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LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

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Nature's Failures--The Lions of Constantinople; --Oriental Life and Manners--The Wild Dervishes--The Thousand-and-One Colonnade--A Famous Mausoleum--Other Curiosities.

Cripples.

CONSTANTINOPLE, August 23d, 1867.

EDITORS ALTA: If you want dwarfs—I mean just a few dwarfs for a curiosity—go to Genoa. If you want to buy them by the gross, for retail, go to Milan. There are plenty of dwarfs all over Italy, but it did seem to me that in Milan the crop was luxuriant. If you would see a fair average style of assorted cripples, go to Naples, or travel through the Roman States. But if you would see the very heart and home of cripples and human monsters, both, go straight to Constantinople. A beggar in Naples who can show a foot which has all run into one horrible toe, with one shapeless nail on it, has got a good thing—but such an exhibition as that wouldn't stand any show in Constantinople. The man would starve. Who would pay any attention to attractions like his among the rare monsters that throng the bridges of the Golden Horn and display their deformities in the gutters of Stamboul? O, wretched impostor! How could he stand against the three-legged woman, and the man with his eye in his cheek? How would he blush in presence of the man with fingers on his elbow? Where would he hide himself when the dwarf with seven fingers on each hand, no upper lip, and his under-jaw gone, came down in his majesty? Bismillah! The cripples of Europe are a delusion and a fraud. The truly gifted flourish only in the by-ways of Pera and Stamboul.

That three-legged woman lay on the bridge, with her stock in trade so disposed of as to command the most striking effect—one natural leg, and two long, slender, twisted ones with feet on them, like somebody else's fore-arm. Then there was a man further along who had no eyes, and whose face was the color of a fly-blown beefsteak, and wrinkled and twisted like a lava-flow—and verily so tumbled and distorted were his features that no man could tell the wart that served him for a nose from his cheek bones. In Stamboul was a man with a prodigious head, an uncommonly long body, legs eight inches long and feet like cradle-rockers. He travelled on those feet and his hands, and was as sway-backed as if the Colossus of Rhodes had been riding him. Ah, I tell you, a beggar has to have exceedingly good points to make a living in Constantinople. A blue-faced man, that had nothing to offer except that he had been blown up in a mine, would be regarded as a rank impostor, and a mere damaged soldier on crutches would never make a cent. It would pay him to get a piece of his head taken off, and cultivate a wen like a carpet sack.

St. Sophia.

The Mosque of St. Sophia is the chief lion of Constantinople. You must get a firman and rush there the first thing. We did that. We did not get a firman, but we took along five francs apiece, which is much the same thing.

I don't think much of the Mosque of St. Sophia. I suppose I lack appreciation. Well, let it go at that. It is the rustiest old barn in heathendom. I believe all the interest that attaches to it comes from the fact that it was built for a Christian church and then turned into a mosque, without much alteration, by the Mohammedan conquerors of the land. They made me take off my boots and travel into the place in my sock-feet. I caught cold, and got myself so stuck up with a complication of gums, slime and general corruption, that I wore out two pair of boot-jacks getting my boots off that night, and even then some Christian hide peeled off with them.

St. Sophia is a colossal church, thirteen or fourteen hundred years old, and ratty enough to be a million. Its immense dome is said to be more wonderful than St. Peter's, but its dirt is much more wonderful than its dome, though they never mention it. The church has a hundred and seventy pillars in it, each a single piece, and all of costly marbles of various kinds, but they came from ancient temples at Baalbec, Heliopolis, Athens and Ephesus, and are battered, ugly and repulsive. They were a thousand years old when this church was new, and then the contrast must have been ghastly—if Justinian's architects did not trim them any. The inside of the dome is figured all over with a monstrous inscription in Turkish characters, wrought in gold mosaic, that looks as glaring as a circus bill; the pavements and the marble balustrades are all battered and dirty; the perspective is marred everywhere by a web of ropes that depend from the dizzy height of the dome, and suspend countless dingy, coarse oil lamps, six or seven feet above the floor. Squatting and sitting in groups, here and there and near and near, were ragged Turks reading books, hearing sermons, or receiving lessons like children, and in fifty places were more of the same sort bowing and straightening up, bowing again and getting down to kiss the earth, muttering prayers the while, and keeping up their gymnastics till they ought to have been tired, if they were not.

Everywhere was dirt, and dust, and dinginess, and gloom; everywhere were signs of hoary antiquity, but with nothing touching or beautiful about them; everywhere were those groups of fantastic pagans; overhead the gaudy mosaics and the web of lamp-ropes—nowhere was there anything to win one's love or challenge his admiration.

