

Chapter III

En Route

WE travelled *viâ* Flushing to Trieste, where we boarded "The Wien," one of the Austrian-Lloyd boats. It was a fine ship and as luxurious as any liner crossing the Atlantic.

The journey down the Adriatic fascinated me. Who can forget his first view of Ragusa, surrounded by old walls, flanked with strange towers and bastions, and commanded by the adjacent hills? It is of very early origin and is supposed to have been founded by the Greeks. Boscovich, the mathematician, was born here and lies buried in the strange and beautiful cathedral.

I could have thrown an orange on the shore of Ithaca, the birthplace and patrimonial kingdom of Ulysses. The scenery is bold and striking with many promontories and bays, and narrow valleys opening to the sea, some richly wooded with olive, orange, or almond trees and others covered with vineyards. I remember asking the chief engineer, who was standing by me, what coast it was, and in a very bored tone he said: "Ithaca"; and on my exclaiming, "What, Ulysses' country?" he answered in the affirmative, and hurried away. Poor fellow! I suppose he had listened to dithyrambics about Homer and Ulysses till he wanted to strike any man who mentioned their names.

After dinner one evening Olcott came to my cabin and said he would like to have a talk with me about the work in hand. We talked for hours, and I was surprised and deeply impressed by the enthusiasm displayed by Olcott, and his very evident, grasp of the subject with which he was dealing. I soon learnt what I had already suspected, that Olcott was a man of vivid imagination and keen intellect. After that conversation all doubts about the success of the enterprise left me. I was free to immerse myself with an untrammelled mind in thoughts of the great work in front of me. Olcott seemed to understand me, and I felt I understood him. Never have I worked with a man with whom I was in more complete accord. He told me, among other things, of the ramifications of the cinematograph business, and of the possible number of people who would see the film when released to the world. I remembered that part of his conversation when the Managing Director of the Kalem Company told me in New York, a year after the release of the film, that they had worked out some figures relative to the number of people who had seen the film. One computation was that four millions of people were witnessing the film simultaneously when it was released to the world at Christmas in 1912.

We arrived at Alexandria, but did not linger as we were anxious to get to Jerusalem. "The Flight into Egypt" had already been filmed, the company having made Luxor their headquarters during the taking of the scenes wherein the "Pyramids" and "The Sphinx" are seen. Alexandria to-day is by no means the beautiful city which claimed such

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admiration from the Romans that they ranked it next to their own capital, but anyone with the smallest knowledge of its history cannot fail to be impressed when setting foot within its gates. Was not the Pharos, built by Ptolemy Philadelphus, one of the seven wonders of the world? Here the first of two of the most famous libraries in the world was established by Ptolemy Soter. The first library was accidentally destroyed by fire during the war with Julius Caesar, and the second by Caliph Omar, who, when ordering the destruction of the library, said that if the books agreed with the Koran they were useless and need not be preserved; if they did not they were pernicious and ought to be destroyed. This crime of bigotry is deplored by the learned to this day. It was in Alexandria that the Greek translation of the Old Testament under the name of the Septuagint was made by the Hellenists by order of Ptolemy Philadelphus.



Calling of Peter and Andrew

The famous obelisks known as Cleopatra's Needles and the Catacombs, now in a ruinous state, are still impressive. The fragments of columns, vestiges of public baths, and beautiful specimens of architecture all bear witness to the grandeur and magnificence which once characterised this great city of the East.

From Alexandria we proceeded to Port Said, a town that did not interest me to any great extent. The coaling of the liner was a sight I shall long remember, and despite the fact that I was warned to go ashore while this was happening, I remained on deck and watched the scene. I have set down my impressions in the accompanying poem, which originally appeared in *The Graphic*.

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THE COALING AT PORT SAID

The tug steams up, and in its wake
A huge barge swings, and pulls,
Like some brave fish that tries to break
The line that so befools ;
And black as the coal whereon they sit
The toilers laugh and jest,
As well they may for the salt of wit
Will dampen soon in the best.

Two planks are laid on the liner's side
Where portholes are fast despite the sun,
And up those planks, not over-wide,
The human ants go one by one.
And I above stand looking on
And ask what strange chance made these men
The carriers of coal and such,
And me the urger of a pen?

It was early dawn when I first looked on Jaffa, the gateway of the Holy Land. Seemingly about fifteen miles from the shore a long range of hills, bathed in a purplish haze so common in the East, was discernible.

So this was the country of Jacob, of David, of Rachel, and of Ruth! Those hills in the distance had known the prophets of Israel, and the Saviour of all men had lived and died among them. Perched above ragged rocks and a whitening surf were nestled tier on tier of curious houses with dark walls flanked on either side by clumps of trees. This was Jaffa, the Joppa of the Scriptures, where St. Peter sojourned, and Dorcas bought fruit and drew water. In my youth I always associated Jaffa with one event. It was here in 1799 that Napoleon poisoned a number of sick soldiers, on the plea that it was to keep them from falling alive into the hands of a cruel enemy. Fervent admirer as I was of the Emperor in those days, I found this story difficult to accept or to explain away.

I was aroused from my reveries by a commotion on deck. An Arab boatman from Jaffa, plying for hire, had resented a warning a Cairene merchant had given to a European relative to his charges. He stabbed the merchant viciously with his knife, scuttled over the side of the ship into his boat, and pulled hard for shore. None of his fellow-boatmen attempted to do anything beyond grin in a fatalistic manner. The poor merchant, who was very seriously wounded, was praying fervently and offering to give a sum of money to a certain shrine if he recovered. My dragoman assured me that the money would be paid in any case. This little scene gave me my first impression of the value of human life to some of the Syrians.

After breakfast we stepped into a large boat and, oared by six men, we set out for a narrow slit in the rocks. The Arab oarsmen drew with an easy, confident stroke and chanted an ancient boat-song while they pulled. It is a dangerous coast and at times it is quite impossible to land passengers.

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Jaffa is the genuine East. Although it has been destroyed in war and rebuilt it has remained in many ways what it must have been in the days of Solomon, Pompey, Saladin, and Napoleon. It is approached by a tricky and dangerous roadstead. Behind the town is a really magnificent orange grove. Through a single gateway called the Jerusalem Gate, which is barred at night (as is the custom in most towns in the Holy Land), the tides of life and commerce ebb and flow. It was through this gate that St. Peter walked in from Lydda, and Pompey, Saladin, and Napoleon rode in all their glory. The Water Gate faces the sea and is hardly more than a window in a wall, about six feet square and about five feet higher than the sea-line when the water is calm. A breeze from the west will soon fret the water and prevent the porters from either loading or unloading. The porters are capable of carrying immense weights on their backs. I saw one old man with a band round his forehead carrying a piano on his back.

The famous orange grove at the back of the town delighted me. Never have I seen such oranges, or such citrons. In this part of the world they can make a lemon-squash more delicious and refreshing than any to be obtained elsewhere. The secret, I was informed, was to gather fresh fruit from the trees and to use it immediately. There is much that I could write about Jaffa, but insomuch as I did none of my work there I will pass on.