

One Home Reading Circle



THE MEASURE OF THE CLIFF

A Story of Modern Greece.

By JOHN LANGDON HEATON.

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PART I.

"E. Mellon's no good!"

The short man stopped to wipe his perspiring brow.

"It ain't no good, I say! Book larin' chases us out of Paris an' dumps us on a wobble-jointed ship w' spiles our appetites. Book larin' gits us into dis God-forsaken hole, an' we ain't a-waitin' gress grease up no twenty-mile Greek mountains, oh, no, we ain't, jus' 'cause it's writ about in de Sunday school books."

"Doubtless," said the taller man, easily, "but think of the view you're getting! Our previous business experience has afforded no such opportunities to inspire the mind. That blue mirror by a thousand leeds for three thousand yards. Yonder is Paranaesus, veiled in spotless snow. Athens hides beyond the eastern hills, and Marathon, with its glorious memories—"

"Oh, chuck de mem'ries!"

"Oh, I'm all right, Sweet William," said the tall man, looking down at his snowy, well-knit frame, looking every inch the gentleman in knickerbockers, Norfolk jacket and top hat. "I'm only sorry that you would insist on delectating these sylvan solitudes with the untidy garb of a materialistic civilization. But here comes Dimitri!"

"Up the steep path there now toiled a little man with a few feathers and beady eyes of a mongrel Greek."

"You climb brave, gentlemen," he panted, as he reached them. "I think I should never catch you. I had led the horses in 'v' good place, and I haf engaged a poor man of the village who will come carrying your little baggage. See, there down! He comest in five more minutes we shall be at the monastery—how you call him—the convent. Oh, I assure you, the largest and mos' hospital in Greece, on shall see."

A fourth man climbed painfully into sight, clad in the costume of a Greek peasant, and bearing two silver-mounted handbags and a roll of blankets; and the queerly-assorted party led the party into the great vaulted hall of the monastery, where they ranged ten narrow beds. The wall was partly covered with uncouth pictures in an ancient manner.

"You shall sleep here alone, gentlemen," said the courier, as he bustled about looking after the comfort of the travelers. "There are other guests, oh, yes! seven or nine poor fellows, and the beaver and me. The convent must receive all who come. But this is the chamber of the guests very comfortable, and the beaver and me in good company. The other beds, they are not use."

"Kin we see the—"

"You shall see the treasures," cried the excellent courier, interrupting him away from the view of the pictures, but not their equal. Ah, such beautiful objects! Then the view from the top of the cliff!"

"The views must be fine, I grant," said the taller traveler, "but I own—"

"Here he turned with a gasp to the Zenodochos and to a still older, more stately monk who just then entered and who proved to be the Prior himself—"that I am become somewhat skeptical about these wonderful old books and the stories about the way places. The collections in the big cities are apt to be finer, as well as less far to seek."

"With a deprecating gesture the courier translated this speech to the Zenodochos and the Prior. They exchanged a smile of amusement not without a tinge of hurt pride."

"Hospitality first; then we shall see," responded the Prior. "Some people who have traveled much have been so urbane as to praise our little church and its few treasures."

"A younger brother, on whose unshorn cheek and chin the first beard of manhood lay soft and thin, entered noiselessly, bearing a tray whereon rested a single spoon, a bowl of sweetmeats, three glasses of water and three cups of Turkish coffee."

The two travelers in turn tasted the contents of the bowl—a very sweet comote of citron—and then enjoyed, as only men tired with a long tramp may do, the delicious, strong, sweet coffee. The Prior drank with them. Then they sat some minutes in chat, the courier interpreting.

The recluse Prior had heard in his cell something of the wonders of America, and wanted to know if in the United States everybody wore riches; if French or English were the language most spoken; if the Greeks who went there did not all become wealthy, and if the Americans were not much interested in Greece—to which queries

replies compounded of truth and polite error were returned.

"If you are now rested," said the Prior, after ten minutes or so thus spent, "we'll show you our church."

"Very well, Dimitri," said the tall traveler; "but don't let us miss the view."

"Well, whispered the short man, as they traversed a maze of passages, 'you are a good one—'

"Shut up!" said the other; "can't you see I'm counting my steps?"

As the party entered the church they were joined by a third monk, the librarian, who opened the door of a passage leading from the quiet old house of worship, used for thirty generations, into a low-vaulted, gloomy room where, carelessly piled upon each other in unlocked cases, were a score of volumes, which a bibliomaniac would do murder to possess. Over these the tall man lingered so long in

critical appreciation that his companion grew restive.

Mr. Ashby's impatience disappeared when with loving hand the librarian lifted from its wrappings a book whose heavy covers of solid gold were thick-set with blazing gems. Then followed a heap of reliquaries whose ornaments of diamonds and emeralds and rubies were in their possessors' eyes valueless by comparison with their sacred contents. There were cups and chalices beaten from soft gold; ikons framed in pearls and emeralds; a reliquary, in short, as a thousand years will gather in a quiet room, sheltered from the storms of the troubled world. There were gifts from the wealth of mighty emperors like Constantine, and from feebler princes in the crusading middle ages like Comnenus and the Palaeologs. Half the world had paid tribute here; but these simple-minded monks toiled for their daily bread, holding in trust a treasure whose value neither they nor any man could tell. And with open door to every stranger who came, they slept soundly of nights behind their primitive bolts and bars.

