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LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

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An Oriental City—Smyrna's Crown—Ciphering Out the Prophecies—How the Smyrniotes Live—Flirting Under Difficulties—Camels and Camel Trains—A Recollection of the "Arabian Nights."

SMYRNA, Asia Minor, Sept. 5th, 1867.

Smyrna.

This is a closely packed city of 130,000 inhabitants, and, like Constantinople, it has no outskirts. It is as closely packed at its outer edges as it is in the centre, and then the habitations leave suddenly off and the plain beyond seems houseless. It is just like any other Oriental city. That is to say, its moslem houses are heavy and dark, and as comfortable as so many tombs; its streets are crooked, rudely and roughly paved, and as narrow as an ordinary staircase; the streets uniformly carry a man to any other place than the one he wants to go to, and surprise him by landing him in the most unexpected localities; business is chiefly carried on in great covered bazaars, called like a honeycomb with innumerable shops no larger than a common closet, and the whole hive cut up into maze of alleys about wide enough to accommodate a laden camel, and well calculated to confuse a stranger and eventually lose him; everywhere there is dirt, everywhere there are fleas, everywhere there are lean, broken-hearted dogs; every alley is thronged with people; wherever you look, your eye rests upon a wild masquerade of extravagant costumes; the work-shops are all open to the streets, and the workmen visible; all manner of sounds assail the ear, and over them all rings out the muezzin's cry from some tall minaret, calling the faithful vagabonds to prayer; and superior to the call to prayer, the noises in the streets, the interest of the costumes—superior to everything, and claiming the bulk of attention first, last, and all the time—is a combination of Mohammedan stinks, to which the stench of a Chinese quarter would be as pleasant as the roasting odors of the fatted calf to the nostrils of the returning Prodigal. Such is Oriental luxury—such is Oriental splendor! We read about it all our days, but we comprehend it not until we see it.

The Biblical "Crown of Life."

Smyrna is a very old city. Its name occurs several times in the Bible, one or two of the disciples of Christ visited it, and here was located one of the old original seven apocalyptic churches spoken of in Revelations. These churches were symbolized in the Scriptures as Candlesticks, and on certain conditions there was a sort of implied promise that Smyrna should be endowed with a "crown of life." She was to "be faithful unto death"—those were the terms. She has not kept up her lick right straight along, but the pilgrims that wander hither consider that she has come near enough to it to save her, and so they point to the fact that Smyrna to-day wears her crown of life, is a great city, with a great commerce and full of energy, while the cities wherein were located the other six churches and to which no crown of life was promised, have perished and have vanished from the earth. So Smyrna really still possesses her crown of life, in a business point of view. Her career, for eighteen centuries, has been a chequered one, and she has been under the rule of princes of many creeds, yet there has been no season during all that time, as far as we know, that she has been without her little community of Christians "faithful unto death." Here was the only Church against which no threats were implied in the Revelations, and the only one which survived.

With Ephesus, forty miles from here, where was located another of the seven churches, the case was different. The "Candlestick" has been removed from Ephesus. Her light has been put out. Christian pilgrims, always too prone to find prophecies in the Bible where none exist, speak cheerfully and complacently of poor, ruined Ephesus as the victim of prophecy. And yet there is no sentence that promises, without due qualification, the destruction of the city. The words are:

"Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

That is all; the other verses are singularly complimentary to Ephesus. The threat is qualified. There is no history to show that she did not repent. But the cruellest habit the modern prophecy-fulfillers have, is that one of coolly and arbitrarily fitting a prophetic shirt on to the wrong man. They do it without regard to rhyme or reason. Both the cases I have just mentioned are instances in point. These "prophecies" are distinctly levelled at the "churches of Ephesus, Smyrna," etc., and yet the pilgrims invariably make them refer to the cities instead. No crown of life is promised to the town of Smyrna and its commerce, but to the half-dozen of Christians who formed its "Church." If they were "faithful unto death," they have their crown now—but I don't care if they had fagged themselves out in the good work, and gone to all manner of preposterous lengths of faithful-

couldn't ring in the city for a crown of life. That would have been crowding things too much. If they could have shown that the promise included the city, too, it would have raised real estate faster than a railroad. These remarks are eminently practical, I know, but still there is reason in them. This fashion of ciphering out fulfillments of prophecy where that "prophecy" consists of mere "ifs," is absurd. Why, suppose a thousand years from now, a malarious swamp takes up a ranch in that shallow harbor of Smyrna, or something else kills the town; and suppose, also, that within that time the swamp that has filled the renowned harbor of Ephesus and rendered her ancient site deadly and uninhabitable to-day, becomes hard and healthy ground; suppose the natural consequence ensues, to wit., that Smyrna becomes a melancholy ruin, and Ephesus is rebuilt. What will the prophecy-fulfillers say? They would coolly skip over our age of the world, and say: "Smyrna was not faithful unto death, and so her crown of life was denied her; Ephesus repented, and lo! her candlestick was not removed. Behold these evidences! How wonderful is prophecy!"

