

THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Twenty.]

In the Crimea—Hospitable Receptions—Invitation to see the Emperor—Battered Sebastopol—Surveying the Battlefields—Hunting for Relics—Brown's Collection of Curiosities.

SEBASTOPOL, August 22d.

Sebastopol.

This is probably the worst battered town in Russia or anywhere else. But we ought to be pleased with it, nevertheless, for we have been in no country yet where we have been so kindly received, or where we felt that to be Americans was a sufficient *visé* for our passports. The moment the anchor was down, the Governor of the town immediately despatched an officer on board to inquire if he could be of any assistance to us, and to invite us to make ourselves at home in Sebastopol! If you know Russia, you know that this was a wild stretch of hospitality. They are usually so suspicious of strangers that they worry them to death with the delays and aggravations incident to a complicated passport system. Had we come from any other country we could not have had permission to enter Sebastopol and leave again under three days—but we were at liberty to go and come when and where we pleased. Everybody in Constantinople warned us to be very careful about our passports, see that they were strictly *en règle*, and never to mislay them for a moment; and they told us of numerous instances of Englishmen and others who were delayed days, weeks, and even months, in Sebastopol, on account of trifling informalities in their passports, and for which they were not to blame. I had lost my passport, and was travelling under my room-mate's, who stayed behind in Constantinople to await our return. To read the description of him in that passport and then look at me, any man could see that I was no more like him than I am like Hercules. So I went into the harbor of Sebastopol with fear and trembling—full of vague, horrible apprehensions—I went sneaking about with dread in my soul and a sickly grin on my face which I was trying to pass off for gaiety—and finally my soul went down into my boots, and I made up my mind that I was going to be found out and hung. But all that time my true passport had been floating gallantly overhead—and behold it was only the Stars and Stripes. They never asked us for any other.

We have had a great many Russian and English gentlemen and ladies on board to day, and the time has passed cheerfully away. They were all happy spirited people, and I never heard our mother tongue sound so pleasantly as it did when it fell from those English lips in this far-off land. I talked to the Russians a good deal, just to be friendly, and they talked to me from the same motive; I am sure that both enjoyed the conversation, but blast the word of it either of us understood. I did most of my talking to those English folks, though, and I am sorry we cannot carry some of them along with us.

We have gone whithersoever we chose, to-day, and have met with nothing but the kindest attentions. Nobody ever inquired whether we had any passports or not. More than that, every port charge has been remitted in favor of our ship. The authorities have declined to receive a cent.

A Distinguished Invitation.

Several of the officers of the Government have insisted on our taking the ship to a little watering-place thirty miles from here, and paying the Emperor of Russia a visit. He is rusticated there. These officers said they would take it upon themselves to insure us a cordial reception. They said if we would go, they would not only telegraph the Emperor, but send a special courier overland to announce our coming. Our time is so short, though, and more especially our coal is so nearly out, that we judged it best to forego the rare pleasure of holding social intercourse with an Emperor. I am mighty sorry about this, because I never got a chance to take a drink with the King of the Sandwich Islands, and now that I have got a show at an Emperor, I don't like to lose it. It would do me proud to clink glasses with him just once, and say "Here's luck!" Why, with my experience, I could give that man some ideas about governing a kingdom that would be worth a thousand dollars to him—upon my word. However, let it pass. I am out of luck again, I suppose. If I could only get a chance at an Emperor once, he might want to adopt a likely young man, but—let it pass, let it pass.

The Battered Town.

