

WAKEMAN'S TRAVELS.

Coast and Interior Scenes in the Island of Sword and Cowl.

ST. PAUL'S BAY AND CITTA VECCHIA

A Tiny Maltese Island That Contains No Towns, but Six Castles.

IMPRESSIVE PREHISTORIC REMAINS

(CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DISPATCH.)

VALETTA, MALTA, March 4.—The visitor to Malta is a long while in tiring of the historic, architectural and social attractions of Valetta, especially in the sunny winter time when day and night seem filled with an endless round of brilliant scenes and gaiety.

From Valetta one can reach the remotest points in Comino and Gozo, even by row or sail boats, with donkeys for the interior portering, and return to the city within day-light hours, and as to Malta itself—whose length is no more than 18 miles with an extreme breadth of less than 12—I have often walked from Valetta to Fort St. Lucian on the southern coast, and as to the island, the ancient capital of the island, to St. Paul's Bay, and to sunny, silent Dinghion, on the extreme southwestern coast, arriving still in time for a Maltese breakfast which, if not a meal of dainty perfection, always possesses the aristocratic quality of interminable delay.

Most Beautiful Coast Scenery.

All the coast scenery of western Malta and all of Gozo, is very beautiful indeed, and occasionally it reaches positive grandeur. For the Bible student there are the scene of the shipwreck of St. Paul and several places made famous by the apostle's stay upon the island. For the simply curious traveler there are the many ruined summer palaces of the Grand Masters, ancient and interesting fortifications and palaces of the Knights. The antiquarian will discover a larger number of prehistoric remains than upon any other equal area, with catacombs as fine as those of Syracuse and greater than those of Rome. Geologists find extraordinarily favorable conditions for research, owing to the bare, denuded condition of the island with its rocky seashores and noble cliff exposures. And naturalists haunt the islands in winter for studies of its rich and winsome tenantry of migratory birds.

The most beautiful examples of coast scenery are to be found upon Gozo. It is so near that a day's excursion in a little felucca, manned by two or three picturesque and incessantly chattering boatmen, will give one a continuous feast of changeful scene, and almost a complete survey of all the coast points of interest. The shores of Malta are completely lined with fishermen or women and children gathering seaweed for enriching the scant soil of the island, and every little cove is alive with color and sound with song.

Waters Always Warm to the Touch.

Even in winter the sparkling and phosphorescent waters of the Mediterranean are here bland and warm to the touch, and the young Maltese disport in the waves during the arduous hours like beves of playful sea-fowl; while the most dangerous cliffs and precipices are so crowded with them in their quest for eggs, the young of the sea-fowl inhabiting the crannies of the cliffs, and for the various forms of vegetation which are stored with miserly care for fuel and manure, that at some distance, the blending of colors of costume with the grays and greens of the island crags, often gives the curious illusion that the seawalls are alive with gigantic tropical flowers.

Gozo, which is called Gaudish by the native Maltese, contains no towns, although at the tiny island, which is but six miles broad and eight miles long, is thickly inhabited. It has six villages or casals. These, with the outlying farms, for it is a very fertile island and under the highest degree of cultivation, are, or were in the old times, protected by an ancient though massive fort called Habato. It is most picturesquely situated at a great elevation in the center of the island. From its walls, with a field glass, I have looked upon the splendid panorama of Malta with its terraced fields, its old walled villages, its massive palaces, and the far white city of Valetta; to the north viewed Sicily with the glistening cone of Etna above its dark and slender thread of horizon line; and seen to the southwest, like purple dots upon the shimmering Mediterranean blue, the lonely islets of Linosa and Lampedusa, half way to the Tunisian shores of Africa.

Charmingly Diversified Scenery.

The topography of Gozo is very beautiful. It is charmingly diversified by hill and dale. Many of its sunny valleys are natural and artificial gardens of wonderful luxuriance. I have nowhere seen their equal, save in those marvelous garden vales behind beautiful Palermo in Sicily. The shores present, save at a very few points, perpendicular sea walls; and on the western and northwestern coasts they often rise straight from the water's edge to a height of over 2,000 feet. These abound in caves of great size and splendor; their sides and brows are the haunts of myriads sea-fowl; their heights here and there show stunted and lonely palms; and the air about them with the sky above are often almost white with millions of the slowly sailing and exquisitely beautiful little Adriatic gulls.

