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Major Commanding 56th Battery R.F.A. D. G. Prinsep

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A JOURNEY IN CYPRUS, 1899.

By Major D. G. PRINSEP, Commanding 56th Battery R.F.A.

Friday, May 5th, 1899.—Having been detailed to visit Cyprus on duty, I left Alexandria on Wednesday, May 3rd, in the "Dundee" (Captain Duncan), and after a very smooth passage in the six hundred-ton cargo-boat named above, and in which I was the only first-class passenger, we arrived at 8.30 off Limasol.

The view from the ship approaching Cyprus from the south is decidedly imposing; in the foreground is the promontory of Akrotiri, with its grey sandstone cliffs and lighthouse, while Limasol can be seen to the east of it, a low line of white houses with red-tiled roofs, and a Greek church with two minarets, all white. Behind Limasol, the ground slowly rises until the mountains commence, topped by Mount Troödos, six thousand feet high, which soars majestically over the minor features, and is the highest point in the island. It is here the Government and the troops make their headquarters during the hot weather, the former going to Nicosia and the latter to a hut camp at Polymedia, three-and-a-quarter miles north of Limasol, for the cold weather. The ground in the vicinity is rich, and cultivated with barley and oat crops at present, and is thickly studded with the carob tree or locust bean, which is a great source of revenue to the inhabitants, the tree producing large quantities of a curved and long large bean, much used for food for cattle, and each tree will produce in value from 10s. to £1 worth of these beans. As the tree requires little or no attention, it is not surprising that they are thought much more of than the cultivation, and indeed the latter might be made much more valuable were water forthcoming, as the ground appears to be of a rich quality and capable of carrying heavy crops. I understand that irrigation works are to be commenced, and by damming the streams near their exits from the mountains a storage of water will be made which cannot but largely enrich the cultivated plains. The general appearance is suggestive of a large park covered with trees, and is most picturesque. The carob tree is so valuable that although a native can be induced to let his lands he will not part with his trees, and consequently a dual ownership may ensue, which is unsatisfactory to both parties.

I drove from the pier to the camp at Polymedia up a very good road in a sort of two-wheeled ambulance drawn by a pair of small ponies, and in due course arrived, finding most comfortable quarters ready for me and muchly-desired breakfast in the officers' mess of the detachment of Sherwood Foresters, after which a visit was made round the camp precincts.

There is only one company quartered here at present, but wood huts on stone plinths are built which will accommodate half a battalion, and the men have a very nice reading-room, library, and a first-rate swimming bath supplied by a mountain stream. The camp commands a magnificent view of the coast round Limasol and as far as Akrotiri to the south. Limasol itself is a small Greek town of white houses and tortuous narrow streets, and is of a "Sleepy Hollow" nature, the inhabitants only waking up when the steamer arrives to take in or discharge cargo. A certain amount of wine is made here, and a very palatable drink it is. I believe two sorts are made, a red and a white wine, but I can vouch for the excellence of the former, and it seems a pity that it will not stand exportation, as it would be a popular drink of the nature of a rich claret. There are a few leather-workers and blacksmiths, and general stores of the usual sort. The town is about a mile long by a quarter mile deep, running along the edge of the bay, and does not contain more than about three thousand inhabitants. I saw nothing in Limasol of architectural interest.

Saturday, May 6th.—Went and explored Limasol in the morning, riding a pony kindly lent me by one of the detachment of the infantry officers. There is a small polo ground on the side of the road outside Limasol, but great difficulty is experienced in getting up a game, owing to the paucity of players. Outside the soldiers there are only a commissioner of the district, a commandant of the Cyprus Police, a most charming man and well informed, and a few merchants, etc., so there is a dearth of society, though on all sides hospitality is unbounded, and the stranger fares well here.

In the afternoon I went with the commander of the detachment to see an old castle at Ho Kalossi (ὁ Καλόσση), about seven miles away—where Richard Cœur de Lion is said to have lived—a very fine ruin which must have been a large place, though all that now remains is a large square tower of three storeys, in the wall on the east side of which are several stones, carved, carrying the arms of that monarch. Traces of other large buildings can be distinctly seen, and a fine aqueduct brings a plentiful supply of water to the land which carries the best crop of oats and barley I have ever seen out of England.