"Now, if you will permit me," said the taller traveler, after they had feasted their eyes at length, "I would like to make a sketch or two from the bindings of those wonderful old volumes I saw first, and then let us go, Dimitri, to the top of the cliff. Pray thank the Prior for his goodness and assure him that, for once, I am quite convinced of the accuracy of the stories he has shown me. I have never seen elsewhere."

"Nor me, neither," said Mr. Ashby, "Thanke kindly, gentlemen."

Each traveler dropped a golden coin into the treasury of the church as he passed out.

When the sun had sunk like a great globe of fire over the Albanian mountains, and when the last trace of red was fading from the sky the party returned from the monastery to the guest chamber. In the visitors' book he wrote two names, "Harold Morgan" and "William J. Ashby," and then supper was placed before them.

They were served by a beautiful boy more than ten years old, a novice, whose perfect breeding was the result of utter unconsciousness of self and complete obedience. Demetrius, the courier, hovered in the background, fearing to offend the hospitable monks by assistance, but keeping a watchful eye upon his guests and from time to time making a suggestion for their greater comfort. Then with cherry good nights their hosts led the two to their repose.

"Dis is easy!" exclaimed Mr. Ashby, in an undertone when the door had closed. "Dis is de easiest yet! Dere ain't a lock in de place wot weighs less'n twenty pounds, an' I could pick any one of 'em wid me teef."

"Still," said the taller man, who sat at the table studying his notebook, "it's just as well to neglect no reasonable precaution. I have here an excellent plan of the whole place, so far as it concerns us, with every distance marked and the character of each door and lock indicated."

"Shall we need—?" and Ashby made an expressive gesture toward his hip pocket.

"Rather not! It ain't many years since these monks thrashed a whole army of Turks. They've got a splendid lot of fellows and as strong as bulls. If you fired a pop here, and they found out about our little plans, there wouldn't be enough of us left for the corner."

"Unlocking both handbags, the taller man first carefully examined the door and windows, then the ground, and then drew out a couple of night-gowns of sheer, fine linen, which would pack in surprisingly little space; two

they but handsome toilet cases, one at least of which was probably more meant for show than use; a few collars and handkerchiefs, two tiny lanterns, and finally some bits of steel, each carefully wrapped by itself in soft cloths.

"Now," said he, at length, "we are all ready, but I suppose we must give them a little time to get sleep. Meanwhile I'll study this plan again. They'll all be off by eleven at the latest. Moon rises about two. By that time we ought to be well down the hill. No telegraph. Path over the mountains as plain as day. Morning train for Athens connects with steamer for Constantinople. We lock door and throw away key. They'll think we're sleeping late until—well, there are always accidents, but it looks all right. Dimitri may have a bad quarter of an hour tomorrow explaining our absence."

"Hope so. 'E's collared plenty of our dough. All right, all right. 'E's a peach, dat Dimitri!"

"Overcharging honest travelers is a fine art in the Levant. Got the stuff ready for the dogs?"

"Yep."

"Lide down, then, and get some sleep. I can't. The more you snore the better. I'll wake you in time."

Within five minutes the regular rise and fall of Ashby's chest and his heavy, honore breathing gave testimony that he was indeed in the land of Nod. No other sound was heard. The taller traveler sat reading a paper-bound book, glancing from time to time at his sleeping companion.

The light of the candle shown back, reflected from the rounded surface of the shining bits of steel. One who had seen such things before might have recognized them as the parts of a sectional "jimmy."

The night was clear. The blinking stars looked down from a dome of unclouded blue upon the great cliff, towering out of an impenetrable gulf of

SHERIFF'S SALE.

By virtue of sundry writs of Fieri Facias, issued out of the court of common pleas of Lackawanna county, to me directed, I have levied and sold, on FRIDAY, MAY 14, 1897, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, at my office, all the right, title and interest of the defendants in and to the following described lots, piece or parcels of land:

Valuable Real Estate

FRIDAY, MAY 14, 1897.

No. 1.—All the right, title and interest of the defendant, J. M. Roselle, in and to the lot of land, situated in the city of Scranton, county of Lackawanna and state of Pennsylvania, being lot No. 2, in block No. 19 upon street called and named Albright avenue upon the plot of "Winnans" addition to the city of Scranton, now known as Park Place, intended to be sold by reference to the plat thereof being recorded with me in my office under the number of 101-102 (60 feet in front and rear and one hundred and fifty feet in depth, more or less; all improved with a two-story frame dwelling house and barn, situated on the lot, and containing the following described items, to-wit: A lot of land, situated in the city of Scranton, county of Lackawanna and state of Pennsylvania, being lot No. 2, in block No. 19 upon street called and named Albright avenue upon the plot of "Winnans" addition to the city of Scranton, now known as Park Place, intended to be sold by reference to the plat thereof being recorded with me in my office under the number of 101-102 (60 feet in front and rear and one hundred and fifty feet in depth, more or less; 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