

athens

Saturday. April 14.

1877. 1876

My dear Malcolm

You will probably have heard something of my movements hitherto. how I am in the seventh heaven & have reached the haven where I would be. When travelling in the interior I found few opportunities of writing and I fear overloaded what letters I did write with descriptions of the scenery which after all cannot be described in words. To you then I will rather <sup>write</sup> something about the people & their ways, and of ~~our~~ <sup>my</sup> personal experiences.

The people are intensely interesting, both to look at & to deal with. It is quite delightful to see how well the old type has been preserved. You see boys and young men who might well have sat to Phidias - Their walk & their pose is quite magnificent to see - so noble, manly & graceful. I am especially struck with the grand masses of hair, curly & straight too, that one sees. The women are not as a rule so good looking as the men. In some places they are not visible at all - a relic of Turkish barbarism. Occasionally however we have seen really

lovely women - dark with lovely dancing  
or eyes - & rich masses of hair, & beautiful  
features. One especially we passed up in  
the mountains in a rude native dress, with  
a bundle of faggots on her back, who  
might have passed for Aphrodite herself,  
only I always imagine her as fair.  
However the finest Greek type we have  
seen anywhere was at Argina - where  
we were on Thursday night & Friday  
morning. We saw one woman there  
who was a perfect Greek - long oval  
face, low straight brow, long narrow  
eyes very soft, beautiful straight nose.  
She was about 40! I should think very  
well preserved, with 3 or 4 very pretty  
children. If she had been 18 or 19  
her beauty might have been too  
much for me. As it was it was  
difficult to keep one's eyes off her  
face. She was our hostess for the  
night & very comfortable we found  
the rooms.

We were very lucky in passing  
through the Peloponnese during Easter  
week - N. B. Greek Easter is a week  
later than ours - as far as food for



the eyes went, for the men were all in their grandest dresses, striding about like kings. at Megalopolis on Easter Sunday we came in for some a Pyrrhic dance - women not very handsome, and to our disgust dressed in very ugly European dresses, of which they were evidently proud. In fact we have seen very little of the few women dressed in Albanian costume, though many of them wear pretty red fezes with long gold, blue or black tassels. I said 'food for the eyes' - for as for that which satiate the heart of man there was very little of it during the fast, when we lived entirely on Easter eggs (pink !!) sour cheese, resined wine, occasional oranges, & Turkish delight. Our meat when we got it was of the roughest - a lamb roasted whole for supper at night - the fragments being carried with us for lunch next day, when beside some sacred stream - such as the Alpheus, or some in some wild glen or shady valley of Arcadia we tore it to pieces with our fingers & pocket knives & devoured it ravenously. Our usual course was to



start about 6 or 7 - ~~dark~~ after a little  
coffee or milk & bread (butter being  
quite unknown) ride 4 or 5 hours,  
mostly climbing up & down precipices  
which you would hardly dream of  
attempting on foot. though every few  
yards of level ground gave excuse for  
a trot or gallop. Then came luncheon  
or breakfast as you please & perhaps  
a rather half an hour's halt - Then  
on again another 5 or 6 hours to  
some place where we could put up for  
the night, where if possible we procured  
lamb or fowls, whose remains should  
serve as above described for next day's  
luncheon & so on. We really enjoyed our  
ten days in the interior very much  
indeed in spite of all drawbacks. Our  
worst experience was at Andritzena where  
we stopped two nights in order to see the  
grand temple at Bassa. ~~Here we at~~  
Megapolis our next resting place we  
were taken into quite a fine house and  
very well fed & slept. At Tripolitza  
we were comfortable enough but had  
it not been for the continual interference  
of the  $\lambda\omicron\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\omicron\upsilon\omicron\omicron$ , or head policeman - a  
most obliging man - we should have been  
swindled out of our lives. We had two  
small rooms for the 4 of us & they actually



had the impudence to ask 30 francs for bed. The whole bill was absurd. We submitted it to our guardian, who calmly cut it down by about 30 francs!! It's a wonderful country! The host was dressed most gorgeously and we believed we were charged for the sight of him. The Greeks as a nation are the most democratic & independent lot I ever came across. There seems absolutely no distinction of rank among them. At Argos where we were most hospitably entertained by the Doctor, who had taken in Mr Mahaffy before - the butler - ~~a fine fellow or~~ ~~an~~ ~~all~~ ~~an~~ ~~in~~ ~~deft~~ ~~calmly~~ ~~walked~~ man who had driven us there the night before calmly walked into the drawing room, sat down in presence of the lady of the house & lit a cigarette.

