

VISITS TO MONASTERIES  
IN  
THE LEVANT

BY THE  
HONOURABLE ROBERT CURZON, Jun.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
D. G. HOGARTH

LONDON  
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## INTRODUCTION

It is a tiresome commonplace of reviewers to liken books of Near Eastern travel to *Eothen*, however little they may have in common with it. But Robert Curzon's *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant*, a product of the same epoch, similar conditions of travel, and a mind formed much as Kinglake's was formed, can be compared very appropriately (as indeed it often has been compared) with that famous Essay on the Near East, which preceded it by five years.

No competent critic would put Curzon's *Monasteries* on so high a literary plane as *Eothen* or claim for it a posthumous life quite so vigorous. Its author devoted much less literary labour and art to his work. Though he allowed even more than Kinglake's nine years to elapse between his experiences and their relation, no external record or internal evidence suggests that his bantling was conceived either during those experiences or while the recollection of them was very fresh in mind: still less that he wrote his relation over and over again with Kinglake's literary conscience and fastidious self-criticism. Curzon's own statement about the genesis of his *Monasteries*, contained in its preface, is sufficiently well borne out both by the impression it makes, and by such indications of his literary habits as are afforded by another travel-book, his *Armenia*, published five years later. This second relation very evidently was written rapidly, casually, and with more help from recollections some years old than from diaries or notes. Doubtless Curzon did make notes during the journeys described in his *Monasteries*;

but a long extract from a letter of his to Cureton,<sup>1</sup> published in the *Quarterly Review* for December 1845 (p. 52), which gives a summary account of his experiences at Der Souriani, encourages the belief that five years later he wrote mainly from unassisted memory.

When, however, the recollection of an experience excited him, Curzon could put into his description an art hardly inferior to Kinglake's. Witness, for example, his classic account of the riot in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and of the gruesome night which followed. But he was less concerned to sustain his effort. With the same selective instinct as Kinglake's, Curzon aimed much more than his predecessor at narrating fully his chosen episodes. Therefore, while *Eothen* is an Essay on the Near East, shot through and through with illustrative experiences, Curzon's *Monasteries* is a proper Travel-book, perhaps the best yet written on that region.

By certain qualities, reflected in their works, the two authors resembled each other closely. The two books are equally conspicuous for a fine sense of humour, which was apt to be excited by similar causes in both minds; but Curzon's humour is drier and, at the same time, somewhat more kindly. His book lacks wit of Kinglake's mordant quality, and the latter's seductive tone of confidential intimacy with his reader; but, on the other hand, the attitude assumed by both travellers towards Near Eastern society and individuals was so much the same that the temper inspiring *Eothen* and the *Monasteries* brings the two books very near together. Curzon, indeed,

<sup>1</sup> Cureton's authorship of the *Quarterly* article, in which this letter appeared, may be presumed on internal evidence.

presents himself as a more 'superior person' than Kinglake, but he keeps his superiority for his countrymen, showing greater respect for the opinions of the common herd in the Near East than for those of the Middle Class in England, as, perhaps, in the 'forties was to be expected of the future Lord Zouche. At the same time one feels that Curzon was better able to hobnob with all sorts of men in the East, and that his sympathies were the more catholic, if his gaze was less penetrating.

When Curzon came to tell his story in 1849 he had two valuable advantages over Kinglake. In the first place he had seen more of the Near East, having both spent a longer time in it and ranged farther afield. In the second place he had had the fortune to meet with adventures more exciting. Against Kinglake's sojourn of hardly more than a twelvemonth, Curzon could set not only the years 1833-8, about half of which he had spent in East Mediterranean lands, making the expeditions described in his *Monasteries*; but also a further term after 1841 as private secretary to Stratford Canning at Constantinople, and Commissioner in Armenia. If he had not ridden from Belgrade to the Ottoman capital, he had roamed more various and less trodden paths than were followed by Kinglake, and besides seeing most of what the latter saw, had gone into Upper Egypt, to the Natron Valley, and through Epirote Albania to Meteora; and he had visited Athos on the one hand and Armenia and Kurdistan on the other. Nor could any adventure of Kinglake's compare in interest with Curzon's quest in the Nitrian monasteries, his encounter on the way to St. Sabba, his life-and-death struggle among the corpses

and panic-struck survivors in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or his march with klephts across Pindus and back. Perhaps it may be reckoned also to his advantage that he went about the East to see more than sights, and that his purpose compelled him to put off insularity and cultivate relations with many kinds of men.

Taken for all in all, *Visits to Monasteries of the Levant* makes as good reading as any travel-book ever written; and although not only *Eothen* but also Warburton's *The Crescent and the Cross* had been offered very recently to the public appetite, Mr. John Murray was called upon to produce three editions of Curzon's book in its first year, and a fourth in 1851. A fifth edition, revised by the author, appeared in 1865. Its text has been chosen for reproduction in the present volume. Robert Curzon, who in 1870 succeeded his mother in the revived barony of Zouche, died in 1873; but Mr. Murray found it worth while to issue a posthumous sixth edition of the *Monasteries* eight years later, and, since the expiry of the copyright, the book has reappeared (1897) in an inexpensive form which is now out of print. In justification for yet another reprint some information may be offered about the causes and the consequences of the principal ventures which Curzon undertook in pursuit of his purpose.

