LETTER XXXIX.

A Fortnight in and Near Athens.

TWO weeks was a longer time than we contemplated giving to Athens, but a low fever, perhaps as is often the case, originating in the exposures of tent-life in Palestine, had developed itself before I left Constantinople, and my first duty on reaching Athens was to summon a physician. Only a Greek physician could be had. His English was very limited, so that most of our interviews had to be conducted through an interpreter, but his skill was good, and after over a week's battle the fever yielded, yet leaving the patient very weak. Of the kindness of my companion, and of the excellent missionaries in Athens, who were untiring in their attentions, and of the interest and frequent visits of one or two converted Greeks, I shall ever have the most grateful memory. A stranger in a strange land—what meaning will those words ever have, "I was sick, and ye visited me!" If one must be sick away from home, Athens is the best place for that purpose. If liable to malarial fever, he had better recruit his health before visiting Southern Italy in the hot weather, and Attica will be found a good sanitarium.

With restored health I was able to visit in detail those interesting ruins of ancient Athens of which I had a remote view from the steamer as we approached the Piræus, and from the carriage as we

drove rapidly to the hotel. While yet on the Ægean Sea, and long before the Acropolis came in sight, we saw on the main-land the marble columns of a beautiful temple, which prepared us for the hardly greater splendor of the Athenian Temple. Very fitly standing as it did, overlooking the sea, it had been erected in the honor of Minerva, the goddess of the Greeks. Whatever houses may have surrounded it have long since disappeared. It stands as a sort of outpost, telling of other structures like itself, all of the costliest material and finest workmanship, in which were worshiped the gods of the Greek mythology. Many of them antedate the Christian era. But while neglected and forsaken they tell of a mistaken faith, they speak no less strongly of that true religious instinct that counts nothing too costly to be offered on the altars of devotion. Fine churches may not be the best means of glorifying God, but certainly poor ones are much less so. The Temple of Solomon tells us that no building is too magnificent in which to worship God. The example of the costly offerings of the heathen, whether Greek or Hindoo, might at least be commended wherever there is danger of going to the other extreme. It is always pleasing, as in this case, when the most striking object in a landscape or a city is a building for religious worship.

Before we climb Mars' Hill or the Acropolis, let us look at the interesting ruins at their base. Who has not heard of the Stadium, where occurred the foot and chariot races? Crossing the dry bed of the Ilissus, we entered a sort of natural amphitheater, made by the hills on three sides, where more than three hundred years before the birth of Christ Greek youths contended for the crown. One successful competitor, Herodes Atticus, provided marble seats for the fifty thousand spectators. Excava-

tions made during the present reign have brought these to light, as well as the marble pavement of the corridor leading to these seats. Unhappily, however, much of the marble has since been turned into lime in the lime-kilns, but enough remains to give some idea of the former extent and splendor of the place. A subterranean passage leading from the Stadium is regarded as rather a mysterious thing by some antiquarians. Our guide's explanation is at least in accordance with a true instinct when he says it was a way by which the unsuccessful competitors could retire. The more fortunate one was crowned with laurel amid the acclamations of the multitude. "They which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize." Between the Stadium and the Acropolis are the ruins of the Temple of Zeus Olympus, one of the grandest buildings ever erected. Nearly four hundred feet long by half as many wide, it was surrounded by one hundred and twenty massive Corinthian columns, each of which was over sixty feet high. Only sixteen of these columns remain, but they constitute a grand ruin, recalling the great temple at Baalbec. The Greeks lounging in their shadow seemed unworthy of such ancestors as had fashioned the marble which towered above their lazy heads. The memory of the martial deeds of their forefathers is more of an inspiration to the modern Greeks than the sight of these magnificent monuments. They are more eager for the fray that may recover part of their territory from the Turk than to preserve the glorious possession which they already have in these architectural remains.