There is also a most curious old stone church in the precincts of this castle, very small and low, with a circular dome over the chancel at the east end. The rood screen is very finely carved in wood and has painted panels representing St. Peter, the Virgin Mary and Child, with two others, now undistinguishable, while the stone walls have been covered with paintings, of which one still remains of a king in chain armour on horseback with spear and shield, probably meant for Richard Cœur de Lion, and it is still in good preservation. The circular dome was also covered with paintings of religious subjects, but only traces can now be seen. The whole church is very ancient indeed, and is still in use.

After spending a couple of hours at this most interesting place, we rode to Limasol, along the flat and through fields of barley and carob trees, passing a village, and so to Limasol, where we changed at the club and dined with the commander of the police, Mr. Marvrogordato, whose

hospitality was much appreciated, and who has a nice collection of guns, silver ornaments, etc., which have come to him during his residence in this island.

A feature of the island is the excellent cigarette made here at a very cheap price, and their wine, sold by the skinful, is almost nominal in its cost. I made during the day arrangements for the hire of three mules and a muleteer for travelling purposes, and the Cyprus mule is a fine animal indeed, 14 to 14.2 hands high, well built and very wiry and hard. Mules and donkeys are the principal means of locomotion on the island, and are to be procured, if taken for a week or so, at about 2s. a head, including the muleteer. The natives are chiefly Greeks and Turks, the former a fine, well set-up and handsome race, and very picturesque they look in shirts of all colours and stripes and black loose loin cloths or knickerbockers, coloured stockings, and shoes or long sea boots. But, like all Easterns, they are lazy and won't do a bit more work than they can help.

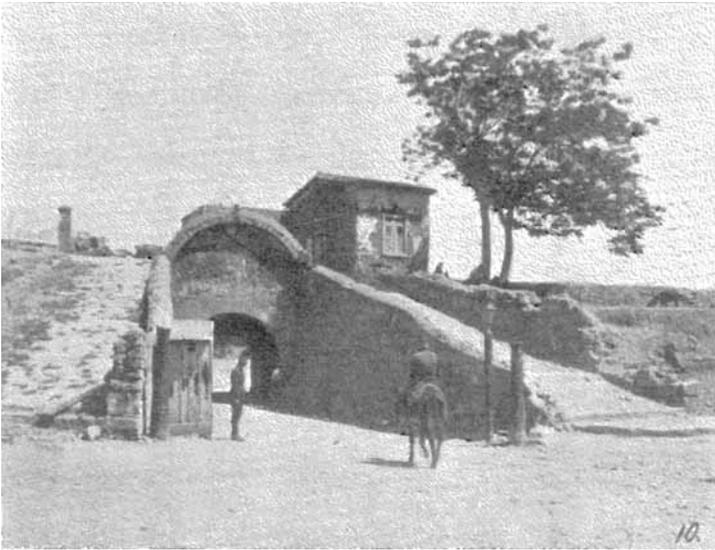
Sunday, May 7th.—After lunch I rode with a friend to some excavations at Amathus, which is about nine miles from Limasol on the sea coast to the east, and is reported to have been formerly a large town. Traces of buildings can be seen on a circular-shaped hill standing by itself in a basin which empties into the sea, and it must have been a great stronghold, as the cliff scarps straight up round the top. To the north, in the lower ground, there were a quantity of excavations, which had disclosed complete buildings enclosing the sarcophagi, and several bodies have been found, pointing this out as an ancient burial-ground. I explored two of these buildings, which were made of large blocks of granite in perfect preservation. One was entered by a rectangular door-shaped entrance leading into a hall about twelve feet square and eight feet high, off which were three other rooms all with rectangular entrances.

The second one was more curious, having a ridge roof of beautifully cut stone and perfect masonry work, but only one room, also about twelve or fourteen feet square. Both these tombs were about twenty feet below the surface of the ground, but the earth does not appear to be a natural stratum, and bits of old pottery can be picked out. A quantity of good pottery, scarabs, etc., have been found in these tombs, the masonry construction of which appears similar to those of the Sphinx, at the Pyramids, Egypt.