They are also a very idle & casual people and don't in the least understand the value of time. If you ordered horses at 6 they would come at 6.30 without fail and think they had done you no wrong.

We met but few Greeks & those for the most part disposed to be friendly. We had however one fright. Riding from Megalopolis to Tripolizza we three youths had better horses than the General (so we call him) and pushed on at a good trot till we were a mile or so in front of him. We then slackened & waited, expecting him to come up.



Still he came not. We had left him coming  
down a steep place in the mountains, while  
we pushed round by the carriage road down  
into the plain - or high plateau - where  
Tripolitza<sup>lies</sup>. We began to get alarmed. At last  
up came two of the drivers alone. But they  
could speak nothing but Greek and we did  
not succeed in getting any satisfactory  
answer from them as to the delay of our  
leader. We really began to think he  
must have been attacked - and as night  
was coming on - determined to push on  
to the town wh. was now close by - &  
communicate with the police. We rode in  
& found the whole place very gay & full  
of finely dressed people - it being Easter  
Monday - ~~fine~~ Handsome women were  
smiling on us from balconies - & the  
whole scene was charming - very  
picturesque town - but for our agitation.  
We were at once surrounded by crowds  
of people - feeling utterly helpless &  
unable to make ourselves understood -  
till at last a man appeared who  
spoke French. To him we explained our  
position & through him heard from the  
drivers that the general & our dragoon  
were close behind. We left our traps at  
a Evodoxior and walked back to meet  
him, expecting ~~him~~ to hear of some exciting  
adventure, some hairbreadth escape. What



was our disgust - I can use no other word -  
to find that in taking his short cut (sic)  
he had lost his coat & rug off his horse  
& had spent the whole time while we  
were in an agony of doubt as to the safety  
of his head, in a fruitless search after his  
great coat. We were none of us in the  
best of tempers that night.

We spent next day in walking  
about town with *δορυφορος* trying  
bargaining for various wares without  
much success. - followed everywhere by  
admiring crowds. After some difficulty  
we got a carriage at 4 to take us to  
Argos. Grand scene at departure, when *ο*  
*δορυφορος* cut down bill as I have said.  
We all indignant - host rather disappointed  
at missing his prey - large, picturesque,  
very curious but on-the-whole - indifferent -  
-to-the-result - crowd surrounding the  
carriage on all sides. We got into  
Argos at 12.30. Bed. Next morning  
our kind host - *ο* *Παπαλοξopoulos* - who  
spoke French - conducted us over the town  
- to the theatre especially - the largest in  
Greece - cut out of the side of the hill wh.  
forms the Acropolis. The view from it  
over the rich plain of Argos - grand  
bay of Nauplia to right - mts in front &  
as far as any eye could see - is one of  
the finest I ever saw. We drove in the



afternoon to my camp & saw all that  
was to be seen. You know pretty well  
what that is & it has been often described.  
The view from the Acropolis was even  
grander than in the morning. This time  
the sea was on the left - I never saw  
such colours - the rich shades of brown  
of newly turned earth - the lovely waving  
green of the barley - these on the plain  
below with lovely shadows - shadows too  
alternating with bright gleams on the  
masses of mts piled around the plain.  
The focus of the whole was the sun shining  
with divided & visible rays through thick  
masses of clouds overhanging the  
mountains immediately in front. But no  
words can describe such a scene.

We returned to Argos & then left for  
Nauplia spending some minutes by the  
way in an inspection of the wondrous  
remains of ΤΙΡΥΝΟΣ ΤΕΚΝΙΟΡΟΥΣ.  
'Wally' it is with vengeance. Such  
masses of rock might well have been  
piled up by the Cyclopes for surely no  
hand of mortal man could lift the  
smallest of the rocks unheven rocks  
which go to the making of this giant's  
fortress. At Nauplia we found good  
quarters and started next morning -  
with the best horses we had met - to  
ride - 7 hours to Epidaurus, which we



