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**ALBANIA.**

**ALBANIA: A NARRATIVE OF  
RECENT TRAVEL.**

**By E. F. KNIGHT, BARRISTER-AT-LAW.**

**WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.**

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# ALBANIA.

## CHAPTER I.

Where to go to?—An unknown country—The expedition—Our inventor—Our equipment—The doctor—A useful remedy—The start—Venice—Trieste.

One day last autumn I was sitting in my Temple chambers, wondering what I should do with myself in the Long Vacation, when I was aroused from my reverie by the entrance of my clerk.

"Here is Mr. N., sir."

"Show him in."

N. entered, and his chance visit solved my problem.

"Don't know what to do with yourself? Why, I have the very thing for you. Three friends of mine—Brown, Jones, and Robinson—are preparing for a tour in Albania. I saw Brown this morning, and he told me they wanted somebody else to join their party."

To cut the narrative short, I was introduced to Brown, Jones, and Robinson, as I shall call my travelling companions in this book; and it was not long before I decided to join them in a trip which promised to be a very amusing one. My friends were artists, and had chosen this almost unknown country for their summer tour, as being an unexplored mine for their pencils, both as regards magnificence of scenery and picturesqueness of costume. I myself knew nothing about Albania before starting, with the exception of what I had gleaned from "Childe Harold." The lines where the poet sings,

Albania, rugged nurse of savage men,

came to my mind; so I took down Byron from my shelves, and read all that he has to say about

The wild Albanian kirtled to his knee,

With shawl-girt head, and ornamented gun,  
And gold-embroider'd garments fair to see.

The information was scanty, but sufficient to show me that no more interesting country could have been chosen for our expedition. I purpose, in this book, to give a narrative of our wanderings in Montenegro and Northern Albania.

My aim is not at all an ambitious one, and I do not intend to enter very deeply into the history and already over-discussed politics of the races of Eastern Europe, but merely to jot down my own first rough impressions of the country; for my object is principally to show my readers how well worthy of a visit it is, and by describing the ways and means of travelling in it, to encourage and render some assistance to any who may purpose to follow in our footsteps over the Highlands of ancient Illyria. My fellow-travellers proposed to travel in a rough style, not to hamper themselves with servants, and to ride or walk, as seemed best when we reached the country.

The originator of the expedition, Robinson, had evolved an imaginary Albania from his inner consciousness, and was therefore always ready to answer, off-hand, any question we might ask him as to what we should take with us in the shape of baggage, &c.

He always advanced his opinion so unhesitatingly, and would give us so many facts as to the climate, nature of the country and manners of the people, that, till I knew him better, I imagined that he must have either travelled in these countries himself, or at least have had a very dear and confiding friend who had done so, for no amount of reading could have brought about so intimate an acquaintance with the subject.

We were certain to meet with an abundance of big game, he told us, so must each be provided with a rifle—the result was, I armed myself with a Martini-Henry. He procured a Winchester rifle (I think, later on in our heavy marches, he regretted having taken this ponderous weapon). Brown provided himself with a lighter Winchester carbine. Jones wisely took no rifle with him. We each had a good revolver, and our scanty baggage was contained in three saddle-bags. Robinson, in addition to his other great qualities, was a wonderful inventor, and

insisted on furnishing the expedition with a huge tent, which subsequently was christened "the White Elephant." This was packed for the journey in a long coffin-like box, and many were the wranglings and afflictions over that unfortunate package. Cabmen, railway porters, custom-house officers, police, all alike suspected it, and hindered its unhappy progress in every way. A fantastic axe, a gigantic yataghan-looking knife, and a cooking apparatus, were also devised by our ingenious friend, and constructed under his supervision. Many and many a plan he drew up before he perfected these marvellous inventions, and long was it ere he could find artisans intelligent enough to comprehend and carry them out. We trembled for all these *impedimenta*, and warned our friend that four camels at least would be necessary to transport them. Remonstrances were useless; we were told it was impossible to travel in Albania without these; so, with reluctance, and foreboding of future troubles, we gave in. Accidents of various kinds delayed our start. Brown and myself at last waxed impatient, and after waiting long for our tardy companions, who never would come up to the scratch, but postponed the journey from one day to another (each to be fixed and unchangeable), we decided to precede them, and await them either at some Dalmatian port or in Montenegro. We settled to leave London on the 18th of September, took through tickets to Trieste, and appointed to meet in our war-paint at Victoria Station at seven o'clock in the evening, so as to catch the eight o'clock train for the Dieppe boat.