I cannot vouch for the emotions of others but as I first tramped over the heights of Nasciar, descending into the valley beyond, and saw spread before me the Bay of St. Paul, a sense of awe mingled with glorious exultation came with the stillness and beauty of the spot where the heroic Apostle was shipwrecked. The bay, which is about two miles long and one in breadth, is situated on the northern coast of Malta, and is hardly distant a brisk two hours' walk from the city of Valetta. Countless excursions are made hither by water from Malta's capital, and often the roads are filled with all manner of vehicles conveying pious or curious pilgrims. I preferred coming in the early morning and alone.

High upon a hill seven miles to the southwest of Valetta stands Citta Vecchia, the walled capital of the island before Grand Master John de Valetta built the splendid city which now crowns Mount Sobererras. At the beginning of the Christian era it contained the house of the "chief man of the island" who so "courteously entertained the shipwrecked Paul. Its Cathedral of St. Paul had its traditional origin during the three months' residence of the apostle, as Pauline is said to have given a portion of his own palace as a site for the first church and to have officiated in it as Malta's first Bishop.

Departed Grandeur of a City.

That was a long time ago, but the antiquated character of the city draws one kindly to these old and loved traditions. Seen from a distance, its mighty walls, cumbersome structures, flat roofs, vast palaces and immense domes, rising like some far and fanciful mountain of dream-built cubes, pillars, arches and capping domes render it the most impressive structural perspective in Europe. When Valetta was built the former grandeur of Citta Vecchia departed. By and by the great mansions were transformed into seminaries, monasteries and convents, and thus they remain. Its tremendous walls shut in a few others than monks, religious students, nuns and novices. The great statue of Juno, queen of all the gods who presided over marriage, which is imbedded in the main gateway, seems strangely out of place as the eucalyptus of a city of religious recluses. The buildings are massive, when colored by time, and strangely silent. The streets are narrow, shadowed and still. The great dungeons beneath the huge Sanatorium, once the palace of the Girati, or the three magistrates of the city, are no more palpable

with silence than are these high-walled narrow streets. No sound is heard save the clanging of bells as the call to endless devotions. Then the thoroughfares are suddenly filled with bowed and dark-robed figures for a moment, and again suddenly become lifeless, dark and still.

The catacombs beneath Citta Vecchia and the prehistoric rock-hewn tombs of Mnaidra are almost a welcome relief from the solemnity and solemn shades of this old place. The passages and chambers of the catacombs are lacking mural decoration, but they are of the same character as those at Syracuse and are much larger than any single examples to be found at Rome. They are hewn out of the soft strata of the upper limestone on which Citta Vecchia stands. You reach them through a perpendicular shaft, and a few steps bring you into a perfect maze of tunnels leading in every direction, with crypts on each side and at every possible level.

These tunnels and their branch tunnels seem interminable. I counted upwards of 800 separate sepulchers, and there are no doubt many thousands. One passage or gallery of very large proportions was found which opened into capacious squares or chambers, where the crypts were fashioned as those for the more distinguished dead. Their proportions were more ample, and they were better formed in every respect. In many, a rest for the head and neck was raised and hollowed in excellent contour; and by the side of others were excavated niches for urns and the lamp for votive and other sepulchral offices.

However ancient was the race that excavated or required such vast area for burial, it is certain that these crypts were equally as extensive in the days of the Romans, 2,000 years ago. They are completely barren of all the objects of the Maltese when flying from the swords of the Goth, Vandal, Moor and Turk. No one has ever fully explored them, and I find from the natives that the belief among them is universal that subterranean passages lead to Valetta and to other remote points in the island.

Some Tremendous Monoliths.

