as in Damascus: it costs almost nothing. Some restaurateurs also offer food to the merchants or strollers in the bazaar. They provide neither tables nor cutlery and sell small skewers holding mutton-pieces, the size of a walnut and roasted in the oven. The buyers carry them away on one of the golden flatbreads I mentioned, and eat them as they walk. The numerous fountains in the bazaar offer the only drink available to the Arabs. One can eat perfectly well in Damascus for two piastres, or about ten sous a day. The common people spend less than half that on food. One can rent a nice house for two or three hundred piastres a year. With three or four hundred francs of income, one would be comfortable here: it is the same everywhere in Syria.

While wandering through the bazaar, I arrived at the quarter of the chest and box makers: theirs is a major industry, since the only furnishings an Arab family possesses usually consist of one or two chests where clothes and jewellery are stored. Most of these chests are made of cedar and painted red, with decorative work formed of gold studs. Some are admirably carved, in relief, and covered with very elegant arabesques. I bought three and sent them back by the Tripoli caravan. The scent of cedarwood perfumes the entire bazaar; and this atmosphere, composed of the thousand different perfumes emanating from the carpenters' shops, the grocery and druggist stores, the chests of amber or perfumed gums, the cafés, and the pipes constantly smoked in the bazaar, reminds me of the impression I had the first time I passed through Florence, where the carving of cypress-wood frames fills the streets with a similar scent (*Florence was noted at that time for its production of picture and other frames, hand-carved, ornate and gilded, using native cypress-wood.*)

Sharif-Bey, the governor of Syria under Muhammad Ali, left Damascus today. News of Ibrahim's victory over the Grand Vizier at Konya (*in Turkey, on December 21st 1832*) arrived last night. Sharif-Bey is taking advantage of the climate of terror that has gripped Damascus to visit Aleppo. He is leaving the city's government to an Egyptian general, assisted by a municipal council composed of leading merchants from all the different groupings. An encampment containing six thousand Egyptians and three thousand Arabs remains at the city gates. The sight of this camp is extremely picturesque; tents of all shapes and colours are pitched in the shade of the large fruit trees along the riverbank. The horses, generally magnificent, are tethered in long lines to ropes stretched from one end of the camp to the other. The undisciplined Arabs are there in all the

bizarre diversity of their tribes, armour, and costumes: some resembling assemblies of kings or patriarchs, others of desert brigands. The bivouac fires emit blue smoke, which the wind carries over the river or across the gardens of Damascus.

I witnessed the departure of Sharif-Bey. All the principal Agas of Damascus, and the officers of the corps remaining there, had gathered at the seraglio. The vast courtyards enclosed by the dilapidated walls of the castle and the seraglio were filled with slaves leading the finest horses in the city, richly caparisoned; Sharif-Bey was taking lunch in the inner apartments. I did not enter; I remained, with some Egyptian and Italian officers, in the main paved courtyard. From there, we watched the crowd outside, the Agas arriving in groups, and the Black African slaves passing by, carrying on their heads immense tin platters containing the various courses of the meal. Some of Sharif-Bey's horses were there; they are the finest animals I have yet seen in Damascus; they are of the Turkoman breed and infinitely larger and stronger than Arabian horses. They resemble large Norman horses, with finer, more muscular limbs, heads that weigh less heavily, and the wide, ardent, proud, and gentle eyes of the Oriental horse. They are all brown bays with long manes: truly Homeric horses. At noon, Sharif-bey set off, accompanied by a vast cavalcade till he was five miles from the city.

In the middle of the Damascus bazaar, I found the most beautiful khan in the Orient, the Khan of As'ad Pasha al-Azm. It is an immense dome whose bold vault recalls that of St. Peter's in Rome; it too is supported by granite pillars. Behind these pillars are shops and staircases. leading to the upper floors, where the merchants' rooms are located. Each prominent merchant rents one of these rooms and keeps his valuable merchandise and books there. Guards watch over the security of the khan night and day; large stables stand nearby for the horses of travellers and caravans; beautiful, flowing fountains refresh the place: it is a kind of exchange for Damascus's commerce. The gate of As'ad Pasha's Khan, which opens onto the bazaar, is one of the richest in detail and most grandiose examples of Moorish architecture to be seen anywhere. The entirety of Arab architecture is found there. Yet this khan was only built eighty years ago. The arts of a people whose architects are capable of designing, and whose workers are capable of executing, a monument like As'ad Pasha's Khan have not yet died. These khans are generally built by wealthy pashas, who leave them to their family or to the city they wish to enrich. They generate substantial income.

A little further on, from a gate opening onto the bazaar, I saw the large courtyard or forecourt of the main mosque of Damascus (*the Umayyad Mosque, early 8th century*). It was once a basilica dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. The monument seems to date from the time of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem: heavy, vast, and of that Byzantine architecture which is a degraded imitation of Greek architecture, and appears to have been built from previous ruins. The mosque's large doors were closed by heavy curtains, so that I could not see the interior. A Christian who would seek to desecrate a mosque by entering, risks death. We stopped for only a moment in the forecourt, while feigning to quench our thirst at the fountain.

*The same date. March 24th, 1833.*

The Baghdad caravan arrived today; it consisted of three thousand camels, and is encamped at the city gates. I bought sacks of Mocha coffee, which can no longer be obtained elsewhere, and shawls from India.

The caravan to Mecca was suspended due to the war. The Pasha of Damascus was tasked with leading it. The Wahhabis (*strict reformists within Sunni Islam*) dispersed it several times. Muhammad Ali drove them back to Medina. The members of the last caravan, stricken with cholera in Mecca, exhausted and lacking water, perished almost entirely. The bodies of forty thousand pilgrims were left in the desert. The dust in the desert leading to Mecca is the dust of human beings. It is hoped that this year the caravan will be able to depart under the auspices of Muhammad Ali; but, before long, the advance of the Wahhabis will forever prohibit the pious pilgrimage.

The Wahhabis represent the first major armed reform movement within Islam. A sage from the vicinity of Mecca, named Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, undertook to restore Islam's original purity of dogma, to eradicate, first through words and then by force, among the Arabs converting to his sect, those popular superstitions whose lack of credibility, or origin in deliberate deceit, corrupts all religions, and to restore the religion of the East as a practical and rational deism. Little was needed to achieve this, since the Prophet had not presented himself as a god, but as a man imbued with the spirit of Allah, and preached only the unity of Allah, and charity towards humankind. Abd al-Wahhab did not present himself as a prophet either, but rather as a man enlightened by reason alone. Reason, this time, fuelled Arab fanaticism, as falsehood and superstition had done previously. The sect took up arms in its name, they conquered Mecca and Medina, stripped the veneration of the Prophet of all the instruments of adoration that had replaced it, and these one hundred thousand armed missionaries threatened to change the face of the East. Muhammad Ali erected a temporary barrier against their incursions; but Wahhabism persists, and has spread throughout the three Arabias (*the Roman regions of Arabia Felix, Arabia Deserta, and Arabia Petraea*), and, at the first opportunity, these purifiers of Islam will spread as far as Jerusalem, Damascus, even as far as Egypt. Thus, human ideas perish by the very weapons that propagated them. Nothing is impenetrable to the progressive dawn of reason, the gradual and ceaseless revelation experienced by mankind. Muhammad, the Prophet, set out from the same deserts as the Wahhabis to overthrow idols and establish the worship, without sacrifices, of the one and immaterial God, Allah. Abd al-Wahhab, in his turn, appears and, shattering popular credulity, returns Islam to its roots in pure reason. Each century lifts a corner of the veil that conceals the image of the god of gods, eternal, evident in Nature, and delivering his oracles to the human mind.

*Damascus, March 25th, 1833*

We spent the day wandering through the city and its bazaars. Memories of Saint Paul are ever-present to the Christians of Damascus. There are the ruins of the house from which he escaped at night suspended in a basket. Damascus was one of the first places where he sowed the word that changed the world. The word bore fruit swiftly there. The East is the land of cults, of wonders, even of superstitions. The great idea that stirs imaginations here, at all times, is the religious idea. All these peoples, customs and laws, are founded on religion. The West has never been the same. Why? Are we less noble, we children of barbarians who still sense our origins?

Matters are reversed in the West. That earliest of human ideas is ranked below all the others. The Western lands are lands of wealth and steel, movement and noise. The Eastern lands are lands of profound meditation, intuition, and adoration! But the West is advancing by leaps and bounds, and when religion and those powers of reason obscured by the Middle Ages, have embraced each

other in truth, light, and love, the religious spirit, the divine breath, will once again become the soul of the world, and will give birth to wonders of virtue, civilisation, and genius. May to be so!

*Damascus, March 26th.*

There are perhaps ten thousand Christians in Damascus and fourteen thousand in Baghdad. The Christians of Damascus are Armenians or Greeks. A few Catholic priests serve those of their own faith. The inhabitants of Damascus tolerate the Catholic monks. They are used to their attire, and consider them Orientals. I have seen, on several occasions recently, two French Lazarist priests who have a small monastery tucked away in the Armenian poor quarter. One of them, Father Poussous, comes to spend the evenings with us. He is an excellent man, pious, learned, and kind. He took me to his monastery, where he educates poor Arab Christian children. Only the desire to do good keeps him in this desert of humanity, where he constantly fears for his own safety. He is nevertheless cheerful, serene, and resigned. From time to time, he receives news and aid from his superiors in France via caravans from Syria, as well as a few Catholic newspapers. He lent me some, and nothing seems stranger to me than reading of the pious or political squabbles of the Saint-Sulpice district, at the edge of the Baghdad desert, beyond Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains and near Baalbek, in the centre of a vast anthill of other human beings preoccupied with entirely different ideas, and where the noise we make and the names of our great men of the day never resound. Vanity of vanities, unless in the service of God, and men on God's behalf! Never is one more imbued with this truth than when travelling, and seeing how puny are those actions that a sea denies, how weak the noise that a mountain intercepts, how unimportant the famous name a foreign tongue cannot even pronounce. Our immortality lies elsewhere than in the false and fleeting sound of our titles here below!

We dined today with an elderly Christian from Damascus, over ninety years old, and in full possession of his physical and moral faculties. An excellent and admirable old man, his features reflecting the serene aspect of kindness and virtue that derives from a pure and pious life nearing its end! He showered us with services of every kind. He was constantly busying himself on our behalf like a youngster. Father Poussous, a companion of his, a merchant from Baghdad, and a high-ranking Persian nobleman on his way to Mecca, completed the peaceful evening gathering which occupied Monsieur Baudin's divans amidst the fumes of tobacco and tombac, which both darkened and perfumed the air. With the help of Monsieur Baudin and Joseph-Antoine Mazoillier, my dragoman, we conversed quite easily. The most perfect cordiality and simplicity reigned in this evening gathering of men from the four corners of the world. The customs of India and Persia, the recent events in Baghdad, and the Pasha's revolt against the Sublime Porte were the subjects of our conversation. The inhabitant of Baghdad had been forced to flee across the desert for forty days by camel, with his treasures and two young Franks. He was anxiously awaiting news of his brother, whose death he feared. A letter from his brother was brought to him while he was conversing with us. The brother was safe, and would arrive with the rearguard of the caravan, which was as yet still awaited. The merchant shed tears of joy. We ourselves were moved, by both his situation, and our sad reflections on our own misfortunes. Those tears, shed mutually by those destined never to meet again, in the shared home of a friend, in the midst of a city to which we were all only visitors; those tears united our hearts, and we loved as friends these men whose very names have lapsed from our memories.

*Same date. March 26th, 1833*

A terrible storm raged during the night. The tall pavilion in which we slept, pierced with numerous windows lacking glass, trembled like a ship in a gale. The rain melted, in a few moments, the mud roof covering the pavilion's terrace and flooded the floor. Fortunately, our mattresses were on planks supported by crates from Damascus; the blankets protected us; but in the morning, our clothes were floating about the room. Such storms are frequent in Damascus and often sweep away any houses whose foundations are not of stone. The climate is cold and damp during the winter months. Abundant snow falls from the mountains. Last winter, half of the bazaars were sunk deep in snow, and the roads were blocked for two months. The summer heat is said to be unbearable. So far, we have not felt it. We light braziers, termed *mangals* throughout the region, almost every night.

I bought a second Arabian stallion from a Bedouin I met at the city gate. I had the rider follow me, so that we could enter into a calm and just negotiation. The animal, smaller than the one I bought from the Aga, was stronger and had a finer, peach-blossom-coloured coat. It was of a breed termed '*king of hocks*.' I purchased it for four thousand piastres. I rode it to try the creature out. It was less gentle than other Arabian horses. It had a wild and untamed character, but seemed tireless. I had *Tedmor* (the Arabic name, for Palmyra, which I had given to the Aga's horse) led by one of my Sais on foot. I rode *Scham* during the journey. *Scham* is the Arabic name for Damascus.

A tribal chief summoned by Monsieur Baudin, who dwells along the Palmyra route, has arrived here; he has agreed to escort me to Palmyra, and lead me back safe and sound, but on the condition that I go alone and dressed as a desert Bedouin; he will leave his son as a hostage in Damascus until my return. We deliberated; I greatly desired to see the ruins of Tedmor: however, as they are less impressive than those of Baalbek, and as it takes at least ten days to go and return, as my wife cannot accompany me, and as the time has come to return to the coast, where our vessel is waiting for us, I regretfully abandoned the idea of a trip across the desert, and we are preparing to leave again the day after tomorrow.

*March 28th, 1833.*

We left Damascus at eight in the morning, and traversed the city and the bazaars, crowded with people, to the sound of a few murmurs and insulting remarks on the way: we being mistaken for Ibrahim's reinforcements. We left the city by a different gate than the one we had entered; rode alongside delightful gardens on a track beside a stream, shaded by magnificent trees; and ascended the mountain from which we had obtained such a beautiful vision of Damascus. We paused to contemplate it once more, and so carry away a lasting image.

I understand why Arab tradition places the site of the lost paradise in Damascus: no place on earth better evokes Eden. The vast and fertile plain, the seven branches of the blue river that water it, the majestic setting of the mountains, the dazzling lakes that reflect the light of the sky across the landscape, the geographical location between the two seas (*the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf*), the perfect climate — all these indicate that Damascus was one of the first cities built by humankind, one of the natural resting places for wandering humanity in the early days; it is one of those cities written by the finger of God on the earth, a capital as predestined to exist as Constantinople. These two are the only two cities not arbitrarily placed on an imperial map, but

determined by the configuration of the land. As long as the earth bears empires, Damascus will be a great city, and Istanbul a world capital; the caravans from India needed an enchanting place to rest at the edge of the desert, at the mouth of the plains of Coele-Syria (*the Roman Province*) and the valleys of Galilee, Idumea, and the coast of the Syrian Sea; that place was Damascus.

Commerce has attracted industry: Damascus is like Lyon, a vast factory; the population is a hundred thousand according to some, two hundred thousand according to others. I know not which is more correct; it is impossible to know, one can only conjecture: in the East, no accurate census is taken; one must take account based on sight alone. Judging by the movement of the crowds flooding the streets and bazaars, by the number of armed men rushing from their houses at the signal of revolutions or riots, by the vast expanse of land occupied by the houses, I would be inclined to believe that what lies within its walls might number between three and four hundred thousand souls. But if one does not arbitrarily define the city's boundaries, if one counts among its inhabitants all those who populate the immense suburbs and villages that blend seamlessly with the houses and gardens of this great agglomeration of people, I could believe that the territory of Damascus sustains a million people. I cast a final glance at it, with heartfelt wishes for Monsieur Baudin and the excellent men who had protected and charmed our stay; and a few paces of our mounts bore us away forever from the sight of its treetops and minarets.

The Arab walking beside my horse points out, on the horizon, a large lake gleaming at the foot of the mountains, and tells me a story of which I understand a few words, and which my dragoman interprets for me:

There was a shepherd who tended the camels of a village on the shores of this lake, in a deserted and uninhabited region of these high mountains. One day, while watering his flock, he noticed that the lake-water was leaking out through an underground outlet, and so he sealed it with a large boulder; however, he lost his shepherd's staff in the depths. A while later, a river dried up in one of the provinces of Persia. The Sultan, seeing his country threatened with famine due to the lack of water for irrigation, consulted the wise men of his empire, and, on their advice, sent emissaries to all the surrounding kingdoms to discover if the source of his river had been diverted or dried up. These ambassadors bore the shepherd's staff, which the water had carried to Persia along with it. The shepherd was in Damascus when these envoys appeared; he remembered his staff had fallen into the lake; he approached, and recognised it as the one in their hands. He understood then that his lake was the source of the river, and that the wealth and lives of a people were in his hands. 'What will the Sultan do for the one who restores the flow?' he asked the envoys. 'The Sultan will grant him,' they replied, 'his daughter in marriage, and half his kingdom.' 'Go then,' he retorted, 'and before you return, the lost river will again water Persia and gladden the Sultan's heart.' The shepherd retreated to the mountains, removed the boulder, and the waters, resuming their course through this underground channel, once again filled the riverbed. The Sultan sent fresh ambassadors to convey his daughter to the fortunate shepherd, and gave him half his provinces.

Such wonderful tales are preserved with complete faith among the Arabs; none of them doubts, because the imagination never does so.

*March 29th.*

We camped that evening on the slope of a high mountain, after an eight hour ride through a barren, cold, and mountainous landscape. We were overtaken by a caravan smaller than our own: it was the Cadi of Damascus, sent there every year from Constantinople, now returning to Alexandretta to embark for home. His wives and children travelled in a double pannier set on the back of a mule; there was a woman and several small children in each half of the pannier; all was veiled. The Cadi rode a quarter of an hour behind his wives, accompanied by a few slaves on horseback. This caravan passed us and camped further on.

A day of ten hours' rough riding followed, in bitter cold and through completely deserted valleys; then an hour's ride in a stream bed where large, rounded boulders from the mountain slopes constantly blocked the horses' path; I rode my beautiful mount *Tedmor* for an hour or two to give *Scham* a rest. Despite two days of wearisome travel, this magnificent animal flies like a gazelle over the rocky desert terrain; in an instant, he outpaces the best runners of the caravan; he is as gentle and intelligent as a swan, possessing a neck of similar whiteness and grace. I intend to bring him back to Europe with *Scham* and *Saide*. As soon as I dismount, he escapes me and bounds to join the Arab named *Mansours* who cares for and leads him; he rests his head on the former's shoulders like a dog being petted; there is a complete bond between the Arab and the horse, as between myself and my dog. Mansours and Daher, my two principal Arab Sais (*grooms*), whom I acquired near Beirut and who have been in my service for almost a year, are the most loyal and gentle of men: sober, tireless, intelligent, devoted to their master and their horses, always ready to fight alongside us should danger arise. What could a skilled leader not do with such a breed of men? If I had a quarter of the wealth of some of the richer bankers in Paris or London, I would alter the face of Syria within ten years: all the elements of regeneration are there; all that is missing is a hand to bring them together, an eye aimed at laying a foundation, a will to lead people there.

Lodging in a kind of isolated inn on a high plain, in extreme cold, we find a little wood to light a fire in the lower room where we spread our carpets; our provisions from Damascus are exhausted; some barley-flour intended for our horses is kneaded into dough, and we eat the bitter and blackish cakes when baked.

We left at daybreak; rode for twelve hours, through a barren and depopulated countryside, and arrived at a little village in which we found shelter, chickens and rice. The rain flooded down all day; we are now only eight hours' ride from the Beqaa valley; but we are approaching it from its eastern end, and much further south than Baalbek.

*The same date. March 30th, 1833.*

We arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon within sight of the Beqaa desert. The caravan halted and hesitated. The plain, from our position to the foot of Lebanon, which rises like a wall on the other side, resembled an immense lake, from the middle of which emerged a few dark islands, submerged treetops, and vast ancient ruins on a hill seven miles or so from us. How could we venture forth without guides, at random, into this flooded plain? We were obliged to do so, however, or risk not crossing it the next day; for the rain continued, and torrents poured their waters into the plain from all sides. We rode for two hours over the higher levels of the plain, which brought us closer to the hill, where those vast ruins of a temple came into view. We passed

on our left the remains of some unknown city, nameless today, contemporary with Baalbek. Sections of its gigantic columns had rolled down the hillside and lay in the mud at our feet. Day was waning, the rain was increasing, and we had no time to climb to the temple. Once past this hill, we were riding in water up to our horses' knees. Every moment, one of our mules slipped and rolled with our baggage into a ditch, from which our porters struggled to extract it. We sent an Arab twenty paces ahead of the caravan to test the ground; but when we reached the middle of the plain, where the Baalbek stream (*the Litani*) had carved its bed, the ground gave way beneath us, and we had to swim across a gap of thirty to forty feet. My Arabs, plunging into the water and supporting the horses' heads, managed to lead my wife and the English maid who was with her across; we ourselves swam, and all reached the opposite bank.

## Zahlé

Night had almost fallen: we raced across the rest of the valley, while the twilight was still sufficient to show the way. We passed near one or two huts inhabited by a fierce tribe of Baalbek Arabs. If they had attacked us, we would have been at their mercy: all our weapons were out of action. The Arabs watched us from their terraces but chose not to descend to the marsh. Finally, as night fell the plain began to rise again, and we found ourselves on the dry land bordering Lebanon. We headed towards the distant light that twinkled eight miles away within a mountain gorge: it was the town of Zahlé. Overwhelmed with fatigue, numb with cold, and soaked to the bone, we finally reached the lower hills where it is sited. There, as we called out to each other and took a headcount, we realised that one of our friends, Ferdinand de Capmas, was missing. We halted, called out, and fired a few shots: there was no answer. We detached two horsemen to go in search of him and entered Zahlé. It took us an hour to follow the river that runs through the town and reach the single bridge that connects one segment to the other. Our exhausted horses could barely stay upright on the slippery cobblestones of that steep bridge, which lacks a parapet. The house of the Greek bishop was, at last, a welcoming sight. Brush fires were lit in the huts surrounding the courtyard. The bishop lent us some mats and rugs. We dried ourselves.

The two Arabs sent to search for our friend returned with him. He was carried, almost unconscious, to the hearth, and there regained his senses. At the bottom of our waterlogged crates, we found a bottle of rum; the bishop provided us with sugar; we revived our exhausted companion with a few glasses of punch, while our Arabs prepared a pilau. The poor bishop had absolutely nothing to offer us but shelter: even then, the curiosity of the women and children of Zahlé was such that they constantly crowded the courtyard and broke open the doors of our rooms so as to see the two Frankish women. I was forced to post two armed Arabs at the courtyard gate to prevent anyone from entering.

The next day, we rested in Zahlé to dry our clothes and replenish our travel supplies, which had been spoiled by the previous day's flood. Zahlé is an entirely Christian town. Founded only a hundred and twenty years ago (*in 1711*) in a gorge on the last foothills of Mount Lebanon, it owes its rapid and prodigious growth to the persecuted families of Armenian and Greek Christians from Damascus and Homs. It has about five thousand inhabitants, conducts a thriving silk trade, and is growing daily. Protected by Emir Bashir, ruler of Lebanon, it is no longer troubled by raids from the tribes of Baalbek and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. The active and industrious inhabitants farm the hillsides that slope down from the city to the plain, and even venture to cultivate the

nearest parts of the desert. The town's appearance is quite extraordinary: a haphazard collection of black houses, built of earth, without symmetry or regularity, on the steep slopes of two hills separated by a river (*the Berdawni*). The gorge, from which the river descends before flowing into the town and the plain, is a wide and deep entrenchment of perpendicular cliffs that part to allow the torrent to pass; it flows from level to level, forming three or four broad cascades that occupy the entire width of these plateaus, on successive tiers. The torrent's foam completely covers the rocks, and the sounds of its falls fill the streets of Zahlé with a deep, continuous murmur. A few rather elegant buildings gleam among the greenery of the poplars and tall vines, above the falls. One is the refuge of our friend Monsieur Baudin; another is a Maronite monastery. The river, after passing between the town's houses, which are clustered on, and suspended in the most bizarre manner above its high banks and overhang its bed, irrigates narrow fields and meadows, where the industrious inhabitants have canalised its waters into a thousand streams. Curtains of tall Persian poplars stretch as far as the eye can see along its course, directing the gaze, like a verdant avenue, as far as the Baalbek desert and the snow-capped peaks of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. Almost all the inhabitants are Syriac Greeks, or Greeks from Damascus. The houses resemble the wretched huts of the peasants of Savoy or Bresse; but in each house one sees a shop, a workshop, in which saddlers, armourers, even watchmakers, labour with crude tools about their trades.

The people seemed kind and hospitable. The sight of foreigners like ourselves, far from frightening or disturbing them, seemed to please them. They offered us all the small services our situation required and appeared proud of their town's growing prosperity. Zahlé seems to be the first throes of becoming a great commercial city, destined to rival Damascus in its trade between the Christian and Muslim peoples. If the death of Emir Bashir does not destroy the unified rule that constitutes Lebanon's strength, Zahlé, within twenty years, will be the leading city of Syria. All others are withering away: it alone is growing; all others are dormant: it alone is active. The Greek spirit carries everywhere the vitality that is in the arteries of that European people, though the activity of the Asian Greeks is currently useful and fruitful, while that of the Greeks of the Morea and the islands is merely a barren agitation. The Asian air tempers the fieriness of the Greeks: here, they are an admirably gentle people, while elsewhere, they are often barbaric. The same is true of the physical beauty of the race. The Greek women of Asia are masterpieces of Nature, ideal in grace and voluptuousness as regards the eyes. The Greek women of the Morea, however, have hard, though pure features, and eyes whose fire, harsh and dark, is not sufficiently tempered by the former's sweet softness of soul and sensitivity of heart: the eyes of these latter are burning coals; the eyes of the women of Asia are like flames veiled by moist vapour.

*The same date. March 29th, 1833.*

The poor Greek bishop of Zahlé comes from a family dwelling in Aleppo, where he has passed his life amidst the elegance and refinement of that city, the Athens of Asia. He finds himself, as it were, an exile in Zahlé, without society or moral support. His manner has retained the exquisite dignity of the residents of Aleppo; but, in his extreme destitution, he can offer us only a humble lodging. We speak with him in Italian. As I leave, I give him alms of five hundred piastres for the poor or for himself, as he seems to be in a state bordering on poverty. A few Arabic and Greek books, scattered haphazardly about his room, and an old chest containing his magnificent fur coats and episcopal vestments, were all his wealth.

I hired guides in Zahlé to cross Lebanon, by unfamiliar paths. The usual route was blocked by the prodigious amount of snow that had fallen during the past winter. At first, we climbed fairly gentle slopes, through hills cultivated with vines and mulberry trees. Soon we arrived at the region of rocks and wayward streams; we crossed at least thirty of these in the space of six hours. They rush randomly down such steep slopes that they fail to carve a bed: each is a sheet of foaming water, gliding over bare rock and flowing as swiftly as a bird's flight.

The sky was soon covered with pale clouds that already blocked the light, though the day was still young; we were completely enveloped in these rolling waves of cloud, and often the head of the caravan, lost in the shadowy narrows was invisible to us. Snow, too, began to fall in large flakes, covering the tracks our guides searched for in vain; we struggled to support our weary horses, whose hooves slipped on the steep ledges we were forced to follow.

The magnificent lower horizon of the Baalbek Valley and the peaks of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, with the great ruins of the temples of the Beqaa, bathed in light, appeared to us only occasionally, through breaks in the cloud; it seemed as if we were sailing amidst the sky, and that the pedestal from which we saw the land no longer belonged to it. However, the sonorous winds that had been sleeping in the deep, high gorges of the mountains began to utter mournful, subterranean sounds, like the roars of a heavy sea after a storm; they passed at lightning speed. Masses of snow and volleys of stones, even quite large boulders, as if hurled from a cannon, flew sometimes over our heads, sometimes over the lower levels beneath our feet, like dead leaves; two of our horses were struck and tumbled with our baggage into the precipice. None of us were harmed; my young Arabian stallions, which we were leading, seemed petrified with terror; they stopped short, raised their heads, and uttered not neighs, but guttural cries like human groans; we walked close together, to watch and aid one another in case of an accident. The night was growing ever darker, and the snow beating on our faces robbed us of what little light could still guide us. The wind filled the entire gorge where we were with swirling snow that rose in columns to the sky and fell back in immense sheets like the foam of great waves on the reefs; there were moments when it was impossible to breathe.

Our guides stopped at every instant, hesitating, and fired shots to direct us; but the furious wind smothered the sound, and the detonation of their weapons resembled faint cracks of a whip. Moreover, as we descended deeper into this deep gorge of the last foothills of Lebanon, we heard with dread a low, continuous, muffled roar that grew louder from moment to moment and formed, as it were, the bass of that horrible concert of unleashed elements; we knew not what it was; it seemed as if part of the mountain was collapsing and pouring down torrents of rock. The thick clouds, skimming the ground, hid everything from us; We had no idea where we were, but suddenly we saw. riderless horses and unladen mules pass by, along with several camels fleeing down the snowy slopes of the mountain.

Soon a group of Arabs followed, shouting; they warned us to halt, pointing out, forty or fifty paces below us, a hut built against a rock, which the clouds had hidden till then: a column of smoke and the glow of a hearth rose from the door of this hut, whose roof, formed of enormous cedar branches, had been half torn away by the hurricane and hung over the wall; it was the only shelter to be had in this part of Lebanon: the Khan of Murat-Bey. A poor Arab lives there during the summer, offering barley and shelter to the caravans from Damascus that travel this route to Syria. We descended, with difficulty, by steps of rock hidden beneath a foot of snow. The torrent that

flows a hundred paces below the khan, and which must be crossed to climb the last stretch of mountains, had suddenly become an immense river, carrying within its waters blocks of stone and debris from the storm. Surprised on its banks by the whirlwind, and half-buried under the snow, the Arabs we had met had relieved the camels and mules of their burdens, leaving them in the open to flee to the Khan of Murat-Bey. We found it filled with these men and their mounts; there was no room for ourselves or our horses. However, sheltered by a boulder larger than a house, the wind was less intense, and the clouds of snow, swept from the peaks of Mount Lebanon, which passed over our heads to settle in the plain, were thinning, and allowed us, at intervals, to glimpse a patch of sky in which stars were already shining. The wind soon died completely; we dismounted; we sought to make a shelter for ourselves, not only for the night, but perhaps for several days, if the torrent, which we could hear but not see, continued to block the passage. Under the walls of the collapsed khan, protected by some of the cedar branches that had just formed the roof, was a space ten square feet in extent, filled with snow and mud: we swept away the snow; a foot of soft mud remained on which we could not lay our mats; we tore some tree branches from the roof, which we spread like a hurdle on the muddy ground; these prevented our mats from getting wet; our mattresses, our rugs, our coats, formed a second floor. We lit a fire in a corner of this shelter, and thus we spent the long night of March 29th to the 30th, 1833.

From time to time the slumbering hurricane awoke; it seemed as if the mountain were collapsing in on itself; the enormous rock against which the khan leaned trembled like a tree trunk shaken by a gust of wind, and the roaring of the torrent filled the sea and the sky with mournful howls. We eventually fell asleep, however, and awoke late, to find the brilliant rays of a serene sun lighting the snow.

The Arabs, our companions, had departed; they had been fortunate in their attempt to cross the torrent; we saw them from afar, climbing the hills where we were to join them. We too set out; we rode for four hours along a high valley where, as if we were navigating the summit ridge of Mont Blanc, we saw nothing but snow beneath our feet and the sky above us. The dazzling light, the sombre silence, the peril of each step over the desert of fresh snow, without any marked path, made the crossing of these high pillars of the earth, the backbone of a continent, a solemn and religious moment.

One involuntarily observed every point of the horizon and the sky, every phenomenon of Nature. I saw one such which struck me like a beautiful image, a thing which I had never before seen. At the very summit of Mount Lebanon, on the slopes of a hill half-sheltered from the morning sun, I saw a magnificent rainbow, not arcing like an aerial bridge linking the heavens to the mountain peak but, seen against the snow and curved in concentric semi-circles, like a brilliantly-coloured serpent. It seemed a rainbow's nest, perched on the most inaccessible peak of Lebanon. As the sun rose and its bright rays grazed the hill, the arch of the rainbow with its bands of shimmering colour seemed to stir and rise; the ends of the luminous arch did indeed rise from the earth, and ascend towards the sky a few tens of yards as if it had tried to leap towards the sun, melting into whitish vapour and liquid pearls that fell back around us.

## Hammana

We dismounted, beyond the snow-covered region to dry our wet shoes in the sun. We soon began to catch glimpses of the deep, dark valleys of the Maronites; in two hours we had descended to the village of Hammana, perched atop the magnificent valley of that name, and in which had already lodged on the way to Damascus. The sheikh had three houses in the village given over to us. The evening sun shone under the broad leaves of the mulberry and fig trees; men were returning with their ploughs from the fields; women and children, walking along the paths between the houses, greeted us with hospitable smiles; the belled cattle were returning to their pens; pigeons and hens covered the roofs of the terraces, and the bells of the two Maronite churches rang slowly through the cypress treetops, to announce some pious ceremony the following day; here was the appearance, sound and peace of a beautiful village in France or Italy, suddenly discovered upon our emerging from our journey among the precipices of Mount Lebanon, the deserts of Baalbek, and the inhospitable streets of Damascus: never perhaps was a transition so rapid, yet so gentle. We resolved to spend the next day, a Saturday, among these beautiful and excellent people, and rest from our long and fatiguing travels.

We, indeed, passed the following day in Hammana: the sheikh and the village market supplied us with abundant provisions; the women of Hammana visited us all day; they are infinitely less beautiful than the Syrian women of the coast; they are of the pure Maronite race; they all have the appearance of strength and health, but with overly-pronounced features, somewhat harsh eyes, and overly-ruddy complexions; their costume consists of white trousers, and over these a long blue cloth dress, open at the front and leaving the breast bare; countless necklaces of piastres hang around their necks, throats, and behind their shoulders. Married women complete this costume with a silver horn, about a foot or sometimes a foot and a half long, which they fasten to their braided hair; it rises slightly, obliquely, above their foreheads. This sculpted and carved horn is covered at the end by a muslin veil which they suspend from it, and with which they sometimes cover their faces; they never remove this horn, not even to sleep. This bizarre custom, the origin of which can only be sought amidst the vagaries of the human mind, disfigures them and hinders all movement of the head and neck.

*April 1st, 1833*

We left Hammana at five on a foggy morning. We rode for two hours along the steep, bare slopes of the high ridges of Lebanon descending towards the plains of Syria. The valley, which we left to our right, deepened and widened below our feet. It may have been about five miles wide and a mile or more deep. The transparent waves of morning mist drifted gently like a sea swell across the horizon, allowing only the summits of tall hills, the crowns of cypress trees, and a few towers of villages and Maronite monasteries to rise above them; but the sea breeze, which rises and climbs imperceptibly with the sun, slowly unfurled all these waves of vapour, and folded them into white veils that clung to and blended with the snow-capped peaks, forming faint grey patches. The entire valley was visible.