At seven o'clock the whole length of Spiers and Pond's refreshment-bar at Victoria Station was monopolized by the travellers and the numerous friends who had come to see the last of them. "You are certain to have your throat cut, old fellow, so you might just as well have one last beverage with me," was an oft-repeated and encouraging salute.

I should say that those who were spectators of our departure must have imagined that we were bound on an expedition to the centre of Africa, at least. Our appearance was certainly remarkable. We were arrayed in blue flannel shirts, rough blue pilot suits, and top-boots. Brown, too, had closely shaven his head, which gave him a decided

Millbank appearance. Our luggage consisted of a saddle-bag, a rifle, and blanket each. Robinson was anxious for us to take "the White Elephant" with us; we did not see it. I forgot to state that Brown had taken upon himself the charge of the medical department, and had arranged a little box of horrible implements and medicaments. The properties of these I do not think he knew much about. As can easily be imagined, we fought very shy of him in his surgical character throughout the journey. At the last moment we remembered another medicine which might, with advantage, be added to our chest; we had incidentally heard that brandy was a useful remedy in some illnesses. We accordingly sent my clerk over to that excellent tavern, the "Devereux Arms," for a bottle of this fluid; it was lucky we did so, for, curiously enough, both of us suffered on several occasions from those maladies for which it is supposed that beverage is a specific; to such an extent, indeed, that though none of the other bottles in the chest were even uncorked, this one had frequently to be replenished.

In sixty-two hours from the time we left London we were in Venice. We were haunted by two guilty consciences during the whole of our run across Europe. For we had to cross three frontiers, and were laden with contraband, in the shape of revolvers and rifle cartridges. In consequence of our suspicious appearance, our baggage was generally examined. At Modane, where is the most unpleasant frontier custom-house in Europe, the officers have instructions to confiscate all revolvers. Thus we had to conceal our own on our persons. As they were large, and so caused a suspicious-looking protuberance of our outer clothing, we did not feel quite happy until we were again seated in a carriage, and plunged into the darkness of the Mont Cenis.

From Venice we took the steamer to Trieste—a twelve hours' journey. The boat was crowded. Brown and myself tossed up as to whether he or I should sleep alongside a very fat old lady who obstructed the entrance to one of the two only vacant berths. I won the toss, and ungallantly enough surrendered the place of honour to Brown.

At six in the morning we were alongside one of the quays at Trieste, and landed without being subjected to any custom-house inspection. We put up at the Hôtel Delorme, at which well-known hostelry the

Prince of Montenegro had been recently staying, on his return from a visit to the Emperor of Austria at Vienna. We found that an Austrian Lloyd steamer started at five the next morning for the different Dalmatian and Albanian ports; so, as Trieste is not a very interesting place, we determined to steam as far as Spalato, and there await our companions. We telegraphed to them to that effect.

We wandered about the town sight-seeing the whole day, visited the Lloyd Arsenal, and called on our consul, Captain Burton, the well-known traveller. He gave us some useful information, and recommended us to several people on the Dalmatian coast. He strongly advised us to take plenty of quinine with us, as the fever season had commenced, and tertians had been exceptionally frequent in Southern Dalmatia this year, after the severe drought this part of Europe had experienced.

We took two *sedea platea* at the Theatre Fenice, the opera for the evening being "Lucia di Lammermoor." The *prima donna* was an English Jewess, Madame Isidore, of whom, as a foreigner, the Triestines seemed to be very jealous, for her excellent singing met with a cold reception. When the opera was concluded, we wandered about the town for a short time. I find in my diary this note: "The beer of Trieste is good."

An English-speaking commissionaire at our hotel had insisted on piloting us about to the different places of interest. He was an amusing man, had tried most professions, had even been a butler in an English family. He had recently been butler, or what here corresponds to a butler, to a Triestine; but, after a few weeks, left his place in disgust, for, as he expressed it, "The Italian no understand life like you English. In cellar no wine. I go to my master. Sar, I leave you."

"Why? what is the reason?"

"Sar, I came here as butler. There is nothing to buttle. I go."

We retired to our beds about one, and enjoyed a few hours' sleep before the time came for embarking.

