

ALBANIA :

A NARRATIVE OF RECENT TRAVEL.

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BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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At midnight we were awakened by the entry of two men. One was the brother of Nik Leka; the other a Bosnian Mussulman, by his dress. The Arnaut clapped me on the back. "Mir, Mir," he said, "Gussinje." Then he pointed to a letter. I understood what he meant. Ali Bey had given his permission, had written a letter to the fathers to that effect, and had sent this Bosnian soldier with it to Seltz. The soldier returned to Gussinje at once, while Nik Leka's brother also left us, to carry the epistle to the Franciscan mission. All seemed now to be going well, and very delighted we were. We should see Gussinje after all.

It was early the next morning, when Father John suddenly made his appearance at the hut. He looked alarmed and anxious, and talked rapidly to our host. Something unpleasant had evidently occurred. We waited patiently till he vouchsafed to explain matters.

"I have heard from Ali Bey," he said. "Here is his letter. I will translate it to you. He writes thus:—

“ ‘ To Father John, greeting.

“ ‘ We have read—we have understood. The chiefs have assembled. If these people will be hostages, will guarantee that Marco Milano withdraw the Karatags within three days, let them

come to Gussinje; if not, they had better not come.

“ ‘FROM ALI PASHA.’ ”

This was hardly what could be called a hearty welcome. Said John, “ You understand what that means. If you can guarantee that the Montenegrins withdraw their troops—”

“ We cannot do that.”

“ Of course not. Well, if you go they will wait three days, then cut off your heads. Now Nik Leka's brother has also brought this news from Gussinje. When they heard of your arrival, some of the men said, ‘ We have heard of these people. They have been to Podgoritza; they are friends of the Montenegrin chiefs. They must be spies. One is a red-bearded Russian (this was Jones). They are accursed giaour traitors.’ Then thirty men decided to leave Gussinje last night, and surprise and murder you here in this hut. Ali Bey heard of it, and stopped them. But Nik Leka's brother says that you had better not stay here. The Gussinians are violently excited about you; they thirst for your blood. Come back to Seltz.”

We were sitting down to breakfast when we heard all this cheering and appetizing information. My back was to the door, as was Jones's, when I heard a noise outside, and the next moment I saw the Franciscan drop the meat he was holding,

turn very pale, and stare in a frightened way in that direction. I turned; the doorway was blocked up by two men, evidently two of the defenders of Gussinje—one in Bosnian dress, one in Albanian festinelle. Both were armed to the teeth. Their faces were not prepossessing. There was a fierce, stern look in their eyes, which wandered anxiously and fiercely round the hut, and a determined expression in their tightly compressed lips, which meant mischief. Whether more were behind, we could not yet see.

Jones and myself were unarmed. According to the custom of the country, we had delivered our revolvers over to our host. He too, and also the priest, were without weapons. The two parties looked at each other without speaking for a moment or two. Our host's wife took her child by the hand, and looked steadily on with compressed lips, to see what would happen next. An Arnaut woman is familiar with bloodshed. However, bloodshed was not intended, it seemed. "We are envoys from Ali Pasha," said the Albanian. "Come in, then," said our host, suspiciously.

They entered, but seemed ill at ease, and suspicious of foul play. However, we made no advance towards our arms, and keeping a sharp eye on the men, continued to eat our kybobs. They sat by us.

The Albanian went on, the Franciscan translating,—“Ali Bey will see these Englishmen, but he does not wish them to enter the town; he cannot rely on his men. Ali Bey is but one man; he cannot protect them, if some wish evil to these men. Ali Bey and the chiefs will therefore meet them outside the town. Let them come with us.”

It seemed improbable that Ali should have sent these men with another message, so soon after the first. The Albanian is deliberate in counsel, and does not alter his mind in this way as a rule.

“Do not go,” whispered the Franciscan. “Do not believe them; there is some treachery.” After what we had heard, we thought our friend might be right, therefore we refused to avail ourselves of their escort. Their faces fell. They talked long and eagerly to the priest and our host.

The priest said to me, “Listen to what I say, but show no surprise or alarm. Let them not think I am telling you this. They are talking to our host about you. They say you are spies, and they are endeavouring to raise his suspicions of you; they mean you evil. O amici,” he said in his dog Latin, “multum est periculum per vos.”

I now entered into an explanation of our journey. I showed that it was the most natural thing in the world that we had visited Montenegro; and soon disarmed any suspicion our host entertained; but the two Gussinians stuck to the

point. The Bosnian turned fiercely to the Arnaut. "By Allah," he said, "they are spies. We have twenty friends in the hills behind here; since they will not come with us, we will kill them here; now is the time." I remember the very words in which Father John, with pale face, translated this to us: "Ille homo," he said, "dixit ad alium, Nunc est tempus intercidere illos homines." The Arnaut spoke. He stood up in his hut with quiet dignity, and without showing the least excitement said, "These are my guests. You think that I will assist you to kill them. They are my friends; I will defend them. Now you are armed; we are not. Possibly you may kill us; but remember, it is nearly three hours to Gussinje. Men of our tribe have seen you approach; rest assured there are many rifles of the Klementi among the rocks. If you wish to go to Ali Bey, and not rot on the Klementi hill-sides, you had better go in peace." The men looked at each other in silence; they knew the words of the Arnaut were true, and not being yet weary of existence, swallowed their coffee and sulkily left the hut. We took our revolvers and went outside, to see if any others were in sight. There were none; but on a rock that commanded an extensive view, we saw the erect form of a white-clad Arnaut, rifle in hand, scanning the ridge of the hill. The Klementis had evidently kept their eyes open. The proba-

bility is that these men had left Gussinje without the permission or cognizance of Ali Bey, and hoped with a fabricated message from the chieftain to tempt us to follow them to some spot, away from our friends the Klementis, where an ambush lay in wait for us. In their annoyance at our refusal to accompany them, they had betrayed their object.

No sooner was this adventure concluded than the occupants of the hut sat down and continued their coffee-drinking and smoking, as if nothing had happened.

Little events of this kind are every day occurrences in this wild country, and are thought nothing of.

The woman put her hand to her throat and drew it backwards and forwards, then laughed merrily, evidently chaffing us about the two separate risks we had so recently run of losing our heads.

As it was now evident that the people of Gussinje were not very anxious to entertain us, we saw there was nothing left but to return to Scutari. We were very disappointed; but what could we do?

We rode back with Father John to Seltz. The missionaries and the Lord Mayor rushed out. They were delighted to see us return in safety. "Ah! Frater Edouardo, Frater Athol, come in.

My poor friends, come in and sit down. How alarmed you must have been. Fear not; here you are safe."

During dinner our story was repeated over and over again by the gesticulative little Father John, and great was the commiseration expressed for us by the kind-hearted fellows. The Lord Mayor became very warlike. "Had they hurt you, I would have taken a gun, gone to Gussinje, and shot Ali Bey—that devil!—myself," he shouted.

While we sat round the fire after our meal, the door opened. "Nik Leka!" joyfully cried out our hosts, "Nik Leka safe! Praise be to the Lord."

The celebrated Arnaut chieftain stalked in smiling, kissed each father on the cheek, shook us warmly by the hand, and sat down by the fire. He was very like his brother, a splendid specimen of a barbarian warrior; very handsome, with an expression that curiously combined great goodness with a certain amount of latent ferocity.

He corroborated all we had heard about the feelings entertained towards us at Gussinje, and said, "You would not live long were you in that *ferri*—that hell over the mountains." He himself had been obliged to escape, for his life was in danger among the fanatical inhabitants.

"They are like madmen," he said, "now—starving, desperate."

He expressed intense hatred of the *Turkis*, as