Why does our language lack the means to capture in a single word the scene the eye sees at a single glance? I would have liked to retain forever in my memory the incomparable view, and my impressions, of the Hammana Valley. I picture myself above one of the thousand torrents that

furrow its slopes with their leaping foam, and which, through the boulders, the hanging meadows, the cypress trunks, the poplar branches, the wild vines, and the black carob trees, glide down to the valley floor and join the central river, which runs its entire length. The valley is so deep that I cannot see its floor; I only hear rising at intervals the thousand murmurs of its waters and the rustling of foliage, the lowing of herds, the distant, silvery peals of monastery bells. The morning shadow still lingers in the depths of the gorge where the main torrent leaps. Here and there, around the bends of some hills, I glimpse the white line of foam it traces amidst this dark shadow. On this side of the valley, I see rising, half a mile or so apart, a quartet of broad plateaus like natural pedestals; their sides appear sheer and are of greyish granite. These plateaus, a mile and more in circumference, are entirely covered with stretches of cedars, firs, and broad-crowned umbrella pines; one can distinguish the tall, slender trunks of the trees, between which the morning light filters and plays. Their dark, motionless foliage is broken from time to time by the light columns of blue smoke rising from the Maronite farmers' huts, and the small stone arches from which the village bells hang are visible. Two vast monasteries, their walls gleaming like coppered bronze, stretch across a pair of these pine-covered plateaus. They resemble medieval fortresses. At the foot of the monasteries, Maronite monks, wearing their black hoods, can be seen ploughing, between their vineyards and the large chestnut trees.

A trio of villages, clustered around rocky knolls, form a lower pyramid, like beehives around the trunks of old trees. Beside each cottage rise a few tufts of paler greenery: they are pomegranate, fig, or olive trees, beginning to bear fruit at this level of the valley; the eye plunges beyond, into the impenetrable shadow hiding the depths of the gorge. If the eye crosses this shadow and climbs the opposite slope of the mountains, it finds, in some places, perpendicular walls of granite rock that soar to the clouds. Above these walls, which seem crenellated by Nature, it glimpses plateaus of the most splendid vegetation, fir-tree tops hanging over the edges of the abysses, and immense sycamore crowns that form broad patches against the sky; and behind these crenellations of vegetation, more village and monastery bell-towers, in places the access to which is via unseen paths. In other directions the granite flanks of the mountains are broken into wide notches where the gaze is lost in the darkness of the forests, and distinguishes here and there only luminous and moving points, which are the beds of the torrents and the small lakes formed by springs. Elsewhere, the rocks abruptly cease; immense, rounded bastions flank them like eternal fortifications, their corners ending in towers and turrets.

High valleys, barely perceptible to the eye, plunge between ramparts of snow and forest; from there descends the main torrent of Hammana's river, which one sees first cascading like a gutter from the vast snow-covered roof, then disappearing into the resounding basin of the falls, where it divides into seven or eight sparkling branches, now vanishing behind blackish blocks and hillocks, now reappearing in a single ribbon of foam, which folds and unfolds with the contours, over the steep or gentle slopes of the hills. Finally, it plunges into the main valley, falling in a sheet a hundred paces wide and two hundred feet high. Its foam, rising, blown here and there by the wind, covers the tops of the broad pines that line the cascade with floating rainbows. To my left, the valley, descending towards the sea, widens, revealing the slopes of hills, more intensely wooded and cultivated; its river meanders between knolls crowned with monasteries and villages. Further on, the palm trees of the plain raise their yellow-green plumes behind low hills of olive groves, punctuating the long line of golden sands that borders the sea. Finally, the gaze is lost in the distant, indistinct expanse, between the sky and the waves.

The details of this magical ensemble are no less captivating than the overall view. At every turn of the rocks, at every hilltop to which the path leads, one discovers a fresh view, where the waters, trees, rocks, the ruins of bridges or aqueducts, the snow, sea, or the fiery sands of the desert, framed in an unexpected way, elicit a gasp of surprise and awe. I have seen Naples and its islands, the valleys of the Apennines and those of the Alps of Savoy and Switzerland; but the Hammana Valley and several other valleys in Lebanon eclipse all these memories. The immense rock formations, the countless waterfalls, the purity and depth of the sky, the vast views of the sea that terminate them everywhere, the picturesqueness of the lines of the villages and Maronite monasteries clinging, like human nests, to heights that the eye hesitates to contemplate; and finally, the novelty, the strangeness, the tints sometimes dark, sometimes pale, of the vegetation; and the majesty of the treetops, some of whose trunks resemble granite columns; all of this shapes, colours, and solemnises the landscape, transporting the soul possessed by emotions deeper and of a more religious nature than the Alps themselves invoke. Any landscape without the sea is incomplete. Here, sea, desert, and sky together form a majestic frame for the scene; and the enraptured eye constantly shifts from the depths of ancient forests, from the banks of shaded springs, from the summits of soaring peaks, from the peaceful scenes of rural or monastic life, to the blue expanse criss-crossed by vessels, to the snow-capped peaks piercing the azure reaches beyond which lie the stars, or to the yellow and gold waves of the desert, where camel caravans trace serpentine lines in the distance. It is due to these ceaseless contrasts that vibrant thoughts arise, and those solemn impressions are gained that render the stony mountains of Lebanon, objects of poetry, and rapture.

*The same date. April 1st, 1833.*

At midday, camped in our tents, halfway up the slopes of Mount Lebanon, to wait out the heat of the day, an Arab courier arrived. He had been on his way to find me in Damascus. He handed me a packet of letters from Europe, announcing my appointment to the Chamber of Deputies.

A new affliction was now added to so many others! Unfortunately, I sought that position at an earlier time, and myself solicited a trust that I cannot now, without ingratitude, decline. I will accept; but how I wish that this cup would pass far from me! I no longer have any personal stake in the drama of the political and social world, whose main act is upon us. I have none of the passion for glory, ambition, and fortune that is the driving force of politicians. The only interest I can take in these impassioned deliberations will be in the interest of the nation and of humanity. The nation and humanity are abstract concepts to those who wish to own the present moment and see the interests of family, caste, or party, triumph at any cost. Where is the calm and impartial voice of philosophy amidst this tumult of facts and events that mingle and clash? Who is capable of seeing the future and its boundless horizon beyond the dust of the present struggle? It matters not: a man chooses neither his path nor his labours; God assigns him his task through circumstance, and according to his convictions. It must be so! But I foresee for myself only moral martyrdom, given the painful task he imposes upon me today. I was born for action. Poetry has been nothing more than repressed action within me; I have felt, I have expressed ideas and feelings, when powerless to act. But today action no longer summons me. I have delved too deeply into human affairs not to understand their course; I have lost too many of those beings to whom my life could actively respond, not to be thoroughly disgusted with the very thought of action. A place

set aside for contemplation, the study of philosophy, and the practice of poetry, in solitude, is the only place of rest in which my heart could now find solace, before the latter breaks and ceases to beat.

**The End of Part VIII of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part IX: Lebanon to Constantinople

## Return to Beirut, and Departure for the Cedars of Solomon

*April 2, 1833.*

We arrived here yesterday evening. I spent two hours at the Franciscan convent, beside the tomb in which my entire lost future is presently interred. The brig *Alceste*, which is to carry my child's cherished remains back to France, is not yet in sight. I chartered another brig today to carry us home ourselves. We are sailing together; but at least the mother will not occupy the cabin where her child's body lies! While the necessary accommodations are being made for transporting such a large number of passengers aboard Captain Coulonne's brig, we will go and visit the Keserwan, Tripoli in Syria, Latakia, Antioch, and the cedars of Lebanon on the last mountain peaks behind Tripoli.

This morning we received visits from all our numerous friends in Beirut: the governor, a Maronite prince; Habib Barbara, our neighbour, who has shown us, since our arrival in the country and especially since our misfortunes, the heart of a true friend; Giovanni Bianco, the Sardinian Consul, and Monsieur Borda, a young and amiable Piedmontese attached to the consulate, relegated, by a bizarre twist of fate, to the deserts of the Orient, while his education, tastes, and character, would render him a distinguished diplomat in a civilised European court; Pierre Laurella, the Austrian Consul; John Farren, the Consul-General, and Peter Abbott, the Special Consul of England in Syria; a young French merchant, Monsieur Humann, whose company has been as useful as it has been pleasant since our arrival here; Camille Callier, a French traveller; Monsieur Jorel, first dragoman of the consulate, a young man raised in France but relocating early in life to the Orient, who commands the languages of Turkey and Arabia as if they were his mother tongues; honest, active, intelligent, obliging by instinct, and by whom a service to be rendered is granted with pleasure; finally Henri Guys, the French consul in Syria, a respectable representative of national probity in these lands where his character is revered by the Arabs, who arrived here only a short time ago, and whom we have seen much less of than we have of his colleagues.

We will carry away with us the names of all these men who have showered us with kindness and compassion during our year-long stay among them, and so preserve, to varying degrees, our memory of them, our interest in them, and our gratitude to them, forever. Were it not for that letter that I received yesterday (*announcing his appointment to the Chamber of Deputies*), and the thoughts of my aged father whose memory constantly summons me back to France, had I to choose a place of exile in this world, to end my weary days in the bosom of solitude and enchanted Nature, I would remain where we are.

*April 5, 1833.*

We left this morning at four o'clock amidst the same caravan I had assembled for Damascus; we followed the coastline to Cape Batroun — via places already described elsewhere — and spent the night at Jbeil (*Byblos, the Phoenician Gebal, and Gibelet of the Crusaders*) in a khan outside the city, on a rise overlooking the sea. The place is remarkable only for a mosque of Christian architecture, which was once a church (*the Church of Saint John the Baptist*), likely built by the Counts

of Tripoli. It is believed that Jbeil is the ancient territory of the Giblites, who supplied King Hiram with blocks of stone for Solomon's construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Adonis's father, King Cinyras, had his palace there, in myth, and the cult of his son was once that of all neighbouring Syria. To the west of the city is a Crusader castle, remarkable for the elegance and height of its various fortifications. We descended into the city to view the small harbour, where a few Arab boats bobbed gently in the water. The city is inhabited almost exclusively by Maronites.

A very beautiful Arab woman, exquisitely adorned, came to visit my wife at the caravanserai; we gave her a few small gifts.

*April 6.*

We continued along the coast, at the foot of the Keserwan mountains which are bathed by the sea everywhere; we camped in our tents in an admirable spot at the entrance to the territory of Tripoli (*Tripoli in Lebanon, not to be confused with Tripoli in Libya*). The road leaves the coast and turns sharply to the east; it plunges into a narrow valley, watered by a stream; a valley which narrows considerably about a mile or so from the sea, and entirely encloses a hundred foot high rock, five to six hundred feet in circumference: this rock, either natural or hewn from the mountainside that adjoins it, bears on its summit a perfectly preserved Gothic castle (*Lamartine appears to be describing Mseilha Fort*), a dwelling place for jackals and eagles. Staircases carved into the living rock ascend to successive terraces, covered with towers and crenellated walls, as far as the upper platform, from which a keep pierced with pointed arch windows rises. Vegetation has taken over the entire castle, the walls, and the battlements; immense sycamores have taken root in the halls and extend their broad crowns above the collapsed roofs. Vines cascading in enormous clumps, ivy clinging to the windows and doors, lichens revealing the stone everywhere, grant this beautiful medieval monument (*Mseilha is seventeenth century, possibly on Crusader era foundations*) the appearance of a castle of moss and ivy. A beautiful fountain flows at the foot of the rock, shaded by three of the most magnificent trees one could see; they are a type of elm. The shade offered by just one of them cloaked our tents, our thirty horses, and our scattered groups of Arabs.

## Tripoli in Syria

*April 7, 1833*

Today I climbed a steep field on a pale and slippery slope, where the horses could barely stand: from the summit, there is an unobstructed view of the entire western coast of Syria as far as the Gulf of Alexandretta (*Iskenderun*) and the Taurus Mountains, and a little to the right, the plains of Aleppo and the hills of Antioch, with the course of the Orontes River (*Nahr al-Asi*). Three hours' ride brought us to the gates of Tripoli; we were expected there, and two miles or so from the city we met a cavalcade of young Frankish merchants of various nations, and various officers of Ibrahim's army, coming to meet us.

The son of Monsieur Lombart, a French merchant established in Tripoli, offered us hospitality in his father's name; we feared being a burden to him, and tried the Franciscan friary; only one friar lived in that immense house, and he received us there.

*8th-9th April, 1833.*

We spent two days in Tripoli, and dined at Monsieur Lombart's — experiencing the joy of meeting a French family where every compatriot meets with a warm familial reception — in the evenings, we spent an hour or so at the home of the Messrs. Katchiflisse, Greek merchants and Russian consuls, a family established since time immemorial in Tripoli, where they own a magnificent palace. Madame and the Mademoiselles Katchiflisse are the three women most celebrated in Syria for their beauty and charming manners, a piquant blend of Asian reserve with the graceful abandon of Greek women, and the consummate politeness of the most elegant women in Europe. They received us in a vast vaulted salon, lit by a dome and cooled by a fount of running water. They were seated on a semicircular divan at the far end of the room. Everything was covered with rich carpets, and the carpets themselves were covered with hookahs, pipes, vases of flowers and sorbets. The trio, dressed in Oriental costume, offered, given the character of their individual beauty, the most admirable ensemble that the eye could contemplate; we spent a delightful evening in conversation with them, and promised to visit again on our return.

The Sheikh of Ehden, the last inhabited village near the summit of Mount Lebanon, was the uncle, on his mother's side, of Joseph-Antoine Mazolier, my interpreter. Having been informed by his nephew of our arrival in Tripoli, the venerable sheikh descended from the mountains with his eldest son and some of his servants; he came to visit me at the Franciscan monastery and offered me hospitality at his home in Ehden. From Ehden to the Cedars of Solomon was only a three-hour ride, and if the snows that still covered the mountain permitted, we could go from there to visit these ancient trees that have spread their glory throughout Lebanon and were contemporaries of that great king. We accepted, and our departure was set for the following day.

*April 10, 1833.*

At five in the morning, we were on horseback. The caravan, even larger than usual, was preceded by the Sheikh of Ehden, an admirable old man whose elegant manners, noble and easy politeness, and magnificent costume were far from reminiscent of an Arab chieftain; he looked like a patriarch walking at the head of his tribe: he rode a desert mare, whose golden bay coat and flowing mane would have made the worthy mount of a hero of Tasso's *Gerusalemme*; his son and his principal servants pranced on magnificent stallions, a few steps ahead of him; next came ourselves, then the long line of our mukaris and sais.

The exit from Tripoli offers admirable views; one follows the banks of a river confined between two hills; the most beautiful trees, including groves of large orange trees, shade the banks of the water; a public kiosk, built under these trees, offers its fragrant terrace to walkers; people visit to smoke and drink coffee, and to breathe in the freshness of the riverine air; from there, through a gap, one can catch a sight of the sea, which is a mile or so from the city, the beautiful square towers, built by the Arabs, on both sides of the port, and the numerous ships in the harbour.

We crossed a wide plain, cultivated and planted with olive trees; on the first hill rising from this plain towards Lebanon, amidst a forest of olive trees and fruit trees of every kind, we encountered an immense crowd of men, women, and children lining the road; they were the inhabitants of a large village spread out beneath these trees, belonging to the Sheikh of Ehden; he spends the summers in Ehden and the winters in this village on the plain. The Arabs greeted their

prince respectfully, and offered us refreshments, then a number of them set out to gather calves and sheep for us, and help us cross the precipitous trails in the mountains: we rode for four hours, sometimes through deep valleys, sometimes along the crest of almost barren mountains; We stopped by a torrent that descends from the slopes of Ehden, carrying mounds of half-melted snow. Sheltered by a rock, the sheikh had a large fire lit for us; we ate lunch and rested our horses. The ascent then becomes so steep over bare rocks, slippery as polished marble, that it is impossible to comprehend how the Arabian horses managed to climb them, and especially to descend; four Arabs on foot surrounded each of our horses, supporting them with their hands and shoulders: despite this assistance, several tumbled against the rocks, but without serious injury.

## Ehden

This dreadful road, or rather this almost perpendicular wall, brought us, after two wearisome hours, to a rocky plateau from which the gaze plunged to a broad inner valley and the village of Ehden, which is built at the highest point, and above the snowline; beyond Ehden there is only an immense pyramid of bare rock: it is the last spur of this part of Mount Lebanon; a small ruined chapel crowns its summit. The winter winds gnaw relentlessly at this rock, detaching enormous blocks that roll right into the village; all the surrounding fields are strewn with them, and even the sheikh's castle is hemmed in on all sides. This castle, which we were approaching, is of entirely Arab architecture; the windows are paired pointed arches, separated by elegant columns; the terraces, which serve as roofs and salons, are crowned with crenellations; the arched doorway is flanked by two high seats of carved stone, and the door jambs themselves are adorned with arabesques. The sheikh had descended first, and was waiting for us at the head of his household. His youngest son, a silver censer in hand, burnt incense before our horses, and his brothers threw perfumed essences on our hair and clothes. A magnificent meal awaited us in the hall, where entire tree trunks blazed in the wide hearth; the most exquisite wines of Lebanon and Cyprus and an immense quantity of game made up this feast; our Arabs were no less well treated in the courtyard.

In the evening, we explored the area around the village; snow still covered parts of the fields; everywhere we saw traces of rich cultivation; every patch of topsoil between the rocks had its vine or walnut tree; countless springs flowed everywhere beneath our feet, and artificial canals spread their waters across the land. These sloping fields were supported by terraces built of immense blocks; we could see a monastery below the rocky outcrop to our left, and numerous villages, very close together, on both sides of the valley.

*April 11, 1833.*

The sheikh sent three Arabs to investigate the road to the Cedars and discover whether the depth of snow would allow us to reach the trees; the Arabs returned, and said that the route was impassable: fourteen feet of snow lay in a narrow valley that had to be crossed to attain the place. In order to get as close as possible, I begged the sheikh to assign me his son and a few horsemen; I left my wife and the caravan in Ehden; I mounted the strongest of my horses, *Scham*, and we were on our way by sunrise.

We had a three-hour ride along mountain ridges or through fields soaked with melting snow; and arrived at the edge of the Valley of the Saints, a deep gorge into which the eye gazes from the

summit of the cliffs, a valley more narrowly enclosed, darker, and more solemn even than that of Hammana; at the head of this valley, at the point where, still rising, it meets the snow, a superb sheet of water falls from a height of a hundred feet, and is perhaps six hundred yards wide; the whole valley resounds with this fall and the lively torrents it feeds; on both sides, the rock on the mountain's flanks streamed with foam; we saw, as far away as the eye could see, on the floor of the valley, two large villages whose houses were scarcely distinguishable from the rocks brought down by the torrent; the tops of the poplars and mulberry trees appeared, from there, like clumps of rushes or grass.

## Bsharri – The Cedars of Lebanon

We descended to the village of Bsharri by paths carved into the rock, so steep that it was hard to believe that folk would venture there; indeed, many perish: a stone thrown from the ridge where we were would strike the rooftops of these villages, which we reached in an hour's descent. Above the waterfall and the snows, stretch immense fields of ice undulating like clouds of vapour, their hues shifting between a greenish colour and blue. About a quarter of an hour's ride to the east, in a kind of semi-circular valley formed by the last hills of Lebanon, we saw a large black patch on the snow: these are the famous group of cedars; they crown, like a diadem, the mountain's brow, and overlook the many deep branching valleys that descend from there, the sea and the sky forming their horizons. We set our horses to the gallop through the snow, to approach the trees as closely as possible; but five or six hundred paces from them, the horses sank up to their shoulders; we saw that the report of the Arab scouts had been accurate, and that we were forced to refrain from placing our hands on these relics of the ages, preserved by Nature; we dismounted, and seated ourselves on a rock to contemplate them.

These are the most celebrated trees in the world. Religion, poetry, and history have consecrated them. Holy Scripture celebrates them, in several of its texts. They are one of the emblems that the prophets favoured. Solomon wished to employ them to adorn the Temple that he was the first to erect to the one God, undoubtedly because of the renown for magnificence and holiness those marvels of Nature already possessed at the time. They are indeed the same ones; for Ezekiel (*27:23-24*) speaks of the Cedars of Ehden as the most beautiful in Lebanon. Arabs of all sects have a tradition of venerating these very trees: they attribute to them not only a vegetative force that seemingly makes them live forever, but also a spirit within, that enables them to anticipate coming events, in a similar manner to animal instinct, or human foresight. They sense the nature of the weather in advance, they move their vast branches like limbs, extend or constrain their elbows, and raise their arms towards the sky or incline them towards the ground, according as the snow is preparing to fall or melt. They are divine beings in the form of trees. They grow in this single site of the Lebanon range; and are rooted well above the region where all such vegetation normally fails.

All this astonishes the imaginative peoples of the East, and I wonder that science itself is not astonished. Alas, the oaks of Bashan languish, Mount Carmel and the cedars of Lebanon wither (*see Isaiah 2:12-13).* The number of trees diminishes with every century. Travellers once counted thirty or forty, later seventeen; still later, a dozen. Now there are only seven whose age suggests they were contemporary with biblical times. Around these ancient witnesses of bygone ages, who know the history of the earth better than history itself, and who could tell us, if they could speak,

of so many vanished empires, religions, and races of humankind, there remains a small forest of younger cedars, which form a group, according to my guess, of four or five hundred trees or saplings. Every year in June, the people of Bsharri, Ehden, Qannoubine, and all the villages of the neighbouring valleys, climb to the cedars and celebrate Mass at their base. How many prayers have echoed beneath these branches! And what more beautiful temple, what altar closer to heaven, what canopy more majestic and holy than this highest plateau of Lebanon, these cedar trunks and domes of sacred branches, which have shaded, and still shade, the many generations of humankind, pronouncing the name of God variously, but recognising Him everywhere in His works, and worshipping Him in such natural manifestations! And I, too, prayed in the presence of those trees. The harmonious breeze that resounded in their sonorous branches played through my hair, and chilled my eyelids with tears of pain and adoration.

We re-mounted, and rode for three hours across the plateaus overlooking the Khadisha Valley; then descended to Qannoubine, the most famous Maronite monastery of all, in the Valley of the Saints. Before doing so, we had sight, also, of the Mar-Sarkis monastery, now abandoned to one or two hermits. Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, in 1810, met with an old Tuscan hermit who was ending his days there, after having been a missionary in India, Egypt, and Persia.

## The Qannoubine Monastery

I viewed the Qannoubine monastery from the top of a peak that juts out over the valley like a promontory. I handed my horse to the Arabs, and lay down in the sun on a rocky point from which the eye plunged straight down into the abyssal Valley of the Saints. The Kadisha River flows at the foot of this cliff, its course but a line of foam, but I was so high up that the sound failed to reach me. Qannoubine was founded, say the Maronite monks, by Theodosius the Great (*in 375AD*). The entire Valley of the Saints resembles a vast natural nave, with the sky as its dome, the peaks of Lebanon as its pillars, and the countless hermits' cells carved into the rock-face as its chapels.

These hermitages are suspended over precipices that seem unapproachable. They are scattered like swallows' nests at every height along the valley walls. Some are merely caves carved into the rock, others are small cottages built among the roots of a few trees, on the projecting ledges of the mountains. The large monastery is sited below, on the bank of the stream. There were forty or fifty Maronite monks busy at work there, some ploughing, others printing elementary books for the instruction of the people; excellent monks, who are the sons and fathers of the people, who do not merely live by their sweat, but who work night and day for the advancement of their brothers; simple men, with no aspirations to wealth, or renown in this world. To work, to pray, to live in peace, to die in grace, unknown to others: such is the entire ambition of the Maronite monks.

I descended to Tripoli from the heights with the sheikh and his tribe. I gave his son a piece of silk cloth to cover a divan.

*April 19, 1833.*

I spent a day exploring the delightful surroundings of Tripoli, and then set off again for Beirut along the sea coast. I have spent the last five days loading our luggage onto the brig I chartered,

the *Bonne-Sophie*, in preparation for a tour of Egypt. I have said my farewells to our Frankish and Arab friends, and have given away several of my horses; I have also sent six of the finest ones off in the care of an Arab squire and three of my best sais so that they might, by traversing Syria and Caramania, await my arrival, by July 1st, in Asia Minor, on the shore of the Gulf of Macri, opposite the island of Rhodes.

## Departure from Beirut

*April 20, 1833.*

At daybreak, we left the house where Julia kissed me for the last time, before she departed for Heaven! The floor of her room kissed a thousand times, and soaked through by many a tear, seemed like a shrine consecrated to her; I still saw her everywhere: the birds, especially the doves, her horse, the garden, the two beautiful Syrian girls who used to play with her and who lodge beneath our windows amidst the garden. The pair rose before dawn, dressed in their richest attire: they wept; they raised their hands to us, and plucked the flowers from their hair; I gave each of them, as a memento of the foreign friends they would never see again, except in memory, a necklace of gold coins for their wedding; one of them, Anastasia, is the most beautiful woman I have seen in the East.

The sea is like a mirror; longboats, laden with our friends, who came to escort us aboard, followed ours; we set sail in a light easterly breeze; the Syrian coast, fringed with its sand, disappeared with all its palm fronds; the white peaks of Lebanon over the sea seemed to follow us for a long time; we rounded Cape Carmel during the night; at daybreak, we were off the coast of Acre, opposite the Gulf of Haifa; the sea is beautiful, and the waves are furrowed by a multitude of dolphins leaping around the ship; everything has an appearance of celebration, and delight in Nature, amidst the waves all around this ship that bears two hearts dead to all joy and serenity. I spent the night on deck, with what thoughts? My heart alone knows!

*April 21.*

We sailed along the low-lying coasts of Galilee; Jaffa gleamed on the horizon, like a hill of chalk above a shore of white sand; we headed there; I intend to stay there for a few days; my wife, and those of my friends who could not accompany me on my journey to Jerusalem, do not wish to pass so close to the sacred tomb without offering further lament there. In the evening, the wind freshened, and we dropped anchor at seven in the stormy harbour of Jaffa; the sea was too rough to launch a boat.

## Jaffa (Tel Aviv-Yafo)

*April 22nd to the 26th, 1833.*

Next day, we disembarked. A caravan had been prepared by the Messieurs Damiani, my old friends the French agents in Jaffa; my wife and companions set off at eleven so as to reach Ramla by nightfall: I remained alone at Monsieur Damiani's.

I have spent five days wandering alone in the surrounding area: the Arab friends I had met in Jaffa during my first two visits led me to the gardens they owned near the city; I have already described these gardens: they are dense groves of orange, lemon, pomegranate, and fig trees, trees as large as walnut trees in France; the Gaza desert surrounds these gardens on all sides; a family of Arab peasants lives in an adjoining hut; there is a cistern or a well, a few camels, goats, sheep, doves, and chickens. The ground is covered with oranges and lemons that have fallen from the trees; a tent is pitched on the bank of one of the irrigation canals that water the land, which is sown with melons and cucumbers; carpets were spread there; the tent was open on the seaward side to receive the breeze that blows from ten in the morning until evening. It is perfumed as it passes beneath the orange trees, and bears clouds of orange blossom. From there one can see the tops of the minarets of Jaffa, and the ships that pass between Asia Minor and Egypt.

I spent my days thus, and wrote a few verses on the subject of the only thought that occupies me. I would like to remain here: Jaffa, isolated from the whole world, on the edge of the great Egyptian desert, whose sand forms white dunes around these orange groves, under a sky that is always pure and warm, would be a perfect place for a man tired of life, who desires only a place in the sun. The caravan has returned.

I asked Madame de Lamartine for some details about Bethlehem and the surrounding sites, which the plague prevented me from visiting on my first trip. She has handed them to me, and I am including them here.

## Jerusalem and Bethlehem: Notes by Marianne de Lamartine

'Leaving the gardens of Jaffa, we spurred our horses into a gallop across a vast plain, covered at this season with yellow and purple thistles. From time to time, a large herd, driven before him by an Arab horseman armed with a long lance, as in the Pontine Marshes, searched for scarce sustenance among the grasses that the sun had not yet completely scorched. Further on, to our right, at the entrance to the El-Arish (*Sinai*) desert, a few mounds of mud, covered with dry grass, emerged from the earth like haystacks yellowed by the storm before they could be harvested: they indicated the presence of a village.

As we approached naked children emerged, like Laplanders, from the small inverted cones that formed their dwellings; some women, with hair hanging down, and barely covered by a dark blue shirt, left the fire they were lighting on two stones so as to prepare their meal, and clambered to the top of their hut, in order to see us pass by.

After a four-hour ride, we arrived at Ramla, where we were met by the agent of the Sardinian consulate, who kindly offered us lodging at his house, as women could not be accommodated at the Latin monastery. In the evening, we visited an ancient tower, a half a mile or so from the town, called the Tower of the Forty Martyrs (*the fourteenth century minaret of the White Mosque in Ramla*), now occupied by whirling Dervishes. It was a Friday, a day of ceremony for their worship; we attended. About twenty Dervishes, dressed in long robes and pointed white felt caps, were squatting in a circle within an enclosure surrounded by a small balustrade; the one who appeared to be the leader, a venerable figure with a long white beard, was, by way of distinction, seated on a cushion and towered above the others. An orchestra composed of a *ney* or reed-pipe, a *shababa*, like a flute, and

two small drums joined together, called *naqqaras* (*the medieval 'naker' of the Crusaders*), played the most discordant tunes to our European ears. The Dervishes rose solemnly one by one, passed before the superior, bowed to him, and began to spin in a circle, arms outstretched and eyes raised to the heavens. Their movement, at first slow, gradually became more animated, reaching extreme speed, and finally forming a kind of whirlwind, in which everything was mere dazzling confusion, as far as the gaze could make them out. As they followed each other, their eyes seemed to express great exaltation, but soon nothing could be distinguished. I cannot say how long this strange dance lasted, but it seemed incredibly long. Little by little, however, the number of whirlers diminished; exhausted, they collapsed one after another and retired to their initial positions. The last of them seemed to put great effort into spinning as long as possible, and it was painful to see this one old Dervish, panting and staggering at the end of his arduous ordeal, and only yielding after all the others.

Meanwhile, our Arabs were telling us about their superstitions; they claimed that a Christian, continually reciting the Creed could force a Muslim to spin endlessly, by an irresistible impulse, until he died; and that there were many examples of this; and, further, that once the Dervishes had discovered whoever who had cast the spell, they forced them to recite the Creed backwards, and thus destroyed the charm just as the whirler was about to expire. We, for our part, reflected, sadly, on the weakness of human reason, which gropes its way to heaven like a blind person, and so often takes the wrong path. These bizarre extravagances, which in a way degrade the human spirit, nevertheless have a respectable aim and pursue a noble principle. Here is mankind seeking to honour God; the human mind seeking exaltation through physical movement, and to arrive, as through the use of opium, at that divine stupor, that complete annihilation of feeling and self, which allows it to believe that it has been plunged into the infinite oneness, and is communicating with God. Perhaps it is a pious imitation of the celestial bodies dancing before the Creator. Perhaps it was an effect of this same enthusiastic and passionate inspiration that once made David dance before the ark of the Lord (*Second Samuel 6:20-22*).

Some of our company, were tempted to mock the Dervishes as did the wife of the poet-king. They seemed to them to be acting foolishly, just as certain monastic observances, the mendicancy of our monks, or the mortifications of certain ascetic orders might appear foolish to those ignorant of the essence of our worship; but however absurd a religious practice may seem to reason at first glance, a deeper and higher reason always finds something in it to respect: the motive that inspires it. Nothing that touches on the idea of God is ridiculous; it is sometimes atrocious, often foolish, but always serious.

The Dervish's conscience is at peace when he has completed his pious dance, and he believes that his pirouettes have honoured the Divine. While we may not consider him ridiculous, we are sometimes tempted to pity him, and I know not if we have any more right to the former than the latter. Where would we ourselves be without the teachings of Christianity, which have enlightened our reason? Would it be any brighter than his? History provides an answer. Only a single Plato for every thousand idolaters.

Leaving the tower, we entered the galleries of a ruined cloister, which led to an underground church; we descended several steps beneath a low vault, supported by a beautiful colonnade. The sight of an underground church has always struck me as imposing and both touching and poignant. The mysterious darkness, the solitude of these silent vaults, transport the imagination back to the

earliest days of worship, when Christians withdrew to deep caves to conceal their mysteries from profane eyes and escape persecution. In the East, most of these churches seem built to embellish primitive sanctuaries and adorn, with all the luxury of architecture, those humble retreats where faith had long been hidden, as if to avenge, through a dazzling act of reparation, the humiliations and insults of pagan domination; but the days of persecution were destined to return for the unfortunate Christians, and the name of this monument, the Forty Martyrs, would suggest that it served as a refuge for the faithful, without being able to protect them. Now, everything is in ruins: the naves and colonnades built by the emperors commanded no more respect from the victors than the humble caves of the first disciples of the cross. The vaults serve as stables, and the cloisters as barracks.

One can still see a few tombs from the time of the Crusaders, but nightfall prevented us from lingering further: we were obliged to return to our lodgings and prepare our caravan for the next day. The Aga of Ramla gave us an escort and instructed the chief *cavas* not to quit me for a moment in the mountain passes we were about to enter, and to obey my orders in everything. The respect Muslims show for European women contrasts sharply with the manner in which they treat their own. Indeed, we had much to praise for the extreme attentiveness of this Janissary and his refined politeness. Constantly occupied with the Arabian mare I was riding, he seemed frightened that I might dare to forge ahead, and did not understand that I could keep my balance on the steep paths we were climbing. He was very useful to us later, when we met, in precisely these same gorges, countless pilgrims returning from Jerusalem, blocking our passage: he forced them to yield to us the least impassable path among the granite blocks and the roots of the shrubs that bordered the ravine and prevented us from tumbling over the precipice; without his authority, the long procession still moving towards us would, indeed, if the rear had chanced to drive the head of the column forward, have infallibly knocked us over.

Leaving Ramla, the road continues across the plain for five miles; we stopped at Jacob's Well (*see John 4:6-7*); but having no jug with which to draw water, and the level being very low, we continued on our way. This whole country preserves such vivid traces of biblical times that one feels no surprise, no difficulty in accepting the traditions that give the name of Jacob to a well that is still in existence; and one expects to see the patriarch watering Rachel's flocks there, rather than doubting its identity. It is only through reflection that one arrives at astonishment or doubt, the past four thousand years, and the various phases that humanity has undergone, presenting themselves to the imagination and shaking one's faith: however, in a plain where water is found only every three or four hours, a well, a spring, was as important in past centuries as it is today, and its name could have been preserved as reverently as that of the Towers of David or the Cisterns of Solomon. We soon entered the mountains of Judea; the path became difficult; sometimes the edge of a precipice left the horses scant room for their feet; sometimes blocks of stone, rolled and piled up across the path, formed a rough staircase that only Arabian horses are able to cross; yet, however difficult this path was, it presented no dangers comparable to those offered by the road to Hammana.

At the summit of the first peak, we turned for a moment to enjoy a magnificent view of the entire country we had just traversed, stretching to the coast beyond Jaffa. Although everything was calm around us, red, heavy cloud above the sea signalled an approaching storm to the experienced eye. Already, menacing waves were tossing the ships about in the harbour. We tried to make out

our own vessel; and thought of those who had remained on board. My grim predictions were not unfounded: the next day, several ships were driven onto that dangerous coast, and ours, after dragging its anchor for a long time, broke its cable in the midst of a terrifying squall.