At three o'clock the next morning we were aroused by our commissioner, who had promised to see us off. We dressed hastily, and sallied forth in search of an early breakfast before our vessel sailed, and soon found a café which had not yet closed its doors. The waiters, and the place itself, had that disreputable and up-all-night appearance which is only apparent to those who themselves have arisen betimes from sober couches. I think my friend and myself rather regretted that we had so risen, and had not wandered about the town till the hour of sailing; for to turn into bed from one to three is productive rather of discontent with things in general than of that freshness, as of a button, the little cherub proverbially enjoys.

After swallowing our coffee we found our way to our vessel, the "Archduke Paul," bid adieu to our commissioner, introduced ourselves to the steward, and, selecting two comfortable berths, turned in for a little more sleep.

## **CHAPTER II.**

On board an Austrian Lloyd—Voyage to Spalato—The coast of Istria and Dalmatia—Old Venetian cities—Our fellow-passengers—Pola—A Turkish officer—The Morlaks—Why is England a triangle?—Sebenico—Arrival at Spalato.

When I awoke, the sun was shining brightly through the skylight, and the familiar thud of the screw told me we were under way. On mounting to the deck, I found that we were to have a glorious day to enjoy the scenery of the coast. There was not a cloud in the sky, and a fresh and pleasant breeze was blowing off shore. As our vessel was to touch at nearly every harbour of Istria and Dalmatia, we were never more than one or two miles distant from some coast, either of the continent or of the innumerable islands which stud the Eastern Adriatic from Fiume to Cattaro.

Very few English tourists ever wander among these remote provinces of the Austrian Empire, yet they are exceedingly easy of access, and possibly no countries in Europe are so interesting.

The fine scenery, the picturesque costumes and manners of the population, and above all, the remarkable Roman and Venetian antiquities, render them well worthy of a visit. It is surprising indeed that they are so little known.

The Austrian Lloyd steamers run up and down between Trieste and Corfu three times a week, and are as clean and comfortable as any in the world. Again, all countries under Austrian rule are perfectly secure, banditti being entirely unknown. Of course, if any one ventures inland, one must not expect to meet with all the luxuries of civilization; indeed, it must be confessed that even the hotels in the chief seaports, such as Cattaro, would seem rather rough to the sybarite. We met with universal kindness and civility, and even honesty, throughout Dalmatia, from the Austrian officers and officials, as well as from the Slav and Italian population. We found every one anxious to go out of their way to point out to us the lions of the district. The tariff at the hotels is very low, as it is, by the way, on the Austrian Lloyds, where the two really excellent meals provided daily at one and eight, cost one and one-and-a-half florins (paper) respectively. In short, one lives luxuriously for about five shillings a day. The officers are gentlemanly and well-educated men—Dalmatians or Italians, as a rule—and very glad to fraternize with jovially-disposed English passengers. One is almost sure to find one or more who speak English. We took our tickets for Spalato, at which very interesting town we determined to stay for a few days. This is but a two-hundred miles' run from Trieste, but forty-two hours are spent in the passage. For though very little merchandize is taken on board at the several ports touched at, in order to pick up mails and passengers, a most unnecessary amount of time is wasted in each. Of this of course we are not sorry. Now the steamer would anchor off some picturesque little town, such as Pirano, crowned by its ancient fortress—a relic of the great republic which once ruled all this coast—and now bring up alongside the marble quay of some ancient Roman city, such as Pola, with its gigantic amphitheatre reflected on the purple Adriatic.

The scenery of the coast is very beautiful. The mountains are lofty and fantastically serrated, and cleft into profound fissures and

chasms; while innumerable islands surround one on every side, so that one seems to be sailing on a large lake rather than a sea. Each turn round some jagged promontory reveals some new wonder, and there is not a village that is not picturesque and antique, with Venetian fortress or Byzantine church rising from the very water's edge. It is impossible to say what colour the Adriatic is; it is certainly the most chameleon-like of seas, and changes its hue quite irrespectively, as far as I could see, of atmospheric influence, under a sunny sky from deepest violet to most delicate turquoise, but ever beautiful.

However, after a time, there is something remarkably wearisome in this coast; for though the mountains are grandly formed, they are almost universally barren, the vegetation being scant and trees exceedingly rare. The Venetians made the most of their possessions when they had them, and destroyed the once magnificent forests of Illyria in a most ruthless manner. Nearly all the timber for their fleets was procured from these mountains.

The result is, that they are hopelessly bleak and barren, while the country in many places presents for miles inland the appearance of a stony desert. I do not think there is a region in Europe so wild and desolate as the plains in the neighbourhood of Novegrad; however, I believe that further inland, and so almost inaccessible, large and fine forests abound.