Robert Curzon, grandson of the first Viscount Curzon, and son of Harriet Anne Bisshopp, in whose favour the barony of Zouche had been called out of abeyance for the second time, went into the Levant lands within two years of leaving Oxford. Though only twenty-three, he had acquired already a taste for antiquities, and some particular knowledge of

palaeography and illumination. Like most amateurs and indeed scholars of his time, he shared the belief, cherished since the sixteenth century, that monastic libraries of the Near East concealed all sorts of lost classics. A good deal had happened to encourage this belief. The manuscripts acquired by the Royal Library at Paris from Greek monasteries in the seventeenth century: the Oriental collection from Syria and Egypt (including some volumes from the Nitrian convents) with which Robert Huntington had endowed the Bodleian; the further booty from Nitria which the two Assemanis had procured for the Vatican early in the eighteenth century; and the great prize of the Plato manuscript carried off from Patmos by Clarke in 1801—these spoils were enough to persuade bibliophiles of the existence of unexplored treasure in the Near East.<sup>1</sup> Quite recently, in 1829, Lord Prudhoe (afterwards fourth Duke of Northumberland) had returned from Egypt to report yet another unsuspected library in Nitria. What Curzon eventually saw and bought there, and still more what Tattam procured a little later, were quite enough to vindicate expectations, so far as Oriental manuscripts were concerned; and if the yield of 'lost classics' by monastic libraries even to the present day has fallen short of what was once hoped, the chances are not exhausted. Known libraries have yet to be examined; more, probably, exist unknown; and the lumber-rooms and libraries of Turks, descended from officers who plundered monasteries in the period of the Greek

<sup>1</sup> See Clarke's statement about the Patmos library in his *Travels*, fourth edition, viii, p. 19.

Revolt, may disgorge treasures such as Curzon had hoped to see.

In 1833 the omens were favourable. During the previous year Mehemet Ali had established his virtual independence in Egypt and his hold on Syria and Cilicia by the victory of Konia and the peace of Kutahia. From both inclination and policy he encouraged Europeans to travel within his dominions and saw to their interests while under his protection. Greece had just won her freedom and settled down under a king. Turkey's 'reforming' Sultan, Mahmud II, newly chastised by a disastrous Russian war and the revolt of Mehemet Ali, was inclined to court Stratford Canning and the Power he represented.

Curzon landed in Egypt with Sir G. Palmer, as travelling companion, in August 1833, and spent the winter there; but without, apparently, visiting convents or searching for books. Thence early in 1834 he proceeded by the overland route to Palestine, was at Jerusalem for the Greek Easter, and visited the Monastery of St. Sabba. He seems to have passed the summer in the Levant, partly at Corfu, and it was late autumn when he undertook his rapid expedition across Epirus to Meteora and back. He returned to London at Christmas, and during the next two years was in England; but late in 1836 he went again to Egypt, with the express intention this time of visiting the Nitrian monasteries. He carried his plan into execution in the month of March, 1837. Subsequently he went to Constantinople with a view to an expedition to Athos, and started for the Holy Mountain in the late spring. Having returned to Constantinople in the summer, he made his way to Egypt for the third



time about the end of the year, and in the spring of 1838 ascended the Nile in a *dahabiyah* as far as Philae, in quest of books. Either this year or the previous one he seems to have re-visited Jerusalem and St. Sabba. There are passing allusions in his *Monasteries* to yet later experiences, e. g. to some gained during the year 1843, which he spent in Armenia, chiefly at Erzerum, as Joint Commissioner with Colonel (later, Sir) John Fenwick Williams charged to settle the Turco-Persian boundary question.

The principal achievements described in Curzon's book are his explorations of the Nitria, the Athos, and the Meteora libraries—to take them in their order of importance, as preserves of the particular game which the author went out to hunt.

(1) Nitria—that is, the depression some thirty miles within the North Libyan desert which Arabs know as Wady Natrun or Habib, while its southern part is Shiit or Shehat (Curzon's *Scete*)—had begun in the seventeenth century to be talked of in the West as a preserve of ancient manuscripts. Though only four of its monasteries were known to survive, the probability was that these had accumulated books from the other ruined convents, which, like them, dated from the origins of monasticism and had been world-famous places of pious resort, protected in a remote situation by successive rulers of Egypt. This probability was sufficient to arouse curiosity among students of the revived classical learning, even without reports, which from time to time reached Europe, that very old books had actually been seen in their precincts. One of these reports, made by Gabriel Eva, abbot of St. Maura in