But we are quite near the place immortalized by the eloquence of Pericles and Demosthenes. It was known as the Pnyx, where the public assemblies of the Athenians were held. It is on the slope of a hill near the Acropolis. The sharp angle of the slope is much relieved by a large stone-wall forming

a sort of terrace. The whole is semicircular, with the speaker's stand, a cubical block of stone cut out of the solid mass, at the highest point of the inclosure. The people apparently stood, as there is no evidence of seats, and the whole assembly had only the blue dome for their covering. Here were uttered those impassioned appeals which, though Demosthenes was the orator, were unavailing to arouse the people to resist the Macedonians, who were to destroy their liberty, and repeat their humiliation.

Just across the valley, and itself a spur of the general hill known as the Acropolis, is Mars' Hill, which heard from Paul's lips a speech hardly less eloquent than any that the Pnyx ever enjoyed. Never did even Demosthenes word an exordium more skillfully: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For, as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the Unknown God. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." Eager ears listened to Paul's account of the attributes of the true God, and devoured it none the less readily because of his apt quotation from one of their own poets. Many were eager to hear more, while others "clave unto him, and believed." His pulpit gave him, even as he spoke, a view of many "temples made with hands." Just at his feet was the Theseum, which had been erected five centuries before in honor of Theseus, who united into one the different States of Attica. It is standing to-day, the best preserved of all the ancient monuments of Athens. The Acropolis, on his right, was crowned with temples whose worshippers could almost hear him as he spoke. Greek skill had constructed their finest edifices for religious worship, temples which would almost have been a fit dwelling-place for the unknown God, if he could,

indeed, dwell in temples made with hands. But Paul proclaims a spiritual worship, worthy of the God of whom they confess their ignorance, and yet show their willingness to learn more. That memorable pulpit remains, perhaps not very different from what he left it. The space is not very great and the auditory on Mars' Hill could not have been large, although many could have heard his voice from the base. There are sixteen steps cut in the rock by which Paul and his hearers ascended, the same used by the judges of the Areopagus, the supreme court of Athens. While the summit is not very high, yet one side is sufficiently precipitous to serve even at the present day, if necessary, its old purpose for the execution of criminals by hurling them down on the rocks below. There are no evidences of any building on the summit.

But let us ascend the Acropolis, whose fortified summit was long the residence of the kings of Athens, and yet longer the supposed dwelling-place of the gods. As a fortress it is still impregnable, save to a well-managed artillery fire. We enter its gates, and ascend the steps which lead to the plateau, some three hundred and sixty yards long and of half the width, where stands the famous Parthenon. Of the exquisite temple of Athene Nike—beautiful even in its reconstruction from its old fragments which had been built into a Turkish bastion—I can give no just description. It is quite small, but a gem, and well deserves a place on the Acropolis. It stands on our right as we enter the magnificent Propylæa, or gateway with colonnades, leading to the Parthenon. There is now a gradual slope to the top, which had been leveled for the foundation of its great temple. All this space was once filled with the finest statuary, with here and there altars for votive-offerings. The ruts in the rocks still show the line of the old road which led up from the gateway.

But what shall I say of the Parthenon? The glory of ancient Greece and of its degenerate child; the admiration of conquerors, who spared it for its beauty; at length nearly destroyed by a Venetian bombshell in the endeavor to dislodge the Turks, who had made it their magazine; despoiled by Lord Elgin of some of its finest sculptures—it remains still a thing of beauty, a splendid ruin. Imagine a white marble building two hundred and forty-three feet long and one hundred and eight feet wide, surrounded by forty-six Doric columns surmounted by architrave and the most elaborately sculptured designs in high relief, representing the famous scenes of mythology, while within stood the gold and ivory statue of Athene Parthenos, forty-seven feet high, and we may form some idea of the great temple as Phidias left it. The explosion, however, threw down part of the walls and some of the columns, while the splendid marbles of its interior and approaches disappeared ages ago. I marvel not at the architect's enthusiasm as he looks on these wonderful columns, gradually swelling toward the middle and then tapering at the top, or the handsome steps so strangely convex that when our guide placed his hat on one end we with our eye on a level with the other end were unable to see it.

Only a few traces remain of the wonderful frieze, large fragments of which we afterward saw in the British Museum. No chisel has ever been so skillful as that of the famous Greek sculptors who fashioned this marble at will. The best Roman sculptors, Michael Angelo excepted, have been little more than imitators, if not copyists. The choicest works even in the Vatican and at Florence are believed to be by the old Greek masters. The famous Caryatides of the Louvre have their originals in the portico of the Erechtheum, which stands right by the Parthenon. In fact, the whole summit of the Acropolis

is covered with splendid fragments, either of the temples which stood there or of the imposing gateway by which they were entered. Many of those fragments have been collected in a museum, which has been too lately built for that purpose, after many of these treasures of art had gone to enrich other lands.

Let us look out from the summit of the Acropolis on the historical spots at our feet. Here are the ruins of the theaters—one holding thirty thousand spectators—where were acted the dramas of Sophocles and Æschylus. Cut in the rock of the hill just beyond is the so-called prison of Socrates. Beyond that mountain stretches the Plain of Marathon, where Miltiades led the Athenians to a successful victory over the Persian army, fifteen times larger than his own. In almost the opposite direction are the Straits of Salamis, where the Persians were no more fortunate in a naval battle. Yet beyond, only more to the right, is Eleusis, the seat of the famous Eleusinian mysteries. Between that point and Athens, and quite near the city, is the Academy of Plato. Even now it is known as the olive-grove, and it was this grove that Plato made immortal. It belonged to one Academus, who cheerfully gave it to the philosopher as a place for the assembly of his students, until his own name became inseparably linked with that of Plato, and the word "academy" is the universal synonym of learning. Just at our feet is the market-place where Paul disputed with the people before he was summoned to Mars' Hill. It is the market-place still, after nearly two thousand years.

We also get a fine view of modern Athens, which is itself a somewhat interesting city of forty-five thousand souls. It covers only in part the site of the ancient city, which had more than three times its population. It was never its size, however, which

gave it importance so much as its being the seat of learning, where gathered the wise men of the land. Very fitly one of the most striking objects that greet us is the university where twelve hundred students receive instruction from some sixty professors. The building is a very capacious one, and the institution, founded only forty years ago, is modern in all save its location. It owes much to Baron Sina, a native of Athens now living in Germany, who has also erected an elegant Art Hall of Pentelican marble, in which the citizens feel a just pride. The Legislative Hall is also a creditable building. On one of the finest sites of the city is the Palace, imposing in nothing but its size. On no account have the Athenians reason to be proud of it, and least of all that it does not belong to them, as they have never been able to purchase it of their former king, who built it at his own expense. There are many private residences in the city which are more attractive than the royal abode.

A borrowed king is the strange anomaly which Greece presents to the world. Bavaria lent the former, who, after nearly thirty years' trial, left the country in disgust. After the nation had gone begging for several months for some other cion of royalty, Denmark sent out King George, who has proved a good ruler, but who has had frequent occasion to recall the proverb, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." The modern kingdom of Greece is ludicrously small, even with Corfu added. The people recall their former domain, and are restless for the restoration of their old glory. The government is not strong enough to control popular feeling or to inspire general confidence. The king is looked upon with suspicion, as a foreigner and of a different religion. He is the merest figure-head on the ship of state, a gilded ornament over which must dash all the waves of the troubled sea through

which the nation is passing. While brigands are less numerous than some few years ago, when travelers in the interior were often seized and set at liberty only on the payment of large ransoms, exacted often by sending the ears of the prisoners to their reluctant friends, there is still danger of large irregular bands breaking into Turkish territory and embroiling the nation in premature war. She is no doubt watching for the moment when she may safely claim from Turkey a part of her old domain. Some of her citizens even aspire to Constantinople itself. In the meantime the king must study the popular will, and, whatever his private views, not venture to oppose it. Nominally a monarchy, Greece is really a republic. While we were there King George was enjoying a visit from his sister, the Princess of Wales, and the palace-garden, which was quite near our hotel, was daily enlivened by the choicest music, whose strains made glad the sick-room as well.