During these days the Greeks were holding a four days' Olympian Games meeting, and on our way home we passed three of the runners in the sixteen-mile race, who were on their way back to finish the course. I believe their reward is a laurel wreath, but no other prize. These men had their backers or runners-up at points along the road cheering them on and giving them pieces of orange to suck as they ran. Their racing costume was merely a thin vest and a pair of short knickers, socks, and very old shoes. As we got back to Limasol we could see the crowds in the games' field and hear their applause. The gate was kept by a body of *zaptiehs*, or local police.

Monday, May 8th.—Court-martial all the morning till lunch time, and in the afternoon rode my mule down into the town to make some purchases and arrangements for a start on Tuesday morning for Nicosia, *viâ* Mount Troödos. In the evening dined at Dr. Girvin's up at the camp. I found some pretty specimens of old Venetian glass and one or two scarabs, also some old Roman pottery, rather nice.

Tuesday, May 9th.—Left camp at ten a.m. for Mount Troodos, the party consisting of myself on a mule with a borrowed ordnance saddle and bridle, Captain Radford on his pony, a muleteer, Captain Radford's groom (native), and three baggage mules. The march was thirty miles, uphill the whole way, through a monotonous country of high hills and dry parched fields thickly studded with carob and olive trees. The last



GATEWAY NICOSIA, CYPRUS.

ten miles of the journey, however, were pretty, and some of the scenes in the Peripedia Pass leading to Platraes were most lovely, the ground being steep and covered with vine trees, while cataracts and rocks with tumbling water could be seen at the base of the ravines. The scenery from here to the top of Troödos is very like that on the road to Murree in the Himalayas, but not on so grand a scale. We reached Platraes at five p.m., and sat in a grass field and made tea and looked at the magnificent view over Limasol and Akrotiri to the sea, and thought of picnics in fair England, and longed to be there once more. We turned in in a large room in a Greek house after a primitive meal of tongue and hard-boiled eggs, washed down with indifferent Cyprus wine and tea, and were asleep by nine p.m.

Wednesday, May 10th.—Up at five a.m., and after a hasty breakfast and a lot of bad language over removal of vermin from our bedding, started for the climb to the top of Troödos at seven a.m. Talking of vermin, Cyprus can boast of being *nulli secundus* in this respect, and I have never in my life been so bitten with insects of all kinds as in this island. But to resume, the climb from Platraes to the summit of the Pass is about six miles, and an ascent of about two thousand feet, through gorge sand round the sides of hills covered sparsely with fir-trees and a little scrub and bushes; the views over the whole island were superb, however. We began the descent on the north side at nine a.m., and a rougher path, or a steeper, I never wish to go over. In about four miles we descended about four thousand feet, and had to walk and lead our animals. No pretty surroundings till we came to Kakopetria, when cascades of water tumbling about in the deep clefts of the hills, and green grass, trees and small fields gave an appearance of health and life again, and this continued till we reached the village of Evrikon, where we stopped at 12.30 for three hours; and while the animals were watered and fed, Radford and I had one of the most delicious bathes in the clear mountain stream I can ever remember. Perhaps it seemed doubly enjoyable because we were very hot and tired, but it was a very acceptable interlude, and we lunched where we bathed. After lunch we struck a trail to the north-east, over some low spurs, up and down, and eventually emerged on to the broken plateau of low land leading to Peristerona, where we arrived tired and very hot at seven p.m. The last part of this march was monotonous to a degree, over rolling plough-land and across dry watercourses, and not a tree to be seen for miles. We were glad to get our evening meal at once in a sort of rest-house which the zaptiehs (Cyprus Native Police) took us to, and to bed at 9.15. Remembering my last night's experience of a couch, I intend to try the stone floor to-night. The Governor is having a carriage road built over this country, they say to take him up to his summer residence at Troödos. If so, I pity the engineer who has to work the gradients, etc., up the hill, as the rocks are big and the soil very treacherous.

Thursday, May 11th.—Up at five a.m. and left Peristerona at six for an eighteen-mile ride across the most bleak and uninteresting country I have ever seen. There is not a single tree in sight, and the ground is all composed of shallow depressions and small hills, from which one can only see the next hillock. Added to which the temperature that morning rose to 90° Fahr. in the shade, so it can be imagined what it was travelling in the sun in a hot glare and not a breath of wind anywhere. We arrived at Nicosia at eleven a.m. thoroughly exhausted, and took up quarters at the club there (commonly known as The Canteen), where we were comfortably looked after by the Steward. After a wash and a drink, we took a carriage and drove to Government House and called on Sir W. Haynes-Smith, the High Commissioner, who was very kind and asked us to dine with him that evening. In the afternoon we strolled about Nicosia admiring the beautiful work on the cathedral of St. Sophia; now, alas! a Turkish mosque, but formerly a place of Christian worship. Nicosia is a

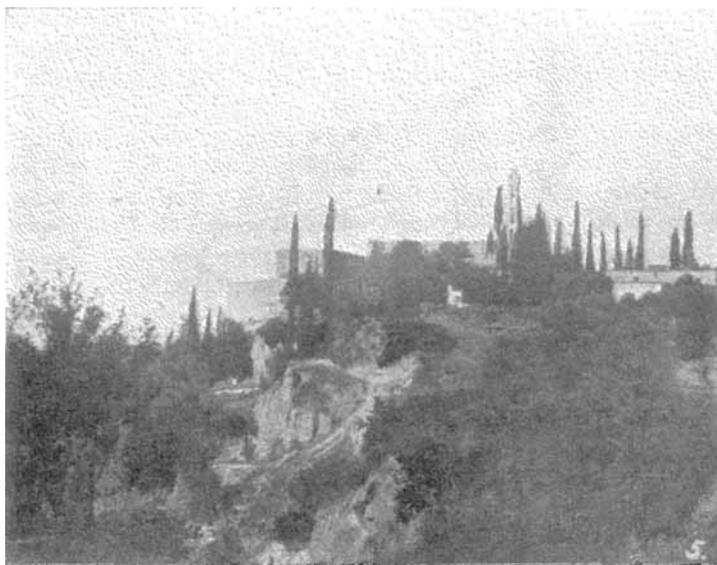
walled and fortified city in shape, an undekagon or eleven-sided polygon, with bastions at the corners, and these are still in good condition, though a bit crumbling in parts. The result is that the whole of the town is in a circle, of which St. Sophia is about the centre. The town is prettily wooded and forms quite an oasis in the midst of this hot plain between the two mountain ranges of Cyprus.

Friday, May 12th.—After again inspecting the Church of St. Sophia and the façade of a smaller church alongside, where I took some photos, we strolled through the bazaar, as it was a fair day, and saw a very brilliant and animated scene, all the women having come in from the villages and squatted themselves down in the road to sell their hand-made silk goods, which are very nicely made, and in another part large groups of men were dealing in donkeys, mules, and ponies. The mule is *par excellence* the animal of Cyprus, and though somewhat small (thirteen to fourteen hands average), he is a strong and hardy beast, and there is a large demand for Cyprus mules both in Africa and India. In the afternoon we inspected a museum of most interesting Cypriote antiquities, well deserving of a public building where they could be shown properly, instead of in the upper part of a Turkish house. The collection of statues, glass, and pottery is probably unique, and the history of this island can be traced back by it to the remotest ages.

Saturday, May 13th.—We got up at five a.m. and started at six a.m. in a most rickety chaise drawn by three ponies to go over the Pass to Kyreina on the north side of the island, sixteen miles off. This proved a most interesting and enjoyable day, as after crossing the Pass the country becomes green and smiling right down to the sea, with luxuriant foliage and plenty of olive and carob trees, and the general views as we drove down the gorges were very fine and impressive, the foreground of rock and bushy scrub with a middle distance of rolling cultivated fields, green with barley and studded with olives and carob trees, while beetling limestone mountains with rugged crests and treacherous-looking slopes stood out in bold relief against a blue Eastern sky in the background.

We arrived at Kyreina at nine a.m. and found the Commissioner of the district in his office, and he, Major Chamberlayne, and the Puisne Judge, Mr. Tyser, were most kind in their attentions to us, and had everything done to show us the beauties of the place.