After this brief respite, we descended the mountainside only to climb yet more slopes further on, sometimes with avalanches of stones rolling beneath our horses' hooves, sometimes along narrow ledges. The hillsides, to the right and left, were occasionally heavily wooded; the bright green of the beautiful strawberry trees (*arbutus unedo*) and laurustinus bushes (*viburnum tinus*) contrasted with the sparse foliage of the mastic and olive trees. Often, all that was lacking was water to complete the landscape; but a spectacle of a different nature awaited us.

A procession of countless pilgrims from all nations, returning from Jerusalem, was passing before us, winding its way, from the summit of a bare and arid mountain, down into the gorge where we found ourselves. Nothing can convey the picturesque effect of this scene, the diversity of colours, costumes, and bearing: from the wealthy Armenian to the poorest *kaloyer* (*Greek monk of the Order of Saint Basil*), everything contributed to its beauty. After admiring the overall effect, we had ample leisure to examine the details during the two hours we spent crossing paths with one another: sometimes a Greek patriarch in his fine attire, majestically seated on a red and gold saddle, his horse's bridle held by two sais, and followed by a crowd on foot, a procession resembling the triumphal march of a papal legate in the Middle Ages; sometimes a poor family whose father, with a pilgrim's staff, led a mule laden with small children; the eldest, seated on the animal's neck, holding a rope for a bridle and a candle for a standard. Other children, piled into baskets placed at either side, nibbled at scraps of holy bread; the mother, pale and exhausted, followed with difficulty, nursing the youngest, tied to her breast by a wide belt; then came a long line of neophytes, each holding an enormous Paschal candle, according to the Greek rite, and chanting in a nasal, monotonous tone; further on, Jews with red turbans, long black beards, and penetrating eyes. Why were they among this crowd of Christians? Some had taken advantage of the caravan to visit David's tomb (*the site on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, near the Church of the Dormition*) or the Valley of Tiberias; others perhaps were there to supply essentials to the multitude. From time to time, the crowd on foot was interrupted by a few camels loaded with immense bundles, and accompanied by their attendants in Arab dress: a jacket and wide brown trousers embroidered with blue, a yellow *kaffiyeh* on their heads. Then came Armenian families; the women, hidden under the large white veil, travelled in a *tactrewan*, a kind of cage carried by a pair of mules; the men in long dark-coloured robes, their heads covered with the large square *kalpac* of the inhabitants of Smyrna, led their sons by the hand, whose serious, thoughtful, calculating appearance revealed nothing of the carefreeness of childhood. Greek sailors and privateer captains, from the ports of Asia Minor and the Archipelago, burdened with pilgrims like a slave ship full of slaves, swore in their forceful language and pressed forward to disembark their cargo of men as quickly as possible. A sick child was carried on a litter, surrounded by his parents who wept over their dashed hopes for the miracle of sudden healing they had hoped for from their pious pilgrimage. Alas! I too wept! I had hoped and prayed like them; but, even more wretched, I could no longer doubt the extent of my own misfortune!

Finally, a crowd of ragged, unfortunate Copts — men, women, and children — passed by, dragging themselves along with difficulty as if they were leaving hospital. This entire group, scorched by the sun and panting with thirst, marched on and on, endlessly seeking to reach the

caravan and not be left behind in the mountain passes; I blushed to feel myself on horseback, escorted by Janissaries, accompanied by devoted friends, who spared me all danger, all hardship, while fervent faith had led thousands of individuals to brave fatigue, illness, and privations of every kind. They were true pilgrims: I was merely a tourist.

Between this first mountain range and the last heights overlooking Jerusalem lies a pretty valley and the village of Jeremiah (*Abu Gosh*). We had just passed the old Greek church, which, like so many others, is now a stable, when we saw about fifty Arabs arranged in an amphitheatre on the hillside, squatting under beautiful olive trees. In the middle of the circle, on a small rise overlooking the others, was the leader, the famous Abu Gosh himself; standing beside him were his brother and son, covered in their weapons and holding their pipes; their horses, tied to the trees behind them, completed the scene. Upon the arrival of our caravan, Abu Gosh sent his son to parley with our dragoman, who was marching at the head of the group. Having learned that the escort was bringing to Jerusalem the wife of the Frankish emir whom he had met six months earlier, he asked us to stop and drink coffee. We were careful not to refuse; and, having distributed provisions to our attendants and servants for their comfort, we allowed ourselves to be led a short distance from the group of Arabs. There, our dignity demanded that we halt until they, in turn, advanced to meet us. Abu Gosh rose to his feet and approached Monsieur de Parseval. After exchanging many pleasantries and offering us coffee again, he requested a private audience. I had my men withdraw four paces away, and, through my interpreter, I learned that one of his brothers was a prisoner of the Egyptians, and that, believing Monsieur de Lamartine to wield immense influence in Ibrahim Pasha's councils, he begged me to intercede on his behalf to secure his brother's release. We were certainly far from having the influence he assumed we possessed; but as chance would have it, I was able to do him a service by pleading his case with the commander of the Egyptian army.

Upon approaching Jerusalem, our view of the walls was blocked by a large encampment of Ibrahim Pasha's troops. The sentries advanced, examined us, spoke to our dragoman, and opened a way for us through the camp. We soon found ourselves facing that general's tent. The drawn curtains revealed the man himself, reclining on a cashmere divan, surrounded by his officers, some standing, others seated on Persian carpets; their brightly coloured garments, trimmed with fine furs and embroidered with gold, their gleaming weapons, the Black African slaves who served coffee in silver *finjans* (*small handleless cups*), formed for us a brilliant and novel scene. Around the tents, their sais walked the finest of Arabian stallions, led by a rope, allowing the foam to dry on their gleaming coats; other horses, restrained by shackles, whinnied impatiently, stamped their feet, and glared fiercely at a cavalry platoon ready to depart. The Egyptian troops, made up of young conscripts dressed in meagre, tight-fitting red garments, half European, half Oriental, contrasted sharply with the Arabs, draped in flowing robes. And yet it was these short, ugly, poorly built Egyptians who had marched from conquest to conquest, making the Sultan tremble even at the gates of Constantinople.

We enter the holy city through the Bethlehem Gate (*the Al-Zararah Arch*), turning immediately left to reach the Latin monastery district. As women cannot be received there, we took possession of a house that is usually uninhabited, but which is occupied by foreigners when the monastery of the Fathers of the Holy Land is full. We spread mattresses on benches arranged for this purpose, hoping to rest from the emotions of the day, and regain strength to experience new and even more thrilling ones; but, assailed by thousands of insects — mosquitoes, fleas, bedbugs — which had

no doubt long lacked sustenance in these deserted rooms, or, even more troubling from the point of view of disease, had been left there by some of the ragged pilgrims we had encountered, all sleep became impossible, and the night was spent trying to defend ourselves by constantly changing position. Consequently, one of our travelling companions, despite our exhortations to patience, ended up seeking refuge in the monastery itself. The Procurador (*Bursar, of the Franciscans*) came to see us and told us that, had he been informed, he would have arranged better lodgings for us, and promised to arrange everything for the next day. I offered my sincerest apologies, assuring him that we lacked nothing, and I still have cause to be ashamed of my caution as regards this humble apostle of poverty and self-denial.

The Procurador, a Spaniard of superior intellect, was endowed with a profound understanding of people and affairs. During our stay in Jerusalem, I had particular occasion to appreciate his indulgent kindness, his merit, and the usefulness of his influence as regards the monastery of the Holy Land; but, barely fifty years old, his arduous career was soon to end here below in martyrdom — at the very moment when he perhaps hoped to enjoy some rest in his native land. Having embarked shortly after our departure to return to Spain, he was massacred, along with fifteen other monks, by Greek sailors, not far from the coast of Cyprus. A Muslim child, the only one to escape the carnage, pursued and denounced the murderers, who were arrested in Caramania.

The next day, at daybreak, we began to visit the holy sites. But I must stop here and remain silent about the intimate emotions these places inspired in me, because they are all personal. Nor will I speak of the appearance of the streets of Jerusalem, already described by my travelling companions. I kept all the impressions of my soul to myself; I had no need to write them down, they are too profound to ever be erased from my memory: if there are places in the world that have the power to awaken all the sadness and grief in the human heart, and to respond to mental pain with a pain that is, so to speak, physical, they are those I viewed. Every step one takes there resounds to the very depths of the soul like a voice of lamentation, and every glance falls upon a monument of sacred grief which absorbs our individual sorrows into the ineffable miseries of humanity which were suffered, expiated and consecrated here!

We left Jerusalem at five in the morning, so as to arrive in Bethlehem at the hour when Mass is said in the Grotto of the Nativity. An old Spanish monk, with a long beard, wearing a *mishlah* (*cloak-like robe*) striped with broad black and white bands, his feet touching the ground, mounted as he was on a very small donkey, walked ahead and served as our guide. Although it was April, a glacial wind was blowing violently and threatened to knock both myself and my horse over; these were the last gusts of the storm over the Jaffa Sea, reaching us. The swirling dust blinded me; I relinquished the reins of my mare to my Arabian sais and, gathering my mishlah around me, I concentrated on the reflections inspired by the road I was travelling and the sites consecrated by tradition. But these sites are only too well known, I will not stop to describe them: the olive tree of the prophet Elijah, the well where the star appeared once more to the Magi, the site of Ramah (*see Jeremiah 31:15*), from which came the heart-rending voice that resounded in my own breast, all excited in me sensations too intimate to be rendered.



'Bethlehem' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

The Latin monastery in Bethlehem had been closed for eleven months due to the plague; but for some time now there had been no new victims, and when we presented ourselves at the small, low door that serves as the entrance to the monastery, it was opened for us. After passing through, one by one, stooping beneath the narrow opening, our first reaction was one of surprise at finding ourselves in a majestic church (*the Church of the Nativity*): forty-four marble columns, each carved from a single block, arranged in two rows on each side, formed five naves, crowned by a massive cedarwood frame; but one searched in vain for the altar or the pulpit; everything was broken, dilapidated, stripped bare, and a crudely cemented wall divided this beautiful building at the base of the cross, thus concealing the part reserved for worship, possession of which the various Christian denominations still dispute. The nave belongs to the Latins, but serves only as a vestibule to the monastery; The main gate was walled up, and the low postern through which we had entered was built to protect these revered remains from the desecration of hordes of Arab brigands, who rode on horseback even to the foot of the altar to extort money from the monks. The abbot received us cordially: his gentle, calm, and cheerful face was as far removed from the austerity of the anchorite as from the jovial insouciance of which monks are often accused; he asked us about the country we had just travelled through, and about the Egyptian troops encamped so close to them. Eleven months of seclusion had made him eager for news, and he was completely reassured to learn that Ibrahim Pasha was granting protection to the Christian population of Syria.



'Shrine of the Nativity, Bethlehem' - David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*Cleveland Museum of Art*

After a few moments of rest, we prepared to attend Mass at the Nativity Chapel; a feeble lantern was lit, and we descended, preceded by the fathers, to a long labyrinth of underground corridors that must be traversed to reach the sacred grotto. These underground passages are filled with tombs and relics: here is the tomb of Saint Jerome, there that of Saint Paula, of Saint Eustochium (*the daughter of Paula*), and the Well of the Innocents; but nothing held our attention at that moment. The dazzling light of thirty to forty lamps, below a small vault at the end of the passage, revealed to us the altar built on the site of the Nativity, and, two steps lower, to the right, that of the Manger: these natural grottoes are partly lined with marble to protect them from the indiscreet piety of pilgrims, who tear at the walls to carry off fragments; but one can still touch the bare rock, behind the marble slabs with which it has been covered, and the underground passage in general has retained the irregularity of its original form. The ornamentation here, unlike in some holy places, has not altered the natural scene to the point of raising doubts about the identity of the site; here it serves only to preserve the original enclosure. Thus, passing under these vaults and recesses in the rock, one easily understands that they must have served as stables for the flocks that shepherds kept in the plain, still covered today with green meadows, stretching far, below the rocky platform crowned by the church and the monastery, as below a citadel. The external exit of the underground passages that connected to the meadows has been sealed, but a few steps further on, one can visit another cavern of the same type, which must have served the same purpose. We attended Mass.

Due to the state of mind I was in, I am, sadly, unable to express what that place and the associated ceremony should inspire; everything for me was summed up in a profound and painful feeling of tenderness. An Arab woman, who approached, so as to have her newborn baptised on

the altar of the Nativity, added further to my emotion. After Mass, we returned to the monastery, no longer via the underground passage, but by a wide and convenient staircase that led to the transept, behind the dividing wall I mentioned earlier. This staircase formerly belonged to both the Greek and Latin communions; now only the Greeks enjoy its use, and we listened to the fathers of Bethlehem's vehement complaints about this usurpation. They wanted to entrust us with asserting their claims in Europe, and we had difficulty persuading them that, though French, we had no authority to obtain justice for them.

The two side aisles that formed the transept of the old church are now divided into separate chapels; one belongs to the Armenians, the other to the Latins. In the centre, is the high altar, placed immediately above the grotto; the choir is separated from it by a grille and a section of gilded woodwork that hides the sanctuary of the Greeks.

The Greek church in the East is much richer than the Roman church: among the latter everything is humble and modest, among the former everything is brilliant and sumptuous; but the rivalry which arises from their respective positions produces an extremely painful impression; one sighs on noting the quarrel and discord in places which should inspire only charity and love.

The original construction of the church is attributed to Saint Helena (*the mother of Constantine I*), as are most of the Christian buildings in Palestine. It is true that some people raise objections, saying that, having reached an advanced age when she visited Syria, she could not have commissioned so many projects in her lifetime; but ideas require no space and little time. It seems to me that her creative will and pious zeal could well have presided over monuments begun at her command yet completed after her death. We returned to the monastery; an excellent meal was offered to us in the refectory by the kind Father Superior, whom we left with regret, wishing to use the remaining hours to explore the surrounding area. As we descended towards the plain, we were shown a grotto where tradition holds that the Virgin Mary withdrew at the time of her departure for Egypt. On some heights overlooking Bethlehem, one can see the remains of towers that mark different positions of the Crusader encampment, and bear the names of those heroes. We descended to the left along rough and arduous paths.

After an hour's ride, we arrived at a small, narrow, enclosed valley, watered by a clear stream. This is Solomon's Garden, the *hortus conclusus*, sung of in the Song of Songs (*4:12*): indeed, enclosed by the rocky peaks of the mountains that surround it on all sides, this unique place offers the means of cultivation, and the valley is at all times a delightful garden, cultivated with the greatest care, and presenting, with its beautiful, moist greenery, the most striking contrast to the stony aridity of all that surrounds it. It may be a mile or more long. We followed the meandering course of the stream, shaded by willows, sometimes following the grassy bank, sometimes our horses' hooves bathing in its waters flowing clear and bright over the smooth pebbles of its bed, occasionally crossing from one bank to the other on a cedar plank; and arrived beneath rocks that naturally close off the valley. A farmer offered to guide us on the ascent; but on the condition that we dismounted, and gave our mounts over to his boys, who, via a long detour, would lead them to the summit.

We turned to the right and climbed, laboriously, for an hour; reaching the summit, we found the most beautiful ancient remains we had ever seen: three immense cisterns (*Solomon's Pools*) hewn from the bedrock and following the mountain's slope, one above the other, in terraces; the walls as clean, the edges as sharp as if they had just been finished; their edges, covered with flagstones

like a quay, resounded beneath the horses' hooves. These beautiful basins, filled with crystal-clear water, on the summit of an arid mountain, are astonishing and inspire a lofty idea of the power that conceived and executed such a vast project; thus, they are attributed to Solomon. While I contemplated them, my travelling companions measured them and found each to be about four hundred feet by one hundred and seventy-five; the lowest is the longest, the highest the broadest: it has a width of at least two hundred feet; they grow larger and larger all the way to the top; above the highest of these gigantic cisterns, a small spring, hidden under a few clumps of greenery, is the *fons signatus ('a fountain sealed', see the Song of Solomon 4:12*) of the Bible, and is the sole source of water for these reservoirs, which formerly emptied into the aqueducts conducting water to the Temple in Jerusalem; we encountered the remains of these aqueducts constantly along our route.

Not far from there, ancient crenellated walls, probably dating from the time of the Crusades, surround an enclosure where tradition locates a palace inhabited by Solomon's wives. Little remains of it, and the site, covered in manure and refuse, now serves as a courtyard where shepherds and their livestock retire at night, when they come to graze the mountains during the grazing season, much as in the Swiss Alps. We returned to Jerusalem by an ancient, wide, paved road called Solomon's Road, which is much shorter and more direct than the one we had taken that morning; it does not pass through Bethlehem. Night was well advanced when we entered Jerusalem beneath the arch of the Pilgrims' Gate (*the Zion Gate, King David's Gate, or Bab Harat al-Yahud*).

On April 25th, after our final visit to the Holy Sepulchre, we asked the clergyman who was accompanying us to lead us around the exterior of the church, so that we could better appreciate the uneven terrain that explains the combination of the Sepulchre and Calvary within the same monument. This route is difficult because the church is surrounded by buildings that obstruct access; but by crossing a few courtyards and passing through some houses, we managed to view the parts that interested us.

We then mounted our horses to follow the city walls, and visit the Tomb of the Kings. North of Jerusalem, after leaving through the Damascus Gate, there is an excavation in the rock, about a mile or so away, forming a courtyard approximately twenty feet deep, enclosed on three sides by walls of rock hewn with a chisel, yielding sight of walls adorned with sculptures carved directly into the stone, and representing doorways, pilasters, and friezes of exquisite workmanship; one presumes that the gradual elevation of the soil-level has sunk the whole by several feet, for the opening on the left leading into the sanctuary is so low that one can only enter by crawling. We managed with extreme difficulty to gain entry, and light torches within. Swarms of bats, awakened by our invasion, assailed us and fought, as it were, to defend their territory; and if our retreat had been easy, I believe we would have given way before them. Gradually, calm was restored, and we were able to examine the burial chambers.

They are excavated and hewn from the living rock. The angles are as sharp and the walls as smooth as if the craftsmen had polished them while quarrying. We visited five of them, connected by openings to which, without a doubt, some stone blocks hewn to form doorways had been attached. These blocks lay on the ground, suggesting that each chamber had been closed and sealed when the niches in the walls, intended to hold sarcophagi or cinerary urns, were filled. Who were, or were assigned to be, the inhabitants of these dwellings, prepared at such great expense? That remains doubtful. Their origin has been hotly contested: the interior, simple yet magnificent, could

date back to the most ancient times, but nothing indicates a precise date. The exterior sculpture appears to be of a high degree of craftsmanship and a taste too pure to be from the distant times of the Kings of Judah. But, since I saw Baalbek, my ideas have changed considerably regarding the level of perfection to which art had reached before the known eras.

We continued our ride through some olive groves, and, descending again into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, we returned south along the walls of Zion. The Tomb of King David, the Holy Cenacle (*the Upper Room, above the Tomb of David, traditionally the site of the Last Supper*), and the Armenian church which possesses the stone which sealed the entrance to the Holy Sepulchre, tempted us to return through the same gate, *Bab an-Nabi Dawud* (*King David's Gate, the Zion Gate*); but when we sought to visit the underground chamber in which tradition asserts the bones of the prophet-king were interred, the Turks opposed us, and told us that entry was strictly forbidden; they suppose that immense riches have been buried in this royal vault, that foreigners possess the secret, and come there only to locate and steal them.

The Holy Cenacle is a large vaulted hall, supported by columns and blackened by time: if age is accepted as proof, it bears the marks of remote antiquity. Located on Mount Zion, outside the walls of the city in those days, it is quite possible that the disciples could have withdrawn there after the Resurrection, and that they were gathered there at the time of Pentecost, as popular tradition affirms. The sack of Jerusalem (*70AD*) under Titus left little standing except the towers and part of the walls; however, the locations remained sufficiently well-known; and the first Christians must have placed great importance on perpetuating the memory of them by means of successive edifices on the same sites, often employing the remains of the ancient monuments. But to detail the various places in Jerusalem would be merely to repeat the words of others, and I regretfully leave a subject to which my memories constantly draw me back. I will say only a word, entirely independent of religious associations, about the appearance of the village of tombs, Siloa, which has remained with me like a picture before my eyes.

The entire native population of Arabs dwelling there, in the cellars and sepulchral caves, would offer a painter a most original scene. Imagine, in the deep valley of Siloa, caverns with openings like oven mouths stacked one on top of the other, scattered across the face of the cliff, like irregular sections of a broken beehive; and, from these sepulchral caves, living beings, women, children, emerging like phantoms from the abode of the dead. I do not know if this subject has been treated before, but it seems to me that it offers the painter's brush, at once, every contrast and every harmony.

On April 26th, we cast our last glances at Jerusalem, and sadly resumed our journey to Jaffa. As we entered the Valley of Jeremiah (*Abu Gosh*), the sounds of wild music caught our attention: in the distance, we saw an entire Arab tribe marching down the hillside; I sent the dragoman ahead; he returned to tell us that everyone was gathered for the funeral of a chieftain, and that we could proceed without fear. He then told us that this chieftain had died suddenly the previous day while hunting, from inhaling the fumes of a poisonous plant; though the well-known character of the Arabs of Nablus, whose costume they wore, led us to believe that he had rather fallen victim to the jealousy of some rival chieftain. Despite their warlike habits and imposing appearance, the credulity of these naive people resembles that of children; any wondrous tale charms them, and arouses no distrust in their minds. An Arab friend of ours, a man of great intelligence and knowledge, often assured us, with a tone of conviction, that a sheikh of Lebanon possessed the

secret of the magic words that had been used in primitive times to move the gigantic blocks of Baalbek, but that he was too good a Christian ever to use them or to divulge them.

We quickened the pace of our horses and soon joined the procession: in the centre was the bier carried on a stretcher, hidden beneath rich draperies, and surmounted by the turban of the Ottomans. Arab women, naked to the waist, their long black hair flowing over their shoulders, their breasts bruised, their arms waving in the air, preceded the body, uttering cries, singing mournful songs, wringing their hands and tearing at their hair; musicians playing the *rebab* (*a string instrument*) and the *daff* (*a frame drum*) accompanied the voices with a continuous and monotonous thrumming and drumming. At the head of the procession walked the deceased's brother; his horse, covered in fine angora skins and adorned with red and gold tassels that swung from its head and chest, sometimes reared at the sound of this discordant music; priests in full regalia awaited the procession before the door of a tomb surmounted by a dome supported by an openwork colonnade; opposite stood the ruined church, whose flat roof was covered with women draped in long white veils, like the priestesses at the ancient sacrifices, or the mourners at the monuments of Memphis. When the chieftain approached the tomb, he dismounted and threw himself into the arms of the high priest with vivid displays of grief; the latter exhorted him to submit to Allah's will and to prove himself worthy to succeed his brother in the leadership of the tribe. Meanwhile, the procession having arrived, the body was laid to rest, the members of the group arranged themselves around the small temple, and the funeral chants resounded even more poignantly: these mournful pantomimes, this funeral pomp, these hymns of despair expressed in another language, with other rites, seemed to us a living memory of those lamentations with which Jeremiah had filled this same valley, and of which the biblical world retains an echo.'

## Departure from Jaffa

*The evening of April 26th, 1833.*

We embarked on an already rough sea, enormous waves crashing like mountains of foam against the rocky sides of the passage; we held back a moment behind these rocks for a group of these waves to pass, and then, with all our oarsmen's might, were launched into the open sea; the waves returned, each one lifting us like a cork on its back; we then plunged back down as into an abyss, neither the ship nor the shore now visible; then rose again, to pitch and toss once more, foam covering us with a veil of rain. We finally reached the ship's side, but its movements were so violent we dared not approach, for fear of being struck by the yards which were dipping into the waves; we waited for a break in the swell; a rope was thrown; the ladder was placed: we were on deck.

The wind's direction was contrary; we remained doubly-anchored, exposed at any moment to shipwreck, should the enormous movement of the waves break the anchor chains. Hours of physical and mental anguish due to the dreadful pitching and tossing ensued. During the evening and night, the wind whistled through the rigging, its tones like those of the high-pitched pipes of an organ; the ship leapt like a ram striking the earth with its horns; the bow plunged into the sea, and seemed ready to sink each time a wave arrived and lifted the stern; we heard the cries of the Arab sailors aboard other ships bringing poor Greek pilgrims to Jerusalem. These small ships, some carrying two or three hundred women and children, tried to set sail to flee the coast; some

passed close to us; the women cried out, holding out their hands to us; great waves engulfed the vessels and carried them backwards a great distance; some managed to claw themselves away from the coast; two were driven onto the breakwaters of the harbour near Gaza; our anchors gave way, and we were dragged towards the rocks of the inner harbour; the captain ordered another one dropped. The wind eased, and shifted a little in our favour; we fled, in grey and misty weather, towards the Gulf of Damietta, and lost sight of land.

During the day, we made good progress; the sea was calm, but early signs of a storm worried the captain and the first mate; it broke at nightfall; the wind freshened by the hour, the waves became increasingly high; the ship creaked and strained; the ropes whistled and vibrated in the gusts of wind like strands of metal; their high-pitched and plaintive sounds resembled the lamentations of Greek women, amidst the processions of their dead; we no longer carried sail; the ship rolled from one abyss to another, and each time it fell on its side, the masts seemed to collapse into the sea like uprooted trees, as the water, beneath their weight, crashed back and covered the deck. All except the crew and myself descended between decks; we could hear the groans of the sick, and the crashing of crates and pieces of furniture as they struck the sides of the brig. The brig itself, despite its strong frame and the enormous beams that spanned it from side to side, creaked and groaned as if the vessel were about to split wide open. The waves crashing against the stern resounded from moment to moment like cannon fire. At two in the morning, the storm intensified further. I tied myself to the mainmast with rope to avoid being swept away by the wave, and sliding into the sea, the deck listing almost perpendicularly. Wrapped in my coat, I contemplated this sublime spectacle. I occasionally went below deck to reassure my wife, who was lying in her hammock. Amidst this dreadful storm, the first mate only left the helm to go from cabin to cabin, offering each person the assistance their condition required: a man of iron in the face of peril, with a woman's tenderness in the face of affliction.

The whole night passed in this way. The sunrise, which was only noticeable by a pale light spreading across the waves, and between the mingled clouds, far from diminishing the force of the wind, seemed to augment it even more; as far as the eye could see, hills of foaming water rose behind other hills. As they passed, the brig driven in every direction, crushed by one, lifted by another, launched in one direction by a wave, stopped in flight by an opposing wave which forcibly imposed a fresh direction on it, fell now on one side, now on the other. The prow plunged forward as if it were about to be swallowed up; the sea which flowed over the vessel fled from its stern, or crossed it from one side to the other. From time to time, the vessel rose; the sea, flattened by the wind, seemed unable to produce more waves and became a mere field of swirling foam, as if we had reached a plain, between those enormous hills of water, allowing the brig a moment's respite: but she soon returned to a region amidst tall waves, rolling again from precipice to precipice.

With equally dreadful choices before us, the day slipped away; the captain consulted me: the shores of Egypt are low-lying and we could be cast aground before even seeing them; the shores of Syria have neither roadstead nor harbour; so, we were obliged either to heave to, amidst the waves, or run before the wind driving us towards Cyprus. There, we could enter a roadstead and find safe haven; but we were at least a hundred and fifty miles away. I ordered the helm set for the island; the wind propelled us forward at a speed of seven to eight knots, its strength not subsiding. A few drops of cold broth sustained the strength of my wife and my companions, still lying in their hammocks. I myself ate a few pieces of biscuit, and smoked with the captain and the first

mate, always in the same position on deck near the cabin, my arms tucked into the ropes that protected me from the waves. Night fell, an even more dreadful one; the clouds weighed heavily on the sea, the entire horizon was torn apart by lightning, all around us seemed on fire; the lightning seemed to leap from the crests of the waves, indistinguishable from the clouds, and crashed down around us three times. Once, as the brig was thrown onto its side by a colossal wave, the yards plunged, the masts struck the surface, and the foam hurled up by the blow shot forth like a torn cloak of flame its shreds scattered by the wind, like fiery serpents; the entire crew shouted aloud; we seemed to be plunged into a volcanic crater.

It was the most terrifying and magnificent of storms that I witnessed during that long night. For nine hours straight, thunder enveloped us; every minute we thought to see our flaming masts fall upon us and set the ship ablaze. In the morning, the sky was less overcast, but the sea resembled boiling lava; the wind, which had dropped somewhat and no longer supported the ship, made the rolling heavier: we must have been eighty miles from the island of Cyprus. At eleven we began to glimpse land; hour by hour it grew clearer: we had sight of Limassol, one of the ports of that island; we set all sails to tack downwind as soon as possible: as we approached, the sea calmed a little; we sailed along the coast at a distance of five or six miles, to reach the roadstead of Larnaca, in which we could already see the masts of a large number of ships that, like ourselves, had sought refuge: the furious wind picked up again, and drove us there in a short while; the ship's momentum was so strong that we feared breaking our cables when dropping anchor: finally the anchor touched bottom; dragged a few fathoms and bit into the sea-bed. The sea was still choppy, but the waves rocked us gently. I saw again the flags of the European consuls of Cyprus saluting us from the summits of the flagpoles, and the terrace of the French consulate, from which our friend Alphonse Bottu sent us welcoming signals; everyone remained on board; my wife could not without heartbreak view the excellent and happy family of Monsieur Bottu, amidst which she, as happy as they, had met with such hospitality fifteen months ago.

## Cyprus

I went ashore with the captain; I received from Monsieur and Madame Bottu, and from Monsieur Perthier and Alexiano Guillois, a young Frenchman attached to the consulate, the touching marks of kindness and friendship I had hoped for from them. I visited Monsieur Mathéi, the Greek banker to whom I had been previously recommended. We sent provisions of all kinds to the brig, and Monsieur Mathéi added gifts of Cypriot wine and Syrian sheep. While I was touring the outskirts of the city with Monsieur Bottu, the storm, which had subsided, renewed itself; communication with the ships in the harbour was now impossible; the waves covered the quays and hurled foam as high as the windows of the houses; I spent a dreadful evening and night on the terrace or at the window of my room, at the French consulate, watching the brig, where my wife was, tossed about in the harbour by immense waves, trembling at every moment lest the anchors lifted and the ship was thrown onto the reefs, with all that remains of my happiness in this world.

The following evening, the sea finally calmed; we returned to the brig, and spent three hours in the roadstead, waiting for better winds, and constantly visited by Monsieur Mathéi and Monsieur Bottu. The latter, our young and amiable consul, was the French agent in the East who welcomed his compatriots most cordially, and honoured them, in his nation's name. I carry a weight of

gratitude and true friendship, recalling his twice receiving us on the island. He was happy, surrounded by a wife after his own heart, and his children who were his greatest joy. I learned that death struck him down not long after our visit (*he died suddenly, on August 24th, 1833*); his position was his family's only fortune; this fortune he devoted entirely to his duties as consul; his poor wife and beautiful children are now at the mercy of France, which he served and honoured with all his might: may France think of them in remembering him!

*April 31, 1833.*

We set sail, the winds variable. We spent three days rounding the western tip of the island by running back and forth along the shore, sighting Mount Olympus (*Olimbos*), Paphos, and Amathus (*the ancient city, its ruins are near Limassol*), with ravishing view of the coasts and mountains of Cyprus from the south. This island might be the most beautiful colony in Asia Minor; it has only thirty thousand inhabitants; it could feed and enrich millions of men; it is everywhere cultivable, everywhere fertile, wooded, irrigated, with natural harbours and ports on all its coasts. Situated between Syria, Caramania, the Greek archipelago, Egypt, and the coasts of Europe, it could become the garden of the world.

*May 1, 1833.*

In the morning, we sighted the first peaks of Caramania in the distance; the Taurus mountains, jagged peaks covered with snow much like the Alps when viewed from Lyon. We met with gentle, variable winds. Splendid starry nights followed. We entered the Gulf of Satalia (*Antalya*) by night; the appearance of this gulf, is like an inland sea. The wind dropped, the ship slumbered as if on a lake. Wherever one's gaze turned, it fell upon the mountainous surrounds of the bays; mountain ranges of all shapes and heights fled one behind the other, sometimes leaving, between their uneven peaks, high valleys where the silvery light of the moon swam. White patches of vapour trailed along their flanks, and their crests were drowned in waves of pale purple; behind rose the angular peaks of Taurus like snow-white teeth. A few low, wooded headlands extended here and there into the sea, and small islands appeared, like ships at anchor, detached here and there from the shore; a profound silence reigned over the sea and land; one heard only the splashing of dolphins, leaping from time to time from the depths of the waves, bounding as little goats do over a lawn. The waves, smooth and marbled with silver and gold, seemed like fluted Ionian columns laid on their sides. The brig experienced not the slightest oscillation. At midnight a land breeze arose. We slowly exited the Gulf of Satalia, and skimmed the coast as far as the island of Castelrozzo (*Kastelorizzo*); we entered all the gulfs, and almost touched land. The ruined edifices, now empty and solitary, of Asia Minor, which once comprised several kingdoms, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia, were highlighted on the promontories; the valleys and plains were covered with forests; the Turkomans arrive and pitch their tents here during the winter; in the summer, everything is deserted, except for a few points on the coast, such as Tarsus (*north-east of Mersin*), Satalia (*Antalya*), Castelrozzo (*Kastelorizzo*), and Marmaris, in the Gulf of Macri (*Fethiye*).

*May 1833.*

The current along the Caramania coast is pushing us towards the tip of the continent and the mouth of the Gulf of Macri; during the night we tacked to approach the island of Rhodes; the captain, fearing the proximity of the Asian coast due to the rising westerly wind, steered us back out to sea; we woke, barely in sight of Rhodes. We found our support brig, the *Alceste*, not far from us. The calm prevented us from approaching it all day, and in the evening, a fresh wind pushed us to the far end of the Gulf of Marmaris. At midnight, the land breeze returned. We entered the port of Rhodes at daybreak.

## Rhodes

*May 1833.*

We spent three days exploring the coast of Rhodes, full of delightful sites, on the mountain slopes overlooking the archipelago. After a two-hour walk along the shore, I entered a valley shaded by beautiful trees and watered by a small stream. Following the stream's banks, lined with oleanders, I reached a small plateau that forms the valley's final tier. There stood a small house inhabited by a poor Greek family. The house, almost entirely covered by the branches of fig and orange trees, possesses, in its garden, the ruins of a small temple of the Nymphs, a grotto, and a few scattered columns and capitals, half-hidden by ivy and the roots of shrubs. Above it lay a lawn a few hundred paces wide, with a spring. There, two or three sycamore trees grew. One of the sycamore trees alone shaded the entire lawn: it is the sacred tree of the island; the Turks respect it, and when the unfortunate Greek living there once tried to cut off a branch, the Pasha of Rhodes had him flogged. It is not true that the Turks destroy Nature or works of art: they leave everything as it is; their sole method of ruining everything lies in improving nothing.

Above the lawn and the sycamore trees, the steep hills are covered with fir woods, and little streams cascade down, carving ravines from the flanks; higher still the island's mountains rise, and shade the hills, the meadow, and the spring. From the edge of the fountain where I lay, I viewed, through the branches of pines and sycamores, the sea of the Asian archipelago, which resembles a lake dotted with islands, and the deep gulfs that plunge between the high, dark mountains of Macri, all crowned with battlements of snow. I heard nothing but the sound of the spring, the wind in the leaves, the flight of a bulbul (*nightingale*) startled by my presence, and the plaintive song of a Greek woman cradling her child on the roof of her house. How beautiful this place would have seemed to me six months ago!