The weather was mild enough now, in the latter end of September (80° Fahr. in the shade), but this is a frightfully hot and parched-up country in the summer. The vegetation, where there is any, is sub-tropical; the date-palm, the aloe, and the cactus, are seen springing here and there from the rocks; citrons, pomegranates, almonds, are cultivated in many parts of the Lowlands.

We steamed slowly on throughout the day, till the setting sun lit up the high Dinanic Alps, which is a precipitous and unbroken line, lowered in the background above the lesser maritime chains. The barren precipices assumed the most lovely tints, in some places glowing like molten iron, while the shadows toned down to a deep hazy purple. But soon the sun had forsaken the loftiest peak, and the

quick-coming darkness reminded us that our supper was spread in the comfortable cabin. The day had been a very enjoyable one, for the scenery and inhabitants were alike new to us. Our deck passengers were lying about in most picturesque groups. Here some Hungarian recruits devouring their rations greedily; here some wild-looking Dalmatian Morlaks; here a solemn Turkish merchant, puffing at his long pipe; Montenegrins, Greeks, and an ugly-looking lot of felons, manacled and chained together, completed the scene. We had touched at Pirano, Parenzo, and Rovigno, in the morning. As our vessel brought up alongside the quay at Pola, we were enabled to stretch our legs for an hour on shore. We might have had two hours there had it not been for the extreme deliberation and prudence with which the officers of these steamers approach a quay.

The vociferations and evident anxiety of every one on board whenever this operation had to be performed would lead one to suppose that it required extraordinary delicacy and skill, and was attended with no small risk. Our captain was evidently excessively pleased and proud whenever he had safely accomplished this duty, and looked round with a very self-satisfied and admire-me-if-you-please air as he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

So deep was the water, and so unobstructed the harbour, that one would have imagined it would have been easy to have steamed the vessel right up to her berth, but that is not the way they do things here.

When we were about half-a-mile off the shore a boat was lowered, which took out at a cable to a large buoy in the roads; then it was found that the line attached to the cable was not long enough to reach the buoy, so we had to steam a little nearer. When, after a good deal of bungling, we succeeded in making fast our bow to this buoy, another cable was taken from our stern to the quay; and, while the first was being gradually slacked out, our donkey-engine slowly coiled up the second cable and drew the vessel stern foremost to her berth.

However, with all these precautions, we did not make fast without some accident. One of our passengers, an Austrian naval officer, who was contemplating the proceedings through his eyeglass, got in the

way of a warp, when it tautened suddenly, caught him in the middle, and projected him into the sea. Great excitement ensued, but he was soon rescued by a soldier on the quay, who hooked him up with his bayonet.

We were accompanied on shore by a fellow-passenger whose acquaintance we had made, a smart-looking young Turkish officer of gendarmerie. He was an Albanian Christian, a native of Scutari, and had just returned from a journey to Trieste. As this was the first time he had left his native country, he was amazed and pleased at all he saw; but he had evidently formed no high idea as to the moral character of the Europeans. The amazing wickedness of the Triestines was a theme on which he harped throughout the journey.

Pola is the head-quarters of the Austrian navy; there were three or four of their finest vessels there at the time. We observed that the proportion of officers and men to the number of ships was very great. Our Turk came with us to visit the remains of the Roman amphitheatre, one of the finest in Europe. The Romans he had never heard of, but had been informed on good authority that the massive edifice before him had been constructed in one day by the devil. We all had supper together on board this evening, and had a most amusing conversation with our new friend over our coffee and subsequent pipe and grog. He could speak and write Turkish, French, Italian, Albanese, and Slave.

We naturally wished to learn from him what sort of a country Albania was, whether travelling was comparatively safe, and how we ought to set to work.

"Albania is perfectly safe," he said; "safer than Trieste. There are no banditti; you can walk alone from Scutari to Salonika, and be treated as a friend by all, especially as you are an Englishman."

What our friend understood by "perfectly safe" was not exactly what a timid tourist would understand by the term. On being questioned as to the police system, he replied: "Well, it is not in an exceedingly happy condition just now, for having received no pay or rations for fourteen months, the gendarmes have struck work."

"And how do you get on without them?"

"Oh, just as well as with them; we Albanians do not require police; we understand what is just, and can take the law into our own hands; the police always were useless. In a wild country like ours, a criminal—a murderer, for instance—can always escape them; he takes refuge in the mountains, and the gendarmerie know better than to follow him there. If we trusted to them, there would be no security for life or property; but this is how we manage. If, for instance, a man murdered me and fled, my family are bound to revenge my death; if they cannot find the murderer himself, they kill one of his family."