the Lebanon, roused a Pope to action early in the eighteenth century, and an emissary of Clement XI, Elias Assemani, a Syrian, prevailed on the monks in 1707 to part with some forty codices, all, apparently, ecclesiastical or theological books in Coptic, Arabic, and Syriac. His account of what he had left behind prompted the Pope to send in 1715 a second emissary, the Vatican librarian, Joseph Assemani, cousin of Elias; but whether he was equally or at all successful has not been revealed. The monks were beginning to complain of their authorities making private profit of things which, however little regarded, belonged to the communities, and for about a century after Assemani's visit no one was able to get much out of them. Browne, for example, who was at Nitria in 1792 or 1793, wrote in his *Travels* (1799), 'I inquired for manuscripts and saw in one of the convents several books in the Coptic, Syriac, and Arabic languages. The works of S. Gregory and the Old and New Testaments in Arabic. The Superior told me they had near eight hundred volumes, but positively refused to part with any of them; nor could I see any more.' Finally in 1828 Lord Prudhoe, though enjoying strong official protection and the company of the influential engineer, Linant Bey, could buy nothing of importance; but he saw the appetizing and tantalizing spectacle of an oil-cellar in S. Maria Theotokos of the Syrians (Der Souriani) littered two feet deep with manuscript leaves. Some communication of this discovery was made doubtless to Curzon before 1837, and having got Linant's account at first hand in Cairo, he determined to see that cellar at all costs. How he succeeded with the aid of 'rosoglio', prime opener

of monkish hearts, he has related both in his *Monasterics* and, even more racy, in the letter to Cureton published in the *Quarterly Review*.

Curzon has often been abused for 'robbing' the Nitrian monks. For example, one of the latest visitors to the convents, J. C. Ewald Falls, a member of the German 'Menas Expedition', has commented adversely<sup>1</sup> on a singularly inaccurate statement of fact—'in 1842 Lord Curzon obtained about a thousand manuscripts'. Here date, title (few Germans could understand how a grandson of Viscount Curzon, his own name being Curzon, had succeeded, through his mother, to the barony of Zouche), and tale of the spoil are all wrong; and if the word 'robbery' can fitly be applied to the rescue of manuscripts from being torn up to cover preserve-pots, or from rotting in fragments piled knee-deep on the floor of an oil-cellar, the memory not of Curzon but of Henry Tattam, Archdeacon of Bedford, must bear nine-tenths of the imputation. He it was who, on a visit to Egypt in 1839 and on a second three years later, when he had the sense not to return to the convent of the Syrians itself, but to get native emissaries to bring away the contents of the cellar *en bloc*, procured the lion's share of the spoil. It amounted, not to a thousand volumes, but to less than four hundred, even if the few brought away by Curzon himself and deposited, not at the British Museum but at Parham, be reckoned in. They include no 'lost classics', as that phrase is commonly understood, but are theological and ecclesiastical works, almost as desirable for their singularity, their rarity, their early dates, and their palaeographical

<sup>1</sup> *Three Years in the Libyan Desert* (1913), p. 86.

character.<sup>1</sup> The Nitrian convents still subsist in ever-increasing desuetude, but, thanks to the Natron Company's railway, in less utter isolation. They retain a few old books, while others belonging to them have been deposited in the hands of the superiors of their Church : but, unless the soil of other abandoned sites in the depression has conserved relics of libraries despite the damp and the salts, there is nothing more for scholars to hope from Nitria.

(2) As early as the sixteenth century Athos was known to the West to possess large libraries; and Belon's classic account of its convents, issued in 1553, resulted in about a hundred and fifty manuscripts and some printed books being procured by one Athanasius, a Cypriote monk, for Segurier and Mazarin. These were shipped to Paris in 1649. A little later, both Moscow and Rome procured others. So far as the manuscripts went, all were ecclesiastical. Belon had reported that any monk convicted of consulting a secular work was excommunicated; and in 1677, John Covel, the first English scholar to visit the Holy Mountain, heard that 'all books of humane learning' at the Iberon monastery had been burned. After turning over a great number of manuscripts and other books at various convents, he came to the conclusion that 'noe books of humane learning were there left',<sup>2</sup> and that Athanasius had 'bought or stole away all that was good for anything'.

<sup>1</sup> See *Quarterly Review*, lxxvii, pp. 60 ff. for Cureton's account of the spoil.

<sup>2</sup> For Covel's Report see F. W. Hasluck in *Annual Brit. School at Athens*, xvii, p. 103: and for general information on other early visitors to Athos, H. Omont, *Missions archéologiques françaises en Orient*.

Curzon, if he knew Belon's account and others of later date, probably was ignorant of Covell's: and, being aware that the Paris and Vatican libraries had been enriched from Athos, was hopeful of finding lost classics. He was, however, disappointed. Almost, if not quite, the first scholar to buy on the spot upon his own account, he was also about the last to carry anything away: for, as one result of his visit, and of the appearance of other curious travellers, like N. A. Didron in November 1837, the interest of the Church and scholars of liberated Greece was awakened to the existence of a mine of national treasure. There has been, of course, a little leakage since. The present writer was offered (but did not purchase) at Salonica in 1887 four or five handsome ecclesiastical manuscripts of no particular interest, which, almost certainly, had been filched from some Athos convent. But virtually all the old books that Turkish soldiers did not destroy during the Greek war of Liberation, and that subsequent neglect and two serious fires, which attacked the libraries of Simopetra and St. Paul respectively in 1891 and 1905, have spared, are still at Athos. There are said to be in the different convents and dependencies (*sketae*) over 11,000 Greek manuscripts, less than two-thirds of which are included in Spiridion Lambros' Catalogue, made from 1880 onwards and printed at Cambridge in 1895-1900; but, in any case, it is practically certain that the Holy Mount is not destined to restore to the world any more of its lost Greek or Latin classics.

