

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

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A Canine Nuisance---An Unhappy Race---Dogs Considered Sanitarily---Constantinopolitan Journalism---Censorship Extraordinary---How Newspapers are Managed in Naples ---Turkish Cookery---Fastidious Travellers.

CONSTANTINOPLE, August, 1867. The Dogs of Constantinople.

EDITORS ALTA: I am half willing to believe that the celebrated dogs of Constantinople have been misrepresented--slandered. I have always been led to suppose that they were so thick in the streets that they blocked the way; that they moved about in organized companies, platoons and regiments, and took what they wanted by determined and ferocious assault; and that at night they drowned all other sounds with their terrible howlings. The dogs I see here cannot be those I have read of.

I find them everywhere, but not in strong force. The most I have found together has been about ten or twelve. And night or day a fair proportion of them were sound asleep. Those that were not asleep always looked as if they wanted to be. I never saw such utterly wretched, starving, sad-visaged, broken-hearted looking curs in all my life. It seemed a grim satire to accuse such brutes as these of taking things by force of arms. They hardly seemed to have strength enough or ambition enough to walk across the street--I do not know that I have seen one walk that far yet. They are mangy and bruised and mutilated, and often you see one with the hair singed off him in such wide and well defined tracts that he looks like a map of the new Territories. They are the sorriest beasts that breathe--the most abject--the most pitiful. In their faces is a settled expression of melancholy, an air of hopeless despondency. The patches of hair on a scalded dog are preferred by the fleas of Constantinople to a wider range on a healthier dog; and the exposed places suit the fleas exactly. I saw a dog of this kind start to nibble at a flea--a fly attracted his attention, and he started after him; the flea called for him once more, and that forever unsettled him; he looked sadly at his flea-pasture, then sadly looked at his bald spot. Then he heaved a sigh and dropped his head resignedly upon his paws. He was not equal to the situation.

The dogs sleep in the streets, all over the city. From one end of a street to the other. I suppose they will average about eight to ten to a block. Sometimes, of course, there are fifteen or twenty to a block. They do not belong to anybody, and they seem to have no close personal friendships among each other. But they district the city themselves, and the dogs of each district, whether it be half a block in extent, or ten blocks, have to remain within its bounds. Woe to him if he crosses the line! His neighbors would snatch the balance of his hair off in a second. So they say. But they don't look it.

They sleep in the streets these days. They are my compass--my guide. When I see the dogs sleep placidly on, while men, sheep, geese, and all moving things turn out and go around them, I know I am not in the great street where the hotel is, and must go further. In the Grand Rue the dogs have a sort of air of being on the lookout--an air born of being obliged to get out of the way of many carriages every day--and that expression one recognizes in a moment. It does not exist upon the face of any dog without the confines of that street. All others sleep placidly and keep no watch. They would not move, though the Sultan himself passed by.

In one narrow street (but none of them are wide) I saw three dogs lying coiled up, about a foot or two apart. A drove of a hundred sheep came along. They stepped right over the dogs, the rear dogs strung across one of these streets makes a bridge, almost. The dogs looked lazily up, flinched a little when the impatient feet of the sheep touched their raw backs--sighed, and lay peacefully down again. No talk could be plainer than that. So some of the sheep jumped over them and others scrambled between, occasionally chipping a leg with their sharp hoofs, and when the whole flock had made the trip, the dogs sneezed a little, in the cloud of dust, but never budged their bodies an inch. I thought I was lazy, but I am a steam engine compared to a Constantinople dog. But wasn't that a singular scene for a city of a million inhabitants?

Their Status.

These dogs are the scavengers of the city. That is their official position, and a hard one it is. But it is their protection. But for their usefulness in partially cleansing these terrible streets, they would not be tolerated long. They eat anything and everything that comes in their way, from melon rinds and spoiled grapes up through all the grades and degrees of dirt and refuse to their own dead friends and relatives--and yet they are always lean, always hungry, always despondent. The people are loath to kill them--do not kill them, in fact. The Turks have an innate antipathy to taking the life of any dumb animal, it is said. But they do worse. They hang and kick and stone and scald these wretched creatures to the very verge of death, and then leave them to live and suffer.

Once a Sultan proposed to kill off all the dogs here, and did begin the work--but the populace raised such a howl of horror about it that the massacre was stayed. After a while, he proposed to remove them all to an island in the Sea of Marmora. No objection was offered, and a shipload or so was taken away. But when it came to be known that somehow or other the dogs never got to the island, but always fell overboard in the night and perished, another howl was raised and the transportation scheme was dropped.

So the dogs remain in peaceable possession of the streets. I do not say that they do not howl at night, nor that they do not attack people who have not a red fox on their heads. I only say that it would be mean for me to accuse them of these unseemly things who have not seen them do them with my own eyes or heard them with my own ears.