Smyrna has been utterly destroyed six times. If her "crown of life" had been an insurance policy, she would have rushed to collect on it the first time she fell. But she holds it on sufferance and by a complimentary construction of language which does not refer to her. Six different times, however, I suppose some infatuated prophecy-sharp blundered along and said, to the infinite disgust of Smyrna and the Smyrniotes: "In sooth, here is astounding fulfillment of prophecy! Smyrna hath not been faithful unto death, and behold her crown of life is vanishing from her head. Verily, these things be astonishing!"

The ship is full of books concerning the Holy Land, and holy places, and every other place on earth, and you cannot be surprised to know that I have read whole volumes of the far-fetched conclusions of these curious prophecy-fulfillers. I will not trust myself to speak of them further than to say that it is not worthy how much extravagance of ideas, language, argument and conclusion will be cheerfully tolerated in a man when he is treating a Scriptural subject. He may rave like a very lunatic, and yet escape criticism. I expect that is as much as I had better say. I have been taught to revere the Scriptures, and that reverence is pretty firmly grounded. Perhaps it would have been well to teach me to revere their commentators. Some of them I don't. I am very sure of that.

The People.

A portion of the city is pretty exclusively Turkish; the Jews have a quarter to themselves; the Franks another quarter; so, also, with the Armenians. The Armenians, of course, are Christians. Their houses are large, clean, airy, handsomely paved with tessalated marble, and in the centre of many of them is a square court, which has in it a rich flower-garden and sparkling fountain; the doors of all the rooms open on this. A very wide hall leads to the street door, and in this the women sit, the most of the day. In the cool of the evening they dress up in their trotting harness and show themselves at the door. They are all comely of countenance, every angel of them, and exceedingly neat in dress and cleanly; they look as if they were just out of a band-box. Some of the young ladies—many of them, I may say—are even very beautiful; they average better than American girls—which treasonable words, I pray may be forgiven me. They are very sociable, and will smile back when a stranger smiles at them, will bow back when he bows, and talk back if he speaks to them. No introduction is required. An hour's chat at the door with a pretty girl one never saw before, is easily obtained, and is very pleasant. I have tried it. I could not talk anything but English, and the girl knew nothing but Greek, or Armenian, or some such barbarous tongue, but we got along very well. I find that in cases like these, the fact that you cannot comprehend each other isn't much of a drawback. In that Russian town of Yalta I danced an astonishing sort of dance an hour long, and one I had never heard of before, with the most beautiful girl that ever lived, and we talked incessantly, and laughed exhaustingly, and neither one ever knew what the other was driving at. But it was splendid. There were twenty people in the set, and the dance was very lively and complicated. It was complicated enough without me—with me it was an astonisher. I just carelessly threw in a figure every now and then that made those Russians ashamed of themselves. But I have never ceased to think of that girl. I have written to her, but I cannot direct the epistle because her name is one of those nine-jointed Russian affairs, and there are not letters enough in our alphabet to hold out. I am not reckless enough to try to pronounce it when I am awake, but I make a stagger at it in my dreams, and get up with the lockjaw every morning. I am fading. I don't take my meals now, only off and on. Her dear name haunts me still in my dreams. It is awful on teeth. It never comes out of my mouth but it fetches an old snag along with it. And then the lockjaw closes down on it and nips off a couple of the last syllables—but they taste good. I am fading. Soon I shall be no more. I want to leave my property to some blind asylum. It won't make any difference to them if they can't see it.

The Camels are Coming.

Coming through the Dardanelles a few weeks ago, we saw camel trains on shore with the glasses, but we were never close to one till we got to Smyrna. I don't think much of Leander, now, who swam the Hellespont (the Dardanelles,) to see his squaw. I mean I do not think much of his feat, and Lord Byron's boasted imitation of it. It was nothing at all. I could swim that creek with all my property on my back. But I was speaking of the camels. They are very much larger than the scrawny specimens one sees in the menagerie. They are as large as those we have had in California so long. They stride along these streets, in single file, a dozen in a train, with heavy loads on their backs, and a fancy-looking negro in Turkish costume, or an Arab, preceding them on a little donkey and completely overshadowed and rendered insignificant by the huge beasts. To see a camel train laden with the spices of Arabia and the rare fabrics of Persia come marching through the narrow alleys of the bazaar, among porters with their burdens, money-changers, lamp-merchants, Alnaschars in the glassware business, portly cross-legged Turks smoking the famous narghail, and the crowds drifting to and fro in the fanciful costumes of the East, is a genuine revelation of the Orient. The picture lacks nothing. It casts you back at once into your forgotten boyhood, and again you dream over the wonders of the Arabian Nights; again your companions are princes, your lord is the Caliph Haroun Al Raschid, and your servants are terrific giants and genii that come with smoke, and lightning, and thunder, and go as a storm goes when they depart!

MARK TWAIN.