(3) As regards Meteora, Curzon had little more to go upon than possible knowledge of about a dozen ecclesiastical manuscripts, brought thence to France and England

in the seventeenth century, and the negative reports of such travellers as Holland and Pouqueville, who had seen no books there of any importance. Standing on isolated rocks in a district notorious for klephtic raids, these monasteries have entertained few of the more learned pilgrims to the Levant. Leake went there, of course, in 1809, but he seems to have made little inquiry about the libraries. Meteora was the least promising of Curzon's three monastic groups. Its convents are all of comparatively late date and they have never been sufficiently famous, except by reason of their fantastic situation, to attract crowds of donors. Nor are they rich in lands. Moreover, owing to their isolation on narrow rock-summits in mid-air, their inhabitants have had little temptation to enlarge them or in any other way make conventual use of casual moneys. Therefore, in Curzon's day, they were equally unlikely to possess many valuable early books or to be induced readily to part with such as they might have. When, over half a century later, after the annexation of Thessaly by Greece, their libraries were examined by scholars and the best of the books were transferred to the National Library at Athens, nothing of any great moment to scholars came to light.

Curzon brought or sent his manuscripts, in the first instance, to Parham near Petworth in Sussex; and a list, made there in 1837 by Sir Thomas Phillipps, enumerates forty-seven, of which thirteen were in oriental scripts, seventeen in Greek and the same number in Latin—these not including Horae, Missals, and other Western books. After Curzon's death, as Lord Zouche, in 1873, his library of manuscripts was

deposited by his son in the British Museum, and Dr. L. D. Barnett, the present Keeper of the Department of Oriental Printed Books and MSS., sums up Curzon's achievement in a recent letter, which he kindly allows me to quote :

'The work done by Curzon as a collector of MSS. is of special interest to us in the British Museum. In his explorations into the libraries of eastern monasteries, he was to a certain extent a pioneer who showed the way to Tattam, by whose agency the Trustees acquired the greater part of their large and precious collection of Syriac MSS. ; and though he was unable to bring home from the Nitrian monasteries material comparable to that obtained for the Museum by Tattam, nevertheless the Parham library, now deposited in the Department of MSS. here, contains a considerable number of valuable MSS. in various oriental languages, for collecting which Curzon has deserved well of orientalist.'

Curzon collected, however, not only books, but other things—for example, Egyptian antiquities. In his *Catalogue of Materials for Writing, &c.*, of which he issued a very small edition in 1849, he enumerated many of these, among them an 'Ark or Chest of Egyptian sycamore . . . older than the Chest or Ark of the Covenant, mentioned in the Book of Exodus, and one of the oldest writings extant upon any portable substance'. Remembering how few travellers had taken the trouble to bring any Egyptian antiquities to England before Curzon, one represses a superior smile in 1915. He had a special liking for arms and early plate, and admired the goldsmiths' work in the Athos treasuries not less than the scribes' work in the libraries. As various passages in his *Monasteries*

testify, he had no mean learning in architecture and other arts.

The writer of a short obituary of Curzon as Lord Zouche in the Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society (vol. xiv)—the society which had issued his *Account of the More Celebrated Libraries of Italy* in 1854—states that his early education at the Charterhouse in Thackeray's time and at Christ Church had left him with a deficient knowledge of history; which defect notwithstanding, he was very positive and downright in historical assertion. The prefatory chapter to his *Monasteries* unconsciously endorses this verdict (compare statements about Gothic architecture and German vestments); but it proves also that he had learned a great deal since undergraduate days, both by reading and by experience in the great school of travel.

*The Lay of the Purple Falcon*, a transparently counterfeit mediaeval ballad, begun by Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta, completed by Curzon, and issued in 1847, shows literary power and a pretty wit in our author; but readers of his *Monasteries* will not need another book to convince them that Robert Curzon could write. Its style, less elaborate than Kinglake's, is not less attractive. In narrative and description it will bear comparison with any other book of travel, and the humorous sympathy with all sorts and conditions of Levantines which is infused through its pages gives it a humanity all its own.

