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CAPTAIN BEST'S EXCURSIONS IN ALBANIA AND ASCENT OF THE DANUBE.

Quartered at Corfu on the Staff of the Governor of the Ionian Islands, Captain Best and several of his brother-officers were in the habit of frequently making excursions to the mainland of Albania. Thinly, nay scarcely peopled—swampy, covered with bush, and closely set with forest—without preserve or poachers,—the country affords fatiguing sport, and the sportsman is exposed to cold and privation. The sportsmen, it appears, do not go alone, but in large parties, after the fashion of our battues, or in companies of three or four.

But Captain Best had a higher ambition than shooting woodcocks or even a wild boar. He had read of travels, and he longed to be a traveller himself; so, with leave of absence in his pocket, he first made a journey to Janina, the capital of Ali Pasha, and next a larger pilgrimage on horseback, not unlike part of Childe Harold's; crossing the Pindus range, roaming over the plains of Thessaly, and through the vale of Tempe to Salonica, whence he steamed to Constantinople. After seeing the sights of the capital, our tourist ascended the Danube to Pest, in a steamer, returning to Corfu by way of Vienna and Trieste. but the narrative of his adventures closes at Pest.

To high literary merit Captain Best makes no pretensions: his mind is not of a philosophic or reflective cast, and he had not much opportunity, in the half barbarous and half-peopled lands he travelled through, of exercising his professional knowledge, though what little there was he does not let pass. But if not a first-rate traveller, Captain Best is a very pleasant and unaffected one. clear and distinct in his descriptions of scenery and customs, animated in his account of incidents, and not heavy or long drawn out in his narrative; whilst by noting every-day practices and describing them minutely, he conveys a better idea of the still life and habits of the people than many more ambitious travellers. The weakest parts of his book are when he quits the subject in hand to grapple with the destinies of nations. It may be true that the beauty and fertility of the country in Albania and Thessaly, compared with the paucity of inhabitants, reflect strongly upon the oppression of the Government—and the frequent ruins of classical times bear testimony to the number of people it formerly maintained; but if the Turkish Government is to be overthrown for the paucity of people compared with the soil, we do not know that others would be particularly secure.

That the facts on which Captain Best founds his inferences are true enough, may be gathered from many descriptions. Here is one:—

TENURE OF LAND IN THESSALY.

Occasionally we passed a piece of magnificent rye, in full ear at that early season, with straw the longest I ever saw in my life; while the number of wild pigeons that kept constantly rising out of these and other fields of corn, as we

rode past them, was positively marvellous. The plain must be marshy in winter; but the whole of it might be easily kept dry enough for cultivation by a few cross-dikes, the parts which are cultivated being drained effectually in that manner.

On passing one very magnificent piece of wheat, I observed incidentally to the surrigger, that it was in fine condition; and asked if he knew to whom it belonged. "How could he tell?" was his reply; "any one that can afford to watch and guard it may sow wherever he pleases; and when the time of harvest comes he may reap it if it has not been stolen before that; and then some one perhaps sows there the next year, and the man who has had the crop sows some-where else." "Then I am to understand that the land belongs to no one, and that any one may plough or sow where he pleases?" said I, somewhat surprised. "How can the land belong to any one?" asked in reply the equally astonished Albanian. "If I sow corn there, the corn is mine, if you sow, it is yours, if I see good grass there, I feed my horses, or sheep, or oxen, if I have any, and any other person may do the same. but the land is not mine." "But to whom then does the land belong? May I come and turn out your flocks, or sow seeds where you want to sow?" "Of course you may, if you can; but if I sow corn there, or feed my flocks there, I take good care to guard it, and not let you."

The following is a curious picture of an unsafe country.

CONVENTS OF METEORA, THESSALY.

We continued to follow the course of the Peneus through a magnificently-wooded country for about four hours more; when we found ourselves in the midst of these huge conglomerate rocks, which seem quite alive with convents. Some are built on the summits of sugar-loaf-like rocks, others about half-way up the faces; but all most carefully constructed in situations apparently inaccessible, and in which they seem to have been placed by enchantment, for it is difficult to conceive how the materials requisite for their construction could have been carried up the sides of almost perpendicular rocks several hundred feet high, or how a sufficient footing could have been gained at the summits of the almost pointed ones, on which some of the convents stand, to place the machinery for raising up the foundation-stones.

These huge rocks cover a space of about one mile and a half in length and of a variable width. They are a kind of soft conglomerate, with sea-pebbles and shells in great quantities; but they show evident marks of the effects of time and weather on a not very solid kind of stone. Besides the convents, there are houses in all directions in and under these rocks; to all of which the access is, as to the convents, by a rope-ladder, which can be drawn up at pleasure, or by some most impracticable steps cut in the solid rock.

The convent we were about to visit was the Agios Stephanos, which is one of the highest. Leaving our horses at the foot of the hill, we reached, after about a quarter of an hour's hard climbing, a spot where, on looking up, we