European dress is quite the rule in Athens. Occasionally one sees a man dressed in a jacket with open sleeves, and some dozen or more short white skirts, called, I believe, "fustanella." The costume when first seen would make a hermit smile. The skirts are too short to dispense with short breeches and gaiters. The fez is much taller than that of the Turk. Many wear a simple jacket and short, wide trousers. Shoes, when worn at all, are usually quite pointed. The complexion of the people is slightly dark, being less so than that of the Turk or Arab. There seems to be a fair amount of business done, considering the simple wants of the people. The fine, bold features of their ancestors seem sadly wanting among the Athenians of to-day. Their period of degeneracy was so long that there has been much intermixing of races, and the Greeks appear to be wanting in energy in ordinary affairs

as much as they are turbulent and revolutionary when the affairs of state do not seem to please them.

It is pleasing to see so many familiar names on the sign-boards, in both Greek and Roman characters. Sophocles, Xenophon, and Socrates, have forsaken the drama, and the sword, and philosophical disquisitions, and have gone to keeping drug-stores or selling meat and vegetables. While they can read the language of their ancestors, they have ceased to speak it. Modern Greek has such a strange pronunciation that only now and then can you catch a familiar word of the classic period. The daily Greek newspapers would contain dispatches from the seat of war which could often be read without much difficulty, but the same dispatches if read aloud according to the ordinary pronunciation would have been about as unintelligible as the language of the Turk himself.

The religion which Paul planted in Athens and Corinth, and which yielded in his day some of its best fruits among the Greeks, has given place to a Christianity which is such only in the name. A dead Church that believes itself alive, an impoverished Church that deems itself increased in goods and needing nothing, one that, losing its vital hold on Christ, has become a communion of mere forms, is the Greek Church of to-day. Hardly in any place is there so little fruit of missionary labor as where it has to contend with an effete Christianity. There are converts to a purer faith, but where the avowal of their change of religion means proscription few venture to make it. Even the work of secular instruction is seriously hindered if the teachers presume to tell of Christ as a personal, conscious Saviour. The priests wield great power, and are jealous of interference with their domain. The Rev. Mr. Leyburn, of the Southern Presbyterian

Church, is proving a faithful successor to his honored father in Athens, while Mrs. Fluhart, after considerable experience as a teacher in Columbia and Kirksville, Missouri, is now dedicating her life to God in the education of young ladies in the capital of Greece. We enjoyed pleasant Christian communion with them and the Rev. Mr. Constantine, a native Greek who was educated in America.

From our Italian steamer at the Piræus we take a final view of the twin hills of Athens, Lycabettus and the Acropolis. We pay our boatman our last drachma, and welcome the hour of our departure no less than we had done that of our arrival. After coasting along in sight of the Peloponnesus, the second day, May 29, brought us to Corfu, where we spent some ten hours. We were still in the land of the olive and the fig. Some of the finest of these trees that we had seen lined the road along which we drove out to the old harbor of the city. We found little to interest us in the city itself, which had lost its distinctive character under the long English supremacy. English appeared to be more commonly spoken by the natives than anywhere we had been. The King of Greece visits his subjects here during the summer months, and they have fitted up for him the official residence of the late English lord high commissioner. His queen, who seems much beloved, is also provided with a residence, located in the midst of a handsome garden, and commanding a fine view of the bay.

A night's run should have brought us to Brindisi. Our ship stopped, and when we arose supposing that we were in the harbor we found ourselves surrounded by a dense fog, unable to know just where we were. The fog lifted somewhat, but as the line to which the "Carriddi" belonged had suffered serious loss from running its ships in a fog, her officers had received strict orders to "stand by." At length,

about noon, just as we had finished our "breakfast," as the meal is called, we sight the land, and were soon at the wharf in Brindisi. We now felt as if we had reached Europe proper, for Greece and Turkey appeared no less Oriental than Syria. A good hotel affords us a few hours of quiet, which we vary by a walk about the old town, as Brundusium had figured in Hannibal's campaigns. Occasionally an old wall or house-front savored of antiquity, but the place is essentially modern, and owes much of its importance to the Suez Canal, and as being the most convenient European port to that great artery of trade.

But the train is waiting which is to take us to Naples, so that we leave the place of Virgil's death for the sight of Vesuvius.

Steamer "Britannic." Atlantic Ocean, Aug. 11, 1877.