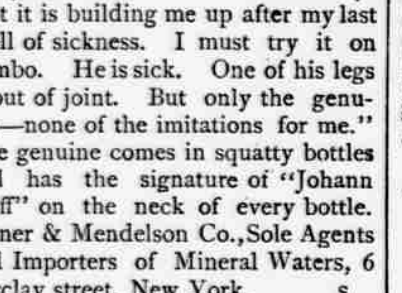
I was shown a great and solitary monolith standing near Har Hassan cave, on the south coast of Malta. There is a dolmen-like ruin on Cordino Hill overlooking Valetta. And I measured upright blocks in the cyclopean Giant's tower I found several with a height of 28 and 30 feet. Their additional length beneath the debris surrounding them must have been considerable. All of these tremendous monoliths were put in place thousands of years ago by a people capable of quarrying and transporting them from sandstone beds nearly a mile distant, for the purpose of some form of adoration. They did their work so well that while all other traces of their race are lost, these mute monuments have brought the story true from almost unrecorded time of the eternal principle of worship in the heart of man.

From my habit of wandering alone, and much in the country, in foreign lands, I have come to regard their birds as my most charming chance acquaintances. Absolutely without trees, save those transplanted and nurtured like exotic flowers, Malta would hardly be regarded as the haunt of birds. And yet I have seen or heard here in midwinter nearly every one of the loved and humble sort well-known in summer time in northern climes.

Along the stony roads I have kept exultant pace with the hopping stonechat and redstart, and chirped back a cheery greeting to flocks of chaffinches among the white and gold of the orange trees. Climbing the cliffs, or pottering among the ruins, the melodies of thrush or linnet have flooded the sky from the olive trees in the valleys below. Crossing the walled fields I have often come upon marshalled hosts of tit-larks. Rooks, wrens, cross-bills and field-fares all welcomed me in a homelike language I knew.

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

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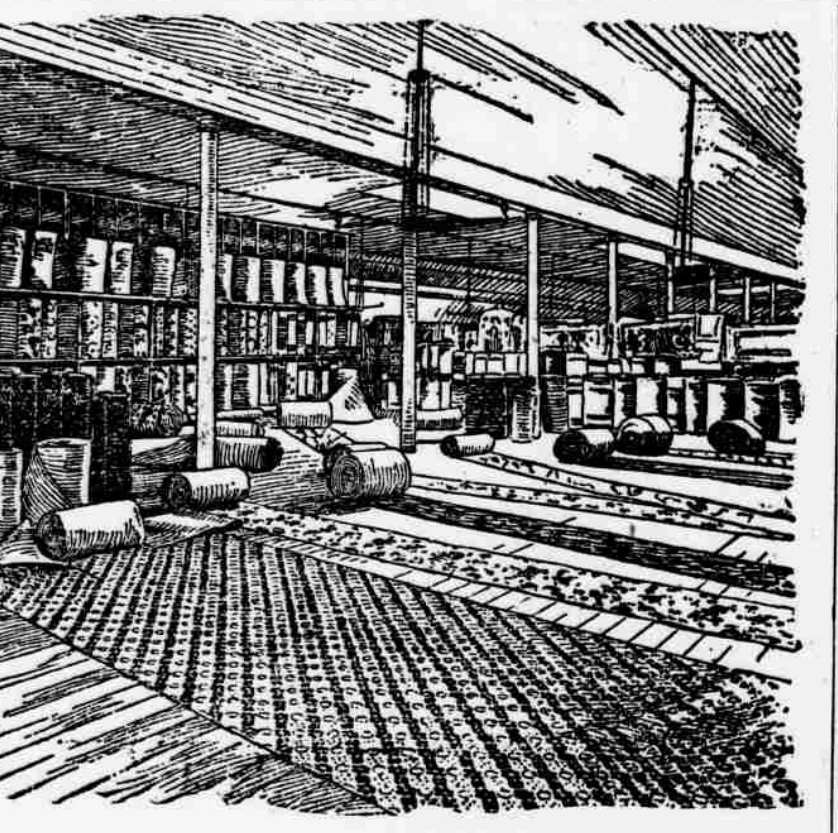
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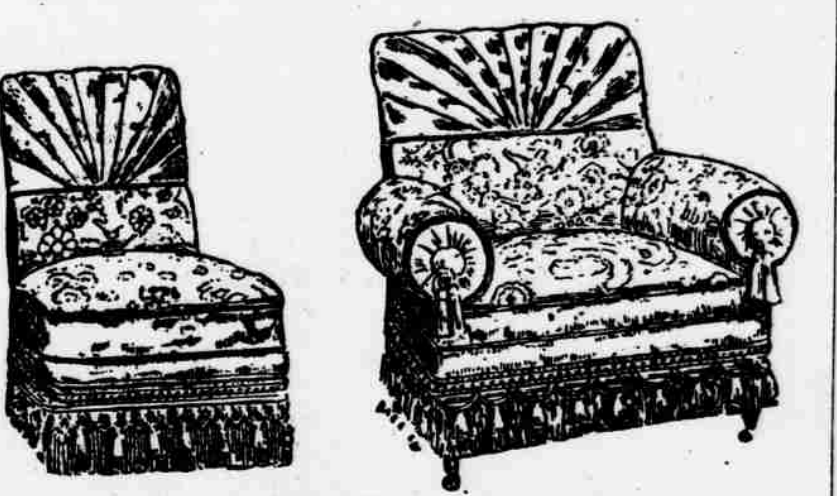
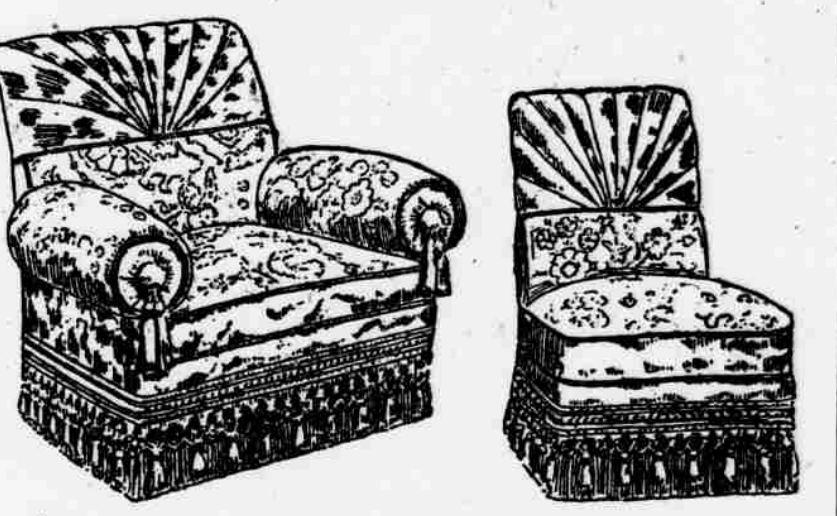