Kyreina is a pretty little natural harbour with two moles running out to protect it and a circular promenade or wharf inside, while on the east side is a curious old square fort of great age, which has had a corner added to one of its bastions for greater strength. At each corner are bastions and towers, and there appear traces of a wet ditch all round, and it must have been a strong place when built. In the fort, which is now used as a convict prison, can be seen the recesses and long vertical slits in the walls in tiers where the bowmen of old used to draw their arrows to protect the town and harbour, while in parts and on the top many gun embrasures have since been added, probably by the Venetians, and the piles of round stone and iron solid shot still remain in rear of each gun emplacement. We wandered all over this fort, down curious twisting



OLD MONASTERY, BELAPAISE, CYPRUS.



THE ABBEY BELAPAISE, CYPRUS.

stairs and underground passages, our *cicerone*, Mr. Greenwood, of the Cyprus Police, and Mr. Tysler explaining the objects of curiosity as we went along. There is a most interesting little chapel, too, in this fort, with a Roman tessellated floor and three marble pillars (the fourth pillar was a stone wall, so to speak) and three graves under the floor, with their stoneware or red clay coffins, which had been excavated. The altar was distinctly traceable in a niche, and about were found columns and memorials with Greek and Turkish inscriptions. In the afternoon we rode mules to Belapaise, the ruin of a magnificent monastery about three miles off and one thousand feet up the hill. This must have been a very large monastery, and shows remains of beautiful carving and work on the transepts and columns, but is greatly shaken and destroyed by earthquakes and time, being built with sandstone. On the west side of the Pass stood the Castle of St. Ilarion, about three thousand feet high, perched like an eagle on a rocky pinnacle, and a veritable stronghold, but now in ruins. We had no time to visit this relic of a prosperous bygone age, but from its size it must have been of great importance and immense strength. Both it and Belapaise overlook thousands of fertile acres at their feet, and the Mediterranean glitters and shimmers in the sun as far as one can see, till the eye catches the outline of the snow-covered Taurus range of mountains to the north in Asia Minor.

Our carriage met us half way up the Pass and we drove back, arriving at 8.15 p.m., to Nicosia.

There is another castle similarly situated to Ilarion on Bufavento, which has a curious history. A certain queen of the district or island had a pet dog, and by some means or the other both dog and woman got the mange. This so disgusted the lady that she and her dog went up in retirement to Bufavento Castle. After a time it was noticed that the dog used to disappear for a couple of hours at a time during the day, and also that it got perceptibly better, so the queen gave orders for the dog to be watched and followed. They discovered that the dog used to go and wallow in a warm spring some little distance from the castle, and the queen therefore tried the same treatment, with the result that she got cured, and in gratitude built a church over the spring and was buried there with her dog. The story is a good one, even if it is not true, which however it is believed to be.

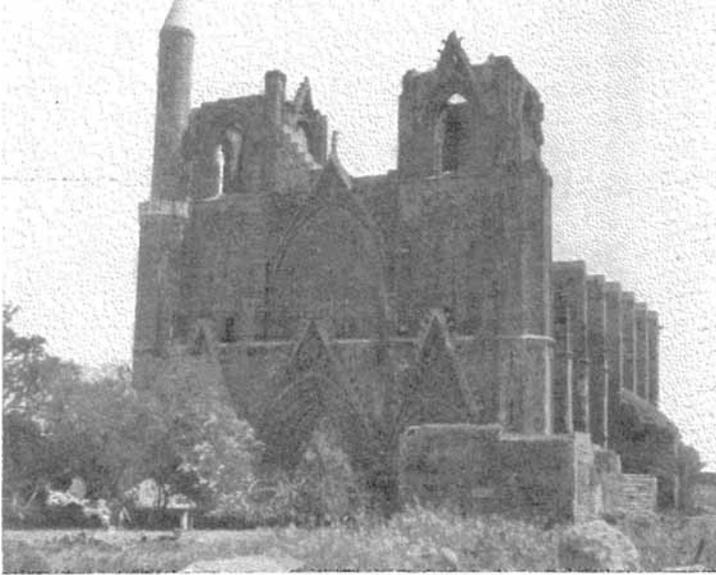
Sunday, May 14th.—We left Nicosia in a carriage to Vavili, about eighteen miles, at eleven a.m., and on arrival found our mules, which we had sent on the day before, ready for us, and we then rode about fifteen miles more to Famagusta, on the east side of the island, arriving at about 6.30 p.m., and in the evening we dined with the Puisne Judge of the place, Mr. McCasky, who was most kind and gave us every use of his house. There were also the members of the Assize Court staying with him, so we sat down, a party of six men, and had a most enjoyable evening.