I understand it, I think. The people who go into ecstacies over St. Sophia get them out of the guide book (where every church is spoken of as being "considered by good judges to be the most marvelous structure, in many respects, that the world has ever seen.") Or else they are these old-master worshippers from the wilds of New Jersey, who can't tell a fresco from lath-and-plaster, and don't know any more about pictures than a kangaroo does about astronomy. And so you always hear them carrying on about wonderful pictures, wonderful statuary and wonderful architecture, the shameless lunatics! as if they had always been used to palaces and studios, extensive travel and the company of the elegant and accomplished, instead of being raised in a cow-lot, educated in a saw-mill, and their minds enlarged and stored with precious knowledge by travel down a creek on a shingle raft.

Now there was that wretched woman in the Vatican in Rome She overheard Brown say something outrageous about the old masters, and she permitted him to overhear her say something rather savage about "people who had no appreciation of the divine works of the great masters." It was not a gentlemanly thing for a lady to do, but she did not know that, perhaps. However, she went into hysterics, pretty soon, over a picture marked "Angelo," and called it a miracle of art, and a heavenly conception and a work such as none but inspired hands could have wrought, and a lot more of sickening nonsense like that, but finally an officer of the institution came along and set her back. He said that that particular "Angelo" was *not* Mike, but a certain other Angelo who used to be a butcher in Pisa—and that after painting until he found out it was not his best hold, he went back into the butchering business again. I just had an idea that may be that woman had had more experience in tending babies on a salary than in setting in judgment on the inspired fire-screens of the old masters.

The Dancing Dervishes.

There were twenty-one of them. They wore a long, light-colored loose robe that hung to their heels. Each in his turn went up to the priest (they were all within a large circular railing) and bowed profoundly and then went spinning away like a grand-daddy-long-legs, with one foot fast in a candle and took his appointed place in the circle, and continued to spin. When all had spun themselves to their places, they were about five or six feet apart, and remained spinning where they were during the remainder of the service—twenty-five minutes. They spun on the left foot, and kept themselves going passing the right rapidly before it and digging it against the waxed floor. Some of them made incredible "time" Most of them spun around forty times in a minute, and one artist averaged about sixty-one times a minute, and kept it up during the whole twenty-five. His robe filled with air and stood out all around him like a balloon.

They made no noise of any kind, and most of them tilted their heads back and closed their eyes, entranced with a sort of devotional ecstacy. There was a rude kind of music, part of the time, but the musicians were not visible. None but spinners were allowed within the circle. A man had to either spin or stay outside. It was about as barbarous an exhibition as I have ever witnessed.

Other Lions.

We visited the Thousand and One Columns. I do not know what it was originally intended for, but they said it was built for a reservoir. It is situated in the centre of Constantinople. You go down a flight of stone steps in the middle of a barren place, and there you are. You are forty feet under ground, and in the midst of a perfect wilderness of tall, slender, granite columns of the Byzantine order of architecture. Stand where you would, or change your position as often as you pleased, you were always a centre from which radiated a dozen long archways and colonnades that lost themselves in distance and the sombre twilight of the place. This old dried up reservoir is occupied by a few ghostly silk-spinners now, and one of them showed me a cross cut high up in one of the pillars. I suppose he meant me to understand that the institution was there before the Turkish occupation, and I thought he made a remark to that effect; but he must have had an impediment in his speech, for I did not understand him.

We took off our shoes and went into the marble mauzoleum of the Sultan Mahmoud, the neatest piece of architecture, inside, that I have seen lately. Mahmoud's tomb was covered with a black velvet pall, which was elaborately embroidered with silver; it stood within a fancy silver railing; at the sides and corners were silver candlesticks that would weigh more than a hundred pounds, and they supported candles as large as the calf of a man's leg; on the top of the sarcophagus was a fez, with a handsome diamond ornament upon it, which an attendant said cost a hundred thousand pounds, and lied like a Turk when he said it. Mahmoud's whole family were comfortably planted around him.

We went to the great Bazaar in Stamboul, of course, and I shall not describe it further than to say it is a monstrous hive of little shops—thousands, I should say—all under one roof, and cut up into innumerable little blocks by narrow streets which are arched overhead. One street is devoted to a particular kind of merchandise, another to another, and so on. When you want to buy a pair of shoes you have got the swing of the whole street—you don't have to walk yourself down hunting stores in different localities. It is the same with silks, antiquities, shawls, etc. The place is crowded with people all the time, and as the gay-colored Eastern fabrics are lavishly displayed before every shop, the great Bazaar of Stamboul is one of the sights that are worth seeing. It is full of life, and stir, and business.

MARK TWAIN.