Newspaperdom in Turkey.

I was a little surprised to see Turks and Greeks playing newsboy right here in the mysterious land where the giants and genii of the Arabian Nights once dwelt--where winged horses and hydra-headed dragons guarded enchanted castles--where Princes and Princesses flew through the air on carpets that obeyed a mystic talisman--where cities whose houses were made of precious stones sprang up in a night under the hand of the magician, and where busy marts were suddenly stricken with a spell and each citizen lay or sat, or stood with weapon raised or foot advanced, just as he was, speechless and motionless, till time had told a hundred years!

It was curious to see newsboys selling papers in so dreamy a land as that. And, to say truly, it is comparatively a new thing here. The selling of newspapers had its birth in Constantinople about a year ago, and was a child of the Prussian and Austrian war.

There is one paper published here in the English language--The Levant Herald--and there are generally a number of Greek and a few French papers rising and falling, struggling up and falling again. You see, newspapers are not popular with the Sultan's Government. They don't understand it: The proverb says, "The unknown is always great." To the Court, the newspaper is a mysterious and rascally institution. They know what a pestilence it is, because they have one occasionally that thins the people out at the rate of 2,000 a day, and they regard a newspaper as a mild form of pestilence. When it goes astray, they suppress it--pounce upon it without warning, and throttle it. When it don't go astray for a long time, they get suspicious and throttle it for luck. Imagine the Grand Vizier in solemn council with the magnates of the realm, spelling his way through the hated newspaper, and finally delivering his profound decision: "This thing means mischief--it is too darkly, too suspiciously inoffensive--suppress it! Warn the publisher that we cannot have this sort of thing; put the editor in prison!"

The newspaper business has its inconveniences in Constantinople. Two Greek papers and one French one were suppressed here within a few days of each other. No victories of the Cretans are allowed to be printed. From time to time the Grand Vizier sends a notice to the various editors that the Cretan insurrection is entirely suppressed, and although that editor knows a good deal better, he still has to print the notice. The Levant Herald is too fond of speaking praisefully of Americans to be popular with the Sultan, who does not relish our sympathy with the Cretans, and therefore that paper has to be particularly circumspect in order to keep out of trouble. Once the editor, forgetting the official notice in his paper that the Cretans were crushed out, printed a letter of a very different tenor, from the American Consul in Crete, and was fined \$250 for it. Shortly he printed another from the same source and got imprisoned three months for his pains. I think I could get the assistant editorship of the Levant Herald, but I am going to try to worry along without it.

Newspapers in Naples.

To suppress a paper here involves the ruin of the publisher, almost. But in Naples I think they speculate on misfortunes of that kind. Papers are suppressed there every day, and spring up the next day under a new name. During the week I staid there one paper was murdered and resurrected twice. The newsboys are smart there, just as they are elsewhere. They take advantage of popular weaknesses. When they find they are not going to sell out, they approach a citizen furtively, and say in a low voice--"Last copy, sir; double price; paper just been suppressed!" The man buys it, of course, and finds nothing in it. They do say--I do not vouch for it--but they do say that men sometimes print a vast edition of a paper, with a ferociously seditious article in it, distribute it quickly among the newsboys, and clear out till the Government's indignation cools. It pays well. Confiscation don't amount to anything. The type and presses are not worth taking care of.

There is only one English newspaper in Naples. It has seventy subscribers. The publisher is getting rich very deliberately--very deliberately indeed.

Turkish Lunch.

I never want another one. The cooking apparatus was in the little lunch room, near the bazaar, and it was all open to the street. The cook was dirty, and so was the table, and it had no cloth on it. The fellow took a mass of sausage-meat and coated it round a wire and laid it on a charcoal fire to cook. When it was done, he laid it aside and a dog walked sadly in and nipped it. He smelt it first, and probably recognized the remains of a friend. The cook took it away from him and laid it before us. Brown said, "I pass"--he plays suchre sometimes--and we all passed in turn. Then the cook baked a broad, flat, wheaten cake, greased it well with the sausage, and started to bring it to us. It dropped in the dirt, and he picked it up and polished it on the seat of his breeches, and laid it before us. Brown said, "I pass." We all passed and called a new deal. He put some eggs in a frying pan, and stood pensively prying slabs of meat from between his teeth with a fork. Then he used the fork to turn the eggs with--and brought them along. Brown said, "I pass." All followed suit. We did not know what to do, and so we ordered a new ration of sausage. The cook got out his wire, apportioned a proper amount of sausage-meat, spit on his hands and fell to work! This time, with one accord, we all passed out. We paid and left. That is all I learned about Turkish lunches. A Turkish lunch is good, no doubt, but it has its weak points.

MARK TWAIN.