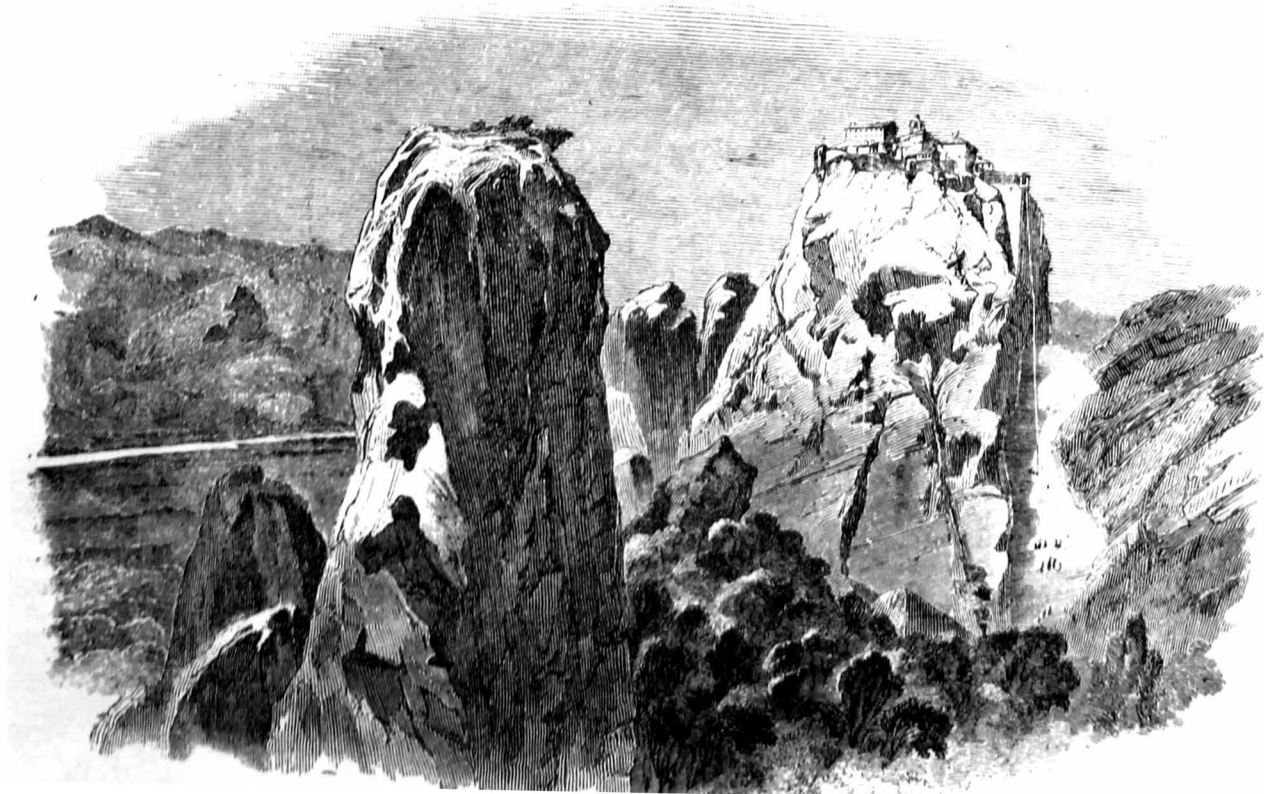
D. G. HOGARTH.



VISITS TO  
THE MONASTERIES OF THE LEVANT

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*From a Drawing made on the spot by Viscount Eastnor.*

**VIEW OF THE GREAT MONASTERY OF METEORA, FROM THE MONASTERY OF BARLAAM, WITH THE  
RIVER PENEUS IN THE DISTANCE**

# VISITS TO MONASTERIES IN THE LEVANT

BY THE  
HONOURABLE ROBERT CURZON JUN.



*From a Sketch by R. Curzon.*

Interior of the Court of a Greek Monastery. A monk is calling the congregation to prayer by beating a board called the simandro (σιμανδρο) which is generally used instead of bells.

WITH NUMEROUS WOODCUTS.

LONDON:  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1865.

[*Facsimile of Original Title-page*]

## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

IN presenting to the public another book of travels in the East, when it is already overwhelmed with little volumes about palm-trees and camels, and reflections on the Pyramids, I am aware that I am committing an act which requires some better excuse for so unwarrantable an intrusion on the patience of the reader than any that I am able to offer.

The origin of these pages is as follows:—I was staying by myself in an old country-house belonging to my family, but not often inhabited by them, and, having nothing to do in the evening, I looked about for some occupation to amuse the passing hours. In the room where I was sitting there was a large book-case full of ancient manuscripts, many of which had been collected by myself in various out-of-the-way places, in different parts of the world. Taking some of these ponderous volumes from their shelves, I turned over their wide vellum leaves, and admired the antiquity of one, and the gold and azure which gleamed upon the pages of another. The sight of these books brought before my mind many scenes and recollections of the countries from which they came, and I said to myself, I know what I will do; I will write down some account of the most curious of these manuscripts, and the places in which they were

found, as well as some of the adventures which I encountered in the pursuit of my venerable game.

I sat down accordingly, and in a short time accumulated a heap of papers connected more or less with the history of the ancient manuscripts; at the desire of some of my friends I selected the following pages, and it is with great diffidence that I present them to the public. If they have any merits whatever, these must consist in their containing descriptions of localities but seldom visited in modern times; or if they refer to places better known to the general reader, I hope that the peculiar circumstances which occurred during my stay there, or on my journeys through the neighbouring countries, may be found sufficiently interesting to afford some excuse for my presumption in sending them to the press.