On a path in the high mountains of Rhodes, I met a Cypriot chieftain, dressed in European style but wearing a Greek cap and sporting a long white beard. I recognised him: his name was Theseus; he was the nephew of the Patriarch of Cyprus (*Archbishop Panaretos II);* he had distinguished himself in the war of independence. Having returned to Cyprus after the pacification of the Morea, his name, his spirit, and his energy had won him the affection of the Greek population of Cyprus. At the time of the recent uprising on the island, the mountain peasants rallied to his command; he used his influence to calm them; and after having, in concert with Monsieur Bottu the French consul, obtained redress for various grievances, he dispersed his troops and took refuge in the French consulate to escape the vengeance of the Turks. A Greek ship had

set him ashore on Rhodes, where he is not safe. I offered him a place on one of my brigs, and he has taken refuge there. I will transport him to Constantinople, to Greece or to Europe, according to his wish. He is a man who has constantly gambled with his life and fortune: a man sparkling with wit and audacity, speaking every language, knowing every country, with an interesting and inexhaustible conversation, as quick to act as to think; one of those men whose very nature is movement, who rise like birds in the storm, with the whirlwind of revolution, only to fall with them. Nature casts few souls in this mould; men thus made are usually unhappy: they are feared, and persecuted; they would be admirable instruments if one knew how to use them for their purpose. I am sending a boat to Marmaris, carrying a young Greek who will wait there for my horses and order my sais to join me in Constantinople. We have decided to go by sea, visiting the islands off the coast of Asia Minor and the shores of the mainland.

We set sail at midnight in a light breeze, rounding Cape Krio (*Deveboynu Burnu*) on the evening of the first day, followed by a beautiful and gentle stretch of water between the islands of Piscopia (*Telos, modern Tilos*), Nisyros, and the enchanted island of Kos, sacred to Aesculapius. After Rhodes, Kos seemed to me the most cheerful and graceful island in this archipelago; charming villages, shaded by beautiful plane trees, line its shores; the town of Kos is cheerful and elegantly built. In the evening, we found ourselves, with our two brigs, as if lost, amidst a maze of small, uninhabited islands; they were covered, down to the water's edge, with a carpet of tall grass; there are charming channels between them, and almost all have small coves where ships could drop anchor. What enchanting havens for those who complain of a lack of space in Europe! Here one has the climate and fertility of Rhodes and Kos, with a vast continent two leagues away. We sailed endlessly between the continent and the islands; seeing the sun shining brightly on the great ruins of the Greek and Roman cities of Asia Minor.

Next day, we returned to the narrow *boghaz* (*passage*) of Samos, between that island and Icaria; the high mountain that almost single-handedly forms the island of Samos towered above us, covered with rocks and pine forests; we could see groups of women and children among these rocks. The population of Samos, currently in revolt against the Turks, have taken refuge on the mountain; armed men reside in the city and on the shores. Samos is like one of the mountains above Lake Lucerne, only illuminated by an Asian sky; its base almost touches the mainland; we noted only a narrow channel separating the two.

## Cesme

A storm caught us in the Gulf of Scala Nova (*the Bay of Kusadasi*), not far from the ruins of Ephesus; we entered the Channel of Chios in the morning and sought refuge in the harbour of Cesme, famous for the destruction of the Ottoman fleet by Admiral Alexis Orlov (*7th of July, 1770*). The enchanting island of Chios stretches like a green hill on the far side of a great river; its white houses, its towns, its villages, clustered on the shaded slopes of the hills, gleam among the orange trees and vines; what remains suggests immense recent prosperity and a large population. The Turkish regime, apart from enforcing servitude was unable to stifle the active, industrious, commercial, and agricultural spirit of the Greek people of these beautiful islands. I know of nothing in Europe that presents the appearance of greater wealth than Chios; it is a garden a hundred and thirty miles or so in circumference.

We indulged in a day trip to the ruins and mineral-water springs of Chesme (*on the Turkish mainland*).

*May 26, 1833.*

The sea was calm; we set sail for Smyrna (*Izmir*), on a day of variable winds, spent gently following the coast of Chios. The woods extend down to the sea; the gulfs all have fortified towns, their harbours filled with small vessels. The smallest cove has its village, and countless little sailboats skim the shores, carrying Greek women and girls on their way to church. On every hilltop, in every gorge, one sees a church or a whitewashed village. We rounded the tip of the island, and met with a counter-wind pushing us into the Gulf of Smyrna. Till nightfall we enjoyed the sight of the beautiful forests and large alpine villages that border the western coast of the gulf; at night, we were in calm waters not far from the Urla Islands, where we saw the lights of the French fleet (*the Levant fleet, commanded by Admiral Gaud Amable Hugon, 1st Baron Hugon*), anchored there for six months, shining brightly. In the morning, we glimpsed Smyrna nestled against an immense cypress-covered hill at the head of the gulf. High crenellated walls crowned the upper part of the city; beautiful wooded countryside stretched to the left as far as the mountains. Here flows the Meles River; the memory of Homer (*who was said to have been born near the river*) hovered about me always near Smyrna. I searched for that tree on the bank of that river, obscure at the time, where the poor slave girl placed her offspring among the reeds: a child destined one day to bring eternal glory to the river and its name, the continent, and the islands. The poet heaven bestowed upon the earth here was destined to portray all of divine and human antiquity for us. He was born and abandoned on the banks of a river, like Moses in the Biblical text; he lived, blind and in poverty, like those divine incarnations in India, who traversed the world disguised as beggars, and were only recognised as gods after their passing. Modern scholarship pretends not to see a man, but a composite literary school, in Homer; one of the hundred thousand learned paradoxes with which men try to combat the evidence of their innermost instincts. As far as I am concerned, Homer was a single individual, a man with ever the same accents in his voice, the same tears in his heart, the same tones in his speech; accepting a whole band of 'Homeric' poets seems to me more difficult than accepting the existence of a race of giants. Nature does not display such wonders in parallel; it creates a Homer, and then defies the ages to produce again such a perfect combination of reason, philosophy, sensitivity, and genius.

## Smyrna (Izmir)

*May 29, 1833*

I visited Smyrna, and explored the city and its surroundings with Monsieur Salzani, a banker and merchant of the city, a man as kind as he was amiable and learned; for three days I have taken advantage of his generosity; we return each day to sleep aboard the brig. Smyrna failed to correspond to my ideas of an Eastern city; it is like a Marseille on the coast of Asia Minor; a vast and elegant trading post where European consuls and merchants live the life of Paris and London. The view of the gulf and the city is beautiful when seen from above the cypress trees on the mountain. On our way down, we found a charming spot on the banks of the Meles, which I enjoyed the thought of being beside, not far from one of the city gates; it was near the Caravan

Bridge (*Kervan Koprusu, constructed c850BC*): the river there was a limpid stream, sleeping peacefully beneath a canopy of sycamores and cypresses; We sat on its banks, and the Turks brought us pipes and coffee. I loved to hear the water murmuring, softly, among the roots of the plane trees along this river which perhaps heard Homer's first cries. I raised it to my lips; I bathed my burning brow with it. May some person destined to create the poem of their time, embodying their dream, and their ideal, be born once more to the Western world! Such a poem becomes the sepulchre of a bygone age, which future generations may visit, in order to venerate a lost tradition, and which eternalises, through the perusing of its glories, the great deeds and great thoughts of humanity. One who creates such a work engraves their name at the foot of the statue they raise to mankind, and lives on, via all the images with which they fill the world of ideas.

This evening, I was invited to the home of an old man who lives alone with two Greek servants in a small house on the quayside, in Smyrna. The staircase, the vestibule, and the rooms are full of fragments of sculpture, relief maps of Athens, and pieces of marble and porphyry. He is Monsieur Fauvel (*Louis-François-Sébastien Fauvel, known in France as the father of Archaeology in Greece. He was seventy-nine at the time, dying in 1838*) our former consul in Greece. Driven from Athens, which had become his home, and whose dust he sifted all his life, like a native son, in order to restore its statues to the world, Fauvel now lives poor and unknown in Smyrna. He has brought his household gods with him and worships them constantly. Monsieur de Chateaubriand saw him in his younger days (*in Athens in 1806, when Fauvel was fifty-three*), happy amidst the magnificent ruins of the Parthenon. I saw him old and exiled, and wounded by the ingratitude of men, but firm and cheerful in his misfortune, and full of that natural philosophy which makes those who hold their fortune in their heart bear misfortune patiently. I spent a delightful hour of oblivion listening to this charming old man.

I encountered again in Smyrna a talented young man I had known in Italy, Monsieur Bousquet-Deschamps, editor of the *Journal de Smyrne* (*Jacques Lucien Bousquet-Deschamps, exiled from France for his political views and editorship of L'Aristarque, on taking over the editorship of the 'Courrier de Smyrne' from Alexandre Helvetius Georges Blacque had renamed it the 'Journal de Smyrne'. He was thirty-four years old when Lamartine met him in Smyrna*). He expressed his fondness and affection for me. The human remnants of Saint-Simonianism had been driven to Smyrna by the tempest, reduced to their last extremities, but bearing their setbacks with the resignation and constancy of strong conviction. I received, on board ship, two remarkable letters from these people. New ideas should not be judged by the disdain they inspire in their own time; all great thoughts are received as strangers in this world. Saint-Simonianism contains something true, great, and fruitful: the application of Christianity to politics, legislation based on human fraternity; in those regards, I am a Saint-Simonian. It was not ideas that this eclipsed, but not yet vanished, sect lacked; nor did its disciples fail it. What it lacked, in my opinion, was a leader, a master: a regulator. I have no doubt that if a man of genius and virtue, a man both religious and political, encompassing both spheres in a just vision of far-reaching scope, had been placed at the helm of this nascent movement, he might have transformed it, and made of it a powerful reality. Times of intellectual anarchy are favourable seasons for the germination of vital, new thoughts. Society, to the philosopher's eyes, is now in a time of disarray; it has neither direction, nor purpose, nor leader; it has been reduced to an instinct for self-preservation. A religious, moral, social, and political sect, possessing a symbol, a motto, a purpose, a leader, a spirit, and marching in unison, straight ahead amidst these disordered ranks, would inevitably gain the victory. But what is needed is to offer society salvation, not destruction, by

attacking in it only what harms it, and not what serves it, by recalling religion to reason and love, politics to Christian brotherhood, property to charity and universal utility, society's sole title and its sole foundation.

A legislator was lacking to lead these young men ardent with zeal, consumed by a need for faith, but at whom senseless dogma was hurled. The organisers of Saint-Simonianism sounded, as their first clarion call: 'War to the death between ourselves and family, ownership, and organised religion! They were destined to perish. One does not conquer the world with the power of a single cry, one must convert the world, stir it, work upon it, and change it. As long as an idea cannot be put into practice, it is unacceptable to society. Humanity proceeds from the known to the unknown, not from the known to the absurd. The present state of affairs is present as a prologue to all great revolutions; one sees signs on earth and in the heavens. The Saint-Simonians are one such sign; they will dissolve as a body, but later, as individuals, may become leaders and soldiers of a fresh army. (*Lamartine anticipates the Revolution of 1848 in France, and his significant part in founding the Second Republic, though his idea of basing it on Social Catholicism was quickly rejected by the electorate*).

## Phocaea (Foca)

*May 30th, 1833.*

Having sailed out of the Gulf of Smyrna under full sail, and reached the latitude of Urla, and while tacking at the mouth of the gulf, the brig struck a sandbank, due to the clumsiness of the Greek pilot. The ship received a jolt that shook the masts, and remained motionless seven miles or so from land; the growing waves broke against its sides; we all ascended on deck: it was a moment of calm and solemn anxiety, with so many lives at stake, and the uncertain likelihood of success of the manoeuvre then attempted. Complete silence reigned, though it was not a sign of fear; human beings prove robust in dire circumstances! After a few minutes of vain effort, the wind came to our aid and turned us on our keel; the brig freed itself, and no leaks appeared; we entered the open sea, the island of Mytilene to starboard.

A beautiful day; we were approaching the channel that separates that island from the mainland; but the wind weakened, clouds gathered over the open sea, and at nightfall, the wind escaped the clouds accompanied by lightning. There was a furious storm, the darkness total. The two brigs signalled each other, searching for the roadstead of Foca, ancient Phocaea, between the rocks that form the northern tip of the Gulf of Smyrna. In the space of two hours the force of the wind drove us twenty-five miles along the coast; at every moment lightning struck, and the wind whistled through the waves. The sky, the sea, and resounding rocks of the coast were illuminated by these bright lightning flashes, occasionally showing us our course; the two brigs were almost touching, and we trembled as if they might break apart. Finally, a daring manoeuvre in the dead of night brought us to the narrow mouth of the Phocaean roadstead. We heard the waves roaring on the rocks to the right and left; a false turn of the rudder would send us flying against them. All were silent on deck, awaiting their fate. We were unable to see our own masts, so dark was the night. Suddenly we felt the brig gliding over a still surface; a few lights shone around us at the rim of the basin into which we had happily entered, and we dropped anchor at random. The wind roared all night around our masts and yards, as if about to tear them away; but the sea was still.

The delightful basin of ancient Phocaea, a mile and more in circumference, is carved out like a semi-circular fortification between graceful hills covered with red-painted houses, thatched cottages beneath olive trees, gardens, climbing vines, and above all, magnificent cypress groves, at the feet of which the white tombs of the Turkish cemeteries are brightly highlighted. We went ashore, and visited the ruins of the city that gave birth to Marseille (*Massalia, founded by the Ionian Greeks of Phocaea, c600BC*). We were received with hospitality and grace in two Turkish houses, and spent the day in their orange groves. The sea calmed on the third day, and we left the natural harbour of Phocaea at midnight.

## Lesbos

*June 4, 1833.*

We followed the Mytilene Channel (*the Mytilini Strait*) all day, between Lesbos and the mainland. It was a poetic reminder of the only woman of antiquity whose voice possessed the power to resonate through the centuries. A few verses by Sappho remain, but these suffice to demonstrate genius of the first order. A fragment of the arm or torso of a statue by Phidias reveals the statue in its entirety. The heart that poured forth Sappho's verses revealed immense depths of passion and imaginative force.

The island of Lesbos is even more beautiful in my eyes than the island of Chios. The clusters of high, green, crenellated, and fir-covered mountains are taller, and more picturesquely grouped. The sea penetrates its broad inner gulf more deeply; the ranges of hills, which hang above the sea, so close to Asia Minor opposite, are more solitary, more inaccessible. Instead of the numerous villages scattered throughout the gardens of Chios, one sees here only the smoke from a few Greek huts drifting between the chestnut and cypress trees, and now and then a shepherd on the tip of a rock, tending a large flock of white goats. In the evening, with the wind still favourable, we rounded the northern tip of Lesbos, and glimpsed on the horizon ahead, amidst the pink haze above the sea, two dark patches, the islands of Lemnos and Tenedos.

*Midnight of the same day. June 4th, 1833*

It is midnight: the sea is as calm as ice; the brig glides like a motionless shadow on its resplendent surface. Tenedos rises from the waves to port, obscuring the open sea; to starboard, and very close to us, stretches the low, jagged shore of the Trojan plain like a blackish bar. The full moon, rising over the snow-blotched summit of Mount Ida, casts a serene, vague light on the mountain peaks, the hills, and the plain; it strikes the sea, making it shine even in the shadow of our brig, like a splendid road upon which shadows dare not tread. We can make out the tumuli, or small conical mounds, which tradition identifies as the tombs of Patroclus and Hector. The broad, red moon, skimming the undulations of the hills, resembles the bloodied shield of Achilles. Not a light on this entire coast, save for a distant fire lit by shepherds on a ridge of Mount Ida; no sound but the beating of the mainsail, the wind having dropped, and the occasional clanging of the main yard against the mast: everything seems dead, and past, in this dull and silent scene. Leaning over the ship's shrouds, I view the land, its mountains, ruins, and tombs emerging like the shadows of a bounded world, evoked and risen from the bosom of the sea in vaporous forms with indistinct contours, amidst the dormant rays of moonlight, silent as the moon, and vanishing, as that orb of

night sinks behind the peaks of further mountains; it seems another beautiful page from Homer's poem; a summation of all history and all poetry: a landscape of unknown tombs, ruins without a name; a bare and sombre planet, dimly lit by the immortal stars; and we, its latest spectators, passing indifferently before its shores, repeating for the thousandth time the epitaph of all things: 'Here lies an empire, a city, a people, and its heroes.' God alone is great! And the thought that seeks and worships Him is the only imperishable one.

I have no desire to visit, more closely and by day, the uncertain remains of the ruins of Troy. I prefer this nocturnal apparition which allows thought to repopulate the waste, lit only by the pale torch of the moon and the poetry of Homer: besides, what do I care as regards Troy itself, its gods and heroes? That heroic page of the world is turned forever.

The land breeze is starting to rise; we take advantage of it to sail closer to the Dardanelles. Already several large ships, seeking the difficult entrance like us, are approaching; their great sails, grey like the wings of night birds, glide silently between our brig and Tenedos. I descend between-decks, and fall asleep.

*June 5th, 1833.*

Awakened by daylight, I can hear the swift wake of the ship, and the sound of the low morning waves, echoing like birdsong around the brig's sides. I open the porthole and see, on a chain of low, rounded hills, the castles of the Dardanelles with their white walls, towers, and immense gun ports. The strait is roughly a mile and a quarter wide at this point; it meanders, like a beautiful river, between the coasts of Asia and Europe, which are perfectly alike. The castles (*Cimenlik and Kilitbahir, respectively*) close off this sea, like the two leaves of a gate; but, in the present state of Turkey and Europe, it would be easy to force the passage by sea, or land, and take the fortresses from the rear. The Dardanelles are impregnable only if guarded by the Russians.

## Constantinople (Istanbul)

*June 7th, 1833*

The swift current carried us, like an arrow, past Gallipoli and the villages lining the strait; we saw the islands of the Sea of Marmara rise before us. We followed the coast of Europe for two days and two nights, hampered by northerly winds. In the morning, we glimpsed the Princes' Islands at the far end of the Sea of Marmara, in the Gulf of Nicaea, and to our left the Castle of the Seven Towers (*Yedikule*) and the soaring peaks of Istanbul's countless minarets, which rise above the seven hills of Constantinople. Each tack as we approached revealed new sights. At this first glimpse of Constantinople, I felt only a painful emotion of surprise and disenchantment. 'What! Is this,' I said to myself, 'the bay, the shore, the marvellous city, for which the masters of the world abandoned Rome and the coasts of Naples? Is this the 'Capital of the Universe', bridging Europe and Asia, which all conquering nations vied for in turn as the symbol of world royalty? Is this the city that painters and poets imagine as the queen of cities, soaring above its hills and its twin seas, enclosed by its gulfs, towers, and mountains, and containing all the treasures of Nature and the luxury of the Orient? Is this the view they compare to the Gulf of Naples, which like a vast amphitheatre bears a whitening city in its hollowed-out bosom, Vesuvius's golden rump losing

itself in clouds of purple smoke, the black foliage of the forests of Castellammare plunging to a blue sea, and the islands of Procida and Ischia, with their volcanic peaks and flanks yellowed with vines and whitened with villas, closing the immense bay like gigantic piers set by God himself at the mouth of the port?'

I see nothing here to compare with that spectacle imprinted on my memory. We sail, it is true, over a beautiful and gracious sea, but the shores are flat, or rise in monotonous and rounded hills. The snows of the Thracian Mount Olympus (*Mount Uludag in Bursa province, Turkey*), which do indeed whiten on the horizon, are but a pale cloud in the sky and lend insufficient solemnity to the landscape. At the end of the gulf, I see only the same rounded hills, all at the same level, without rocks, without coves, without inlets; and Constantinople, which the pilot points to, is nothing more than a pale city, confined to a large promontory on the coast of Europe. Was it really worth coming so far to meet with such disillusionment? I wished to gaze upon it no longer.

However, the ship, tacking repeatedly, brought us considerably closer. We skimmed past the Castle of the Seven Towers, an immense, austere, grey block of medieval construction (*fifteenth century*) that flanks the angle of the Greek walls of ancient Byzantium along the coast, and came to anchor beneath the houses of Istanbul in the Sea of Marmara, amidst a multitude of ships and boats delayed outside the port, like ourselves, by the violence of the northerly winds.

It was five in the evening; the sky was serene and the sun bright. I was beginning to recover from my initial disdain for Constantinople: the walls of this part of the city, picturesquely built from the remains of ancient fortifications, and surmounted by gardens, kiosks, and little wooden houses painted red, formed the foreground of the scene. Above, countless terraced houses pyramiding like a staircase from one level to the next, were interspersed with orange trees and sharp, black cypress spires; higher still, seven or eight great mosques crowned the hill, and, flanked by their openwork sculpted minarets and Moorish colonnades, their golden domes ablaze with the sun's reflection, reached towards the sky. The mosques' walls, painted a soft azure, and the lead roofs of the cupolas surrounding them, gave them the appearance and transparent sheen of porcelain ornaments. The dark, motionless crowns of ancient cypresses accompanied these domes, and the various hues of the city's houses made the vast hill gleam with all the colours of a flower-garden. No sound arose from the streets; none of the countless window grilles opened; no movement betrayed the presence of so great a multitude of people: everything seemed asleep under the burning sun; only the gulf, criss-crossed in every direction by sails of all shapes and sizes, gave any sign of life. At every moment, we saw ships under full sail emerging from the Golden Horn at the opening to the Bosphorus, the true port of Constantinople, and passing by us as they fled towards the Dardanelles; but I could not glimpse the entrance to the Bosphorus, nor even understand its position.

We dined on deck, facing that magical spectacle. Turkish caiques came to interrogate us, and to bring us provisions. The boatmen told us that the plague was almost extinguished in the city. I sent my letters ashore. At seven o'clock, Gaetano Truqui, the Sardinian Consul General, accompanied by officers of his legation, visited us and offered us hospitality in his house at Pera (*Beyoğlu*), there being no possibility of finding lodging in the city, which had recently been afflicted by fire. His obliging cordiality, and the warm respect that Monsieur Truqui inspired in me from

the very first moment, encouraged me to accept. A contrary wind still prevailing, the brigs cannot weigh anchor this evening: we sleep on board.

**The End of Part IX of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part X: Constantinople and the Bosphorus

## Constantinople

*June 7, 1833.*

At five o'clock I was standing on deck; the captain had a boat launched; I descended with him, and we sailed towards the mouth of the Bosphorus, along the walls of Constantinople, which the sea washes clean. After half an hour of sailing, amidst a multitude of anchored ships, we reached the walls of the Seraglio, which extend from those of the city, and form, at the end of the hill on which Istanbul stands, the angle that separates the Sea of Marmara from the Bosphorus Canal and the Golden Horn, or great inner harbour of Constantinople; it is there that God and Mankind, Nature and Art, have assembled, or rather created, in concert, the most marvellous view that eyes could behold. I let out an involuntary cry, and utterly forgot the Gulf of Naples and all its enchantments. To compare anything to the magnificent and graceful scene would have been to insult Creation itself.

The walls that support the circular terraces of the immense gardens of the great Seraglio were a few steps from us, to our left, separated from the sea by a narrow walkway of stone slabs that the tide constantly washes, and where the perpetual current of the Bosphorus forms small murmuring waves, blue like the waters of the Rhône at Geneva. These terraces, which rise in imperceptible slopes to the Sultan's Palace (*Topkapi*), whose golden domes can be seen through the gigantic tops of the plane trees and cypresses, are themselves planted with enormous cypresses and plane trees, whose trunks tower over the walls, and whose branches, overflowing from the gardens, hang over the sea, in sheets of foliage, and shade the caiques; their oarsmen stopping from time to time in their shade. At intervals, the rows of trees are broken by palaces, pavilions, kiosks, and carved and gilded gates opening onto the sea, or batteries of copper and bronze cannons of bizarre and antique shape. The barred windows of these maritime palaces, which are part of the Seraglio, overlook the waves and, through the shutters, one can see the chandeliers and gilded ceilings of the apartments gleaming; at every step, too, water from elegant Moorish fountains, embedded in the walls of the Seraglio, cascades down from the gardens and murmurs in marble basins, from which the thirst of passers-by is quenched. A few Turkish soldiers lie about near these springs, and stray dogs wander along the quay; some rest in the mouths of cannons of enormous calibre.

As the boat advanced along these walls, the horizon before us widened, the coast of Asia drew nearer, and the mouth of the Bosphorus began to take shape before our eyes, between slopes of dark greenery and opposing hills, which seem painted with all the shades of the rainbow. There we rested again. The welcoming coast of Asia-Minor, about a mile from us, was taking shape to our right, adorned with broad, high hills whose summits were deep black forests with spiky crowns; with fields whose edges were surrounded by fringes of trees; scatterings of red colour-washed houses; and steep ravines bordered and carpeted with green vegetation and sycamore trees whose branches dipped into the water.

Further on, these hills rose higher, then sloped down to green shores, forming a broad promontory that resembled a large city: this was Scutari (*Uskudar*)with its large white barracks, like

a royal castle; its mosques surrounded by their resplendent minarets; its quays and coves lined with houses, bazaars, and caiques (*skiffs*), shaded by trellises or plane trees, and the deep, dark cypress forest that cloaked the city. Through the branches, shone, as if with a mournful glow, the countless white monuments of the Turkish cemeteries. Beyond the tip of Scutari, ending in an islet bearing a Turkish chapel, and called the *Maiden's Tower*, the Bosphorus, like a river in a narrow channel, parted and seemed to flow between dark mountains, whose rocky flanks, external and internal angles, ravines, and forests echoed each other on both sides, and at the feet of which one could distinguish, as far as the eye could see, an uninterrupted succession of villages, fleets at anchor or under sail, small harbours shaded by trees, scattered houses, and vast palaces with rose gardens beside the water.

A few strokes of the oars carried us forward to the point of the Golden Horn itself, where one enjoys a combined view of the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the entire port, or rather inland sea, of Constantinople. Once there, we turned our eyes from Marmara, the coast of Asia-Minor, and the Bosphorus, to contemplate in a single glance the basin of the Golden Horn, and the city covering the seven hills of Constantinople, converging on this arm of the sea and forming a unique and incomparable whole, at once urban and rural, with its port, riverbanks, gardens, wooded mountains, and deep valleys, its anthill of streets, ocean of houses and ships, tranquil lakes and enchanted solitudes, forming a scene which no painting could capture except in odd details, and where each stroke of the oar carries the eyes and the mind to a fresh aspect, a contrasting impression.

We set sail for the hills of Galata and Pera (*Beyoğlu*); the Seraglio receded from us, expanding in extent, as the eye took in more of the vast contours of its walls and the multitude of its slopes, trees, kiosks, and palaces. It alone could have formed the foundation of a large city. The harbour extended before us, winding like a canal between the flanks of curving mountains, deepening and expanding in scope the further we advanced. The port bore scant resemblance to one; it was more like a wide river, such as the Thames, enclosed on both sides by hills laden with houses, and covered with endless rows of vessels grouped at anchor alongside the quays. We passed through this countless multitude, some at anchor, others already under sail and making for the Bosphorus, the Black Sea, or the Sea of Marmara; vessels of every shape and size, displaying flags of every country, from the Arab boats, whose prows soared and rose like the beaks of ancient galleys, to the triple-deckers, their sides gleaming with bronze. Flocks of Turkish caiques, rowed by one or two oarsmen in silk sleeves — small boats serving as carriages between the waterfront streets of this amphibious city — circulated among those great masses, crossing paths, bumping against each other without capsizing, jostling like the crowd in a public square; while flocks of albatrosses, like beautiful white doves, rose from the sea at their approach to settle further out, rocked there by the waves.

I made no attempt to count the ships, brigs, boats, vessels of every kind, anchored or sailing the waters of the port of Constantinople, from the mouth of the Bosphorus and the tip of the Seraglio, to the suburb of Eyup and the delightful valleys of the freshwater streams (*'Les Eaux-Douces de Europe', 'The Sweet Waters of Europe', the historic name for the area around the Kagithane creek, which flows into the Golden Horn*). The Thames in London offers nothing comparable to this port. Suffice it to say that, in addition to the Turkish fleet and the European warships anchored in the middle of the channel, both banks of the Golden Horn are covered with ships two or three vessels

deep, and for a length of two miles and more on each side. One's eyes could barely follow the long lines of prows as one gazed at the sea; and, in the opposite direction, one's gaze was lost at the end of the gulf, as it narrowed inland, among a veritable forest of masts.

We landed at the foot of the town of Pera, not far from a magnificent artillery barracks, whose covered terraces were cluttered with gun carriages and cannons. An admirable Moorish fountain, built in the form of an Indian pagoda, its carved and brightly coloured marble highlighted like lace against a silken background, poured its waters into a basin in the small square. This square was cluttered with bales, merchandise, horses, stray dogs, and Turks squatting and smoking in the shade; the boatmen from the caiques sat, in great number, on the quay's edge, waiting for their masters or soliciting passers-by. They are a fine breed of men, whose attire further enhances their beauty. They wear white breeches, with pleats as wide as those of a petticoat, held in place at the waist by a crimson silk belt; and small red Greek woollen caps, topped with a long silk tassel that hangs behind their heads. Their necks and chests are bare, a wide, unbleached silk shirt with long, hanging sleeves covering their shoulders and arms. Their caiques are narrow-boats, twenty to thirty feet long and two or three feet wide, made of varnished walnut-wood that gleams like mahogany.

The prows of these boats are as sharp as a spearhead and they cut through the sea like knives. The narrow shape of the caiques makes them perilous and awkward for the Franks, who are unaccustomed to them; they capsize at the slightest rocking motion imparted by a clumsy foot. One must lie down like the Turks, and care must be taken to ensure that the weight of the body is equally distributed between the two sides of the boat. They come in various sizes, accommodating from one to four, or eight passengers; but all have the same shape. There are thousands of them in the port of Constantinople; and, apart from those which, like the cabs, are in public service at all hours, every wealthy individual in the city has one for their own use, whose oarsmen are their servants. Everyone who travels in the city on business is obliged to cross the sea several times a day.

Leaving this small square, we entered the dirty, crowded streets of the Pera bazaar. Apart from the clothing the people wore, these streets presented much the same appearance as in the street-markets of our own cities: wooden stalls where pastries or meats were fried for the customer; barbers' shops, tobacconists, vegetable and fruit vendors; a bustling, crowded throng; all the costumes and languages of the Orient clashing before the eyes and filling the ears; above all, the barking of the numerous dogs that filled the squares and bazaars, fighting over the scraps thrown from the doors.

From there, we entered a long, narrow, solitary street that climbed steeply up the hill of Pera. The barred windows revealed nothing of the interiors of the Turkish houses, which appeared poor and desolate. From time to time, the green spire of a cypress tree emerged from within a wall of grey, ruined ramparts, rising motionless into a clear sky. White and blue doves were scattered on the window-ledges and rooftops, filling the silence with their melancholy cooing. At the top of this street lay the beautiful district of Pera, inhabited by Europeans, ambassadors, and consuls: it is a district somewhat like an impoverished little town in our provinces. There were once fine ambassadorial palaces on the sloping terraces of Galata; now only fallen columns, blackened sections of wall, and the ruined gardens remain: the flames devoured everything. Pera has neither character, nor originality, nor beauty; from its streets, one cannot see the sea, nor the hills, nor the

gardens of Constantinople; one must climb to the top of its rooftops to enjoy the magnificent view with which Nature and Mankind have surrounded it.

Monsieur Truqui received us like members of his own family; his house is vast, elegant, and admirably situated; he has placed it entirely at our disposal. The richest furnishings, the exquisite cuisine of Europe, the most affectionate and friendly attentions, the gentlest and most amiable company, found in and around him, have replaced for us the desert carpet or mat, the Arab pilau, and the harshness and ruggedness of maritime life. Hardly had I settled in with him when I received a letter from Admiral Albin Roussin, the French ambassador to Constantinople, who was kind enough to offer us hospitality in Therapia (*Tarabya*). These touching marks of interest and kindness, received from unknown compatriots, twelve hundred miles and more from home, when one has experienced isolation and hardship, leave a deep impression on the traveller's memory.

*June the 8th to the 10th, 1833.*

The days have been spent in the disembarkation of the two brigs; and in rest, and visits received from the principal merchants of Pera; days also spent in the charm and intimacy of Monsieur Truqui's company. We have been shopping in Constantinople, and generally viewing the city. We also visited the ambassador in Therapia.

*The same date, June 10, 1833.*

When one suddenly leaves behind the ever-changing, stormy scene of the sea, the dark, moving cabin of a brig, the wearisome rolling of the waves; when one feels one's feet firmly planted on friendly ground, and is surrounded by people, books, and all the comforts of life; when one has before one fields and woods to explore, the whole of terrestrial existence to rediscover after a long period of disorientation, one feels an instinctive and purely physical pleasure that never grows old; any land, even the wildest, even the most remote, is like a homeland rediscovered. I have experienced this twenty times upon disembarking, even for just a few hours, on an unknown and deserted foreign shore. Many a little thing: a rock that shelters you from the wind; a sapling that protects you with its trunk or its shade; a ray of sunshine that warms the sand where you sit; a few lizards that scurry among the stones; the insects that fly around you; a restless bird that approaches and gives a cry of alarm, already provided to the man who dwells on land, form a whole world apart for the weary sailor landing from the sea. But the brig is still there, pitching and rolling in the gulf on a choppy sea, before shortly sailing upriver. The sailors are on the yards, busy drying or mending the torn mainsails; the ship's boat, rising and vanishing in the foaming ravines formed by the waves, plies back and forth repeatedly between the ship and the shore; it brings provisions, or fresh water to the vessel; its cabin boys wash the multi-coloured linen shirts and hang them on the mastic trees; the captain studies the sky, waiting for the wind to shift, ready to recall the passengers, at a cannon shot, to their life of misery, darkness, and constant movement.

Though one is eager to arrive at one's destination, one secretly prays that the contrary wind will not drop too soon, that necessity will allow time to savour this intimate pleasure that binds man to the earth. One becomes friends with the coast, with the small strip of grass or shrubs that stretches between the sea and the rocks; with the freshwater spring hidden beneath the roots of an old holm oak; with the lichens, with the small wildflowers that the wind ceaselessly ruffles

between the crevices of the reefs, which one will never see again. When the recall-cannon fires from the ship; when the signal-flag is raised on the mast, and the longboat pulls away to bring the voyager back on board, one weeps at leaving a nameless corner of the world, where one has only stretched one's weary limbs for a few hours. I have often felt this innate love of human beings for any shelter, solitary and unknown, on a deserted shore.

But here in Pera I experienced two opposing things: one sweet, the other painful. First, the pleasure I have just described, of planting my feet firmly on the ground, a bed that no longer rocks from side to side, a floor that no longer constantly throws one from one wall to the other, the freedom to walk about, large windows that can be closed or opened at will, without fear of sea-spray rushing in, and the delight of hearing the wind playing among the curtains without making the house tilt, the sails resound, the masts tremble, and the sailors race on deck to the deafening sound of their footsteps. Moreover, there is friendly communication with Europe, with travellers and merchants; there are newspapers, books — everything that connects and reconnects people in mind and experience; that participation in the general movement of things and of thought, from which we had been deprived for so long. And, more than anything else, the warm, attentive, and joyful hospitality — I would even say, the friendship — of our excellent host, Gaetano Truqui, who seems as happy to surround us with his care, his thoughtfulness, and all the comforts he can provide, as we are happy ourselves to receive them. An excellent man, a rare man, the like of whom I have not encountered twice in my long life of travel! His memory will be sweet to me for as long as I remember these years of pilgrimage, and my thoughts will always follow him to the shores of Asia or Africa, to wherever fate condemns him to end his days.