reached about 3 - a lovely sheltered bay -  
blue sea - Aegina in front of us - the  
hills of Attica beyond. We got a sailing  
boat & hoped to be in the Praeus by  
o'clock. But the fates willed it otherwise.  
A fresh breeze sprang up wh. took us  
merely along, but the crews were always  
timid sailors and our ~~own~~ skipper feared  
to venture beyond Aegina. We were certainly  
a good deal knocked ~~at~~ about, & one  
of the sailors (!) was sick - but I think  
the thing might have been done. However I  
am glad now as it turned out that we  
did not go. We should have reached Athens  
in the dark for one thing. Well we put  
into Aegina about 7.30, and no sooner  
had we dropped anchor in the harbour  
than another sailing boat - heavier by  
some tons than ourselves - ran right  
into us amidships at full speed. Had  
this happened 5 minutes earlier - while  
we were rolling about in the open sea -  
your brother might after all have  
found a watery grave in the Aegean  
without having set foot in the Parthenon.  
But by good luck no great harm was  
done, though the sailors were in a great  
fright & mostly jumped on to the other ship.  
It was a rather exciting bit of experience.



Well we had a delightful sail across  
- soon coming in view of the Athens - of  
which the first prominent object was  
Mt. Lycabettus - a ~~round~~ conical peak  
rising 150 feet or more above the Acropolis  
wh. hardly showed at all till we got  
near. We passed close under Salamis -  
and there in front rose Pentelcus - &  
Hymettus. As you enter the Piræus - a  
fine busy harbour - Athens disappears  
behind the ridge wh. divides Munychium  
& Phalerum from the Piræus - I mean  
the Acropolis & Lycabettus disappear for  
the town lying behind & below these heights  
is not visible from the sea. A drive of  
3-4 miles along a straight dusty road  
lined with white poplars - with the mighty  
olive groves of about the Ilissus on the left - &  
the dusty fields stretching to Hymettus on  
the right - the Acropolis in front just  
touched to purple by the last rays of the  
setting sun - brought us to Athens &  
to civilisation indeed. To us in our  
weary & dilapidated condition the  
luxury of fresh clothing, clean beds,  
comfortable rooms, & an eatable dinner  
were great. A greater luxury would  
have been a letter - yes even a letter -  
from home - but no, not one. And  
it is 3 weeks today since I left, and



We were rowed to shore all right in an open boat & there we saw a little steam launch lying. On enquiry we found it to be a Greek Government boat conveying the Director of the Dockyard at Porto to Athens. She had also put into Aegina through stress of weather & was going on next morning at 4 a.m. We found out the Director - a very great man in his way and an interesting - by name Capt. Mionis - and explained our plight. He at once most kindly volunteered to take us across to the Piraeus next morning. However when we woke the wind was still fresh & in the wrong direction. So we had to amuse ourselves by walking about till 2 o'clock when the N.W. wind dropped, a nice S.W. breeze came up. We had an interesting morning however talking to Capt. M., who comes of a distinguished family. His grandfather was a great Admiral in the War of Independence & his father was sent himself a boy of 8 going with him to England to ask aid of the government. He told us many most interesting things which I have no time to tell now. He remembered Byron at Missolonghi. ~~We saw more faces~~ I told you that at Aegina we saw more genuine fresh faces than anywhere else. V.S.



not a line not even a postcard have I found to tell me whether my 'friends' are well or ill, alive or dead!! Such is life. I think I have written at least a dozen letters - not to mention postcards. I suppose I must have missed some on the way, but I did expect to find some news in Athens. But I have seen the Parthenon & must not complain.

I have no time now to tell you of the Acropolis. I will write to somebody or other tomorrow a full account of the greatest day of my life - the day to which for years I have looked forward. Suffice it now to say that I went to be impressed - I went knowing almost exactly what it would be like - and yet the reality surpassed all my expectations in beauty & grandeur - <sup>so that</sup> I was almost overwhelmed.

For 10 days we have of course been quite without news. Yesterday on our return to the light of day we find that Turkey has rejected the Protocol - that the Russian army is moving on Pruth & that war is certain. Who knows what may have happened when you get this!

Mahaffy is made much of here, both by Greeks & Germans. The Mycenaean treasure is to be opened to us at 2 tomorrow. I saw Newton & Gardner today. They leave tomorrow. Please send my letter home when read, I suppose you are back in Oxford now, so send this to me  
your affectionate brother  
G. Macmillan