



Troodos Camp

CYPRUS AS AN UNTRODDEN EDEN

Cyprus is once more coming into the public eye. The rapid evolution of political changes in the Near East closely affects our position in Egypt, upon which the Empire is now pivoted. Cyprus is Egypt's great strategical outwork in the Levant, and her garrison is to be considerably increased. Recently, also, fresh discoveries have made her a centre of archaeological interest, and she is not unlikely to become the British Riviera of the future.

One of the most regrettable things about the world is that it is losing its novelty. Already conventionality reigns supreme from the Pillars of Hercules to the Pyramids of Gizeh, and is scarcely stayed on reaching Khartoum. Except for the habitual slaves of fashion, the crowded gaieties of the Mediterranean and Cairo have become a weariness of the flesh, and even a pilgrimage to Jerusalem furnishes us with disillusionment at the booking-office of the Jaffa Railway Station, where we take our tickets for the City of David.

All at once, in the bizarre modernity of our surroundings, patriarch and prophet grow alarmingly commonplace. A terrible suspicion takes hold of us that they may even have listened to some such refrain as "Change here for Jericho, Jerusalem, and Ramoth Gilead! Any more for the Cities of the Plain?" No, it is terribly disappointing.

But worse than all, our regrets vanish. We lose the capacity for disappointment. Literature, science, religion, appeal only as excitements, much as tickling does to cats. In fact, it is quite interesting to think that we on the topmost geological stratum seem destined by the last effort of civilisation to complete the circle of the ages by joining hands on a mental and sensual level with the father of molluscs away back in his shell in the dark eons behind us.

It was a perfect specimen of the American variety of the mollusc which I once met with at Beyrouth. He had just returned from a visit to the Holy City, with his interest and enthusiasm condensed and packed away into a single hardy and portable fact, which he revealed as follows: "Wall, I guess I've bin round old Jerusalem in the shortest time on record. I gave my dragoman some extra to see me through, and even then, I calculate, we wasted half an hour in the house of that bloomin' old liar Ananias."

It is, in truth, quite easy to drop to that level of sensuousness at which the inward and spiritual graces and the still small voices never penetrate our case-hardened materialism. But Nature herself provides an antidote, if we retain sufficient consciousness to seek it in those "fairy voices," of which Milton tells, "which syllable men's names by sands and shores and desert wildernesses." In other words, we all need, and can find, a moral and mental renaissance by an occasional withdrawal into some fastness of nature removed from the haunts of men. But where amidst the buzz of modern conventionality can we discover our harbour of refuge? I can tell of one such, and that the most beautiful I have ever known.

Not far from the track of our yearly peregrinations, behind the blue horizon looking seaward from the Delta of the Nile, those who would for a while escape from the rush and rattle of the beaten paths, from the ceaseless tramp of the tripper and the serried hordes of fashion may find a realisation of all their desires. Even as I write there rises on my vision the picture of an island Eden, of forests of immemorial pines shadowing the mountain-sides and filling the hills with beauty; of lowland groves and woodland, blue skies and bluer

seas, and purple distances of headland plain and shore. In this "enchanted island," as Cyprus was once described by Mr. Mallock, natural beauty is reinforced by historic interest. We may still look upon the stately cathedrals of Venice, the crumbling splendours of Cœur de Lion's occupation, and trace on many a solitary cliff and plain those of an older day before ever the great columns of the temples rolled down, or the marble gods fell from their pedestals, when the square-sailed triremes rode in the great blue bays, and the fleets of Tyre sped by to distant Gades.

The lowlands have a fascination all their own in the bright freshness of the March and April springtime, but at this time of the year, when the sun is scorching them to an ochre tint, we must up and away to the cool atmosphere of the mountains. So, having made all our arrangements for a hill-camp with the local Whiteley



WHEN THE WEATHER WAS FINER
Blæja's jets bathing off the Isle of Wight. The boom helps the bathers to get out of the water, and also acts as a diving-board.

of Limasol, who is always ready to supply anything, from a camel to a packet of hairpins, we set forth on our upward journey.

The fresh novelty of the ascent, with its ever-varying scenery, is an enchantment in itself from the moment our ponies strike the mountain road leading to the cool recesses and mysterious beauty of the hills. With a strange suddenness the scenery changes from the dwarf woodlands of olive and currant and the far-stretching plains where nature expends herself in a sleepy calm, to a giant region where the mountains rise and fall in the billowy grandeur of Biscayan seas. At one moment the road lifts us up on sunny hillsides, at another it buries us in some leafy glen, where there steals upon our vision the picture of a mountain stream and meadowlands, vine-covered slopes, and, half-hidden by great trees, a tiny hamlet of the mountain folk.

The pines are still far above us, but the fir and the oak, beautiful evergreens, and the light green foliage of the arbutus have come to meet us on our upward way. All is still and surpassingly beautiful, and now and again,

as the road lifts us to some point of vantage, we halt our ponies to gaze back at the plains, growing, at each ascent, more and more map-like in their setting of silver sea.

Nowadays the ascent may be made by wheeled conveyance in one day, and quarters obtained in an excellent hotel recently built on Mount Troodos. But for the robust lover of nature the pleasanter will be the primitive and more leisurely way—the way of my last visit, with its wayside camps in some wooded or grassy glen, tinkling with a mountain stream for one's morning plunge, and a sniff of roasted coffee and frying sausages ascending like a morning sacrifice.

And now for a description of our mountain home which awaited us upon a lofty pine-clad spur commanding an endless panorama of mountain-tops and gorges. Our principal tents were roomy, double-roofed affairs, with boarded floors covered with matting and rugs. Joined together they afforded us sitting and dining rooms, while single-pole tents pitched close by served for night quarters. Kitchen and servants' tents were placed a few yards away among the pines, while an old stable of mud and rubble only needed a thatch of faggots and bracken to provide excellent accommodation for our ponies.

This was our headquarters, a pattern of many other snug little mountain homes, many far more luxurious, where feminine influences prevailed, which ensconce themselves in the recesses of Troodos during summer. Hence on our active little native ponies we explored in all directions. By narrow and devious tracks we plunged into valleys and ravines where the myrtles bloomed in early July and oleanders were still in flower. We nearly rode on to the flat roofs of tiny villages built out of the hillsides rich in mulberry, orange, lemon and apricot trees. At one moment we would find ourselves in some narrow pass, where beautiful rocks cragged above us on the right, and on the left hand a sudden descent to some invisible torrent. Next moment the rocky wall would vanish, and, behold! we were in a Devon glade—apple and pear trees, dog-roses of wondrous colour, beautiful oaks and walnut trees scattered upon a park-like expanse, and streams of crystal water dancing along past myrtle banks.

Buried among the recesses of the mountains are numbers of these gem-like scenes, each in its atmosphere of entire abstraction filling the heart with a sense of utter peace. You may seek them in company with none other than Nature herself to explain their meaning and lesson, or, if you choose, find genial comrades among the hill society, which, both military and civil, although small, is hospitable and enterprising.

At all events, my companion and I found it possible to vary our sojourn with tennis, cricket, picnics, explorations of the mountains and their fairy secrets. And all who care to seek a thorough mental and physical rejuvenescence will find it here in a magnificent climate, in which one drinks in health and vigour with every breath of the pines.

T. H. MANNERS HOWE.