*The same date, June 10, 1833.*

But often, once one has unwittingly savoured those first pleasures of returning to land, one is tempted to long for the perpetual uncertainty and turmoil of life at sea. At least, there, thought lacks the leisure to turn inward and plumb the depths of sorrow that an untimely death creates within us! The pain is always there still, but it is constantly eased by some thought that prevents its weight from utterly crushing the heart: the noise and movement around one; the ever-changing aspects of the ship's decks and the sea; the waves swelling or flattening; the wind shifting, rising, or falling; the sails that must be trimmed twenty times a day; the spectacle of the manoeuvres, that one is sometimes involved in one's self in rough weather; the thousand accidents of a stormy day or night; the pitching, rolling and yawing of the ship, torn sails, broken furniture sliding below the tween deck; the dull, irregular blows of the sea against the fragile sides of the cabin where one is attempting to sleep; the hurried footsteps of the watchmen, running from one side to the other above one's head; the plaintive cries of the chickens, flooded by foam in their cages tied to the foot of the mast; the crowing of the roosters, the first to announce the dawn at the end of a night of darkness and squalls; the whistling of the log line, cast to measure the course; the strange, unfamiliar, bizarre aspect, wild or tame, of a coastline unsuspected the day before, which one skirts at daybreak, measuring the heights of its mountains, or pointing out its towns and villages gleaming like mounds of snow among clusters of fir trees; all this more or less deflects one's thoughts, eases the heart a little, allows some of one's pain to evaporate, and soothes grief while the journey lasts; yet the pain presses once more, with all its weight, on the soul, as soon as one reaches the shore, and sleep, in a peaceful bed, has restored the intensity of one's impressions.

The heart, no longer distracted by anything external, finds itself face to face with its mutilated feelings, its despairing thoughts, its shattered future: one knows not how one will be able to bear the old life, the monotonous life, the empty life of cities and society. This is how I feel, to the point of now desiring an eternal voyage, an endless journey, with all its opportunities, and even the most painful distractions. Alas! This is what I read in my wife's eyes, even more than in my own heart. A man's suffering is nothing compared to that of a woman, a mother; the woman lives and dies by a single thought, a single feeling: life, for the woman, represents something possessed; death, something lost! A man lives for everything, whether good or bad. God does not kill him with a single blow.

*June 11, 1833.*

I surround myself with newspapers and pamphlets recently arrived from Europe, generously provided by the French and Austrian ambassadors. After reading all day, I have reconfirmed in myself the ideas I brought with me from Europe. I see that political events are proceeding entirely in line with the predictions that historical and philosophical analogy allows us to assign to their course in this glorious century. France, initially shaken, is calmer; Europe, anxious but timid, watches with jealousy and hatred, yet dares not intervene; it senses instinctively, and the instinct is prophetic, that it might disturb the balance of power by making a move. I have never believed war to be an inevitable consequence of the July Revolution; France would have had to be guided by insane counsel to attack others. And since France mounts no attack, Europe will not willingly throw itself into the revolutionary flames, where one burns oneself, even while trying to stifle them. The July Monarchy deserves much credit in France and Europe for this very fact: for having contained the impatient and blind fervour of the bellicose spirit alive in France after those three days of revolution. Europe and France were equally at a loss. We had no army, no feeling of public spirit, for there can be none without unanimity; a foreign war would have immediately led to civil war in the south and west of France, and to persecution and plunder everywhere. No government could have survived in Paris.

Despite the revolutionary fervour of the centre, while ragtag armies, hastily assembled by a patriotism devoid of guidance or restraint, would have been devoured on our eastern borders, the south, as far north as Lyon, would have raised the Royalist flag; the west, as far as the Loire, would have reconstituted the counter-revolutionary guerrilla bands of the Vendée; the manufacturing populations of Lyon, Rouen, and Paris, exasperated by the misery into which the resulting stoppage of work would have plunged them, would have exploded forth centrally, their undisciplined masses overflowing Paris and the borders, choosing leaders for a day, and expressing their whims in unplanned campaigns. Property, commerce, industry, credit — everything would have perished at once; violence would have been required to collect loans and taxes. Hidden wealth, the unavailability of credit, and despair would have driven opposition and resistance to the plunder, murder, and torment of the populace. Once embarked on the path of bloodshed, there would have been no other outcome than anarchy, dictatorship, or dismemberment. But all this would have been further complicated by unexpected and spontaneous uprisings in other parts of Europe: Spain, Italy, Poland, the Rhine frontier, Belgium — all would have caught ablaze together or successively; all of Europe would have been swept by fluctuating insurrections and uprisings changing the face of events at every instant. We would have entered, ill-prepared, into another

Thirty-Years' war (*1618-1648*). The spirit of civilisation did not will it so; what was meant to be, came about. We will only fight after preparing for battle, recognising each other, counting our numbers, reviewing our preparedness, and lining up in battle formation; the struggle will be orderly, and we will have a predictable and certain outcome: it will no longer be a battle by night.

Things are clearer from a distance, because details no longer obstruct the view, and objects appear as large, dominant masses. That is why prophets and oracular priestesses lived alone and apart from the world; they were purveyors of wisdom, studying things as a whole, whose judgment was not clouded by the petty passions of the day. Politicians must often distance themselves from the stage on which the drama of their time is unfolding if they wish to judge that drama and foresee its results. Predicting the outcome is impossible: prevision belongs only to God; but foresight is possible: foresight belongs to Mankind.

I often wonder where this great movement of minds and events will lead, this movement which, originating in France, is stirring the world and drawing everything, willingly or unwillingly, into its maelstrom. I am not one of those who see there only the raw movement itself, that is to say, the tumultuous disorder of ideas; who believe the moral and political world is in those final convulsions that precede death and decay. It is clearly a twofold movement of both decomposition and re-organisation; the creative spirit works while the destructive spirit destroys; one faith in what is replaces another; one form is substituted for another; as the past crumbles, the future, fully formed, appears from amidst the ruins. The transition is slow and arduous, as is any transition where the passions and interests of human beings must contend as they advance, where social classes and diverse nations march at an uneven pace; where some stubbornly try to retreat while the mass advances. There is confusion, dust, ruin, darkness at times; but, from time to time also, the wind stirs this cloud of dust that obscures the path and the destination, until those on the heights can discern the march of columns, recognise the terrain of the future, and see the barely risen sun, illuminating vast horizons. I constantly hear people around me, even here, declare that: 'People no longer believe; all is left to individual reason; there is no longer shared faith in anything, neither in religion, nor in politics, nor in society.' Belief, a shared faith, is the lifeblood of nations; when that lifeblood fails everything falls apart; there is only one way to save a people: that is, to restore their belief.

But is it really true that there is no longer any light of human intelligence, no shared belief in the minds of nations, no intimate and insignificant faith in the conscience of humankind? The statement is given credence without having been examined; it lacks meaning. If the world no longer possessed shared ideas, faith, belief, the world would not be in such turmoil: nothing begets nothing, *mens agitat molem ('mind moves matter', Virgil's 'Aeneid' Book VI:727*). On the contrary, there is immense conviction, fanatical faith, confused but undefined hope, ardent love, a common ideal, though not yet fully revealed, which drives, compresses, stirs, attracts, condenses, and sees gravitate together all the intellect, all the conscience, all the moral force of this era. The revolutions and upheavals, the fall of empires, the repeated and gigantic movements in all the members of old Europe, the repercussions in America and Asia-Minor, the unreflective and irresistible impulse which, despite individual wills, imprints so much agitation and unity on these collective forces; all this is not an effect without a cause; all this possesses meaning, a profound and hidden meaning, but a meaning evident to the philosophe's eye. This meaning is precisely what people complain of having lost, what they deny in today's world; yet it is a common ideal; a conviction; a social law; a

truth which, having involuntarily entered all minds, and even, without their knowledge, the minds of the masses, works to manifest itself in reality with the force of a divine truth, that is to say, an invincible force. Faith lies in the power of reason; speech is its organ, the press its apostle: it wishes to remake in its image civilisations, societies, and laws rendered imperfect or obsolete through the errors and ignorance of the dark ages they have passed through; it seeks to found itself on religion — the one and perfect God as dogma, eternal morality as its symbol, adoration and charity as it forms of worship — in politics, as humanity above nationality; in legislation, as every individual equal to every other individual; in society as a fraternal exchange of reciprocal services and duties, regulated and guaranteed by law; in a word, a legislated form of Christianity.

People desire it, and will achieve it. Tell me again that there is no belief, no shared faith among those of our day! Since Christianity appeared, never has so great a work been accomplished in the world with such meagre means. A cross and a printing press — these are the instruments of the world's two greatest civilising forces.

*June 12, 1833.*

This evening, in splendid moonlight that reverberated across the Sea of Marmara and even the violet stretches of eternal snow on Mount Uludag, I sat alone beneath the cypresses of the Stairway of the Dead (*in Tepebasi, at the foot of the 'Little Field of the Dead' cemetery*), cypresses that shade the countless tombs of the Muslims and descend from the heights of Pera to the seashore; they are interspersed with several paths, some steeper than others, that climb from the port of Constantinople to the Mosque of the Whirling Dervishes (*now the Galata Mevlevihanesi Museum*). No one was passing by at this hour; one would have thought oneself two hundred miles and more from any large city, if a thousand sounds of evening rising from there and borne on the wind, were not fading amidst the trembling branches of the cypresses. All these sounds, already weakening at that late hour: sailors' songs from the ships, the strokes of oars from the caiques on the water, the noise of the Bulgarians' wild instruments, the drums from the barracks and arsenals, the voices of women singing to their children at their barred windows, the deep murmur of the crowded streets and bazaars of Galata; the calls from time to time of the muezzins from the minarets, cannon shot, the retreat, fired from the fleet anchored at the entrance to the Bosphorus, echoing from the resonant mosques and the hills, filling the Golden Horn basin, and resounding beneath the peaceful willows of the Fresh Waters of Europe; all these sounds, I say, blending at times into a single, muffled, indistinct hum formed a kind of harmonious music where human sounds, the stifled breathing of a great city falling asleep, mingled indistinguishably with the sounds of Nature: namely the distant crash of waves, and the gusts of wind bending the pointed cypress tops. It was one of the most boundless and weighty impressions that a poetic soul can bear. Everything is intertwined: Mankind and God, Nature and society, inner turmoil and the melancholy repose of thought. One cannot tell whether one participates more in the great movement of living beings, rejoicing or suffering amidst the tumult of rising voices, or in the nocturnal peace of the elements that also murmur, lifting the soul above cities and empires, to seek the harmony of Nature and God.

The Seraglio, a vast peninsula, darkened by its plane trees and cypresses, jutted out like a forested cape between the two seas, before my eyes. The moon whitened the numerous kiosks, and the ancient walls of Murad IV's palace (*Topkapi*) rose like a cliff wall from the dark green of

the plane trees. Before my eyes, and in my mind, the entire scene was displayed in which so many dramas, both sinister and glorious, had unfolded over the centuries. All these appeared before me, along with their characters, bearing traces of blood or glory.

I envisaged a horde, emerging from the Caucasus, driven by the instinct for migration that God granted to conquering peoples, as he granted to the bees the instinct to leave their tree trunk and raise a new swarm; and the great patriarchal figure of Osman I, amidst his tents and his flocks, as he spread his people throughout Asia Minor, advancing, step by step, as far as Bursa, dying in the arms of his sons who had become his lieutenants, and saying to his eldest son Orhan: 'I die without regret, since I leave a successor such as yourself! Go, spread the divine law, the thoughts of Allah, which arose from Mecca to the Caucasus to seek us; be charitable and merciful as it demands: this is how princes draw down Allah's blessing upon their nations! Do not leave my body in this land, which is for us merely a path onward; but lay my mortal remains in Constantinople, in the place I have chosen for myself in dying.'

A few years later, Orhan, son of Osman, was encamped at Scutari (*Uskudar*), on these same hills darkened by cypress woods. The Greek emperor John VI Cantacuzene (*Kantakouzenos*), driven by necessity, gave Orhan Gazi his beautiful daughter, Theodora, as the fifth wife of the latter's harem (*in 1346*). The young princess crossed, to the sound of instruments, that arm of the sea where I see the Russian fleet today, and went, a sacrificial victim, to immure herself in vain, prolonging the life of the empire by only a few days. Soon Orhan's sons reached shore, followed by a band of valiant soldiers; in one night, they built three rafts supported by ox bladders inflated with air; they crossed the strait under cover of darkness; the Greek sentinels were asleep. A young peasant, emerging at daybreak to work, met the lost Ottomans and showed them the entrance to an underground passage that led to the interior of the castle and the Turks gained a foothold and a fortress in Europe.

Five reigns later, Mehmed II replied to the Byzantine Greek ambassadors: 'I plan no attack on you; the empire of Constantinople is confined within its walls.' But Constantinople itself, so confined, nevertheless kept the Sultan awake; he sent for his vizier and said to him: 'I demand Constantinople of you; I can no longer sleep; Allah wishes me to overthrow the Romans.' With savage impatience, he spurred his horse into the waves, which threatened to engulf him. 'Come,' he said to his soldiers, 'on the day of the final assault, I reserve only the city for myself; the gold and the women are yours. The government of my largest province goes to whoever reaches the ramparts first!' All night long, the land and waters were ablaze with countless fires that replaced the day, so slow seemed that dawn to arrive which was to deliver the Ottomans their prey.

Meanwhile, under the dark dome of Hagia Sophia, the brave and unfortunate Constantine (*Constantine XI Dragases Palaiologos*) came, on his last night, to pray to the God of the empire and to receive communion, with tears in his eyes; at the break of dawn, he emerged on horseback, accompanied by the cries and groans of his family, and went to die a hero, during the breaching of his capital: the date was May 29, 1453.

A few hours later, axes broke down the doors of Hagia Sophia; the old men and women, young girls, monks, and nuns, had crowded into this vast basilica, whose courtyards, chapels, galleries, underground passages, immense tribunes, domes, and platforms could hold the population of an entire city; a final cry rose to heaven, as if Christianity itself were dying; in a short while, sixty thousand elderly people, women, and children, without distinction of rank, age, or sex, were bound

in pairs, the men with ropes, the women with their veils or belts. These pairs of slaves were thrown onto ships, taken to the Ottoman camp, insulted, exchanged, sold, and bartered like mere cattle. Never were such lamentations heard on the twin shores of Europe and Asia; women were separated forever from their husbands, children from their mothers; and the Turks drove this living plunder from Constantinople into the interior of Asia by different routes. Constantinople was sacked for eight hours; then Mehmed II entered through the Saint Romanus Gate (*Cannon Gate*), surrounded by his viziers, pashas, and guards. He dismounted before the portal of Hagia Sophia and struck a soldier who was smashing the altars with his yataghan. He refused to destroy anything. He converted the church into a mosque, and a muezzin ascended, for the first time, this same tower from which I can hear one now calling the Muslims to prayer. From there, Mehmed II went to the deserted palace of the Greek emperors and, upon entering, recited this Persian couplet: 'Now the spider is chamberlain in Caesar's palace, and the owl hoots the watch on the towers of Afrasiab!' (*Afrasiab, a mythical Turanian king, is the main antagonist of the Iranians in Ferdowsi's Persian epic the 'Shahnameh'.*)

Constantine's body was found that day beneath a heap of dead; the Janissaries had heard the magnificently dressed Greek, struggling in his death throes, cry out: 'Is no Christian to be found to take my life?' They severed his head from his body. Eagles embroidered in gold on his boots, and the tears of a few faithful Greeks, left no doubt that this previously unrecognised soldier was the brave and unfortunate Constantine. His head was displayed, so that the vanquished would entertain neither doubt he was dead, nor hope that he would reappear; he was then buried with the honour due to royalty, heroism, and death.

Mehmed did not abuse his victory. Religious tolerance was evident in his first acts. He allowed Christians to retain their churches and their freedom of public worship. He maintained the Greek patriarch in his position. He himself, seated on his throne, presented the crozier and pastoral staff to the monk Gennadius and gave him a richly caparisoned horse. The fleeing Greeks escaped to Italy, taking with them a taste for theological debate, philosophy, and literature. The flame extinguished in Constantinople cast its sparks beyond the Mediterranean and was rekindled in Florence and Rome. During thirty years of a reign that was nothing but conquest after conquest, Mehmed II added two hundred cities and twelve kingdoms to the empire. He died (in *1481*) amidst his triumphs, and is remembered as 'Mehmed the Conqueror'. The tale of his reign still haunts the final years of rule of a people he brought to Europe, now destined to bear his remains back to Asia. That prince had the complexion of a Tartar, a smooth face, deep-set eyes, and a profound, piercing gaze. He possessed all the virtues, and all the vices, that politics ever dictates.

Bayezid II, the Louis XI of the Ottomans, had his sons thrown into the sea; and he himself, driven from the throne by Selim I, fled with his wives and his treasure, and died from the poison prepared by his son. This Selim, in response to the vizier who asked him where he should pitch his tents, had the vizier strangled; the vizier's successor asked the same question and met the same fate; a third had the tents pitched, without asking anything, facing the four points of the compass; and when Selim asked where his camp was: 'Everywhere,' replied the vizier. 'Your soldiers will follow you, whichever way you turn your weapons.' 'That,' said the dread Sultan, 'is how I should be served.' It was he who conquered Egypt, and who, mounted on a magnificent throne erected on the banks of the Nile, had the entire race of oppressors of that beautiful land brought to him, and had twenty thousand Mamluks massacred before his very eyes: their bodies were thrown into

the river. All this not because he was cruel, but through that sense of fatalism which believes in its mission, and which, to accomplish the will of Allah, whose instrument it considers itself to be, regards the world as its own to conquer, and Humankind as the dust beneath its feet. That same hand, stained with the blood of so many thousands of men, wrote verses full of resignation, gentleness, and philosophy. The piece of white marble on which he wrote these sentences still remains: 'Everything comes from Allah; he gives as he pleases or withholds what we ask. Any on earth who could act solely of their own will, would be equal to God.' Further down, one reads: 'Selim, the servant of the poor, composed and wrote these verses.' Conqueror of Persia, he died having instructed his vizier to make pious restitution to Persian families ruined by war. His tomb is not far from that of Mehmed II, and bears this proud epitaph: 'On this day, Sultan Selim passed to the eternal kingdom, leaving the empire of the world to Suleiman.' (*Mehmed's tomb is in the Fatih Mosque, Selim's is in the garden of the Yavuz Selim Mosque, half a mile or so away.*)

From here, I can see, shining between the domes of the mosques, the resplendent cupola of the Mosque of Suleiman (*the Suleymaniye*), one of the most magnificent in Constantinople. He had just lost his first son Sehzade Mehmed whom the famous Roxelana (*Hurrem Sultan*) bore him. The mosque stands as a touching testament to the grief of this prince. To honour the memory of his child, he freed a multitude of slaves of both sexes, wishing them to share in his sorrow.

Soon, alas, the area around this same mosque was the scene of a terrible tragedy. Suleiman, enraged with Mustafa, his son by another woman (*Mahidevran Hatun*), summoned the mufti and asked him: 'What punishment does Zair, the slave of a merchant in this city, deserve, who entrusted his wife, children, and treasure to him during a journey. Zair disrupted his master's affairs, attempted to seduce his wife, and set traps for the children. What punishment does the slave Zair deserve?' 'The slave Zair deserves death,' replied the mufti, 'Allah be praised!'

Armed with this answer, Suleiman the Magnificent summoned Mustafa to his camp. Mustafa arrived, accompanied by Cihangir, a son of Roxelana, who, far from sharing his mother's hatred, felt the tenderest affection for Mustafa, his brother. Mustafa, unarmed, appeared before Suleiman's tent. He advanced alone into the first enclosure, where complete solitude and a gloomy silence reigned. Four mutes rushed at him and tried to strangle him; he overpowered them and was about to escape and call to his guards, who worshipped him, when Suleiman himself, who had been watching the mutes struggle with his son, lifted a corner of the tent curtain and glared at them with fury. At this sight, the mutes rose again, and managed to strangle the young prince (*October 1553*). His body was displayed on a carpet before the Sultan's tent. Cihangir died not long afterwards (*November 1553*) in despair, it is said, at his brother's execution, which the soldiers had witnessed in terror, as the woman, love of whom had subjugated the unfortunate Suleiman, carried out her implacable vengeance. Mustafa had a ten-year-old son, Mehmed; Roxelana overhead the order for his death being issued by the Sultan. A secret messenger was sent to deceive the child's mother. A pretext was devised to lead her to a pleasure house not far from Bursa. The young prince was on horseback, preceding the princess's litter. The litter broke; the prince rode ahead, followed by the eunuch carrying the secret order for his death. No sooner had he entered the house than the eunuch stopped him at the door and presented him with the noose: 'The Sultan orders you to die immediately,' he said. 'This order is as sacred to me as if it had been issued by Allah himself,' replied the child; and he offered his head to the executioner. The mother arrived, and found her

son's still-quivering body on the doorsill. Suleiman's insane passion for Roxelana filled the Seraglio with more crimes than the palace of Argos ever saw.

The Seven Towers Castle reminded me of the death of the first Sultan immolated by the Janissaries. Osman II, dragged by them into that fortress, fell two days later under the blows of Davud (*Kara Davud Pasha, known as Hain Davud, Davud the Traitor*), the vizier (*in 1622*). This vizier, some months later, was himself taken to the Seven Towers. His turban was torn off, he was made to drink from the same fountain from which the unfortunate Osman had quenched his thirst, and was strangled in the same room where he had strangled his master. The Agha of the Janissaries, one of whose soldiers had laid hands on Osman, was executed; and, until the abolition of that corps, whenever an officer named the sixty-fifth corps, another would respond: 'May the voice of that Agha perish! May the voice of that Agha be silenced forever!'

The Janissaries, repentant after the murder of Osman, deposed Mustafa I his successor (*in 1623*) and went on their knees to the Seraglio to beg for an eleven-year-old boy to be given command of the empire. Dressed in a cloth of silver robe, the imperial turban on his head, and seated on a portable throne, four Janissary officers lifted the prince onto their shoulders and paraded the young emperor among his people. He was Murad IV, worthy of the throne to which rebellion and repentance had appointed him before due time.

There, ended the days of glory of the Ottoman Empire. Suleiman's law, which decreed that the Sultans' children be imprisoned in the Seraglio among the eunuchs and women, had weakened Osman's spirit and thus condemned the empire to the intrigues of eunuchs and the rebellions of the Janissaries. Occasionally, a few fine characters shone forth; but proved powerless having been accustomed from an early age to subjecting their will to that of others.

The Seraglio, abandoned long ago by Mehmed II, is now nothing more than a glittering tomb. But how dramatic and moving its secret history would prove, if the walls could speak!

One of the saddest and most poignant figures, in these shadowy dramas is that of the unfortunate Selim, who, deposed and imprisoned in the Seraglio for refusing to shed the blood of his nephews, became the tutor there of the future Sultan Mahmud II. Selim III was a philosopher and a poet. The tutor had reigned; the pupil was destined to do so. During the two princes' long captivity, Mahmud, angered by the negligence of a slave, flew into a rage and struck him in the face: 'Ah! Mahmud,' said Selim, 'when you have passed through the furnace of this world, you will not fly into such a rage. When you have suffered as I have, you will know how to sympathise with suffering, even that of a slave.'

Selim's fate was tragic to the end. Bayraktar (*Bayraktar Mustafa Pasha*), one of his loyal pashas, armed for his cause, arrived in Constantinople and presented himself at the gates of the Seraglio. Sultan Mustafa was asleep in comfort at that very moment in one of his kiosks on the Bosphorus. The *bostangis* (*palace guards*) defended the gate. Mustafa returned to the Seraglio; and while Bayraktar was forcing the gates open with artillery, demanding the return of his master Selim, that unfortunate prince fell beneath the dagger of the *Kislar Agasi* (*Head of the Imperial Harem*) and his eunuchs. Sultan Mustafa ordered Selim's body to be thrown to Bayraktar from the wall; the latter rushed to Selim's corpse, and covered it with kisses and tears. They searched for Mahmud, hidden in the Seraglio, fearing lest in Mustafa the last drop of Osman's blood had been shed. He was

finally found, hidden beneath rolls of carpet in a dark corner of the Seraglio. He believed they were searching for him to assassinate him.

He was placed on the throne (*1808*). Bayraktar prostrated himself before him. The heads of Mustafa's supporters were displayed on the walls; his wives were sewn into leather bags and thrown into the sea. But, a few days later, Constantinople became a battlefield. The Janissaries revolted against Bayraktar and demanded Mustafa again as Sultan, whom Mahmud II 's clemency had spared. The Seraglio was besieged; fire consumed half of Istanbul. Mahmud's friends begged him to order the death of his father Mustafa, which alone could save the Sultan's life and their own: the sentence expired on his lips; he covered his head with a shawl and rolled himself on a sofa. They took advantage of his silence, and Mustafa was strangled. Mahmud, the last and only descendant of Osman, was now an inviolable and sacred figure to all parties. Bayraktar had perished in the flames during the fighting around the Seraglio, and Mahmud began his reign.

The Atmeydani (*Sultanahmet Square*), which looms darkly behind the white walls of the Seraglio, from where I view it, bears witness to the greatest act of this prince's reign: the extinction of the Janissary line. This measure, which alone might have rejuvenated and revitalised the empire, produced nothing but one of the bloodiest and most dismal scenes in the annals of any. Traces of it still scar all the ruined monuments of the Atmeydani; still visible are the marks of cannonballs and shot. Mahmud prepared for it with profound political acumen, and executed it heroically. An accident triggered the final revolt (*sparking the 'Auspicious Incident' of June 1826*).

An Egyptian officer struck a Turkish soldier; the Janissaries overturned their cooking pots (*an act traditionally symbolic of their rebellion*). The Sultan, learning of this and ready for anything, was with his principal advisors in one of his gardens at Besiktas, on the Bosphorus. He rushed to the Seraglio and seized the sacred banner of Muhammad (*The 'Sancak-i Serif' or Holy Standard, of the Prophet*). The Mufti (*Islamic jurist*) and the *ulema* (*the body of Muslim scholars*), gathering around the sacred banner, proclaimed the abolition of the Janissaries. The regular troops, and the Muslim faithful, armed themselves and assembled at the Sultan's command; he himself rode forward at the head of the Seraglio troops. The Janissaries, assembled on the Atmeydani, respected his presence; he rode through the mutinous crowd several times, alone and risking death a thousand times, but animated by the supernatural courage that is inspired by decisive resolve. That day would be the last of his life, or the first of his liberation and power. The Janissaries, deaf to his voice, refused to follow their Agha; numbering forty thousand men, they gathered from all parts of the capital. The Sultan's loyal troops, the gunners and the bostangis, occupied the exits of the streets near the Hippodrome (*Constantine I's arena, now the open-air Sultanahmet Square*).

The Sultan ordered his troops to fire on the mutineers: the gunners hesitated; a determined officer, Kara-Djehennem, ran to one of the cannons, fired his pistol at the priming wad, and the cannon felled the first groups of Janissaries beneath a hail of grapeshot: the Janissaries retreated; the cannons ploughed across the square; fire devoured the barracks; thousands of men, prisoners in that narrow space, perished beneath the collapsed walls, under the grapeshot and in the flames: the executions began, and ended only with the death of the last of the Janissaries. One hundred and twenty thousand men, in the capital alone, enlisted in that corps, were prey to the fury of the people and the Sultan. The waters of the Bosphorus bore their corpses to the Sea of Marmara. The rest of the mutineers were relegated to Asia Minor, and perished en route. The empire was

liberated; the Sultan, a monarch more absolute than any prince has ever been, now rules only obedient slaves; he is able to regenerate the empire at will.

The finest view of Constantinople is from above our apartment, at the top of a belvedere built by Monsieur Truqui on the roof terrace of his house. This belvedere overlooks the entire group of hills of Pera and Galata, and the slopes surrounding the port on the freshwater side. It grants an eagle-eye view of Constantinople and the sea. Europe, Asia-Minor, the entrance to the Bosphorus, and the Sea of Marmara are visible simultaneously. The city is at one's feet. If one were only able to cast a single glance upon the world, it is from here that one should contemplate it. I cannot understand, whenever I spend time there — and I do so several times a day, entire evenings also — I cannot understand how, of the many travellers who have visited Constantinople, so few have spoken of the dazzling effect this scene has on the eyes and mind. Why have none of them described it? Perhaps words lack the means to capture the feeling of space, the wide view, and its colours, and only the language of the eyes, of the artist, can attempt the task? But painting itself has rendered none of this. Only lifeless lines, truncated scenes, and flat colours, while the countless gradations and variety of hues according to the weather and the time of day; the harmonious whole, the colossal grandeur of these lines; the movement, mistiness, intertwining of its diverse aspects; the gleam of sails on its trio of seas; the murmur of people between its shores; the cannon shots that rise thunderously from the ships; the flags rising to, or lowered from, the mast-heads; the crowd of caiques, the vaporous reflections of domes, mosques, spires, and minarets in its waters: where is all that? Let me try again.

The hills of Galata, Pera, and three or four others slope down from my feet to the sea, covered with towns and villages in varying colours; some have houses painted blood red, others black, with a multitude of blue domes punctuating their sombre hues. Between the domes, rise clusters of greenery formed by plane trees, fig trees, and cypresses in the small gardens adjoining the houses. Large open spaces between the houses are cultivated fields and gardens where one can see Turkish women, covered in their black veils, accompanied by their slaves, playing with their children in the shade of the trees. Flocks of white turtledoves and pigeons swim in the blue air above these gardens and rooftops, like white flowers swaying in the wind against the blue of the sea, which forms the horizon.

One can distinguish the streets that wind down towards the sea like ravines, and, lower still, the movement of the people in the bazaars, enveloped by a veil of light, transparent smoke. These separate townships or city districts are separated from one another by verdant promontories crowned with wooden palaces and kiosks painted in every hue, or by deep gorges where the eye is lost among the foothills, and from which one sees only the cypress tops and the sharp, shining spires of minarets rising. Reaching the sea, the gaze wanders over its blue surface amidst a maze of vessels sailing or at anchor. The caiques, like water-birds, skimming the waves, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone on the sea, criss-cross in every direction, plying a course from Europe to Asia, or from Pera to the tip of the Seraglio. Several large warships emerge from the Bosphorus, move by under full sail, salute the Seraglio with their broadsides, the clouds of smoke from which envelop them for a moment like grey wings, then depart, their white canvas resplendent, passing, while seeming to touch them, the tall cypresses and broad plane trees of the Grand Seigneur's garden, to enter the Sea of Marmara. Other warships, the Sultan's entire fleet, are anchored, thirty to forty in number, at the entrance to the Bosphorus; their immense masses cast a shadow on the

waters on the landward side; only five or six can be seen in their entirety. The hillslopes and the trees conceal parts of the others, whose elevated sides, masts, and yards seemingly intertwined with the cypresses, form a semi-circular avenue winding its way to the far end of the Bosphorus. There, the mountains of the opposite coast, the Asian shore, form the backdrop. They are higher and greener than those of the European shore; thick forests crown them and cascade into the gorges that pierce them; their slopes, cultivated as gardens, bear solitary kiosks, galleries, villages, and small mosques, all enclosed by curtains of tall trees; their coves are filled with moored vessels, oared caiques, and small sailing boats. The great city of Scutari *(Uskudar*) stretches out at their feet along a wide shore, dominated by shaded peaks and enclosed by dark cypress forest. An unbroken line of caiques and boats loaded with Asian soldiers, horses, or Greek farmers carrying loads of vegetables to Constantinople, move between Scutari and Galata, and open continually to give passage to some other line of ships emerging from the Sea of Marmara.

Returning to the European coast, but on the farther side of the Golden Horn, the first thing the eye encounters after crossing the channel's blue basin is the Seraglio Point. It is the most majestic, varied, magnificent, and wild site a painter's eye could seek. The Seraglio Point juts forth like a promontory or a flattened cape between these three bodies of water, facing Asia. The promontory, from the Seraglio Gate on the Sea of Marmara to the Sultan's Great Kiosk opposite the Pera Steps, may be two miles in circumference; it is a triangle whose base is the Palace or Seraglio itself, whose headland plunges into the sea, and whose longest side overlooks the inner harbour or channel of Constantinople.

From where I stand, I have a commanding view of it: a forest of gigantic trees, with trunks like columns, rises like the walls, and terraces from the enclosure, extending their branches over the kiosks, batteries, and ships at sea. These trees, a dark, glossy green, are interspersed with verdant lawns, flowerbeds, balustrades, marble steps, domes of gold or lead, minarets as slender as ships' masts, and the broad domes of the palaces, mosques, and kiosks that surround the gardens: a view much like that offered by the terraces, slopes, and palace of Saint-Cloud when viewed from the shore opposite the Seine or from the hills of Meudon; but these rural sites are surrounded on three sides by the sea, and dominated on the fourth by the domes of numerous mosques, and by an ocean of houses and streets that form the true Constantinople or the city of Istanbul. The Hagia Sophia mosque, once the Saint Peter's Basilica of this Rome in the East, raises its massive and gigantic dome above, and close to, the walls of the Seraglio. Hagia Sophia is a shapeless hill of heaped stones surmounted by a dome, which gleams in the sun like a sea of lead.

Further on, the later mosques of Ahmed I (*the Blue Mosque*), Bayezid II (*Bayezid Camii*), Suleiman (*the Suleymaniye Mosque*), and Selim I (*Yavuz Selim*), rise into the sky, their minarets interspersed with Moorish arcades. Cypress trees as thick as the shafts of the minarets accompany them, their dark foliage contrasting everywhere with the resplendent brilliance of the buildings. At the summit of the flattened hill of Stamboul, one can glimpse, among the walls of the houses and the stumps of the minarets, a few ancient mounds, blackened by fire and bronzed by time: they are remnants of ancient Byzantium, in the Hippodrome, now Atmeydani Square. There too extend the vast lines of several palaces of the Sultan or his viziers: the Divan (*Hall of Audience*), with its gate which gave a name to the empire, is in this group of buildings. Higher up, and standing out starkly against the azure horizon of the sky, a splendid mosque crowns the hill and looks out over the two seas: its golden dome, struck by the rays of the sun, seems to reflect its fire, and the translucency of the

dome and its walls, surmounted by aerial galleries, gives it the appearance of a monument formed of silver or bluish porcelain. The broad view ends there, and the eye descends again traversing two other large hills, covered with a mass of mosques, palaces, and colourful houses, to the far end of the harbour, where the sea gradually narrows and disappears beneath the trees in the Arcadian valley of the 'Fresh Waters of Europe'. If one's gaze travels up the channel, it floats over masts clustered at the edge of the arsenal, and the Staircase of the Dead in Kasimpasa, and below the cypress forests that cover the slopes of Constantinople, to find the Galata Tower, built by the Genoese, rising, like a ship's mast, from an ocean of rooftops, between Galata and Pera, like a colossal milestone between two cities; and returns to rest, at last, on the tranquil basin of the Bosphorus, vaguely outlined between Europe and Asia.

Such is the essence of the picture. But when one adds to these principal features the immense frame that envelops them and highlights them against the sky and the sea, the dark lines of the Asian mountains, the low, hazy horizon of the Gulf of Nicomedia (*the Gulf of Izmit*), the ridges of the Bursa mountains that appear behind the Seraglio, beyond the Sea of Marmara, their vast snows spread like white clouds in the firmament; when one adds to this majestic whole the grace and infinite colour of its countless details; and the varied effects of the sky, the wind, and the hours of the day on the sea and the city; when one adds further the fleets of merchant ships detaching themselves, like flocks of seabirds, from the dark trees of the Seraglio headland, attaining the middle of the channel, and slowly dwindling away into the Bosphorus, forming ever-new groupings; when the sun's rays skimming the tops of trees and minarets, set ablaze, like the reflections of some vast fire, the red walls of Scutari and Stamboul; when the freshening or fading breeze flattens the Sea of Marmara to a lake of molten lead, or, rippling the waters of the Bosphorus lightly, seems to spread across them the resplendent mesh of a vast silver net; when the smoke from the steamboats rises and swirls amid the great shimmering sails of the Sultan's ships or frigates; when the cannon marking the moment for prayer resounds, with its prolonged echoes, from the decks of one of the fleet's vessels as far as the cypresses of the Fields of the Dead; when the countless sounds from the seven hills and the thousands of ships rise in gusts from the city and the sea, and reach one, carried by the breeze, on the height from which one gazes; when one reflects that the skies here are almost always as deep and pure, that these waters and their natural harbours, always as calm and safe, where every house-front along their extensive quays is a mooring where a ship can anchor at any time beneath the windows, are also ports in which triple-decker vessels are built and launched into the sea beneath the very shade of the plane trees on the shore; when one remembers that one is in Constantinople, in the city that is the Queen of Europe and Asia, at the precise point where the armies of the two continents have assembled, from time to time, either to embrace or to fight one another; when night surprises one in this contemplation of which the eye never tires; when the lighthouses of Galata and the seraglio of Scutari, and the lights on the high sterns of ships, are illuminated; when the stars gradually detach themselves, one by one or in groups, from the blue firmament, and starlight envelops the black peaks of the Asian coast, the snow-capped peaks of Uludag which is the Mount Olympus of Bursa, the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara, the dark plateau of the Topkapi Palace, the hills of Istanbul, and the three seas, like a blue net strewn with pearls in which all of Nature seems caught; when the quiet glow of the firmament, in which the rising moon leaves sufficient light to distinguish the vast masses that fill the scene, erases or softens the details; then one has before one, to be sampled at every hour of the day and night, the most magnificent and delightful

spectacle that the human eye can grasp; an intoxication of sight that is communicated to the mind, dazzling one's gaze and one's soul. This is the spectacle I have enjoyed every day and every night for the past month.

The French ambassador having invited me to accompany him on the visit to Hagia Sophia that all newly arrived ambassadors are entitled to make, I found myself this morning at eight o'clock at a gate in Istanbul that opens onto the sea, behind the walls of the Seraglio. One of His Highness's principal officers was waiting for us on the shore and led us first to his house, where he had arranged for refreshments. The apartments were numerous and elegantly decorated, but furnished only with divans and pipes. The divans were placed against the windows overlooking the Sea of Marmara. Lunch was served in the European style; only the dishes were local: they were numerous and refined, but all new to us. After lunch, the ladies went to visit the wives of this Turkish colonel, who were confined for the day to a lower apartment. The harem, or women's apartment, was the very one where we had been received. We were all equipped with yellow morocco-leather slippers to wear in the mosque; otherwise, we would have had to take off our boots and walk barefoot. We entered the courtyard of the Hagia Sophia mosque, amidst a number of guards who parted the crowd gathered to see us. The faces of the Ottomans looked worried and displeased. Zealous Muslims view the entry of Christians as a desecration of their sanctuaries. After we arrived, the mosque gate was closed.



'Shadirvan in front of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (1851)' - attributed to David Roberts (British, 1796 – 1864)
*PICRYL*

The great basilica of Hagia Sophia, built by Justinian I (*in 532-537 AD; the original church on the site is said to have been built by Constantius II, c 360AD, or earlier by his father Constantine I*), is one of the largest edifices that the genius of the Christian religion has brought forth; but one senses, from the barbarity of the art that produced this mass of stone, that it was the work of a time of corruption and decadence. It is a confused and crude memory of a taste that is no more; the formless sketch of an art still in its infancy. The temple is preceded by a long, wide peristyle, covered and enclosed like that of Saint Peter's in Rome. Granite columns of prodigious height, but set within the walls and forming a solid mass with them, separate this vestibule from the forecourt. A large door opens onto the interior. The church's enclosure is decorated on its sides with superb columns of porphyry, Egyptian granite, and precious marbles; but these columns, of varying sizes, proportions, and orders, are clearly fragments borrowed from other temples and placed there without symmetry or taste, as barbarians will re-use the mutilated fragments of a palace to support a hovel. Gigantic pillars of common masonry support an airy dome like that of Saint Peter's, and whose effect is at least as majestic. This dome, once covered with mosaics that formed pictures on the vault, was whitewashed over when Mehmed II seized Hagia Sophia (*in 1453, on his capture of the city*) and converted it into a mosque. Some of the plaster has fallen away, revealing the former Christian decoration. Circular galleries, backed by vast tribunes, run around the basilica, at the level of the vault's springs. The building's appearance is beautiful from this vantage point: vast, sombre, unadorned, with its vaults stripped bare and bronzed columns, it resembles the interior of a colossal tomb whose relics have been scattered. It inspires awe, silence, and meditation on the instability of the works of human beings, who build, with book or a sword in hand, inspired by ideas they believe to be eternal, but in whom successive ideas conspire in turn to re-create or ruin their monuments. In its present state, Hagia Sophia resembles a vast divine caravanserai. Here, the columns of the temple of Ephesus, the images of the apostles with golden halos on the vault, look down on the hanging lamps of the imams.

Leaving Hagia Sophia, we visited the seven principal mosques of Constantinople; they are smaller, but infinitely more beautiful. One senses that Islam possessed its own artistic tradition, its own ready-made art, in keeping with the simplicity of its ideas, when it erected these splendid temples, simple and regular in form, without the concept of sacrificial altars. These mosques all resemble each other, differing only in size and colouration; they are fronted by large courtyards surrounded by cloisters, where the schools and the imams' residences are located. Magnificent trees shade these courtyards, and numerous fountains spread the sound and the voluptuous coolness of their waters. Minarets of admirable craftsmanship rise, often as aerial landmarks at the four corners of each mosque, and soar above their domes; small circular galleries, with a parapet of stone carved with openwork like lace, surround at various heights the slender shafts of the minarets: there, at different hours of the day, stands the muezzin who calls the hour, summoning the city to the constant thought pre-occupying all Muslims, that of Allah. An openwork portico overlooking the gardens and courtyards, raised a few steps, leads to the temple gate. The temple is a square or round forecourt, surmounted by a dome supported by elegant pillars or beautiful fluted columns. A pulpit is placed against one of the pillars. The frieze is formed by verses from the Quran (*Koran*), written in ornate characters on the walls. The walls are painted with arabesques. Iron wires run across the mosque from one pillar to the next, supporting a multitude of lamps, hanging ostrich-eggs, and bouquets of wheat or flowers. Rush mats and rich carpets cover the flagstones of the courtyard. The effect is simple and magnificent. This is not a temple inhabited

by one of a number of gods; it is a house of prayer and contemplation, where people gather to worship the one and universal God. What we ourselves call worship does not exist in this religion. The rite is simple: an annual festival, ablutions, prayer at the five daily intervals, belief in a creator and rewarder, Allah — that is all. The priestly body was formed only later. Every time I have entered mosques, whether on that day or any other, I have found a small number of Turks squatting or lying on the carpets, praying with all the outward signs of fervour and complete absorption of mind.

In the courtyard of the Bajazet mosque, I saw Constantine's beautiful empty tomb. It is a porphyry sarcophagus of prodigious size; it could hold twenty heroes. The block of porphyry is evidently from the Greek period. It is likely some fragment torn from the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. Centuries lend their temples as they do their tombs, which are returned empty. Where are Constantine's bones? The Turks have enclosed his sepulchre in a kiosk, to prevent it being desecrated. The tombs of the Sultans and their families are in the gardens of the mosques they built, beside marble kiosks shaded by trees and fragrant with flowers; fountains murmur outside, sometimes even within, the kiosk itself; and the cult of remembrance is so profound among Muslims that I have never passed by one of these tombs without finding bouquets of freshly picked flowers placed on the doors or window-sills of the numerous monuments.

*June 13, 1833,*

I have just finished a trip up and down the Bosphorus channel from Constantinople to the mouth of the Black Sea. I will sketch a few features of this enchanting landscape, so as to recall them later. I had never imagined that sea, sky, land and humankind together could create such ravishing scenes. Only the translucent mirror of the sky or the sea can see and reflect them in their entirety: my imagination sees them and preserves them here, though my memory can only retain and depict them in a few successive details. Let me then describe those scenes, view by view, cape by cape, cove by cove, and stroke by stroke of the pen. It would take a painter years to render a single one of the Bosphorus's shores. The landscape changes with every glance, and yet it is always renewed, just as beautiful in its ever-changing appearance. What can be said in a few words?

Driven along by four Armenian oarsmen in one of those long caiques that cut through the sea like a fish, I embarked alone at seven in the morning, beneath a clear sky, under a brilliant sun. An interpreter, reclining in the boat between the rowers and me, provided me with the names of the various locations, and pointed out the details. We first sailed along the quays of Tophane, with its artillery barracks. The town of Tophane, rising in tiers of colour-washed houses like bouquets of flowers clustered around the marble mosque, faded away beneath the tall cypresses of the Great Field of the Dead at Pera. Its dark curtain of trees marks the end of the hills on that side. We glided through a multitude of ships at anchor and countless caiques carrying officers of the Seraglio, the ministers and their attendants, and the families of Armenians whom the working day recalled to their trading posts, to Constantinople.

These Armenians are a magnificent group of men, each dressed simply and nobly in a black turban and long blue robe, tied around the waist with a white cashmere shawl; they have athletic physiques; their faces are intelligent, yet commonplace; their complexions are ruddy, their eyes blue, their beards blond; they are the Swiss of the Orient: industrious, peaceful, and orderly like them, but similarly calculating and greedy. They place their mercantile genius at the service of the

Sultan or the Turks. There is nothing heroic or warlike in this race of men: commerce is their genius; and they will conduct it under any master. They are the group of Christians who sympathise most closely with the Turks. They prosper and accumulate wealth that the Turks neglect to garner, and that escapes the Greeks and the Jews: everything is in their hands here; they are the dragomans of all the pashas and viziers. The women, whose features, as pure but more delicate, are reminiscent of the serene beauty of Englishwomen, or that of countrywomen from the Swiss mountains, are admirable; the children likewise. The caiques were full of them. They bring baskets of flowers from their country houses, displayed on the prow.

We rounded Tophane Point, and glided through the shadows of the great warships of the Ottoman fleet, anchored off the coast of Europe. Those enormous masses lay there as if on a lake. The sailors, dressed like Turkish soldiers in red or blue jackets, were leaning nonchalantly on the shrouds, or bathing in the sea around the keels. Large troop-laden longboats shuttled back and forth between the shore and the ships; and the elegant barges of the Kapudan-Pasha, rowed by twenty oarsmen, passed us like arrows. Admiral Tahir Pasha and his officers were dressed in brown frock coats and wore the fez, a large red woollen cap which they pull down over their foreheads and eyes, as if ashamed of having discarded the noble and graceful turban. These men looked melancholy and resigned; they smoked their long amber-tipped pipes.

There are about thirty beautifully constructed warships present, seemingly ready to set sail; but they lack sufficient officers and sailors, and this magnificent fleet is currently merely a decorative feature of the Bosphorus. While the Sultan (*Mahmud II*) contemplates it from his kiosk at Beylerbeyi, located opposite on the Asian coast, Ibrahim Pasha's two or three frigates peacefully control the Mediterranean, while the boats of Samos dominate the Archipelago. A few oars' lengths from these vessels, near the European shore, we glided beneath the windows of a long and magnificent palace of the Sultan, Uninhabited now, it resembles an amphibious palace; the Bosphorus's waves, rising only slightly in the wind, skirt the windows and cast their foam into the ground-floor apartments; the steps of the porches are soaked by the water; grilled gates open onto the sea, even in the courtyards and gardens. There are sheds for the caiques and baths for the Sultanas, who swim in the sea sheltered by the shutters of their salons. Behind these seaside courtyards, gardens of shrubs, lilacs, and roses rise in successive tiers, supporting terraces, and gilded kiosks with grilles. These flowery lawns yield to vast groves of oak, laurel, and plane trees that cover the slopes, and rise amidst the rocks to the hilltop.

The Sultan's apartments are open, and through the windows one can see richly-gilded ceiling mouldings, crystal chandeliers, divans, and silk curtains. Those of the harem are shuttered by thick, elegantly carved wooden grilles. Immediately beyond this palace, begins an unbroken series of palaces, houses, and gardens belonging to the Grand Seigneur's principal favourites, ministers, and pashas. All of them sleep by the sea, as if to inhale its coolness. Their windows are open; the masters sit on divans in vast rooms gleaming with gold and silk; they smoke, converse, and drink sherbet while watching the boats pass by. Their apartments also open onto tiered terraces laden with trellises, shrubs, and flowers. Numerous slaves, in rich costumes, are generally seated on the steps of staircases bathed by the sea; and the caiques, manned by oarsmen, are moored at the edge of these stairs, ready to receive and bear away the masters of these dwellings. Everywhere the harems form a wing, somewhat separated by gardens or courtyards from the men's apartments. They are barred. I only saw, occasionally, the head of some pretty child pressing against the

openings of the trellis entwined with climbing flowers, to glance at the sea, and the white arm of a woman half-opening or closing a shutter. These palaces and houses are all made of wood, very richly crafted, with eaves, galleries, and countless balustrades, all nestled in the shade of tall trees, amidst climbing plants, groves of jasmine and rose-beds. All are bathed by the current of the Bosphorus, and possess inner courtyards into which sea water flows and re-flows, where the caiques find shelter.

The Bosphorus is so deep everywhere that we passed close enough to the shore to breathe the fragrance of the flowers, and allow our oarsmen to rest a moment in the shade of the trees. The largest vessels also passed close to us; and often a yardarm of a brig or ship became entangled in the branches of a tree, the trellises of a vine, or even the shutters of a window, and ran on, carrying with it shreds of foliage or fragments of the shutters. The houses are separated from one another only by groups of trees on a few small promontories, or by angular rocks covered with ivy and moss, which run from the crests of the hills and extend a few feet into the water. Only occasionally does a deeper, hollower inlet appear between two separate hills, formed by the carved-out bed of a torrent or stream. A village spreads there along the flattened borders of these gulfs, adorned by beautiful Moorish fountains, a mosque with a dome in gold or azure, and a slender minaret whose summit blends with that of the tall plane trees. Colour-washed cottages rise in an amphitheatre, on both sides and at the back of these small gulfs, their facades and kiosks in a thousand hues; on the hilltops, large villas extend, flanked by hanging gardens, and groups of broad-crowned fir trees, complete the horizon. At the foot of these villages are granite beaches or quays only a few feet wide; the beaches are planted with sycamores, vines, and jasmine, and form moorings, in which the caiques find refuge, lining the coves as far as the wider sea. There, at anchor, lie multitudes of boats and merchant brigs from all nations. They anchor opposite the shipowners' houses or shops, and often a gangplank thrown from the brig's deck to a villa's window serves to transport the goods.

A crowd of children, vegetable vendors, and date and fruit sellers bustle about these quays; they form the bazaars of the villages, and the Bosphorus. Sailors of every kind and speaking every language are gathered there amidst the Ottomans, who smoke, squatting on their rugs, by the fountains, around the trunks of the plane trees.

No view of the villages of Lucerne or Interlaken can convey the exquisite grace and picturesque charm of these little inlets of the Bosphorus. It is impossible not to pause for a moment, and allow the boat to rest on the oars, so as to contemplate them. One finds such towns, ports, or villages roughly every five minutes along the first half of the European coast that is to say, for six or seven miles. They then become a little less frequent, and the landscape takes on a more rustic character with the increasing elevation of the hills and greater depth of the forests. I am speaking here only of the European coast, because I will describe the Asian coast, which is even more beautiful and along which I returned, later; but it must not be forgotten, in order to form an accurate picture, that the Asian coast was still only a few strokes of the oars from me; that often one is as close to one shore as the other, holding the middle of the current in the places where the channel narrows and bends, and that the same scenes that I describe on the European side delight the eye every time it falls upon the Asian coast.

But let me return to the shore I was now approaching more closely. There is a place, beyond the last of these natural harbours, where the Bosphorus narrows, like a wide and swift river,

between two rocky headlands that plunge steeply from the top of twin mountains; to the naked eye, the winding channel appears to be entirely confined there; it is only as one advances that one sees it unfold, in turning behind Cape Europa, then widen and deepen into a lake, bordered, on the European shore, by the two townships of Therapia (*Tarabya*) and Buyukdere. From the base to the summit of these two rocky headlands, covered with trees and thick clumps of vegetation, rise half-ruined fortifications, and enormous white, crenellated towers, with drawbridges and keeps; fine constructions of the Middle Ages. These are the famous castles of Europe and Asia (*Rumeli Hisari and Anadolu Hisari, respectively*) from which Mehmed II long besieged and threatened Constantinople, before entering it. They rise, like two white phantoms, from the dark bosom of the pines and cypresses, as if to bar access to the two seas. Their towers and turrets rising above ships under full sail; the long ivy branches hanging like warriors' cloaks from their half-ruined walls; the grey rocks that support them, their corner-towers emerging from the surrounding forest; the broad shadows they cast on the water, render this one of the most distinctive scenes on the Bosphorus. It is here that it loses its exclusively graceful aspect, taking on one that is graceful or sublime by turns. Turkish cemeteries stretch out at their feet, and funereal turbans carved in white marble emerge here and there, from clumps of foliage bathed by the waves. Happy are the Turks! They rest forever in their favourite places, in the shade of the shrubs they loved, by the streams whose murmurs charmed them, visited by the doves they fed in their lives, embalmed by the flowers they planted: if they do not possess the earth during their lives, they surely possess it after death. The remains of those that one has loved are not relegated to those fields full of bones that human beings create, from which one's prayers and pious memories recoil in horror.

Beyond the castles, the Bosphorus widens; the mountains of Europe and Asia rise more rugged and desolate. Only the shores of the sea are still dotted here and there with white cottages and small, rustic mosques perched on a knoll beside a fountain, and beneath the canopy of a plane tree. The village of Therapia (*Tarabya*), residence of the French and English ambassadors, lies a little further along the shore; the high forests that overlook it cast their shadows on the terraces and lawns of the two palaces; small valleys meander, nestled between the rocks, and form the limits of the two powers. Two frigates, English and French, anchored in the canal opposite the respective palaces, were there to await the signal from the ambassadors, and to carry messages of war or peace to the fleets of the Mediterranean.

Buyukdere, a charming town at the end of the gulf formed by the Bosphorus as it bends to flow into the Black Sea, stretches like a curtain of palaces and villas across the slopes of two dark mountains. A beautiful quay separates the gardens and houses from the sea. The Russian fleet, composed of five ships of the line, three frigates, and two steamships, was anchored before the terraces of the Russian palaces, forming a city on the water, opposite the town and its delightful shade. The boats carrying orders from one ship to another; the vessels fetching water from the fountains or taking the sick to the shore; the yachts of the young officers, struggling like racehorses, their sails, leaning to the wind, sloshing in the waves; the cannon fire that echoed through the depths of the valleys of Asia, announcing new ships emerging from the Black Sea; a Russian camp perched on the scorched slopes of the Giant's Mountain (*Joshua's Hill, Hazreti Yusa Tepesi*), opposite the fleet; the beautiful meadow of Buyukdere on the left, with its grove of magnificent plane trees, a single one of which can shade an entire regiment; the magnificent forests of the palaces of Russia and Austria, which adorn the hilltops; a multitude of elegant houses with balconies lining the quays, roses and lilacs hanging in festoons from the edges of the terraces; Armenians with their children,

constantly arriving or departing in their small boats laden with branches and flowers; the darker, narrower arm of the Bosphorus, appearing, stretching towards the misty horizon of the Black Sea; other mountain ranges, entirely devoid of villages and houses, rising into the clouds cloaked in dark forests, like formidable boundaries between the stormy sea and the magnificent serenity of the waters of Constantinople; two fortresses (*Garipce Kalesi and Poyraskoy Kalesi*), facing each other on either shore, crowning the advanced heights of two sombre capes with their batteries, towers, and battlements; and finally, a double line of forested rocks, fading into the blue waters of the Black Sea: that is the view from Buyukdere. Add to this the perpetual passage of a line of ships arriving or departing Constantinople, depending on whether the wind blows from the north or the south. These ships are sometimes so numerous that one day, returning to my caïque, I counted nearly two hundred in less than an hour. They sail in groups, like migrating birds changing climates; if the wind shifts, they tack from shore to shore, changing course beneath the windows and trees of Asia and Europe; if the breeze freshens, they anchor in one of the countless coves or at the tips of the small capes of the Bosphorus, and set sail again a short while later. Every minute, the view, enlivened and transformed by these groups of vessels under sail or at anchor, and by the various positions they assume along the shore, alters in appearance rendering the Bosphorus a marvellous kaleidoscope.

Having arrived in Buyukdere, I took possession of the charming house on the quay, which Monsieur Truqui kindly displaying his hospitality once more, has offered us; we will spend the summer here.

*The same date, June 13, 1833.*

It might seem, after the description of the European coast of the Bosphorus, that Nature is unsurpassed there, and that no landscape can outshine the one that filled my eyes. However, I travelled along the Asian coast on my way back to Constantinople this evening, and found it a thousand times more beautiful than the European coast. The Asian coast owes almost nothing to man; Nature is everything there. It lacks a Büyükdere, a Therapia, the ambassadorial palaces, the towns of Armenians or Franks; there are only mountains, gorges that separate them, small valleys carpeted with meadows hollowed out between the roots of rocks, streams that meander through them, torrents that whiten them with their foam, forests that cling to their slopes, slide into their ravines, and descend to the shores of the numerous gulfs along the coast; a variety of shapes, hues, foliage, and vegetation that the landscape painter's brush could scarcely invent; a few isolated houses belonging to Turkish sailors or cultivators, scattered here and there along the shore, or over the plateau of a wooded hill, or grouped on the rocky point to which the current carries one, breaking in waves as deep blue as the night sky; a few white sails, like dry sheets washerwomen fold, sails of fishing boats, penetrating the deep coves, which you see gliding in front of one plane tree after another; countless flocks of white birds preening themselves at the edges of the meadows, eagles soaring from the top of the mountains out over the sea; mysterious coves, entirely enclosed by rocks and gigantic trees, whose branches, laden with clouds of leaves, bend over the waves, and form cradles on the sea into which the caiques sink; with one or two villages hidden in the shadow of these coves, their gardens rising behind them on green slopes, their clusters of trees at the foot of the cliffs, their boats rocked by the gentle waves at their doors, flocks of doves on the rooftops, women and children at the windows, old men seated under the plane tree at the foot

of the minaret; farmers returning from the fields in their caiques; and others filling their boats with green bundles of myrtle or flowering heather to dry and burn in the winter.

Hidden behind these mounds of overhanging greenery, which overspill and touch the water, neither the boat nor the oarsman is visible, and one seems to see a piece of the shore, detached from the land by the current, floating haphazardly on the sea, with its green foliage and still-fragrant flowers. The coastline presents this aspect as far as the fortress (*Rumeli Hisari*) of Mehmed II, which seems, for its part, to close off the Bosphorus like a Swiss lake. There, its character changes: the hills, less rugged, slope gently, their backs sagging, and their narrow valleys hollowing out more softly; Asiatic villages spread there, richer and more crowded; the' Sweet Waters of Asia' (*Göksu Deresi*), a charming little plain shaded by trees, dotted with kiosks and Moorish fountains, comes in sight; a great number of Constantinople carriages, gilded wooden cages on four wheels, drawn by a pair of oxen, are scattered across the lawns; veiled Turkish women emerge from them and gather, seating themselves at the foot of a tree or on the shore, with their children and their Black African slaves; groups of men sit further away, drinking coffee or smoking pipes. The varied colours of the men's and children's clothing, the monotonous brown of the women's veils, form beneath the trees a strange mosaic of hues that delights the eye. Oxen and tame buffaloes ruminate in the meadows; Arabian horses, with velvet, silk, and gold trappings, paw the ground beside the caiques that arrive in droves, filled with Armenian or Jewish women who sit unveiled on the grass by the stream, forming a line, women and girls, in various costumes and poses. Some are breathtakingly beautiful, their beauty further enhanced by the exotic variety of hairstyles and costumes. I saw a large number of Turkish women from the harems, unveiled; almost all of them small, very pale, with sad eyes. and a thin, sickly appearance. In general, the climate of Constantinople, despite all its apparent benefits as regards one's health, seems unhealthy to me; the women in general, at least, are far from deserving the reputation for beauty they enjoy; only the Armenian and Jewish women struck me as beautiful. But how great the difference from the beauty of the Jewish and Armenian women of Arabia, and especially from the indescribable charm of the Greek women of Syria and Asia Minor! A little further, to the south, on the very shore of the Bosphorus, rises the magnificent new palace now inhabited by the Grand Seigneur (*Mahmud II*).

Beylerbeyi is a palace in the Italian style, displaying also Indian and Moorish influences; displaying an immense, multi-storied main section with wings and interior gardens. Large flowerbeds planted with roses and watered by fountains extend behind the buildings, between the mountain and the palace; a narrow granite quay separates the windowed facade from the sea. I passed slowly beneath this palace, where, surrounded by marble and gold, so many worries and so many fears lurk. I glimpsed the Grand Seigneur, seated on a divan in one of the kiosks overlooking the sea; Ahmed Fethi Pasha, one of his young favourites, was standing beside him. The Sultan, struck by our European attire, pointed us out to Ahmed Pasha, as if to ask who we were. I greeted the master of Asia in the Oriental manner; he graciously returned my greeting. All the shutters of the palace were open, and the rich decorations of this magnificent and delightful dwelling could be seen gleaming. The wing inhabited by the women, the harem, was closed; it is immense, but the number of women who actually live there is unknown. Two caiques, entirely gilded, manned by twenty-four oarsmen each, were at the palace gate, on the water. These caiques are in the most exquisite taste, being of European design, and Oriental magnificence: the prow of one of them, which extended at least twenty-five feet, was formed by aa golden swan, with outstretched wings,

which seemed to bear the golden boat over the waves; a silk pavilion mounted on gold columns formed the stern, and rich cashmere shawls served as a seat for the Sultan; the prow of the second caique was a feathered golden arrow which seemed to fly, detached from the bow, over the sea.

I lingered, for a long time, out of the Sultan's sight, admiring the palace and its gardens: everything there seemed arranged with perfect taste. I know of nothing in Europe that presents to the eye greater magnificence and enchantment as regards royal residences: everything, seemingly sprung from the hands of an artist, is pure, radiant with brilliance and colour. The palace roofs are concealed by gilded balustrades, and even the chimneys, which in Europe disfigure the lines of our public buildings, are gilded and fluted columns, whose elegant capitals add to the decoration of this dwelling. I admire this prince, who spent his childhood in the shadows of the Seraglio's dungeons; threatened daily with death; instructed in misfortune by the wise and unfortunate Selim; thrust onto the throne by the death of his brother; nurturing for fifteen years, in silent thought, the liberation of the empire and the restoration of Islam through the destruction of the Janissaries; executing his plan with the heroism and calmness of the fatalist; constantly defying his people so as to regenerate them; bold and impassive in peril; gentle and merciful when he could consult his heart, yet lacking support around him, instruments to carry out the good he contemplated; his worth unrecognised by his people; betrayed by his pashas; ruined by his neighbours; abandoned by fortune, without which one can do nothing; standing by, and witnessing the ruin of his throne and his empire; finally, abandoning his true self, hastening to squander his remaining existence, a shadow of sovereignty, on the pleasant shore of the Bosphorus. A man of noble desires, and upright will, yet ultimately a man of insufficient genius and a weakened will: like the last of the Greek emperors (*Constantine XI Palaiologos*) whose city he occupies, worthy of another people, and a better time, and capable of dying at least a hero. He was once a great man.

History has no tale comparable to that of the destruction of the Janissaries; it was the most meticulously planned and heroically accomplished event I know of. Mahmud has that to his name; but why is it the only notable achievement of his reign to date? The hardest part was done; the tyrants of the empire were overthrown, all that was needed was will and perseverance to revitalise that empire by civilising it. Mahmud has stopped short. Could it be that genius is even rarer than heroism? (*Mahmud continued to modernise until his death in 1838, his Reform Movement being continued by his son Abdulmecid I.*)

After the Beylerbey Palace, the Asian coast becomes wooded and solitary again as far as Scutari (*Uskudar*), which shines like a rose garden at the tip of its cape, at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara. Opposite Scutari, the verdant tip of the Seraglio comes into view; while between the European coast, crowned by its three cities, and the coast of Istanbul, resplendent with its domes and minarets, lies the immense port of Constantinople, where ships, anchored on both shores, leave only a wide channel for the caiques. We glided through this maze of vessels, like a Venetian gondola beneath the shadows of the palaces, and disembarked at the Staircase of the Dead, below an avenue of cypresses.

*June 16.*

This morning, I visited the slave market guided by a young man from Constantinople. After traversing the long streets of Istanbul that run alongside the walls of the old Seraglio, and passing through several magnificent bazaars teeming with countless merchants and buyers, we

climbed, via narrow alleyways, to a muddy square where the gate of another bazaar opened. Thanks to the Turkish attire we were wearing, and to my guide's perfect command of the language, we were allowed into this marketplace commanded by men. How many years and successive revelations it has taken for human reason to cease seeing force as right, and for slavery to become a crime and a blasphemy in the eyes of intelligent human beings! Such progress though! And how much greater it promises! How many things there are that do not shock us, but which will be incomprehensible crimes in the eyes of our descendants! These were my thoughts as I entered the slave-bazaar, where they sell the lives, the souls, the bodies, the freedom of others, as we sell an ox or a horse, and where they believe themselves the rightful owner of what they have thus purchased. How many legitimacies so assumed we are unaware of! Yet they are real, for we cannot ask more of such men than they know. Their convictions are truths to them; they possess no others. God alone commands truth and conviction, and distributes them to us in proportion and according to our respective intellects. (*Lamartine was destined to sign the French governmental decree abolishing slavery, on 27th April 1848*.)

The slave market was a vast open courtyard, surrounded by a portico surmounted by a roof. Beneath this portico, enclosed on the courtyard side by a waist-high wall, were doors leading to the rooms where the merchants held the slaves. These doors remained open so that the buyers, as they strolled by, could see these latter. The male and female slaves were kept in separate rooms; the women were unveiled. Besides the slaves confined in these lower rooms, there were a large number grouped together in the arcade, under the portico, and in the courtyard. We began by walking amidst these different groups. The most remarkable was one of twelve or fifteen Abyssinian girls. Leaning back to back, like the ancient caryatids that support a vase on their heads, they formed a circle, all their faces turned toward the onlookers. These faces were generally of great beauty: almond-shaped eyes, aquiline noses, thin lips, delicate oval cheeks, and long black hair that shone like ravens' wings. The pensive, sad, and languid expression of their faces renders the Abyssinian women, with their coppery complexions, a most admirable race; they are tall, slender, and graceful like the palm fronds of their beautiful land. Their arms are held in ravishing poses. These young women wore only a long shirt of coarse yellowish linen. They wore bracelets of blue glass beads on their legs. Seated on their heels, and motionless, their chins resting on the back of their hands or on their knees, they looked at us with eyes as gentle and sad as the eyes of the goat or lamb that the peasant woman holds by the rope and haggles over at the fair in our villages; sometimes one would say a word to another, and they would smile. There was one who held a small child in her arms and was crying because the merchant wanted to sell it without her to a child trafficker. Not far from this group were seven or eight little Black African lads, aged between eight and twelve, quite well-dressed, with an appearance of health and well-being. They were playing together an Oriental game whose instruments are small pebbles which are combined in different ways in small holes made in the sand: during this time, merchants and resellers circulated around them, taking now one, now the other, by the arm, examining him carefully from head to toe, feeling him, and making him show his teeth, to judge his age and his health; then the child, distracted a moment from his games, eagerly returned to them.

I then passed under the covered porticoes, filled with a crowd of slaves and buyers. The Turks who conducted this trade strolled among the various groups; they were superbly dressed in fur-lined coats, a long pipe in hand, their faces anxious and preoccupied, jealously watching every glance cast into their shops full of men and women; but, taking us for Arabs or Egyptians, dared

not deny us access to any of the rooms. Street vendors of small cakes and dried fruit roamed the gallery, selling food to the slaves. I slipped several piastres into the hand of one of them so that he could distribute his basket to a group of small Black African children, who devoured the pastries.

There I noticed a poor Black African woman of nineteen or twenty, remarkably beautiful, but of a harsh and sorrowful beauty. She was sitting on a bench in the gallery, richly dressed, her face uncovered, amidst a dozen other Black African women in rags displayed for sale at very low prices; she held on her lap a superb little boy of three or four, magnificently dressed as well. This child, who was a mulatto, had the noblest features, the most graceful mouth, and the most intelligent and proud eyes imaginable. I played with him and gave him cakes and sugared almonds that I bought from a nearby stall; but his mother snatched what I had given him from his hands and threw them angrily and proudly onto the pavement. She bowed her face and wept. I believe it was out of fear of being sold separately from her son, and, moved by her misfortune, I asked Monsieur Morlach, my obliging driver, to buy her and the child for me. I would have taken them together and raised the beautiful child, so keeping him with his mother. We approached a broker acquaintance of Monsieur Morlach, who entered into negotiations with the owner of the beautiful slave and the child. The owner at first pretended to genuinely want to sell her, and the poor woman began to sob even louder, and the little boy also started to cry, putting his arms around his mother's neck. But this was merely a game on the part of the merchant; and when he found that I would immediately pay the high price he had set, he bemoaned his misfortune as regards the pair, for he took the broker aside and confessed that the slave girl was not for sale; that she belonged to a wealthy Turk, whose son this child was; that she was too proud and un-tameable as regards the harem, and that, to correct and humiliate her, her master had sent her to the bazaar as if to get rid of her, but with the secret command not to sell her. This kind of punishment often occurs; and when a Turk is displeased, his most common threat is to send someone to the bazaar. So, we passed on.

We traversed a great many rooms, each containing four or five women, almost all of them dark-skinned and plain, but with an appearance of health. Most seemed indifferent to their situation, and even solicited the buyers; they chatted, laughed among themselves, and made critical observations about the faces of those haggling over them. One or two wept and hid at the rear of the room, returning reluctantly to stand prominently on the platform where they seated themselves once more. We saw several being led away cheerfully by a Turk who had just bought them, taking their small bundles folded in handkerchiefs, and covering their faces with their white veils. We witnessed two or three acts of mercy, that Christian charity might envy, performed by good Muslims. Turks came to buy old female slaves, rejected from their masters' houses because of their age and infirmities, and led them away. We asked what use these poor women could be to them? 'Allah wishes it,' the broker replied. And Monsieur Morlach informed me that several Muslims sent people to the markets to buy poor slave, infirm men and women, to be fed, out of charity, in their homes. The spirit of God never completely abandons Mankind.