Ruined Pompeii is in good condition compared to Sebastopol. Here, you may look in whatsoever direction you please, and your eye encounters scarcely anything but ruin, ruin, ruin!—fragments of houses, crumbled walls, torn and ragged hills, devastation everywhere! It is as if a mighty earthquake had spent all its terrible forces upon this one little spot. For eighteen long months the storms of war beat upon the helpless town, and left it at last the saddest wreck that ever the sun has looked upon. Not one solitary house escaped unscathed—not one remained habitable, even. Such utter and complete ruin I could not have conceived of. The houses were all solid, dressed stone structures; most of them were ploughed through and through by cannon balls—unroofed and cut down from eaves to foundation—and now a row of them, half a mile long, looks merely like an endless procession of battered chimneys. No semblance of a house remains in such as these. Some of the larger buildings had corners knocked off; pillars cut in two; cornices smashed; holes driven straight through the walls. Many of these holes are as round and as cleanly cut as if they had been made with an auger. Others are half pierced through, and the clean impression is there in the rock, as smooth and as shapely as if it were done in putty. Here and there a ball still sticks in a wall, and from it iron stains trickle down and discolor the stone.

The Battle-Fields.

They were pretty close together. The Malakoff tower is on a hill which is right in the edge of the town. The Redan was within rifle-shot of the Malakoff; Inkerman was a mile away; and Balaklava removed but an hour's ride. The French trenches, by which they approached and invested the Malakoff, were carried so close under its sloping sides that one might have stood by the Russian guns and tossed a stone into them. Repeatedly, during three terrible days, they swarmed up the little Malakoff hill, and were beaten back with terrible slaughter. Finally, they captured the place, drove the Russians out, and they tried to retreat into the town, but the English had taken the Redan, and shut them off with a wall of flame; there was nothing for them to do but go back and retake the Malakoff or die under its guns. They did go back; they took the Malakoff and retook it three times, but their desperate valor could not avail, and they had to give up at last.

These fearful fields, where such tempests of death used to rage, are peaceful enough now; no sound is heard, hardly a living thing moves about them, they are lonely and silent—their desolation is complete.

Relic Hunting.

There was nothing else to do, and so everybody went to hunting relics. They have stocked the ship with them. They brought them from the Malakoff, from the Redan, Inkerman, Balaklava—everywhere. They have brought cannon balls, broken ramrods, fragments of shell—iron enough to freight a sloop. Some have even brought bones—brought them laboriously from great distances, and were grieved to hear the surgeon pronounce them only the bones of mules and oxen. I never supposed that Brown would lose an opportunity like this. He brought a sackful on board and started after another. I stopped him. He has already turned the state-room into a museum of worthless trumpery, which he has gathered up in his travels. He is labelling his trophies, now. I picked up one a while ago, and found it marked "Fragment of a Russian General." I carried it out to get a better light upon it—it was nothing but a couple of teeth and part of the jaw-bone of a horse! I said, with some asperity:

"Fragment of a Russian General! This is absurd. Are you never going to learn any sense?"

He only said: "Go slow—the old woman won't know any different."

This fellow gathers mementoes with a perfect recklessness, nowadays; mixes them all up together, and then serenely labels them without any regard to truth, propriety, or even plausibility. I have found him breaking a stone in two, and labelling half of it "Piece broken from the pulpit of Demosthenes," and the other half "Darnick from the Tomb of Abelard and Heloise." I have known him to gather up a handful of pebbles by the roadside, and bring them on board ship and label them as coming from twenty celebrated localities five hundred miles apart. I remonstrate against these outrages upon reason and truth, of course—but it does no good. I get the same tranquil, unanswerable reply every time:

"At all signs, the old woman won't know any different."

Ever since we three or four fortunate ones made that midnight trip to Athens, it has afforded him genuine satisfaction to give everybody in the ship a pebble from the Mars-hill where St. Paul preached. He got all those pebbles on the sea shore, abreast the ship, after he came back. However, it isn't of any use for me to expose the swindle—it affords him pleasure, and does no harm to anybody. He says he never expects to run out of mementoes of St. Paul as long as he is in reach of a sand-bank. Well, he is no worse than others. I notice that all travellers supply deficiencies in their collections in the same way. I shall never have any confidence in such things again while I live.

MARK TWAIN.