I have no further apology to offer. These slight sketches were written for my own diversion when I had nothing better to do, and if they afford any pleasure to the reader under the same circumstances, they will answer as much purpose as was intended in their composition.

## PREFACE, 1865

IN reading my own words after a lapse of some years, I am struck with the great difference in the habits and manners of the same countries which has taken place within the last thirty years.

In the days when I wrote this book, the difficulties to a traveller in the Levant were as great as they would be now in China or the most distant lands. The adventures which happened to me then are now never met with, and these pages describe a state of affairs so entirely passed away, that the account of them seems to belong to a much more remote period than the year 1833. Those countries were, however, much better worth seeing at that time than they are now; they were in their original state, each nation retained its own particular character, unadulterated by the levelling intercourse with Europeans, which always, and in a very short time, exerts so strong an influence that picturesque dresses and romantic adventures disappear, while practical utility and a commonplace appearance are so generally disseminated, that in a few years more every country will be alike, and travellers will discover that there is nothing to be found in the way of manners and customs that they may not see with greater ease in their own houses in London. Fortunately it is not easy to vulgarise the Pyramids

and the gigantic ruins of Egypt and Asia. For the rest I hope that the slight accounts which I have given of original states of society will be acceptable as a record of manners now so much changed that no future traveller is likely to meet with anything of the kind unless he extends his researches to much more remote regions than those described in the pages of the Monasteries of the Levant.

The origin of my researches in the libraries of ancient monasteries, and many other out-of-the-way places, not mentioned in this book, was that I wished among other hobbies to make such a collection of early MSS. and printed books as would enable me to illustrate a history of the art of writing from specimens in my own possession. The history arrived at a certain degree of quantity if not of quality; but when a link was wanting, no MS. of the desired kind was to be had, or if found, the value was far beyond my means. Several illustrations were not to be procured for any sum of money, such as a Peruvian manuscript, of which only one is known to exist; and although, through the kindness of the late Lord Elgin, I have procured the information that printing was invented in China in the tenth century, his untimely death has prevented my procuring a specimen of any book printed at that ancient date. This discovery gives support to a story which I heard at Venice many years ago, to the effect that Guttemberg having been at Venice for some mercantile transactions there saw some printed sheets which had been the work of a professional writer called Pamfilo Castaldi of Feltre, who had taken the idea from some block-prints or woodcuts which

had been brought from China by Marco Polo ; and his improvement on the works of Castaldi laid the foundation of the art of printing with movable types, as practised at the present day.

Should more certain information be gained on this curious subject, it would prove that almost all the great inventions of mankind have had their origin in the Flowery Land ; while the millions of people who inhabit that wonderful country have never been able to make any use of their great discoveries.

I soon found that I was not likely ever to be able to illustrate a history of the most important of all arts, —the art of writing : from specimens in my own collection, I discovered that this was vanity as well as vexation of spirit ; and the history of writing came to an end for want of proper nourishment.

My researches, however, though not very profitable to myself, have been of use to others, *sic vos non vobis*. I was the pioneer who first in modern times undertook this sort of literary campaign. The British Museum, though cheated by the monks according to their gifts (that is, as far as a total want of principle and understanding enabled them to cheat), acquired the ancient Syriac library of the Natron Lakes at a far less cost than what I had paid to those same monks and others for the ancient books which were of no use to them.

The most successful miner among the hidden stores of ancient lore has been Mr. Tischendorf, who not only dug out the famous *Codex Sinaiticus* from the convent of St. Catherine, but he has rescued from destruction and brought to civilised Europe fifty uncial manuscripts, perfect and imperfect. Some of these



I must have seen many years ago, but the monks refused to sell them to me; now they have become more wise.

In my transactions, I always asked the superior of the monastery openly whether he was inclined to part with any of his useless books. If he consented to do so, well and good, but if he did not I dropped the question; and probably, in doing so, lost many a rare tome which I might have purchased if I had argued sufficiently on the subject, as when I was in those countries the monastic libraries were almost in every instance utterly neglected and cast away; they were neither useful or ornamental; and, excepting myself, there was no one who would have given five pounds for any one of them.

Since my day the monks have received many a round sum for books which were of no earthly value to themselves; it is only to be hoped that they have made a better use of the money than they ever did of the manuscripts which they have since sold to travellers and to the emissaries of more enlightened European Governments; but so thoroughly were these ancient libraries explored in the fifteenth century, that no unknown classic author has been discovered, nor has any manuscript been found of greater antiquity than some already known in the British Museum and other libraries.

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## APPENDIX

### *Syriac Manuscript of the date A. D. 411, in the British Museum.*

(PAGE 143.)

THE history of this invaluable manuscript is so curious, that with the permission of my friend Mr. Cureton, I have made a short abstract of its history from his own account of it and from other sources, for the information of such as may take an interest in this precious addition to the treasures of the British Museum.