The last rooms we visited were half-shuttered, and our entry was disputed for some time; there was only one slave in each, under the guard of a woman. They were young and beautiful Circassian women, newly arrived from their country. They were dressed in white, with remarkable elegance and coquettishness. Their beautiful features showed neither sorrow nor astonishment, but a disdainful indifference. These beautiful white slaves from Georgia or Circassia have become

extremely rare since Greek women no longer populate the seraglios, and since Russia has prohibited the sale of women.

However, Georgian families still raise their daughters for this shameful trade, and smugglers manage to bring in shipments from time to time. The price of these beautiful creatures reaches between twelve and twenty thousand piastres, between three and five thousand francs, while Black African slaves of ordinary looks sell for only five or six hundred francs, and the more attractive of them for between a thousand and twelve hundred. In Arabia and Syria, they would fetch five or six hundred piastres, a hundred and fifty to two hundred francs. One of these Georgian women was exquisitely beautiful: with delicate and sensitive features, a gentle and pensive eye, and skin of admirable whiteness and radiance. But the physiognomy of the women of that country is far from the charm and purity of that of the Arabs: one senses the North in their faces. She was sold before our very eyes for the harem of the young Pasha of Constantinople. We left with withered hearts and moist eyes from this scene, which is repeated every day and at every hour in the cities of the Orient, and returned pensively to the bazaar of Istanbul.

This is what stagnant government does! It enshrines age-old barbarities, and by maintaining rights established in antiquity gives legitimacy to crime. The fanatics for the past have proved as guilty, and as disastrous for humanity, as the fanatics for the future will. The former sacrifice humanity to their ignorance and memories; the latter to their hopes and impulsiveness. If humanity did and believed what its ancestors did and believed, the entire human species would remain mired in fetishism and slavery. Reason is the sun of humanity: it is the infallible and perpetual revelation of divine law applicable to societies. We must strive to follow it, lest we remain mired in evil and darkness; but we must not outpace it, lest we fall from the precipice. To understand the past while regretting our failings; to tolerate the present by improving it; to hope for the future by preparing for it: that is the law of the wise, and of all benevolent institutions. The opposition among some to the improvement of things is a sin against the Holy Spirit; it is a selfish and stupid effort to drag the moral and social world backwards, a world which God and Nature are always propelling forward: the past is the sepulchre of fallen humanity; it must be respected, but one need not be confined to it, or wish to live there.

The large bazaars of various goods, grocery stalls in particular, are long, wide vaulted galleries, bordered by pavements and lined with shops full of all kinds of goods. Armour, horse-harnesses, jewellery, foodstuffs, leather goods, shawls from India and Persia; fabrics from Europe, carpets from Damascus and Caramania, essences and perfumes from Constantinople, hookahs and pipes of all shapes and sizes; amber and coral mouthpieces cut for use by Orientals for the smoking of *tombeki*; displays of chopped or folded tobacco like reams of yellow paper; pastry shops, their products enticing in their shape and variety; fine confectionery shops, with countless varieties of sugared almonds, candied fruits, and sweets of every kind; drugstores from which emanate fragrances that perfume all the bazaar; Arab cloaks woven with gold thread and goat hair; women's veils embroidered with silver and gold sequins: and amidst all this, an immense and constantly renewed crowd of Turks on foot, pipes in their mouths or hands, followed by slaves; veiled women accompanied by Black African women carrying beautiful children; pashas on horseback, riding slowly through the dense and silent throng; and Turkish carriages, enclosed in gilded latticework, driven at a walking pace by coachmen with long white beards, and filled with women who stop from time to time to haggle at the jewellers' doors: such are the sights in all the bazaars. The line

would stretch for several miles if they were all crammed into a single gallery. These bazaars, where one is forced to constantly rub shoulders, and where the poorer Jews display and sell the clothes of plague victims, are the most active vehicles for contagion. The plague has broken out in Pera these past few days with five or six fatalities, and it was with concern that we traversed this crowd that it could decimate tomorrow.

*June 18, 1833.*

Our days are spent in solitude at Buyukdere; the Bosphorus and the Black Sea before us; studying, and reading. In the evenings, we take trips by caique to Constantinople, to Belgrad Ormani and its incomparable forests; to the Asian coast, the mouth of the Black Sea, and the Valley of Roses (*Lamartine is probably speaking of the Sariyer valley*), nestled behind the hills of Buyukdere. I go there often. This delightful valley is watered by a spring (*probably he refers to the Circir Suyu spring overlooking the Sariyer stream-bed, one among many fine springs in the area*) which the Turks visit, so as to revel in the flow of water, the coolness, the scent of roses, and the songs of the bulbul or nightingale; five immense trees stand by the spring; a leafy café is sited beneath their shade: beyond, the narrowing valley leads to a mountainside where two small artificial lakes, fed by the water that falls from a spring, lie dormant under the vast canopies of the plane trees. Armenian women visit in the evening with their families to sit on the banks and enjoy their supper. Delightful groups surround the tree trunks; young girls dancing together; the quiet, decent pleasures of the Orientals. One sees that inner thought finds joy in itself. They feel Nature more readily than we do. Nowhere do the trees and the springs attract more sincere worshippers. There is a profound sympathy between their souls and the beauties of the earth, sea, and sky.

When I return in the evening from Constantinople by caique, and sail along the coast of Europe by moonlight, there is a row, two miles and more in length, of women, girls, and children, sitting silently in groups on the granite quaysides or on the parapets of the garden terraces: they spend delightful hours there contemplating the sea, the woods, the moon, breathing in the stillness of the night. Our own people no longer seem to feel any of these natural pleasures: they have exhausted their senses; they need artificial pleasure, and only vice can stir them. Those in whom Nature still speaks loudly enough to be understood and adored are deemed dreamers and poets: wretches for whom the voice of God in his works, Nature, love, and silent contemplation suffice.

I met several acquaintances again in Buyukdere and Therapia (*Tarabya*); among the Russian diplomats, Count Alexis Orloff, and Apollinariy Petrovich Bouteniev, the Russian ambassador to Constantinople, a charming and moral man, a philosopher and a statesman. Baron von Sturmer (*Bartholomaus Freiherr von Sturmer*), the Austrian ambassador, showered me with kindness. The new European politics. That is the important area now under discussion. Will the Russians, encamped in Asia and anchored beneath our windows, withdraw? For my part, I have no doubt. There is no hurry to seize the prey that cannot escape. Yesterday, Count Orloff had me read an admirable letter that Emperor Nicholas wrote to him. Here is its gist: 'My dear Orloff, when Providence places a man at the head of forty million men, it is so that he may grant the world, from the highest throne, an example of probity and faithfulness to his word. I am that man. I seek to be worthy of the mission I have received from God. As soon as the difficulties between Ibrahim and the Grand Seigneur are resolved, do not linger for a day; bring home my fleet and my army.'

This is noble language, an excellent understanding of the situation, a potentially fruitful generosity. Constantinople will not vanish, and necessity will draw the Russians back to it, even if political probity keeps them distant for a while.

**The End of Part X of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**

# Part XI: The Balkans and the Return to France

## Constantinople - Continued

*June 20, 1833*

I met a kind and distinguished man here, one of those men stronger than their misfortune, who use the very tide that seems determined to drown them to reach the shore. Monsieur Calosso (*Giovanni Timoteo Calosso*), a Piedmontese officer implicated, like many of his comrades, in the Piedmontese military revolution of 1820, and like the rest, an exile without refuge or sympathy anywhere, arrived in Turkey. He presented himself to the Sultan and offered to train his cavalry; he became his favourite and his military mentor. Upright, knowledgeable, and reserved, he himself tempered the effects of a perilous show of favour which might have rendered him a source of envy. His modesty and cordiality pleased the pashas of the court and the ministers of the Divan. He made friends everywhere and knew how to keep them through the merit that had earned them. The Sultan raised him to a high rank without asking him to renounce his nationality or his faith. He is now known to all the Turks as Rustem-Bey, and to the Franks, as a kind and obliging Frank. He sought me out here and offered me everything his familiarity with the Palace and the Seraglio could procure for me: access everywhere, the friendship of some of the principal officers of the court, and an opportunity to see and learn about everything, which no Christian traveller has ever been able to obtain before, not even the various ambassadors. I have prepared, with his assistance, a complete tour of the Seraglio, which no one has entered since Lady Wortley Montagu. Tomorrow we will attempt to explore that mysterious place together, which he himself knows little of, though happily he possesses connections there among the highest officials of the Palace.

We began by visiting Mehmed Namik Pasha, one of the Grand Seigneur's young favourites, who had invited me to lunch at his barracks in Scutari and had placed his horses at my disposal for a tour of the mountains of Asia-Minor. Namik Pasha was on duty that day at the Sultan's palace in Beylerbey, on the banks of the Bosphorus. We disembarked there. Thanks to Rustem Bey's rank, and as a favour, we were allowed to pass through the gates and examine the surroundings of the Grand Seigneur's residence. The Sultan was preparing to visit a small mosque in a European village on the other side of the Bosphorus, opposite Beylerbey. His superbly equipped caiques were moored along the quay bordering the palace, and his magnificent Arabian horses were kept ready in the courtyards by the sais, for the Sultan to mount after he had crossed his gardens. We entered a wing of the palace, separate from the main building, where the pashas, the officers on duty, and the palace staff were located. We crossed vast halls where a crowd of soldiers, employees, and slaves circulated. All was in motion, as in a government ministry or a European palace on a day of ceremony. The interior of the palace lacked magnificent furnishings: divans and carpets, frescoed walls, and crystal chandeliers were its only decoration. The Oriental costumes — the turban, the fur coat, the wide trousers, the belt, the golden caftan — abandoned by the Turks for a miserable European costume, poorly cut and ridiculously worn, has changed the grave and solemn appearance of this people into a poor parody of the Franks. The diamond star that shines on the chests of the pashas and viziers is the only decoration that distinguishes them and recalls their former magnificence.

We were led through several crowded salons to a small room overlooking the outer gardens of the Grand Seigneur's palace. There, Namik Pasha joined us, sat down beside us, had pipes and sherbet brought, and introduced us to several of the young pashas who, along with him, enjoyed the master's favour. Colonels from the Nizam (*the reformed military*), or regular troops of the guard, joined us and took part in the conversation. Namik Pasha, recently returned from his embassy to St. Petersburg, spoke French with taste and fluency; his manners, studied by Russians, were those of an elegant European diplomat; he struck me as witty and refined. Halil Pasha (*Damat Gürcü Halil Rifat Pasha*), recently Kapudan Pasha (*Grand Admiral*), who has since married the Sultan's daughter (*Saliha, in 1832*), also speaks French very well. Ahmed Fethi Pasha is also an elegant young Ottoman, with all the features of a European. Nothing in this palace was reminiscent of an Asian court, except for the Black African slaves, the eunuchs, the barred windows of the harem, the fine pools of shade, and the blue waters of the Bosphorus, upon which one's gaze fell when it wandered to the gardens.

We spoke discreetly, but frankly, about the state of negotiations between Egypt, Europe, and Turkey; about the progress made and yet to be made by the Turks in tactics, legislation, and the policies of the various powers with regard to Turkey. Nothing in our conversation suggested that we were discussing what are termed 'barbarisms with the barbarians', or that the ear of the Grand Seigneur himself, that shadow of Allah, could be offended by our murmured discussion. It would have been no less intimate, no less profound, no less elegantly conducted, in a salon in London or Vienna. These young men, eager for knowledge and progress, spoke of their situation and of themselves with a noble and touching modesty. As the hour of prayer approached, we took our leave of our hosts; We postponed to another time the request for a direct presentation to the Sultan.

Namil Pasha entrusted us to a colonel of the Imperial Guard, whom he charged with leading us and ushering us into the courtyard of the mosque which the Sultan was visiting. We crossed the Bosphorus and were placed at the very entrance of the small mosque, on the steps leading up to it. A few minutes later, we heard the cannon-fire from the fleet and the forts, which every Friday announces to the capital that the Sultan is attending the mosque; and we saw the two imperial caiques detach themselves from the Asian coast and cross the Bosphorus like arrows. No luxury of horses and carriages could approach the Oriental luxury of these gilded caiques, whose prows soared, like golden eagles, twenty feet ahead of the caique's hull, whose twenty-four oarsmen, simultaneously raising and lowering their long oars, imitated the beating of two vast wings, and each time lifted a veil of foam that enveloped the caique's sides and, finally, the pavilion of silk, gold, and feathers, whose folded curtains revealed the Grand Seigneur seated on a cashmere covered throne, with his pashas and admirals at his feet. Touching the quay, he sprang ashore lightly, resting his hands on the shoulders of Ahmed and Namil Pasha. The band of his guard, lined up opposite us in the mosque square, burst into a fanfare; and he advanced swiftly between two lines of officers and spectators.

Sultan Mahmud is a man of forty-five, of medium height, with an elegant and noble bearing; his eyes are blue and gentle, his complexion ruddy and brown, his mouth graceful and intelligent; his beard, black and glossy as jet, cascaded in thick waves down his chest: it was the only vestige of the national costume he had retained; otherwise, were it not for his hat, one would have taken him for a European. He wore trousers and boots, a brown frock-coat with a diamond-embroidered

collar, and a small red woollen cap, topped with a jewelled tassel. His gait was jerky, and his gaze anxious; something had shocked him, or deeply troubled him: he spoke energetically and turbulently to the pashas who accompanied him; He slowed his pace when he was near us, on the steps of the door, cast a benevolent glance at us, inclined his head slightly, gestured to Namil Pasha to take the hand that a veiled Turkish woman was offering him, and entered the mosque. He stayed there for only twenty minutes or so. The military band played opera pieces by Mozart and Rossini the whole time. He then came out with a more open and serene expression, bowed to the right and left, walked slowly towards the sea, and, laughing, jumped into his boat. In the blink of an eye, we saw him reach the coast of Asia and return to his gardens at Beylerbey.

It is impossible not to be struck by Mahmud's countenance, and not to secretly wish for a prince whose features reveal a manly energy and a profound sensitivity. But, alas, the wish falls flat when one thinks of the dark future that awaits him. If he were a truly great man, he would forge his own destiny and overcome the fate that envelops him. There is still time: as long as a people is not dead, there is within them, within their religion and their nationality, a source of energy and renewal that a skilful and strong genius can cultivate, stir, and regenerate, leading to glorious transformation; but Mahmud is a great man only in his heart. Fearless as regards fighting and the prospect of death, the spring of his will weakens when it comes to acting and ruling. Whatever his fate, history will pity and honour him. He has attempted great things; he understands that his people are doomed without transformation; he has wielded the axe against the dead branches of the tree: but he lacks knowledge of how to give sap and life to what remains standing of that healthy and vigorous trunk. Is it his fault? I think so. What remains to be done seems nothing compared to the destruction of his Janissaries.

*June 21, 1833.*

At eleven o'clock we mounted the steps of the Old Seraglio and entered the streets surrounding it. I visited, in passing, the Divan of the Porte, a vast palace where the Grand Vizier resides and where the empire's policies are debated. The impression left by the scenes that once unfolded there is nothing remarkable; nothing in the building's character recalls the many blood-stained and dramatic acts. It is a large palace of painted wood, with an exterior staircase, covered by a soffit cut into festoons in the style of India or China. The rooms are bare, covered with mats. From there, we descended into the square where the dreaded Seraglio gate has so often opened to disgorge the bloody heads of viziers or even sultans. We passed through this gate without hindrance. The public enters the first courtyard of the Seraglio. This vast space, planted with groups of beautiful trees, slopes down to the left towards a magnificent Mint, a modern building, lacking Oriental character.

The Armenians, directors of the Mint, received us and opened the caskets where the jewels made for the Seraglio were kept. A shower of pearls and diamonds, paltry riches, which may ruin an empire! When a state becomes truly civilised, such idealised representations of wealth are exchanged for real, productive riches: land and credit. I did not linger; we were about to enter the inner courtyard of the Seraglio, inaccessible to everyone except the Seraglio's employees, and ambassadors on days when they are received, and bordered by the several wings of palatial buildings and by kiosks, separated from one another; the quarters of the eunuchs, guards, and slaves. Fountains and trees provide coolness and shade. Arriving at the third gate, the soldiers

guarding the archway stubbornly refused to let us enter. In vain, Rustem-Bey made himself known to the Turkish officer in command, who in turn cited his orders and told him that he would risk his life if he allowed me to enter. We were sadly turning back when we were approached by the *kesnedar*, or treasurer, who was returning from the Mint to the Seraglio, where he resides. A friend of Rustem-Bey, he approached the latter, and, having inquired about the cause of our predicament, told us to follow him, and led us without any difficulty into the Court of the Icoglanlar (*the pages and servants of the Inner Palace*). This courtyard, smaller than the first, is formed by several small palaces in the form of kiosks, with very low roofs that extend seven or eight feet beyond the walls and are supported by small Moorish columns or pillars of painted wood. The columns, pillars, walls, and roofs are also of carved and painted wood in various hues. The courtyards and gardens, formed by the gaps left between the kiosks, irregularly scattered throughout the space, are also irregularly planted with trees of great beauty and great age: their branches droop over the buildings and envelop the roofs and terraces. The right wing of these buildings is formed by the kitchens, immense living quarters whose numerous chimneys and exterior walls, blackened by smoke, announce their purpose.

One can gain an idea of the grandeur of this edifice when one learns that the Sultan feeds all those attached to the court and the palace, and that this number of diners amounts to at least ten thousand a day. A little in front of the main kitchen building is a charming little palace, surrounded by a gallery or portico on the ground floor: this is the palace of the pages or *icoglanlar* of the Grand Seraglio. It is there that the Grand Seigneur provides for the sons of the families of his court to be raised and educated, or young slaves destined for positions in the Seraglio or the empire. This palace, which once served as a residence for the sultans themselves, is decorated inside and out with a profusion of carvings, sculptures, and gilded mouldings that do not detract from its refined style. The ceilings are as rich as those of the finest palaces in France or Italy; the floors are covered in mosaics. It is divided into several rooms, roughly of equal size: these rooms are enclosed on the right and left by niches and carved wooden stalls, much like the finest stalls in the choirs of our ancient cathedrals. Each of them forms the chamber of an *icoglan*: at the far end is a platform where he folds his cushions and rugs, and where his clothes are hung or stored in a gilded wooden chest. Above these stalls is a kind of tribune, also projecting, divided, adorned, and decorated, which contains as many stalls as the room below. The whole is lit by domes or small windows at the top of the building. The young icoglans, all former pupils of Rustem-Bey, received him with touching joy and displays of affection. A long-awaited father could not have been more tenderly welcomed. The excellent hearts of these young people moved him to tears; I was moved myself witnessing such spontaneous and frank signs of affection and recognition: they took his hands; they kissed the tails of his frock coat. 'Rustem-Bey! Rustem-Bey!' they cried to one another; and all rushed to meet their friend, trembling and blushing with emotion and pleasure. He could not escape their caresses: they spoke charming words to him: 'Rustem-Bey, why have you abandoned us for so long? You were our father; we languish without you. Everything we know, we owe to you. Allah and the Sultan sent you to make men of us; we were nothing but slaves, sons of slaves. The name Ottoman was an insult, a mockery in Europe; now we will know how to defend and honour it. But tell the Sultan to return you to us; we no longer study; we wither away in boredom and sadness.'

Five or six of these young men, gentle, frank, intelligent, and admirable in appearance, took us by the hand and led us everywhere. Then they brought us back to their room for recreation: a kiosk surrounded by jets of running water that cascaded from the walls into marble bowls. Divans

were arranged all around; a staircase, hidden within the thick walls, led to service areas, where numerous slaves, under the orders of the icoglans, constantly tending the fire for the pipe-smokers, and bringing coffee, sherbet, water, and ice. There were all sorts of games being played in this room; several people were playing chess. Sherbet and ice were served to us; and, reclining on the divan, we talked for a long time. They spoke eloquently of the progress of their studies, of European politics, and of the destiny of the empire; they trembled with indignation at the present state of affairs, and expressed their wishes for the success of the Sultan in his innovative projects.

I have never seen a more ardent desire for the regeneration of a country than that which burned in the eyes of, and was expressed in words by, these young people. Young Italians, when speaking of independence and the Enlightenment, pulsate with no greater fervour. Their faces shone brightly as we spoke to them. The oldest were perhaps between twenty and twenty-two years of age; the youngest, twelve to thirteen. Except at the naval orphanage in Greenwich, I have never seen more admirable faces than those of some of these young people. They did not wish us to leave and accompanied us insofar as they were allowed to, into all the surrounding gardens, courtyards, and kiosks. One or two had tears in their eyes as we left Rustem-Bey. The kesnedar, meanwhile, had ordered the eunuchs and guardians of the gardens and palaces to allow us to move about freely and to enter wherever we wished.

At the far end of the courtyard, a little beyond the palace of the icoglans, another large palace blocked our view and passage; this was the residence of the Sultans themselves. Like the kiosks, and the palaces, we had just visited, it was surrounded by a gallery formed by extensions of the roofs. The countless doors and windows of the apartments opened onto this gallery. The palace had only one floor. We entered the large halls that served as a vestibule and provided access to the various rooms. This vestibule is a regular labyrinth, formed by the pillars that support the roofs and ceilings, from which run vast circular corridors for the service of the apartments. The pillars, the ceilings, the walls, everything is of wood, painted and carved with Moorish ornamentation. The doors of the imperial chambers were open; we saw a great many of them, all more or less identical in the layout and decoration of their moulded and gilded ceilings. Wooden or marble cupolas, pierced with arabesque fretwork, through which the light filters softly, veiling the walls; wide, low divans around these walls; no furniture, no seats, only carpets, mats, and cushions; windows that begin half a foot from the floor, and open onto the courtyards, galleries, terraces, and gardens — that is all.

On the side of the palace opposite the one through which we had entered, there is a terraced platform, built of stone and paved with marble slabs. A handsome kiosk, where the Sultan sits when receiving ambassadors, is separated from the palace by a few yards, and raised by a few feet on this platform; it resembles a small Moorish chapel. A divan fills it; circular windows surround it: the view from there of Constantinople, the port, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus is unobstructed and magnificent. Marble fountains flow and emit jets of water in the open gallery between this kiosk and the palace. It is a delightful promenade. The branches of the shrubs and rosebushes from the little gardens covering the lower terraces creep over the balustrades and trellises, perfuming the palace. Several paintings on marble and wood hang on the walls: they are views of Mecca and Medina. I examined them with curiosity. The paintings are like plans without perspective: they perfectly match Ali Bey's account of Mecca, the Kaaba, and the layout of the various sacred monuments in the holy city (*Ali Bey el Abbassi, the Spanish traveller Domingo Badia y*

*Leblich, provided the first comprehensive nineteenth-century European account of Mecca after his visit in 1807, published as 'Voyage en Afrique et en Asie', 1814*) They prove that he actually visited the sites. What he says about the circular gallery surrounding the area of the different mosques is corroborated by these paintings. One sees the portico, reminiscent of that of St. Peter's in Rome, depicted there.

Following the palace platform to the left, one arrives, via a narrow balcony supported by high terraces, at the harem, or palace of the Sultanas. It was closed; only a small number of odalisques remained (*female slaves and attendants, sometimes concubines or favourites of the Sultan*). We did not seek to approach this secret place further. We viewed only the barred windows and the delightful balconies, also surrounded by trellises and shutters interwoven with flowers, where the women spend their days contemplating the gardens, the city, and the sea. We gazed at a multitude of flowerbeds enclosed by marble walls, watered by fountains, and planted, with care and symmetry, with all kinds of fragrant flowers and shrubs. These gardens, which one descends by staircases and which connect to one another, sometimes also have elegant kiosks; This is where the women and children of the harem walk and enjoy Nature.

We had reached the slope of the Seraglio, which begins to descend from there towards the port and the Sea of Marmara. It is the highest point of this unique site, from which the view encompasses all the hills and all the seas of Constantinople. We lingered there for a long time to enjoy it. It is the opposite of the view I described from the top of the Pera belvedere. While we were on this palace terrace, the mealtime bell rang, and we saw a great number of slaves passing by, carrying on their heads large tin platters containing the dinners of the officers, employees, eunuchs, and women of the Seraglio. We witnessed several of these dinners. They consisted of pilau, poultry, kibbeh (*small dumplings of rice and minced meat roasted in vine leaves*), flatbreads similar to wafers, and a vessel of water. Wherever the slave met his master, there the dinner was set out, sometimes in the corner of a palace room, sometimes on the terrace in the shade of the roof, sometimes in the gardens under a tree, near a fountain.

The kesnedar came to fetch us and led us to the kiosk where he resides, opposite the Seraglio treasury. This treasury, where so much incalculable wealth has been held since the empire's founding, is a large stone building, fronted by a covered portico. The building is very low to the ground, the doors are low, and the chambers are underground. Large wooden chests painted red contain gold and silver coins. A certain number are removed each week for the service of the empire. There were several under the portico. We did not ask to enter; but it is said that, in addition to the gold and silver coins, the kesnedar holds heaps of pearls and diamonds there. This is likely, given the Sultans' custom of depositing them all in the treasury, and only retrieving them in the most desperate circumstances. But since the value of precious stones is variable, if the Grand Seigneur wished to realise his wealth by selling them, it would reduce their value if quantities were continually traded; so that this resource, which seems immense in financial terms, might not prove so.

The kesnedar, an open, cheerful, and witty man, showed me into his apartment. There, for the first time in Turkey, I found a touch of European luxury in the furnishings and comforts: the divans were high and covered with silk cushions; there were tables and wooden shelves around the room; on these shelves were ledgers, books, maps, and a globe. We were brought jams and sorbets. We discussed the state of the arts and sciences in Europe compared those known in the Ottoman Empire. The kesnedar seemed to me as learned and as free from prejudice as a European.

He understood everything; he desired Mahmud's every success in his attempts at improvement; but being old, and having spent his life in positions of trust in the Seraglio under four sultans, he seemed to have little hope and to have philosophically resigned himself to the future. He led a peaceful and solitary life in the depths of this abandoned Seraglio. He questioned me at length on everything: philosophy, religion, poetry, the popular beliefs of Europe, the systems of various states, whether monarchies or republics; politics, tactics; everything was reviewed by him, with a rectitude of mind, aptness, and sound judgment that clearly showed me I was dealing with one of the most distinguished men in the empire. He brought me a sphere, and his globe, and desired me to explain the movements of the planets, and name the continents and seas of the earth. He took notes on everything and seemed delighted. He begged me to join him for supper at his house, and to spend the night there. I found great difficulty in resisting his entreaties, and could only overcome them by telling him that my wife and friends, who knew I was at the Seraglio, would be in mortal anxiety if they did not see me reappear. 'You are indeed,' he said, 'the first Frank who has ever entered there, and that is a reason for you to be treated as a friend. The Sultan is great, and Allah is over all!'

He accompanied us to the inner staircases that descend from the platform of the Sultan's palace to the maze of little gardens of the harem, which I mentioned earlier, and entrusted us to the care of a head gardener, who led us from kiosk to kiosk, from flowerbed to flowerbed, all planted out and watered by gushing fountains, until we reached the gate of a high wall that separates the inner palace buildings of the Seraglio from the large outer lawns. There we found ourselves at the feet of enormous plane trees that rise to over a hundred feet high before the walls and beside the high balconies of the harem. These trees form a forest, of groves interspersed with green lawns; further on are fruit trees and large vegetable gardens cultivated by Black African slaves who have their huts beneath the trees. Streams water these irregular plantings. Not far from the harem is an old and magnificent pavilion (*the 'Conqueror's Pavilion', Fatih Kosku*) built circa 1460 for Sultan Mehmed II, and used by Bayezid II, abandoned to ivy and night birds. It is made of stone and in admirable Arab style. It could easily be restored and would be worth the entire Seraglio in itself; but tradition holds that it is inhabited by evil spirits, and no Ottoman ever enters there.

Since we were alone, I entered one or two of the underground archways of this beautiful palace, cluttered with debris and stones; the walls and staircases I had time to glimpse appeared to me to be of the most elegant workmanship. Having arrived near one of the gates in the Seraglio walls, we retreated, still beneath a forest of plane trees, sycamores, and cypresses — the tallest I have ever seen — and circled the outer gardens. They led us back to the shores of the Sea of Marmara, where there are two or three magnificent palaces inhabited by the Sultans during the summer. The apartments open onto the channel and are constantly refreshed by the breeze. Further on, grassy hills bear small mosques, kiosks, and pools of water surrounded by marble parapets and shaded by gigantic trees. We sat there, among the flowers and the murmuring fountains. The high walls of the Seraglio were behind us, and in front a grassy slope ending at the sea; between the sea and us rose a curtain of cypress and plane trees bordering the enclosure wall. Through this curtain of trees, we viewed the waves of the Sea of Marmara, the Princes' Islands, the sailing ships, whose masts slid by behind the trees, and Scutari reddened by the rays of the setting sun. The golden peaks of the Mount of the Giants (*Yusa Tepesi*), and the snowy peaks of the Phrygian mountains framed this divine scene.

Such, then, is the interior of this mysterious abode, the most beautiful of all abodes on earth; the scene of so many bloody dramas, where the Ottoman Empire was born and flourished, but where it refuses to die, even though since the massacre of the Janissaries, Sultan Mahmud no longer dwells there. A man of gentle ways and sensual pleasures, the bloodstained sites associated with his reign are repugnant to him. Perhaps he also feels unsafe amidst the fanatical population of Istanbul, and prefers to have one foot in Asia, amidst his thirty palaces along the Bosphorus, and the other on his flagship. The general character of these admirable dwellings is neither of grandeur, nor comfort, nor magnificence; they are pavilions of gilded wood, pierced with light. The character of these palaces displays the characteristics of the Turkish people: intelligence and love of Nature. This instinct for beautiful landscapes, for sparkling seas, for shade, for springs, for vast horizons framed by the snow-capped mountain peaks, is the predominant instinct of this people. One senses here the memories of a pastoral and agricultural race who cherish their origins, and whose tastes are simple and instinctive. A people who placed the palace of their masters, the capital of their imperial city, on the slope of the most beautiful hill in their empire and perhaps in the entire world.

This palace has neither the interior luxury nor the mysterious delights of a European palace; it has only vast gardens, where trees grow as freely and live as long as in virgin forest, where waters murmur, where doves coo; rooms pierced by numerous windows always open to the air; terraces overlooking the gardens and the sea, and kiosks with grilles where the sultans, seated behind their shutters, can enjoy both solitude and the enchanting aspect of the Bosphorus. It is the same everywhere in Turkey; the ruler and the people, great and small, have but one need, one sentiment, in the choice and arrangement of their dwellings: to enjoy the sight, the view, of a beautiful horizon. or, if the situation and the poverty of their home prevent it, at least of a tree, some birds, an ewe and doves, and the patch of land around their humble dwelling. And wherever there is a sublime, elevated, gracious corner of the landscape, a mosque, a saint's tomb, a Turkish kiosk, will be placed there. There is not a site on the Bosphorus, a hillock beside a smiling gulf on the coast of Asia and Europe, where a pasha or a vizier has not built a villa and a garden. To be seated in the shade, facing a magnificent horizon, with beautiful foliage above one's head, a fountain nearby, the countryside or the sea before one's eyes, and to spend hours and days there, losing oneself in vague and inarticulate contemplation — such is the life of the Muslims: it explains the choice and arrangement of their dwellings; it also explains why this people remains inactive and silent, until passions stir them and restore the innate energy, dormant within them, which is never quite lost. The Turks are not loquacious like the Arabs; they care little for the idle pleasures of society; the pleasures of Nature suffice: they dream, meditate, and pray. This is a race of philosophers; deriving everything from Nature, attributing everything to God. Allah is constantly in their thoughts and on their lips; not as a sterile idea, but as a tangible, evident, and practical reality. The Muslims' virtue is in perpetual adoration of the divine will; their dogma, fate. With this faith, one may conquer the world or lose it with the same ease, and with the same composure.

We exited through the gate which led to the port, and I entered the beautiful kiosk on the quay, in which the Sultan sits and views his fleet leaving or returning from an expedition and saluting its master.

*June 22, 1833.*

Two of my friends are leaving me (*Amedee de Parseval and Jean-Vaast de Laroyère*) and journeying to Europe. I will remain in Buyukdere, with only my wife and Ferdinand de Capmas.

*June 25.*

I spent two days in Belgrad Ormani (*'Belgrad Forest', settled by Serbs deported to Constantinople from Belgrade in 1521, when it fell to the Ottomans*) a village in the middle of the forest of the same name, fifteen miles or so from Constantinople: an immense oak forest covering hills situated between the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara, equidistant from both, and extending almost uninterrupted to the Balkans. A site as wild and charming as any of England's forests, with a beautiful Greek village built in a wide valley in its midst, Arcadian meadows, a river flowing beneath the trunks of the oaks, and magnificent artificial lakes formed in the basin of the high hills to capture and retain the water supplying the fountains of Constantinople.

We were hospitably received at the home of Monsieur and Madame Alyon (*Jacques François Antoine Alléon, known as Jak Alyon, and his brothers, Antoine and Jean, became the most important and wealthiest bankers in Constantinople; he married Marie Marion. 'As rich as Alyon' became a proverbial phrase there*), French bankers established from father to son in Constantinople, who own a delightful villa in Buyukdere and a hunting lodge in the village of Belgrad Osmani; a charming family, where elegance of manners, nobility of sentiment, and intellectual refinement are combined with the grace and amicable simplicity of the Orient. In Constantinople, I found another, entirely French, welcome in the society of Monsieur Jaques Salzani, brother of my banker in Smyrna, (*and brother-in-law to the Alléon brothers, having married their sister Christine*) a good man, a man of heart and mind, who treats us as compatriots and friends. In general, the Frankish society of Constantinople, composed of officers of embassies and consulates, the families of dragomans, and merchants from various European nations, is far superior to its reputation. Constituted like a small town, it has the faults of small towns, namely gossip and petty jealousies; but there is probity, education, elegance, and a gracious and cordial hospitality toward foreigners. They are as well-informed about Europe here as in Vienna or Paris; They participate strongly in the movements of life that stir the West. There are men of merit, and women of grace and noble virtues. I have seen salons in Pera, Therapia and Buyukdere, where one would have thought oneself in one of the most distinguished salons of our great cities of Europe, if one had not cast one's eyes but now on the Bosphorus, or the Golden Horn sparkling at the foot of the garden, between the leaves.

