

THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Eighteen.]

Turkish Morals—Much Matrimony—Selling Slave Girls—A Model Market Report—Commercial Morals—Honesty at a Discount—Fleeing Strangers—Effects of Evil Example.

CONSTANTINOPLE, August, 1867.

Morals.

Mosques are plenty, churches are plenty, graveyards are plenty, but morals and whiskey are scarce. The Koran does not permit Mohammedans to drink. Their general principles do not permit them to be moral. They say the Sultan has eight hundred wives. This almost amounts to bigamy. It makes our cheeks burn with shame to see such a thing permitted here in Turkey. We don't mind it so much in Salt Lake, however.

Circassian and Georgian girls are still sold in Constantinople by their parents, but not publicly. The great slave marts we have all read so much about—where tender young girls were stripped for inspection, and their points discussed just as if they were horses at an agricultural fair—no longer exist. The exhibition and the sales are private now. Stocks are up just at present, partly because of a brisk demand created by the recent return of the Sultan's suite from the inhospitable Courts of Europe; partly on account of an unusual abundance of breadstuffs, which leaves holders untortured by hunger and enables them to hold back for high prices; and partly because buyers are too weak to bear the market, while sellers are amply prepared to bull it. Under these circumstances, if the ALTA were published here in Constantinople, your next commercial report would read about as follows, I suppose:

Slave-Girl Market Report.

Best brands Circassians, crop of 1850, £200; 1852, £250; 1854, £300. Best brands Georgian, none in market; second quality, 1851, £180. Nineteen fair to middling Wallachian girls offered at £130@150, but no takers; sixteen prime Alsold in small lots to close out—terms private.

Sales of one lot Circassians, prime to good, 1852 to 1854, at £240@242½, buyer 30; one forty-niner—damaged—at £23, seller ten, no deposit. Several Georgians, 1852, changed hands to fill orders. The Georgians now on hand are mostly last year's crop, which was unusually poor. The new crop is a little backward, but will be coming in shortly. As regards its quantity and quality, the accounts are most encouraging. In this connection we can safely say, also, that the new crop of Circassians is looking extremely well. His Majesty the Sultan has already sent in large orders for his new harem, which will be finished within a fortnight, and this has naturally strengthened the market and given Circassian stock a strong upward tendency. Taking advantage of the inflated market, many of our shrewdest operators are selling short.

There is nothing new in Nubians. Slow sale.

Eunuchs—None offering; however, large cargoes are expected from Egypt to-day.

I think the above would be about the style of your commercial report. Prices are pretty high now, and holders firm; but, two or three years ago, parents in a starving condition brought their young daughters down here and sold them for even twenty and thirty dollars, when they could do no better, simply to save themselves and the girls from dying of want. It is sad to think of so distressing a thing as this, and I for one am sincerely glad the prices are up again.

Commercial Morals, Especially,

Are bad. There is no getting around that. Greek, Turkish and Armenian morals consist only in attending church regularly on the appointed Sabbaths, and in breaking the ten commandments all the balance of the week. It comes natural to them to lie and cheat in the first place, and then they go on and improve on nature until they arrive at perfection. In recommending his son to a merchant as a valuable salesman, a father does not say he is a nice, moral, upright boy, and goes to Sunday School and is honest, but he says, "This boy is worth his weight in broad pieces of a hundred—for behold, he will cheat whomsoever hath dealings with him, and from the waters of Marmora to the Euxine there abideth not so gifted a liar!" How is that, for a recommendation? The Missionaries tell me that you hear encomiums like that passed upon people every day. They say of a person they admire, "Ah, he is a charming swindler and a most exquisite liar!"

Everybody lies and cheats—everybody who is in business, at any rate. Even foreigners soon have to come down to the custom of the country, and they do not buy and sell long in Constantinople till they lie and cheat like a Greek. I say like a Greek, because the Greeks are called the worst transgressors in this line. Several Americans long resident in Constantinople contend that most Turks are pretty trustworthy, but none claim that the Greeks have any virtues that a man can discover—at least without digging for them.

Amusements.

I have been to one or two of the numerous beer-gardens here, but saw nothing that one might not see anywhere—a lot of people of various nationalities sitting at tables drinking beer, and half a dozen moderately pretty Bohemian girls fiddling and singing on a platform, and afterwards going around with a plate to take up a collection—and doing it, too, with that same old vain-glorious, self-important swagger that being petted and worshipped by rongs of the city and flats from the country has conferred upon the lager-beer girl in all ages of the world. When I found there was nothing national about the beer gardens of Constantinople, I dropped them with a promptness and a moral sensitiveness which cannot be too highly commended in one so young.

Then I tried smoking the thing they call the narghili. Curse the narghili. I will meddle with it no more. It is a long-necked glass decanter, with water in it, and a pipe-bowl on top of the neck. None but Persian tobacco is ever smoked in it and nothing but charcoal will light it. One stem goes down into the other and makes a fearful blubbering when you draw and the other leads to your mouth, and is like a section of hose. You sit down flat on a carpet, tailor-fashion, with your decanter near by, and then you bend on your hose and begin. Just after you begin, you quit, and don't begin any more. You do that if you have got good sense. You see, you do not suck up the smoke with the lips, as in ordinary smoking, but by a long respiration, swelling the lungs to their utmost, just as if you heaved a powerful sigh through your mouth instead of your nose. Now, you understand that when a greenhand does that, the smoke does not discharge itself in a great volume from his nose as it ought to do, but goes in a great volume down into his lungs, his stomach, even down into his legs! And then he coughs one mighty cough, and it is as if Vesuvius had let go! For the next ten minutes he smokes at every pore, like a frame house that is on fire on the inside, and after that he lays down his hose and goes home sicker than ever he was before in all his life. These Turks can have my share. Not any more narghili for me.

I will continue the amusement business of Constantinople in some future letter.

MARK TWAIN.