Monday, May 15th.—After breakfast at the Greek inn where we put up, we rode our mules to the old ruined fort of Famagusta, about one and a half miles from the new town of Varosia, and explored the interior. It is a wonderful old fort, overlooking a harbour which requires dredging to

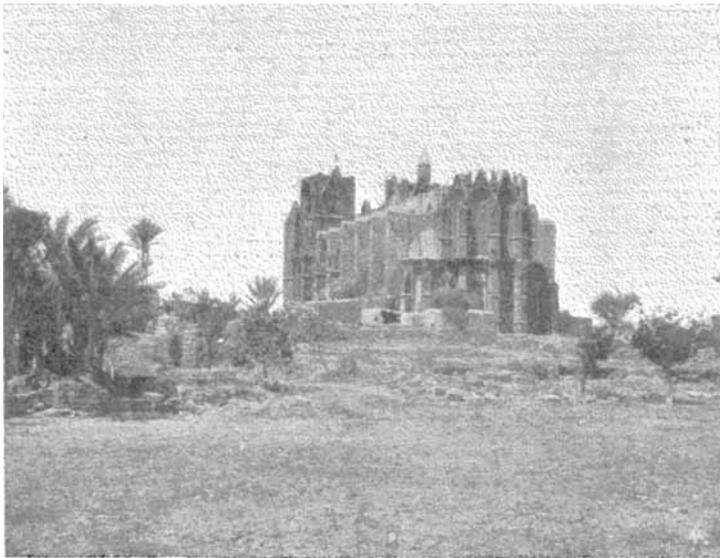
be of much use, strongly built and in good repair considering the age of it. There can be seen traces of the drawbridge and a strong tower over the main gate, and bastions at the corners. A ditch, probably wet formerly, now planted with trees, and niches for bow and arrow men as well as embrasures for guns. We found two guns still in the tower, one a long one of bronze, about three and a half inches in bore, and the other larger, on an old field carriage, and of iron, with a Latin inscription on its breech. The interior of the fort is an inhabited Turkish village, and there is also a prison with an important façade of arches and marble columns, in which are stored iron and stone shot of all sizes, and a quantity of carved pieces of marble, cornices, escutcheons, heads, etc., and one or two very ancient pieces of guns.

The most interesting piece of architecture, however, is the cathedral, which has a very fine front on the west, and the apse to the east is also in good state of preservation. It has two towers, incomplete, on one of which is built a Turkish minaret, as the place is used as a mosque still; but traces of the excellence of design and carving are still visible, as in the cathedral at Nicosia. A curious effect is noticeable in the Latin cathedrals used as mosques: the cathedral altar faces east, but the Turk has to face Mecca, which is about south-east in Nicosia, consequently all the Turkish pulpits are placed in the south-east corner, and the platforms and carpets, etc., are arranged thus inside, which gives a skewed effect, and the old place where the altar was is left empty and blank. It certainly seems a pity these churches could not have been kept for Christian worship, as the Turk takes no trouble to preserve ancient buildings, and they are all gradually falling away into decay. Besides the cathedral, are ruins of many other fine churches and buildings inside the fortress, and all tend to show a most populated and prosperous condition of things in former years. There is an enormous carved marble lion, in bad repair now, reposing on the ground near the harbour gate, and on one of the outworks we came across a marble slab with coat of arms and Latin inscription, showing that a certain man either was governor or built the *annexe*, but I did not copy it and have forgotten the name; the date was about A.D. 1429. After a bathe in the blue waters of the Mediterranean we returned to lunch with Mr. McCasky. We walked about the town, etc., but saw nothing of note.