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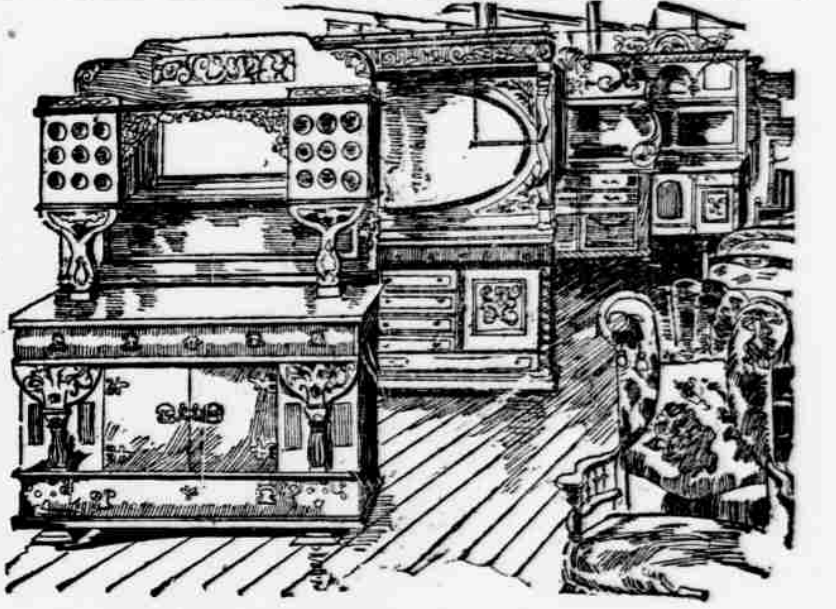
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