"Does not this system lead to a good many lives being sacrificed over one quarrel?"

"It acts well as a rule. But, as you say, it does lead to some bloodshed. Just before I left Scutari a man shot another's pig, which had strayed into his field; the owner of the pig immediately walked over to the other man's house and blew his brains out, which he was bound to do as a man of honour; then a relation of the slain man shot a relation of the other behind his back as he strolled into the bazaar, totally unaware of the existence of any quarrel between the families."

"Was that looked upon as fair play?"

"Everything is fair in our blood feuds. This very man was himself shot a few days afterwards as he was coming out of a mosque, by the brother of the man he had killed, who was waiting for him behind a wall. Several others on both sides were killed in this pig dispute, till at last the two families met and settled the matter amicably, and without dishonour to either party, for it was shown that an equal amount of damage had been inflicted on both families—ten men of one having been slain; nine men, one woman, and a pig of the other."

Our friend told us that he himself had a blood feud on hand, and had to keep a very sharp look out.

I noticed that his hand was bandaged, and inquired how he had hurt it.

"Oh," he said, "I scratched it with my sabre, and so poisoned it. I have enemies at Scutari, and some months ago expected to be murdered any day; but, determining to kill some of them first, when the time came poisoned my sabre with a strong animal poison. I accidentally scratched myself with it one day. Luckily the poison was nearly rubbed off by that time, but as it was it very nearly took me out of this world."

Many other little anecdotes we extracted from our friend, all illustrative of the extreme security of Albania. Among other things we were warned never to allow people to walk close behind us; not to pay excessive attention to the lady portion of the population—that being the most frightful crime that one can be guilty of in that country.

We played at dominoes, drank grog, and discoursed on various topics till a late hour; then retired for the night, during which the old vessel steadily steamed her eight knots an hour.

The Austrian Lloyd Company are bound, by their contract with the Government, not to run their vessels at a higher speed; why, no one could inform us.

On awakening the next morning we found ourselves moored to the quay of the fine old town of Zara. We went on shore with our new friend, who, by the way, was saluted by the Austrian officers and soldiers when they observed his uniform—an honour which we afterwards found was rarely paid him by his own men in Scutari, in the present discontented condition of the half-starved Turkish soldiery. We had time to visit the monuments of this interesting old Venetian fortress, the fine churches, and the magnificent cathedral, built by Doge Dandolo.

The streets are narrow, sewerless, and malodorous; but would be the delight of artists. The natives wear a particularly picturesque costume, but are exceedingly dirty, and not prepossessing in features.

I had somehow or another formed an idea that as we advanced southwards into the more uncivilized countries of Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania, we should find that the population, as it became more and more artistic in appearance, would at the same

time become more and more dirty and villanous-looking. Seeing how very nasty these Dalmatians were, I expected to come across something very horrible indeed later on. In this I must say that I was agreeably disappointed; for all these reputedly barbarous races are far more intelligent, clean, and handsome, than the dull and in every way objectionable Morlak of Southern Austria, who much resembles his brother the Bulgarian.

One of the natives of this district writes thus of his countrymen:—

"For every article of necessity and comfort Dalmatia is dependent on other countries. There is clay, but no potter; quartz, but no glass-work; timber, but no carpenter; lime, but no kiln; coal, but no mine; iron, but no furnace; rags (plenty of them), but no paper-mill."

These words, written some years ago, are almost true of the present day. The wretched condition of the country is partly due to the régime of the Venetians, who got what they could out of it, but did little for the improvement of the people. The greater portion of the territory was acquired by Austria from Venice in 1798.

But though the Government has established schools, and a university at Zara, and done much in many ways to ameliorate the condition of things, Dalmatia is still in a very backward condition. The natives look with suspicion on, and are far from grateful for, the benefits they receive from the State. The Austrians are cordially hated by both the Sclavs and the Italians. These two latter, again, are very jealous of each other. So great is the mutual dislike, that it is rare to find even two fellow-townsmen of the different races on anything like friendly terms.

To a casual observer, at any rate, it seems that Austria has no very secure footing in this country, and has effected a mere military occupation of it.

The Government does its best to conciliate the people. They are lightly taxed, and have been allowed to retain many important rights and privileges.

The population has been disarmed by the Austrians, who are now

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