*June 29, 1833.*

The Freshwater Streams of Europe are situated at the inner end of the port of Constantinople, where the hills of Eyup, and those of Pera and Galata, draw imperceptibly closer, leaving only a narrow strait between their shores; to the west lies the suburb of Eyup with its mosque (*the Eyup Sultan Mosque*), where the sultans, upon their accession to the throne, would gird the sword of Muhammad about them — a martial coronation, a consecration of power, within the Muslim religion, of their despotism. This pyramidal mosque rises gracefully above the painted houses of the suburb, and the tops of its minarets merge on the horizon with the high, ruined Greek walls of Constantinople. Along the channel, beautiful palaces of the Sultanas stretch along the water's

edge. The windows are at water level; the broad, leafy canopies of the garden trees tower above the roofs and are reflected in the sea. Beyond, the channel is no more than a river flowing between two lawns. Hills, gardens, and woods cover these beautiful slopes. A few Bulgarian shepherds play the bagpipes, seated on the rocks, tending flocks of horses and goats. Finally, the river is no more than a stream, its banks touched by the oars of the caiques, and the roots of magnificent elms growing along the banks obstructing navigation. A vast meadow, shaded by groups of plane trees, stretches to the east; to the west, rise the wooded and verdant hills; in the distance, the eye is lost among the green and irregular columns of trees that shade the stream and meander with it. Thus ends the beautiful port of Constantinople, thus ends the vast, beautiful, and stormy Mediterranean. You find yourself in a shaded cove, at the end of a green gulf, on a bank of grass and flowers, far from the noise and bustle of the sea and the city. Oh, how well a life would end that ended here! God grant such an end to the lives of my friends, who are glowing with health and busy today amidst the human melee! Silence after noise, a kind darkness after the bright day, rest after turmoil. A nest of shadow and solitude in which to reflect on one's past life, and die in peace, in friendship with Nature and Humankind. I no longer ask such a thing for myself, I no longer seek it: my solitude can never now prove so sweet or so fair.

Having disembarked from the caique, I followed the banks of the stream to a gazebo that I saw gleaming white among the trees. At each trunk, I glimpsed a group of Turkish and Armenian women who, surrounded by beautiful children playing on the lawn, were eating their meals in the shade. Superbly harnessed saddle horses and ox-drawn *arabas*, carriages from Constantinople, were scattered across the meadow. The gazebo was fronted and surrounded by a canal and ponds where swans swam. The gardens were small, but the entire meadow was a garden. The present Sultan often came here in the past to spend the warmer seasons. He loved this delightful retreat because it pleased a favourite odalisque. Love had found a place in his heart after the massacres of Atmeidan; and, amidst the sensual pleasures of the harem, the beautiful odalisque died here. Since then, Mahmud has abandoned this beautiful place. He often visits the odalisque's tomb it is said, and his presence alone consecrates the gardens of this abandoned palace. I spent a day deep in the valley, in the shade of the trees. I wrote a poem addressed to 'V' (*Aymon de Virieu*).

*July 3.*

I embarked this morning for Constantinople. I sailed up the Bosphorus, entered the Sea of Marmara and, after following the outer walls that separate Istanbul from that sea for about two hours, disembarked at the foot of the Fortress of the Seven Towers (*Yedikule*). We had neither *tezkere* (*official permit*) nor guide. The Turkish soldiers, after much resistance, allowed us to enter the first courtyard of this bloodstained castle, where deposed Sultans were dragged by the mob to await death, which is never long delayed when the people are both judge and executioner. Half a dozen heads of decapitated emperors rolled down the steps of its staircase. Thousands of less regal heads covered the battlements of the entrance tower. The guard refused to allow us any further. While he went to ask the commander for orders, the door of a low, vaulted room in the eastern tower opened a crack. I took a few steps, heard a roar that shook the vault, and found myself face to face with a magnificent chained lion. The lion lunged at a fine greyhound that had been following me. The greyhound broke free and took refuge between my legs. The lion reared up on its hind legs, but its chain held it against the wall. I exited and closed the gate. The guard came to

tell me that he would risk his head if I were allowed to enter further. I withdrew and left the city through a gate in the old wall that leads out into the countryside.

The walls of Constantinople originate at the Castle of the Seven Towers on the Sea of Marmara and extend to the hilltops overlooking the suburb of Eyub, towards the far end of the harbour, and the Fresh Waters of Europe — thus encircling the entire ancient city of the Greek emperors, and the city of Istanbul of the Turkish emperors, along the side of the triangle not protected by the sea. On that side, nothing defends Constantinople but the gentle slopes of its hills, which fade to a beautiful cultivated plain. There, a triple line of walls was built against which so many assaults failed, and behind which the ill-fated Greek Eastern Empire believed itself imperishable for so long. These magnificent walls still stand; and they are, after the Parthenon and Baalbek, the most majestic ruins attesting to the power of empire. I walked along their outer bases this morning, which are stone terraces. The walls are fifty to sixty feet high, and occasionally fifteen to twenty feet wide, faced with dressed stones of a beautiful grey-white colour, often entirely white, as if fresh from the artisan's chisel. They are separated from the terraces by ancient ditches, filled with debris and lush topsoil, where trees and wallflowers have taken root for centuries, forming an impenetrable glacis, a virgin forest thirty to forty yards wide, filled with birds' nests, and teeming with reptiles. Sometimes this forest completely hides the sides of the walls and square towers that flank it, or reveals only their high battlements. Often the wall reappears at full height, reflecting the sun's rays with a golden gleam. It is notched at the top by breaches of all shapes, from which the verdure slopes down as in mountain ravines to merge with the moat. Almost everywhere its summit is crowned with overflowing vegetation, forming a mound of plants, with capitals and volutes of vines and ivy. Here and there, from the heart of the towers filled with stones and dust, a plane tree or a cypress tree springs forth, its roots intertwining amidst the cracks in this pedestal. The weight of branches and leaves, and the gusts of wind with which these airy trees are constantly battered, cause their trunks to lean southward, and they hang like uprooted trees, their vast branches laden with the nests of a multitude of birds. Every three or four hundred yards, one encounters one of the paired towers, magnificently constructed, with the enormous vaults of a gateway or an ancient arch between them. Most of these gates are now walled up, and vegetation, which has overtaken everything — walls, gates, battlements, and turrets — achieves a most bizarre and beautiful union with the ruins and the works of mankind. There are patches of ivy that descend from the tops of the towers like the folds of immense cloaks; there are vines forming bridges of greenery fifty feet long, arching from one breach to another; there are beds of wallflowers, self-sown on perpendicular walls, plants that the wind constantly sways in flowery waves; thousands of shrubs form crenellations jagged with foliage in various colours. From all this, flocks of birds emerge when a pebble is thrown against the sides of the covered walls, or into the depths of the thickets at their base. We saw especially a large number of eagles which inhabit the towers and soar all day in the sun, above the areas where they feed their young.

*July, 1833.*

The same solitary life in Buyukdere. In the evenings, by the sea or in the Valley of Roses. Visits from Monsieur Truqui every week. Such kind hearts possess a virtue that consoles. God has given them the only remedy there is for incurable wounds of the heart: compassion.

Yesterday, Count Orloff, commander of the Russian fleet and army, and ambassador extraordinary of the Emperor of Russia to the Sublime Porte, celebrated his victory and departure with a military festival held for the Sultan on the Bosphorus. The gardens of the Russian embassy in Buyukdere occupy the wooded slopes of a mountain that closes off the gulf and whose base is lapped by the waves. From the palace terraces, one has a view of the Bosphorus in both directions, towards Constantinople and towards the Black Sea. All day long, the cannons of the Russian fleet, anchored at the foot of the gardens before our windows, resounded from minute to minute, the flag-bedecked masts blending with the greenery of the tall trees on both banks. From early morning, the sea was covered with small ships and caiques bringing between fifteen and twenty thousand spectators from Constantinople, who spread out among the kiosks, into the meadows, and onto the surrounding rocks. A large number remained in the caiques, which, filled with Jewish, Turkish, and Armenian women dressed in bright colours, floated like bouquets of flowers here and there on the sea. The Russian camp on the slopes of the Giant's mountain, a mile or so from the fleet, stood out, with its white and blue tents, against the sombre greenery and scorched slopes. In the evening, the gardens of the Russian embassy were illuminated by thousands of lanterns suspended from all the tree-branches. The ships, with lights on every mast, yard, and section of rigging, resembled fire-ships whose conflagration in turn ignited the batteries. The ships' sides spewed forth torrents of lightning, while the camp of the landing troops, lit by great flashes of fire on the headlands and hillocks of the Asian mountains, was mirrored in luminous trails on the sea, casting a fiery glow across the entire vast surface of the Bosphorus.

The Grand Seigneur arrived, in the midst of this dazzling night, on a steamship that drew alongside the terraces of the Russian palace, to enjoy the spectacle before him. He was seen on the ship's bridge, surrounded by his vizier and his favourite pashas. He remained on board and sent the grand vizier to attend Count Orloff's supper. Immense tables set up beneath the long avenues of plane trees, and other tables hidden in all the groves of the gardens, were covered in gold and silver threaded cloths that reflected the light from the illuminated trees. At the darkest hour of the night, shortly before moonrise, a firework display, borne on rafts across the waters in the middle of the Bosphorus, equidistant from its three shores, launched its rockets into the air, which raced over the waves, and cast a blood-red light upon the mountains, the fleet, and the countless crowd of spectators whose caiques covered the sea. Never could a more magnificent spectacle befall the human eye: it seemed as if the vault of night had torn open, revealing a corner of an enchanted world, with its elements, mountains, seas, and skies of unknown form and colour, and with thousands of vaporous, fleeting shadows floating across waves of light and fire.

Then all returned to silence and the night. The lanterns, extinguished as if by a breath of wind, vanished from every yardarm and gunport of the ships; and the moon, rising from a high valley between the crests of two mountains, spread its softer light over the sea, and silhouetted, against a pearl-coloured background, the enormous black masses, and the dissected spectres formed by the masts, yards, and shrouds, of the ships. The Sultan departed on his light steamship, whose column of smoke trailed across the sea, and vanished silently, like a shadow come to witness the ruination of an empire.

This was scarcely Sardanapalus illuminating the ruins of his fallen throne with the glow of his pyre, though. This was the murder of a tottering empire, forced to seek its enemies' support and protection against a rebellious slave (*Muhammad-Ali Pasha of Egypt*), and bear witness to their glory,

and its own humiliation. What would the old Ottomans have thought if they had seen the glow of the Christian barbarians' camp, and the light of their fires from the sacred mountains of Asia-Minor, fall upon the domes of the mosques, and reverberate on even the walls of the old Seraglio? What was Mahmud himself thinking, behind the affected smile on his lips? What serpent was gnawing at his heart? Ah! There was something profoundly sad in play, something that, on his behalf, I found heart-breaking, and which, in my opinion, should have driven him to revive his heroism, simply through remorse.

*July.*

I dined today at Baron von Sturmer's with the Crown Prince of Bavaria (*the future Maximilian II*), who has just returned from Greece and has halted for a few days in Constantinople. This young prince, eager for knowledge and wise enough to show no outward signs of reflecting on the throne that awaits him, seeks the company of men who have no interest in flattering him, and educates himself by listening to them. He is a marvellous conversationalist himself. 'The King of Greece, my brother (*Otto*),' he said, 'is still hesitating over his choice of capital. I would like to have your opinion.' 'The capital of Greece,' I replied, 'must surely be dictated by the very nature of the events that have reconstituted Greece. Greece is resurrected. When one is resurrected, one must be reborn with one's own form and name, one's complete individuality. Athens, with its ruins and its memories, is the emblem of Greece. Greece must be reborn in Athens, or it will be nothing more than what it is today — an impoverished tribe scattered across the rocks of the Peloponnese and the islands.'

*July.*

The Russian fleet and army are departing. They know the way here, now; they have accustomed the eyes of the Turks to seeing them. The Bosphorus remains deserted and lifeless.

My Arabian horses arrived via Asia Minor. Tedmor, the most handsome and spirited of them all, perished at Magnesia, almost at the end of the journey. The local people mourned him, and still mourn as they remind me of his death. He had been admired in every city of Caramania he passed through. The others are so thin and so tired that they need a month's rest to be fit enough to make the journey through European Turkey and Germany. I am selling the two finest to Count Boutenieff (*Apollinary Petrovich Butenev, the Russian Ambassador*) for the stud farms of the Emperor of Russia, and the other three to various people in Constantinople. I will forever miss Tedmor and Saide.

I have just made a deal with some Turks from Istanbul and the Eyoub suburb, owners of those carriages that carry women through the streets of Constantinople; they are renting me five arabas, each drawn by four horses, to transport my wife and I, Monsieur de Capmas, my servants, and our luggage to Belgrade a journey of twenty-five days duration. I am hiring two Tartars to lead the caravan; mule drivers to carry the beds, the kitchen utensils, the crates of books, etc.; and finally, six horses, to provide mounts for us, if the state of the roads prevents the use of the arabas. The price of all these horses and carriages is about four thousand francs. An excellent interpreter will accompany us on horseback. Our departure is set for July 26th.

*July 26th, 1833.*

We left Constantinople at two o'clock this morning; the horses and carriages were waiting for us in the suburb of Eyoub, in a small square not far from a fountain shaded by plane trees. A Turkish café is nearby. A crowd gathered to see us depart; but we experienced neither insult nor loss of any belongings. Probity is the virtue of the streets in Turkey; it is less common in palaces. The Turks sitting beneath the trees in front of the café, and the children passing by, came and helped us load our carriages and horses, and gathered up and returned to us any items that fell or that we forgot.

We set off at sunrise, all on horseback, climbing the long, lonely, hilly streets that lead from the Eyub suburb to the Greek walls of Istanbul. We emerged from the city onto a bare, deserted hillside dominated by a magnificent barracks. Two battalions of the Nisam Djedid, the regular troops, were training in front of the barracks. Monsieur Truqui and the young Greeks from his consulate wanted to accompany us. We parted there. We embraced this excellent man, who has been a godsend to us during these days of isolation. Amidst our despair, a two-month friendship felt like one of many years. May God reward and console the final years of this dispenser of consolation! Who knows if we will meet again here below? We departed on a long and perilous journey. He remains, sad and ill, far from his wife and his homeland. He tried in vain to hide his tears from us, and ours moistened his trembling hand.

We halted seven miles or so from Constantinople to allow the day's heat to subside. We crossed a rolling landscape of hills overlooking the Sea of Marmara; a few houses, scattered across the fields; no villages. We set off again at four; and, still following the low, broad, bare hills, we arrived at a small town where our Tartars, who were ahead of us, had a house prepared for us, which belongs to a charming Greek family: three graceful women with children of admirable beauty. They spread carpets and cushions on the firwood floor for the night. My cook managed to procure rice, chickens, and vegetables in abundance. Our caravan will be ready to leave at three in the morning. One of my Tartars will march for a few hours at the head of the group.

## Adrianople (Edirne)

*July 31st, 1833.*

After our noon rest each day, which we took by a fountain or beneath some caravanserai roof, the Tartar would receive my orders, and gallop to the town or village where we were to spend the night. He carried my letters from the grand vizier, to the pasha, agha, or ayan (*local official*), or the lord of the village. These officials choose the best Greek, Armenian, or Jewish house in the place and inform the owner to prepare it for foreigners. They have fodder brought there for the thirty-two horses that make up our retinue, and often a supper for us. The ayan, accompanied by the leading citizens and some horsemen, if there were troops in the place, came to meet us at a certain distance along the road and escorted us to our lodgings. They dismounted with us, ushered us in, ordered the pipes and coffee brought, and after a while, retired to their own homes, where I would go to visit them soon afterward.

From Constantinople to Adrianople, there is nothing remarkable, nothing picturesque, except an immense series of plains devoid of dwellings and trees, each crossed, here and there, by some

narrow, shallow river flowing beneath the arches of a ruined bridge. In the evening, one finds a small isolated village at the end of a valley and surrounded by orchards. The inhabitants are all Greeks, Armenians, or Bulgarians. The khans of these villages are hovels almost without roofs, where people and horses are crammed-in together. The road was like this for five days. We encountered no one; it resembled the roads in the Syrian desert. Only once did we find ourselves in the midst of thirty or forty Bulgarian peasants, in European dress, wearing black sheepskin caps. They were marching towards Constantinople to the sound of a pair of bagpipes. They shouted loudly when they saw us and rushed towards us, asking for a few piastres. These folk are the 'Savoyards' of European Turkey (*Itinerant traders and seasonal workers from Savoy used to travel the roads of France, as book and print sellers, showmen, and pedlars, the lads often as chimney-sweeps, etc. journeying as far as Paris*). They guard the horses of the Grand Seigneur and the pashas in the meadows of the Freshwater Streams of Asia, and of Buyukdere. They are also the gardeners of Istanbul.

On the morning of the sixth day, we caught sight of Adrianople, once the capital of the empire, at the edge of these plains, nestled in a beautiful basin between mountains. The city appeared immense, dominated by its magnificent mosque (*the Selimiye Mosque*), built by Selim II, which is the most beautiful religious monument in Turkey after Hagia Sophia. The fields, for five miles before reaching the city, were cultivated with wheat, vines, and fruit trees of every kind. The landscape resembled the area around Dijon or Lyon. Numerous streams meandered across the plain. We entered an extensive suburb, and crossed the city amidst a throng of Turkish men, women, and children who pressed forward to see us, but who, far from bothering us, showed us every kind of politeness and respect. The people who had come to meet us led us to the door of a beautiful house belonging to Pietro Vernazza, the Sardinian pro-consul in Adrianople.

We have spent two days in Adrianople, in the pro-consul's delightful house. His family lives a few miles away, on the banks of the Maritsa River (*the Hebrus of the ancients, also known as the Evros, or in Turkish as the Meric*). We enjoyed a ravishing view of Adrianople in the evening, from Monsieur Vernazza's terrace. The city, roughly the size of Lyon, is watered by three rivers: the Maritsa, the Arda, and the Tundzha; it is surrounded on all sides by woods and water; beautiful mountain ranges frame this fertile basin. We visited the mosque, a building similar to all mosques, but higher and vaster in size. Our arts have produced nothing bolder, more original or more effective than this monument and its minaret, a column pierced by openwork, rising to a height of over a hundred feet.

## Philippopolis (Plovdiv)

*6th August, 1833.*

We departed Adrianople for Philippopolis (*Plovdiv, Bulgaria*); the road crossed defiles and wooded, pleasant, but deserted, basins between the high ranges of the Rhodope and Haemus mountains. A journey of three days. Beautiful villages. In the evening (*of August 2nd*), seven or eight miles from Philippopolis, I saw a swarm of Turkish, Armenian, and Greek horsemen galloping towards us over the plain. A handsome young man, mounted on a magnificent horse, arrived first and touched my garment with his finger; he halted beside me; he spoke Italian and explained that, having been the first to touch me, I must accept his hospitality, regardless of the other horsemen's entreaties to host me elsewhere. The governor of Philippopolis' attendant then

arrived, welcomed me on behalf of his master, and told me that the governor had ordered a large and comfortable house, and supper, prepared for me, and that he wished to keep me in the city for a few days; but I persisted in nominating the house of the young Greek, Georgi Mavridi (*the house is extant and known as the Lamartine/Mavridi House, at 19, Knyaz Tseretelev Street*).

We entered Philippopolis with between sixty and eighty horsemen; people crowded the windows and the streets to see our procession; we were received by the sister and aunts of Monsieur Mavridi: his is a large and elegant house; a beautiful divan with twenty-four windows, furnished in the European style. The governor and the head of the various nationalities inhabiting the city came to welcome us, and take coffee. We have spent three days in Philippopolis, enjoying Monsieur Mavridi's generous hospitality, travelling around the area, and receiving and returning visits from Turks, Greeks and Armenians.

Philippopolis is a city of thirty thousand souls, three days' journey from Adrianople, eight days' journey from Sofia, situated on the banks of a river, on a mountain of isolated rocks in the middle of a wide and fertile valley; it is one of the most beautiful natural city sites that one could imagine. The mount has twin peaks, their slopes both equally adorned with houses and gardens, and the streets descend in a circular, winding fashion, so as to more easily navigate the slopes, to the banks of the river, which itself flows at the foot of the town, and encloses it with a 'moat' of running water. The sight of the bridges, the gardens, the houses, the tall trees rising from the riverbanks, the wooded plain separating the river from the Macedonian mountains, and the mountains themselves, whose flanks are cut by torrents foaming white, and dotted with villages or large Greek monasteries, renders Monsieur Mavridi's garden one of the most magnificent viewpoints in the world. The town is populated by roughly equal numbers of Greeks, Armenians, and Turks. The Greeks are generally educated and merchants; the most prominent among them send their children to be educated in Hungary. The oppression of the Turks only seems heavier to them thereafter, and they long for the independence of their brothers in the Morea. There I met three charming young Greeks, worthy, by their sentiments and their energy of spirit, of a different fate and a different homeland.

## Pazardzhik

*10th August, 1833.*

We left Philippopolis, and arrived in two days at a pretty town, in a cultivated plain, called *Tatar-Pazardzhik*; along with the surrounding province, it belongs to one of those great Turkish feudal families, of which half a dozen branches in Asia and Europe were and are respected by the Sultan. The young prince who owns and governs *Tatar-Pazardzhik* is the son of the former vizier (*Hussain Pasha Kavanoszade*). He received us with chivalrous hospitality, and lodged us in a newly built house on the bank of the river Maritsa that flows past the town, a spacious, elegant, and comfortable house belonging to a wealthy Armenian. We had barely settled in when we saw between fifteen and twenty slaves arrive, each carrying a tin tray on his head. They placed on the floor at our feet a multitude of dishes of pilaf, pastries, game, and sweets of every kind, from the prince's kitchens. Two fine horses were brought to me as a gift, which I refused, and calves and sheep to feed my entourage.

The next day, we saw the foothills of the Balkans before us: these beautiful mountains, wooded and interspersed with large villages and rich fields, are inhabited by Bulgarians. All day we followed the banks of the river that forms marshes in the plain; arriving at the foot of the Balkan Mountains, I found all the principal inhabitants of the Bulgarian village of Yenikoy (*'New Town', likely Belovo; Golyamo Belovo being the old village*) waiting for us. They took the reins of our horses and positioned themselves to the right and left of our carriages, supporting them with their hands and shoulders, sometimes even lifting them, to prevent the wheels from plunging into the ravines, and thus led us to the wretched village which my Tartars had reached before us; the houses were scattered on the slopes or ridges of two hills separated by a deep ravine, and surrounded by pretty orchards and meadows; all the mountains are cultivated at their base and covered with beautiful forests on their slopes; the peaks are rocky. These Bulgarian cottages are built of wattle and daub and covered with tree branches and leaves; we occupied seven or eight of them, and our soldiers, Tartars, and horsemen camped in the orchards; each house has only one room, and the bare earth serves as a floor.

*1st September, 1833.*

I caught a fever and suffered an inflammation, a consequence of grief and fatigue. I spent twenty days lying on a mat in a miserable, windowless cottage, between life and death. My wife's admirable devotion for me has seen her spend a fortnight, night and day, without closing her eyes beside my straw bed; she sent men to the marshes in the plain to seek leeches; the Bulgarians finally found some; sixty leeches on my chest and temples have lessened the danger. I am aware of my condition; I think day and night of my wife, abandoned here should I die, two thousand miles from our home and any source of consolation, in the mountains of Macedonia: dreadful hours!

I summoned Monsieur de Capmas and issued my last instructions in case of my death. I begged him to have me buried under a tree by the roadside, which I saw on arriving, with a single word written on the stone, the word of supreme consolation: — God. On the sixth day of fever, the danger already past, we heard the sound of horses and weapons in the courtyard; several riders dismounted; it was the young and amiable Greek from Philippopolis, Georgi Mavridi, with a young Macedonian doctor, and several servants who were soon unloading horses laden with provisions, furniture, and medicine. A Tartar, who was crossing the Balkans to go to Adrianople, had stopped at the house in Philippopolis and spread the rumour that a Frankish traveller had fallen ill and was dying at Yenikoy. This rumour reached Monsieur Mavridi at ten in the evening. He presumed that this Frank was his recent guest. He sent for his friend the doctor, gathered his servants, had his horses loaded with everything his charitable foresight deemed necessary for a sick man, and set off in the middle of the night, riding without a pause, and arrived, two days' journey away, to bring aid, remedies, and comfort to a stranger he was unlikely ever to see again. These are the kinds of acts that refresh the soul and show the generous nature of mankind, in all places and in all climates.

Monsieur Mavridi found me almost recovered; his business affairs called him back to Philippopolis. He departed the same day, leaving me the young Macedonian doctor, a man of talent and learning, who had studied medicine in Semlin, Hungary, and could speak Latin. His talent was of no use to us; my wife's tenderness, presence of mind, and energy of resolve had achieved everything; but his company was pleasant to us during the twenty deathly days of our

stay in Yenikoy, which were necessary for the illness to dissipate and for me to regain the strength to mount my horse.

The Prince of Pazardzhik, informed of my illness from its very beginning, showed me no less touching marks of interest and hospitality. He sent me sheep and calves daily for my people; and, throughout my stay in Yenikoy, five or six horsemen of his guard remained constantly in my courtyard with their horses bridled and ready to execute my every wish. During the last days of my convalescence, they accompanied me on horseback rides in the magnificent valley and on the mountains surrounding Yenikoy; the prince even had slaves offered to me; a detachment of his cavalrymen accompanying me from the outset to the borders of his province. There, within the very heart of their families, I was able to study the customs of the Bulgarians; they are those of our Swiss or Savoyard peasants. The men are simple, gentle, hard-working, full of respect for their priests and zeal for their religion, which is the Greek form. The priests are simple farmers, like themselves. The Bulgarians form a population of several million, which is constantly growing; they live in large villages and small towns separate from the Turks: one or two Turks, delegated by the pasha or the ayan, travel throughout the year between these villages to collect the taxes. Apart from that and a few chores, they live in peace and according to their own customs. Their clothing is that of German peasants; the women and girls have a costume roughly similar to that of the Swiss mountains; they are pretty, lively, and graceful.

Their customs seemed purely traditional to me, though the women no longer wear veils as in Turkey and freely associate with the men. I saw rustic dances among the Bulgarians, just as in our French villages; they despise and hate the Turks; they are perfectly ripe for independence and, together with their neighbours the Serbs, will form the basis of the future states comprising what is now European Turkey. The countryside they inhabit would soon be a delightful garden, if the blind and stupid oppression, not of the government, but of the Turkish administration, would allow them to cultivate the land with a greater modicum of security; they have a passion for the land.

I left Yenikoy and its kind-hearted people with regret: it is a delightful summer retreat; all the people of the village accompanied us some miles into the Balkan Mountains and showered us with good wishes and blessings; we crossed the first mountains in a single day, which are much like those of the Auvergne region, accessible and arable almost everywhere; five hundred workers could build the finest carriage road there in a single season. In three days, I arrived at Sofia, a large city on an inland plain, watered by rivers (*mainly the Iskar*). A Turkish pasha resided there; he sent his kahya (*steward*) to meet me and arranged for me to lodge in the house of a Greek merchant. I spent a day there; the pasha sent me calves and sheep but refused to accept any gifts. The city itself is unremarkable.

In four short days' ride, sometimes through easily accessible mountains, sometimes through admirably fertile but uninhabited valleys and plains, I had arrived on the plain of Nis, the last Turkish town almost on the borders of Serbia (*now Serbia's third largest city*). I was riding half an hour ahead of the caravan. The sun was scorching; about two miles or so from the town, I saw a large white tower rising in the middle of the plain, shining like Parian marble; the path led me there. I approached it, and, giving my horse to a Turkish child who was accompanying me, I sat down in the shade of the tower to sleep for a while: I had scarcely done so when, raising my eyes to the monument that lent me its shade, I saw that its walls, which had seemed to me to be built of marble

or white stone, were in fact formed by regular courses of human skulls. These skulls and human faces, emaciated and bleached by rain and sun, cemented together with a little sand and lime, entirely formed the triumphal arch that sheltered me; there may have been fifteen to twenty thousand of them; on some, the hair still clung, and floated like lichen and moss in the breeze; the mountain breeze blew briskly and freshly, and, rushing into the countless cavities of the heads, faces, and skulls, made them emit plaintive and lamentable hissing sounds. I had no guide to explain this barbaric monument to me; the child who held the two horses by the bridle played with small pieces of the skulls that had fallen to dust at the foot of the tower. I was so overcome with fatigue, heat, and sleepiness that I fell asleep with my head resting against these walls of severed heads. When I awoke, I found myself surrounded by the caravan and a large number of Turkish horsemen, who had come from Nis to escort us into the city. They told me that these were the heads of the fifteen thousand Serbians killed by the pasha in the First Serbian Uprising in 1809 (*The Skull Tower, Cele Kula in Nis, is a 15 foot high limestone structure built by Ottoman forces, to terrorise the Serbs following the Battle of Cegar in that year*). The plain had been the battleground of these valiant insurgents, and the monument was their tomb. I saluted with my eyes and my heart the remains of these heroic men, whose severed heads had become a symbol of their homeland's future independence.

Serbia, which we were about to enter, is now free, and it was a song of liberty and glory that the mountain wind made to arise from the tower of the Serbians who died for their country. Soon they will possess Nis itself. May they maintain this monument! It will teach their children the value of independence, by showing them the price their fathers paid for it.

Nis resembles Sofia and is without character. We spent a day there. After Nis, we entered the beautiful mountains and the ocean of forests of Serbia. These virgin forests stretch everywhere as far as the horizon, with only a wide road, recently laid out by Prince Milos (*Milos Obrenovic I*), the independent leader of Serbia, winding its way through them. We plunged into their magnificent and perpetual shade, with no other view in sight than endless colonnades of enormous, towering beech-trees, their waves of foliage swaying in the wind, and avenues of hills and mountains uniformly clothed in their ancient oaks.

At intervals of about fifteen miles or so, we would descend into a slightly wider valley where a river meandered, and large wooden villages appeared, with a few pretty, and new, white houses, emerging from the forests, with a small church and a presbytery beside a lovely river, amidst meadows and melon fields. The inhabitants, seated on wooden sofas in front of their shops, work at various trades. Their faces, though gentle and kind, have something northern, energetic, and proud about them, immediately suggesting a people already free, and worthy of being so entirely. Everywhere we were received with hospitality and respect; the most prominent house in the village was prepared for us; the priest came to speak with us. People are beginning to furnish their homes in the European manner; the women are no longer veiled. In the meadows and woods, groups of young men and women can be seen working the fields together, singing national songs reminiscent of the Ranz des Vaches (*Swiss Alpine songs*). The young women are dressed in a chemise, pleated with a thousand folds, that covers their shoulders and breasts, and a short skirt of brown or red wool; they resemble, in their freshness and cheerfulness and the clarity of their foreheads and eyes, the beautiful women of Bern, or of the mountains of Lucerne.

There, our faithful companions from all the konaks (*Ottoman buildings*) of Turkey abandoned us; we no longer saw those storks, whose large nests, like rush cradles, crown the tops of all the mosque domes in European Turkey and serve as roofs for the crumbling minarets. Every evening, upon arriving in the villages or deserted khans, we would see them wandering two by two around our tent or huts. The fledglings, raising their long necks out of the nest like a knot of snakes, hold out their beaks to the mother, who, half-suspended on her broad wings, shares with them the food she brings back from the nearby marshes; while the father, hovering motionless, high above the nest, seems to be enjoying the touching spectacle. These beautiful birds are by no means wild: they are the guardians of the roof as dogs are guardians of the hearth; they live in peace with the flocks of turtledoves that whiten the domes of the khans and mosques everywhere, and cause the swallows no fright. The Turks themselves live in peace with all of creation, animate and inanimate, trees, birds, and dogs, respecting all that God has made; they extend their charity to these poor creatures, abandoned or persecuted in our country. In every street, there are, at intervals, dishes full of water for the neighbourhood's dogs, and sometimes, upon dying, the Turks establish pious foundations so that grain may be scattered to the turtledoves they fed during their lives.

## Semlin (Zemun, Belgrade)

*September 5th, 1833.*

This morning, we emerged from the eternal forests of Serbia, which stretch down to the banks of the Danube. The point where one first glimpses this king of rivers is a knoll covered with magnificent oaks; after crossing it, one discovers at its foot a vast lake of clear blue water, nestled among woods and reeds, and dotted with green islands; as one rides on, one sees the river widen to right and left, first skirting the high, wooded cliffs of Serbia, and then disappearing, to the right, into the plains of Hungary. The final forested slopes that descend towards the river are some of the most beautiful places in the world. We spent the night on the banks of the Danube, in a small Serbian village.

The next day, we left the river again, and rode for four hours. The country, like all borderlands, is arid, uncultivated, and deserted. Around midday, we climbed some barren hills, from which we finally discovered Belgrade at our feet. Belgrade, so often damaged by bombs, sits on a high bank of the Danube. The roofs of its mosques are holed; the walls are torn apart; the abandoned suburbs are strewn with ruins and piles of rubble; the city, like all Turkish cities, descends in narrow, winding streets toward the river. Semlin (*Zemun*), the first city on the Hungarian side (*now part of Belgrade*), gleams, across the Danube, with all the magnificence of a European city, its bell towers rising opposite the minarets.

Upon arriving in Belgrade, while we were resting in a small inn — the first we had found in Turkey — Prince Milos sent some of his principal officers to invite me to spend a few days at the fortress where he resided, a few miles from Belgrade. I resisted their entreaties and instead ordered the boats for the crossing of the Danube. At four o'clock, we descended toward the river. Just as we were about to embark, I saw a group of horsemen, dressed almost in European style, hastening to ascend the riverbank. It was Prince Milos' brother (*Jevrem*), the Commander of the Serbian Knights, who had come on behalf of his elder brother to renew the latter's entreaty that I stay with him for a few days. I deeply regretted not being able to accept such kindly-offered hospitality; but

my travelling companion, Monsieur de Capmas, had been gravely ill for several days. He could barely be supported on his horse. It was urgent for him to find the rest and resources that a European city and the care of doctors at a lazaretto (*quarantine station*) would offer. I talked for half an hour with the prince, who seemed to me to be a man as learned as he is affable and kind. I saluted in him and his noble people the imminent hope of an independent civilised nation, and I finally set foot on board the boat, which carried us to Zemun. The journey took an hour; the river, wide and deep, possesses waves like the sea. We then travelled beside the meadows and orchards that surround Zemun.

On the evening of the 3rd of September, I entered the lazaretto, where we were to remain for ten days. Each of us had a cell and a small courtyard planted with trees. I dismissed my Tartars, my grooms and muleteers, and my dragomans, who were returning to Constantinople: all of them kissed our hands sadly, and I myself could not leave those simple and upright men without feelings of tenderness and gratitude, those faithful and generous servants who had guided me, served me, guarded me, cared for me as brothers would a brother, and who had proven to me, during the countless vicissitudes of eighteen months of travel in a foreign land, that all religions have their divine morality, all civilisations their virtue, and all human beings ideals of justice, goodness, and beauty engraved on their hearts, albeit in different characters, by the hand of God.

## Translator's Postscript

After a ten-day quarantine at Zemun, Lamartine and his wife returned to France, via Vienna, reaching Mâcon on October 18th, 1833. Between the 25th of October and the 3rd November, Lamartine travelled to Marseille, returning with the remains of their daughter Julia, who was interred in the neo-gothic family vault which Lamartine had built at Saint-Point after the death of his mother (*Françoise Alix de Lamartine, who had died in 1829*). After arriving home, he wrote to his close friend and confidant Jean-Marie Dargaud: 'I arrived, alone, yesterday evening, and have deposited the coffin of my only child above that of my mother: all my past, and all my future. I am broken in body and spirit. I can barely write.'

**The End of Part XI, and of Lamartine's 'Voyage en Orient'**