To the Duke of Northumberland and Mr. Linant is due the honour of being the first discoverers of the vault beyond the oil-cellar in the convent of Souriani, where the collection of fragments of the ancient Syriac library had been thrown away. I was the first who made any researches among the great mass of loose leaves which I found there for the purpose of ascertaining whether there were any perfect MSS. to be discovered among them. I have narrated in the present volume how I dug out this ancient book, and left it behind in the convent, because it was so much less perfect than the others which I brought away. Another account of this occurrence will be found in the 'Quarterly Review,' No. CLIII, Dec. 1845. The whole of the library was purchased for the country by Dr. Tattam in 1842; but the monks cheated him and kept back about half of the books and leaves, which were fortunately recovered, and purchased by Mr. Pacho, from whom they were bought by the Lords of the Treasury, and presented to the Museum, on the 11th of November 1847. The monks again cheated Mr. Pacho, and still kept back a quantity of MSS., though they said, as before, that they had parted with the whole. These remaining MSS. have, however, been added to the rest of the collection in the British Museum. Mr. Cureton, with wonderful labour and perseverance, had sorted the multitude of loose leaves, and put together a great many volumes; of which about 60 exhibited dates the most ancient in existence, from the year 464 down to 1292; of these, 12 were transcribed in the 6th century, the first in 509, the last in the year 600. The whole number of MSS., perfect and imperfect, amount to about 1000 volumes; a collection which adds considerably to the importance of the national library.

The manuscript in question is a large thick quarto volume, written in the Syriac character, in three columns. It contains the 'Theophania' (or Divine Manifestation of Our Saviour), by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea; the 'Recognitions' of St. Clement; the treatise of Titus, Bishop of Bosra, in Arabia, against the Manicheans; the book of Eusebius on the Martyrs of Palestine, and his Oration in Praise of the Martyrs. The value of the book is considerably enhanced from the fact that the original Greek text of the 'Theophania' is lost. The Syriac text of this work has been published by Dr. Lee, with an English translation, 8vo, Cambridge, 1843.

The work of Titus, of which a considerable portion has been lost in the original Greek, is here found entire; and the work of Eusebius on the Martyrs is exhibited in a more extended state than that usually inserted in the Greek edition of his Ecclesiastical History.

The Greek text of the 'Recognitions' of Clement is also lost; and in the Latin translation of Rufinus, Presbyter of Aquileia, several passages are omitted, which the translator says he did not perfectly comprehend. The present Syriac version seems to contain a different recension from that which Rufinus followed.

The manuscript I have said was imperfect, wanting many leaves; but on its examination in England by Mr. Cureton, he found on leaf 238, in the treatise of the Martyrs of Palestine, a marginal note, in Syriac, of which the following is the translation:—

'Behold, my brethren, if it should happen that the end of this ancient book should be torn off and lost, together with the writer's subscription and termination, it was written at the end of it thus—viz., "This book was written at Orrhoa, a city of Mesopotamia, by the hands of a man named Jacob, in the year seven hundred and twenty-three. In the month Tishrin the latter it was completed." And agreeably to what was written there, I have written also here, without addition; and what is here I wrote in the year one thousand and three hundred and ninety-eight of the era of the Greeks.'

These dates, reduced to our era, give A. D. 411 for the time of the original transcription of the book, and A. D. 1086 for that of the note. It is much to be regretted that the ancient antiquarian who wrote this interesting note, and who seems to have had so great a respect for the even then venerable age of this grand old book, did not append his signature to his marginal annotation, that his careful reverence for the objects of his study might be handed down for the regard of future bibliographers. This, however, is quite in character with the humble, self-denying habits of the old ascetic monks, who were not desirous

of earthly glory, but, absorbed in the study of the works of the Fathers and the text of Holy Scripture, passed their lives in retirement and contemplation, in caves and dens, or in solitary convents in the arid wilderness, trusting, or at least hoping, that they would in the next world be rewarded openly for that which they had done in secret here below. Little did the old hermit think, as, seated in his quiet cell in the convent of the desert of Nitria, he penned the lines which have become so interesting after a lapse of 800 years, that his book would have become imperfect as he prophesied, that the lost parts of it would be recovered, that it would be dug out by travellers from the shores of a far distant island, from the subterranean vaults where it had lain for centuries, and be carried away across seas and continents, to the most noisy, and crowded, and bustling of the cities of the earth; where the crash of carriages and the trampling of horses, the roar of steam, and the din and tumult of two millions of men, crowded into a narrow space, almost drown the voice and stun the ear—that there his words would be read by the inhabitants of a land which was in his days almost unknown, that it would be commented on in a language which had not then its origin, and that books would be written on the subject, upon paper not then invented, and printed by a process not even dreamt of for 500 years after his death.

Orrhoa, where the manuscript was originally written, was the Ur of the Chaldees, the Edessa of the Greeks and Romans, and is now called Orfa.

In 1843 Mr. Cureton found, among the loose leaves and fragments of the Nitrian manuscripts in the British Museum, parts of two additional leaves of ‘the end of that ancient book which had been torn off and lost.’

