

OLD FAMAGUSTA, THE SEA-PORT CITY OF OTHELLO: MEDIÆVAL MONUMENTS OF CYPRUS, IN URGENT NEED OF REPAIR.

By DOUGLAS HAMILTON.

The Cyprus Committee was formed in December 1933, under the chairmanship of Lord Mersey, to assist the Colonial Office and the Cyprus Government in the preservation, maintenance, discovery, and examination of the antiquities of the island, and to collect funds for that purpose. The Committee recently issued its first report, describing the work that has so far been done and repeating the appeal made at its inauguration. Contributions, marked "Cyprus Monuments Fund," should be sent to Lloyds Bank, 6, Pall Mall, S.W.1, or to the Ottoman Bank or to the Ionian Bank, Nicosia. We commend this appeal to our readers, as we have done in the past; and we again draw their attention—by means of Mr. Hamilton's extremely interesting article on this page and of the photographs given here and on the two preceding pages—to the extraordinary archaeological richness of Cyprus and to the urgent need of so many of its monuments for immediate work of preservation. Already the Committee has accomplished much, but much more remains to be done. We may add that a special exhibition of excellent photographs, the majority of them taken by Mr. C. J. P. Cave, was recently opened to the public at the Victoria and Albert Museum. These photographs show what tasks the Cyprus Committee has undertaken and has still to undertake.

SO this is Old Famagusta, scene of "Othello"! The ship rounds a reef and enters the new half-million harbour, set in a lagoon of burnished silver. The sea-gate with its bastioned Guard Room is shut. You enter the mediæval town by an archway in the Curtain Wall. Old Famagusta has little to do with modern Greek and Turkish Cyprus. It is a city of intruders. All around rise the carved chancels of crumbling Gothic churches. Above them soar the decapitated towers and pinnacles of a splendid Latin cathedral. Mighty flying buttresses cast deep shadows on its sides, to which a Moslem minaret clings precariously. A square moated citadel of Norman mien looms forbiddingly on the right. The whole city is rich with the echoes of past splendour. But who worshipped in these churches now so pathetically empty? Who were the tenants of the castle by the sea?

Cœur de Lion, on a crusade, conquered Cyprus for insult to Berengaria, whom he wedded on the island. He sold it to the Templars, who resold it to Guy de Lusignan, Count of Poitou and King of Jerusalem, just lost to the Saracens. So this romantic French dynasty was installed

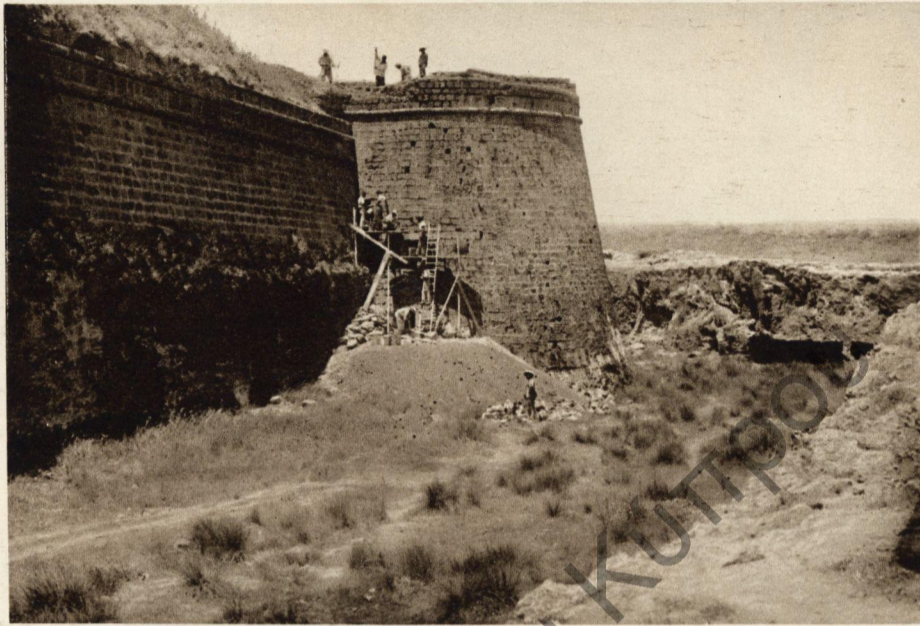


THE SOUTH FLANK OF THE MARTINENGO BASTION, FAMAGUSTA; SHOWING THE SALLY PORT, AND (IN FOREGROUND) AN OPENING IN THE CEILING OF AN UNDERGROUND PASSAGE.

in Cyprus, to rule three hundred years. Under it the chivalry of the West adopted the East, and, chameleon-like, changed its colours. As the Saracens overran Syria and Palestine, Latin refugees flocked to Cyprus. Counts and Barons of French—and a few of English—descent were granted fiefs all over the island. Western arms surmounted the doors of splendid palaces—names like Neville and Grey are still seen on tombstones. These nobles lived luxuriously in shady arcades amongst scented gardens. Clad in silks, spangled with Oriental jewels, they fed delicately, and moved over deep-piled carpets. Corrupted by this sybaritic life, some combined "French arrogance, Greek effusiveness, and Oriental effeminacy!"