Tuesday, May 16th.—Up at six a.m. and off by 6.40 for a march to Larnaka, which we reached at one p.m., in time for lunch. This is the most important seafaring place on the island, and nearly all goods from the interior are exported from here. There is not much to see in the way of ruins, but the place has a small modern fort used as a prison. The Commissioner here, Mr. Cobham, was most kind to us and showed us round everywhere. The bazaar is curious and picturesque, and there is a certain European population connected with the shipping, etc. As I write this, looking over the roadstead, there are two steamers, one barque, and a dozen or so small sailing-ships busy taking in or discharging cargo; the principal exports being wool, barley (which Bass & Co. buy up), carob beans, and silk, while the imports are cotton goods, sewing machines, etc., and wood.



THE CATHEDRAL, FAMAGUSTA, CYPRUS.



THE CATHEDRAL, FAMAGUSTA, CYPRUS. EAST APSE.

On the whole the Greeks, Turks, and Cypriotes get on amicably together, but now and then there are fracas and a murder or so.

Cyprus is full of antiquities, and tombs are opened up and various articles of bronze, pottery, glass and coins are found almost daily, showing the great age and changes of the island. Much is yet undiscovered, but the sites of old Roman and Phœnician towns and burial-places have been located. The antiques are dug up by a representative of the British Museum under the following agreement: the Museum



THE CATHEDRAL, FAMAGUSTA, CYPRUS. WEST TOWER RUIN FROM ROOF.!

takes one-third, the Government of Cyprus one-third, and the owner of the land one-third, and as all these antiques are forbidden to be exported, the owner, who is usually a farmer, sells his share to the British Museum, and what is not wanted is broken up. This latter I consider a vandalism, and I cannot see any useful object attained by prohibiting the export of *curios* if people are willing to buy them for their private collections, unless it is to enhance the value of the few that are kept. A dog-in-the-manger policy is not the one to attract sightseers, and if there were less restrictions of this sort perhaps many would come and spend money in the island who do not do so now.

Wednesday, May 17th.—Loafed about Larnaka all the morning, watching the picturesque bazaar and the shipping. At two p.m. our mules came round to the Royal Hotel where we were staying, and we started off to Ziyi, about twenty-six miles, arriving at 7.30 p.m., having travelled slowly on account of one mule which came down the day before and cut his knees. The road, or rather track, lay along the south shore of the island, about one mile to half a mile from the sea, and the country was undulating and not ugly. Ziyi is a custom-house only, with large store-houses for storing the locust bean in the season prior to shipment. There was a small pier, and the whole place is looked after by the zaptiehs, or Cyprus Police, a very fine and useful body of men, chiefly Turks, who very efficiently control the very mixed population. Their dress is a blue serge jacket and trousers, brown belts and gaiters and red fez. Their arms are Martini-Henry rifles, sword bayonet, and carbine and sword for the mounted men. They are most civil and obliging, and indeed the whole population is a very well mannered one to Europeans, all people getting up and usually taking off their hats or making some sort of obeisance when an Englishman passes.

Thursday, May 18th.—After a lovely bathe in the Mediterranean off the pier, we left Ziyi at 8.15 a.m., and by dint of pressing on, canter and walk alternately, we reached Polymedia camp in time for lunch at one o'clock, the distance being about twenty-one miles. Here our trip ended, and we had nothing more to do but to pay off the muleteer and settle up accounts generally. The camp here is prettily situated three miles from Limasol, and the ground slopes up covered with barley crops and carob trees.

Friday, May 19th.—Packed up and off by the Austrian Lloyd Mail in the evening.

Saturday, May 20th.—Arrived by steamer at Paphos and went ashore. The town is prettily situated about a mile and a half inland, on a shelf of high ground. In the foreground is a small harbour dominated by a curious old square fort in ruins, and there were formerly two moles which ran out to form the harbour. The Temple of Venus is about three miles off, and old Paphos town was close to the harbour, but now in ruins. The mountains formed a pretty background to the whole picture.

Sunday, May 21st.—Arrived at Port Said and disembarked there as the plague had broken out at Alexandria, and our ship had instructions to proceed no further. Arrived back at Cairo at 11.30 p.m. same evening.