I will now quote his own words for the account of his discovery of other parts of this MS. from page xxi. of ‘The Festal Letters of Athanasius,’ London, 1848:—

‘When I first had the gratification of examining that portion of the library of the Nitrian monastery which arrived in England in 1847, I immediately recognised numerous fragments of volumes which were familiar to me; and not more than a few minutes passed before I had the pleasure of finding one entire leaf, and soon afterwards another, belonging to that precious book, the peculiarity of whose features was so deeply impressed upon my mind. The second leaf was not only complete in itself, but had also attached to it a small fragment of the corresponding leaf in the same quire, both of which had been formed of one piece of vellum, of folio size folded into quarto. The back of this fragment I observed had been left blank; I thus ascertained that it must have belonged to the

last page of the volume, and consequently to that which had contained the original subscription of Jacob, the scribe of Orrhoa. I now felt that I might even venture to indulge the hope of finding the very subscription itself, and I anxiously looked forward to the time when I should have an opportunity of opening and examining at leisure about twenty small bundles, which were pointed out to me as containing fragments only of leaves, which had been swept from the floor of the room in which the manuscripts had reposed for ages. Not many days later, when these with the rest of the collection were transferred to the British Museum, this opportunity was afforded me. One by one I untied the bundles, and diligently and eagerly examined their contents. As I opened the fourth, I was delighted at recognizing two pieces belonging to one of the leaves of this precious book: in the next I found a third: and now, reader, if thou hast any love for the records of antiquity, if thou feelst any kindred enthusiasm in such pursuits as these, if thou hast ever known the satisfaction of having a dim expectation gradually brightened into reality, and an anxious research rewarded with success—things that but rarely happen to us in this world of disappointment—I leave it to thine own imagination to paint the sensations which I experienced at that moment, when the loosing of the cord of the seventh bundle disclosed to my sight a small fragment of beautiful vellum in a well-known hand, upon which I read the following words:—

“There are completed in this volume three books—Titus, and Clement, and He of Caesarea.

“Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; now and at all times and for ever. Amen and Amen.

“This volume was completed in the month Tishrin the latter, in the year seven hundred and twenty-three, at Orrhoa, a city of Mesopotamia.” \* \* \* \*

‘No more, indeed, of this inscription remains, but this was enough to repay me for the labour of my research, and to confirm and verify the facts connected with it.

‘The first of these sentences is written in red, the second in yellow, and the third in black.

‘Among all the curiosities of literature, I know of none more remarkable than the fate of this matchless volume. Written in the country which was the birth-place of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the city whose king was the first sovereign that embraced Christianity (Abgarus), in the year of our Lord 411, it was at a subsequent period transported to the Valley of the Ascetics in Egypt, probably in A.D. 931, when 250 volumes were collected by Moses of Nisibis during a visit to Bagdad, and presented by him, upon his return, to the monastery of St. Mary Deipara, over which he presided. In



A. D. 1086, some person with careful foresight, fearing lest the memorial of the transcription of so valuable, beautiful, and even at that remote period "so ancient a book," should be lost, in order to secure its preservation, took the precaution to copy it into the body of the volume. At how much earlier a period the fears which he had anticipated became realised I have no means of ascertaining; but in 1837 "the end of the volume had been torn off," and in that state, in A. D. 1839, it was transferred from the solitude of the African desert to the most frequented city in the world. Three years later two of its fragments followed the volume to England; and, in 1847, I had the gratification of recovering almost all that had been lost, and of restoring to its place in this ancient book the transcriber's own record of the termination of his labours, which after various fortunes in Asia, Africa, and Europe, has already survived a period of one thousand four hundred and thirty-six years.'

The discovery of two other manuscripts in this curious library, of the Syrian Epistles of Ignatius, in addition to the one above mentioned, all of them being more ancient by many centuries than any Greek or Latin versions now in existence, has enabled Mr. Cureton to detect many spurious passages which had been interpolated in the works of that Father, and to restore to their genuine state the writings of one of the most famous of the disciples and companions of St. John. Mr. Cureton's researches have been the subject of much discussion and controversy in the theological world, from the importance attached to the doctrines of one who flourished in the lifetime of the Apostles, and who was one of the earliest of the Christian martyrs. The results of his discoveries have been given in the 'Corpus Ignatianum,' which has been recently published.

The collection in the British Museum, which once formed the library of the convent on the Natron Lakes, contains two other volumes which deserve very honourable mention: one is a Syriac treatise of Severus of Antioch against Grammaticus, MS. of the eighth or ninth century, but under this writing are the words of a much more ancient MS., comprising 4000 verses of Homer, and nearly the whole Gospel of St. Luke, in uncial Greek, of the highest antiquity, and a fragment of Euclid in Greek, not quite so ancient; the other volume is a copy of the four Gospels, imperfect, written about the beginning of the fifth century in Syriac, the Gospel of St. Matthew being an unknown recension, in the language in which it is supposed to have been originally written, and is certainly one of the most ancient MSS. of any part of the New Testament extant.

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