Queen Catherine Cornaro, who sat to Titian, was done out of Cyprus by the Venetians. Under them the island declined and fell to the Turks. One rapacious Pasha after another completed its desolation. Century after century the splendid Gothic ruins looked down on Turkish decadence

and the hovels of the ragged Turkish garrison. Guards watched the gates of the fortress that were closed at nightfall. The ancient buildings beckon. Under a Venetian lion you enter the moated citadel, or sea-castle, by a dark passage into a square court. In one of its towers lodged Christoforo Moro, the original of Othello. Iago lurks in its shadows and clicks his canakin with Cassio in the



WORK IN PROGRESS ON THE BASTION OF DEL MOZZO, FAMAGUSTA: WORKMEN (ABOVE) CLEARING THE AIR SHAFT, AND (BELOW) TAKING EARTH OUT THROUGH THE GUN PORTS.

groined and vaulted banquetting-hall. From its ramparts, that look over the bay to castled mountains, shots of courtesy would have echoed to welcome Desdemona. On what slight basis Shakespeare built his plot! A Venetian general, with his young bride, went to Cyprus to command the troops. She died there of fever. Her family was not quite satisfied with the general's account of her death. Perhaps there was another lady in the case! On this slight story Shakespeare built a whole drama of Oriental jealousy and over-trying loyalty, of murder, remorse, and suicide!

Following the grass-grown ramparts, embrasured for cannon, but now dotted with sand-strewn putting-greens, you come to the Martinengo Bastion, where north wall meets west. Above it rises a lofty Cavalier, or gun-platform. Below loom the dry depths of the enormous rock-cut moat. Over the wide Cyprian plain beyond, patriarchal shepherds wander through asphodel. A light patch is a rocky plateau. A dark blot is a scented orange-grove. Purple cloud shadows creep over the silvery mountains that close the wide sweep of the ultramarine bay. Peak after castled peak dwindles into the sea-embraced distance. And how incongruous appears the smoke-stack of a steamer peeping over the curtain wall!

A flight of steps descends into the bowels of the bastion. Time has hardly touched the masonry of the spacious, vaulted casemates. More steps, flanked by enfiling embrasures, run down into the moat. Shafts for powder-smoke pierce the roof. A sloping tunnel leads up into the town. And now you are back in the Crusades. Between palm clumps and a colony of cave-dwellers round a quarry, a whole flock of Gothic churches is scattered. Fantastic gargoyles and carved animals look down from roof and wall. You enter a church alive with faded frescoes, and you puzzle out the compositions. You enter another and another. Gold, blue, green, and reddish-brown are the colours that have lasted best. Sometimes the subject is clear—a scene from the Passion, St. George spearing the Dragon. In a small domed church a huge gold halo shines over an archangel's mighty head and wings. The invading Turks and catapulting boys have destroyed the heads of many figures. Mules and oxen were long stabled in the churches, and poked their heads through exquisite trefoil windows.

Beyond the decorative spread of a mighty tree, the Cathedral of St. Nicholas soars above the square. Gothic canopies surmount its doors. The whole façade is a mass of florid

carving. The lofty traceried windows were once rich with stained glass. The great western front, with its mutilated twin towers, reminds you of Rheims. But it has also the look of an English cathedral. You enter, and the columns soar like the boles of a secular forest. Whitewash covers the frescoed walls. You note the carved tomb of a Frankish bishop, said to have died of a mediæval chill, caught bathing. But no organ rolls, and no flute-voiced choristers pipe the responses. Instead there rises some long-drawn, swelling modulation, that ends in the name of Allah.

But it is time to leave Old Famagusta. A long street

bordered by vaulted wine-shops leads out of the city. Through the door of a heavily buttressed church, carved with Gothic angels, orange cases flaunt gay labels. Aphrodite lends her charms to advertise her island's golden fruit. And a coal-black Othello, in trunk hose and doublet, is half-embraced by a blonde Teutonic Desdemona. The echoing tunnelled Land Gate leads to a causeway over the moat. You squeeze by strings of gurgling, supercilious camels, whose bells sound a flawed tinkle. Huge sacks of charcoal are roped to their high wooden saddles. Camels

kneeling to be loaded under the shady arches of caravanserais are specially romantic. One does not feel the same about the trucks of the light railway on the quay, though they load from the high-pooped schooners of half the isles of Greece.

The road leads between arched Government offices and a plantation of pines. Dilapidated carriages, the colour of an unblacked shoe, drawn by saturnine horses, dog your footsteps. On the ridge beyond the pine plantation lies the English Club. The British Empire consists of thousands of clubs, dotted at intervals over the earth's surface. In them British officials drink pegs and swap stories, more or less isolated from the surrounding population.

Over coffee and liqueurs in the flagged dining-room of the Club, your thoughts turn again to the pageant and romance of Old Famagusta. You catch the faint echoes of bygone chivalry, and see the hunting cavalcaades wind past the ramparts with their falcons. But your steamer waits. So farewell to Old Famagusta, where the immemorial East is changing at last, and irreverent modern life is penetrating. But, in spite of all, the battered churches and clear-cut, bastioned walls live on. To adapt verses on a far more ancient town—

Match me such marvel, save in Southern clime,
An amber city, victor still of Time.



A FRESCO OF HELL IN PYRGA CHURCH: A COMPOSITION OF A KIND NOT UNCOMMON IN THE OLD RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS OF CYPRUS, ESPECIALLY IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES.