

Megalopolis

Sunday night April 8. 1877.

My dear Maffie

Imagine me in the heart of Greece, in the town founded by Epaminondas after the battle of Leuctra - as of course you know. There is not much of the old town left though - only the shell of the theatre cut out of the high riverbank - the largest in Greece says Pausanias. It is very fine. There are besides one or two stores only, belonging to an old Stoa & a temple. But I must return to Pyrgos whence I last wrote immediately after my landing in Greece proper. Well we started off on horseback on Thursday morning & had a most lovely ride up the rich valley of the Alpheus to Olympia. The country - both hill & valley is all alluvial - made that is of soil & stones brought down by the Alpheus. It is therefore wonderfully rich in flowers & vegetation of all kinds. Scarlet anemones abounded. We reached Olympia about 1. I was much pleased to find that my six lessons in town had put me quite at ease on horseback. The Greeks do not usually ride their horses at more than $\frac{1}{2}$ - 3 miles an hour - but we esp. W. Goulding & I pressed our steeds to a gallop whenever we came to a bit of level ground, & made the pace considerably. Though I came to Olympia quite prepared to

find nothing actually standing, yet the first sight of the diffings was rather disappointing. It looked too much like an ordinary quarry with 250 workmen moving to and fro among the ruins. Then the stone of the temple is not very prepossessing to any one who sees here his first Greek temple. It is very rough porous composite - dirty brown in colour - dug from the hills round - often entirely made of shells. It was covered originally with white stucco & traces still remain. However for all that the general effect of the ruin is very striking - magnificent drums & capitals &c piled on one another all about. The remarkable thing is that the earthquake wh. destroyed the temple must have burst from the centre, as the columns have fallen outwards on ^{each} side all the four sides. There is still part of the basement wall left, on which stood the greatest statue in the world ever saw. - Phidias' Olympian Zeus in gold & ivory - afterwards carried to Constantinople & there burnt in some conflagration. But the finest thing to be seen at Olympia is the collection of statues from the pediments & metopes of the temple, which are deposited in two wooden sheds in the meadow close by. Some of these are very splendid, for the most part rather archaic but very grand & noble in conception - though some ~~are~~ approach the finest period of Greek art. I mean to get the photographs wh. the Germans are publishing when I come home. Then you will see something of them. Dr Hirschfeld the director of the diffings was most kind to us, as were also his young wife & her charming sister. We exchanged cards & they

are going to call upon us when they come to
England & Ireland. The site of Olympia is
very beautiful. The Alpheus is joined at this
point by the Cladeus coming down from N.
As you stand in the temple there are low
wooded slopes all round, one conical hill

- Mt Kronion - rising immediately to the N.
above the stadium. Higher peaks can be
seen Eastward - the mts of Arcadia. The plain
beneath is a long narrow fertile strip, full
of asphodels, red anemones &c. - and
fields of corn. Next day, April 6.

we started early for Andritzera - a town high
up in the mountains of Arcadia. It was a
wonderful ride through splendid wooded country
- ~~going up the left side of the Alpheus the path~~
winding up & down along the left side of the
Alpheus valley - through wild pear trees covered
with blossom, birch, pines, oaks, arbutus,
laurestinus &c. about midday we crossed
a spur running out towards the river - above
~~was a little~~ passing through a little village
where we got water & Turkish delight - a
great institution here - & saw a splendid
frouseau in the shape of richly coloured
ruffs & shawls hung out over a balcony -
the bride elect herself - a very pretty girl -
coming out to show herself. We wished her
all happiness & descended to the river again,
forded it and then bathed, & lunched off the
fragments of a lamb which had been roasted
whole for us the night before. We then had a
very stiff ride up hill nearly all the way,
a very bad stony path - to Andritzera, which
we reached about 6.15. At one point we

came down after a breathless descent of several hundred feet on to a real Arcadian scene - a rich green valley, richly cultivated - shepherds in sheepskin cloaks, with crooks, leading their flocks of sheep & goats. It is quite marvellous to me how these horses go up & down the places they do. You always let the reins hang quite loose, trusting to the animals to pick their own way. Andruzzena is a very picturesque little town - houses with red tiled roofs & penthouses coming out from each side over the street - covering the shops - perched up on the side of a hill - with hills all round. Our accommodation was rather rough - one bare room ~~about the size of the hall~~ ^{was} not much bigger than the school room - with 2 windows opening on a balcony - for the four of us & for night & day. The food was not very easy to get & not very attractive when it came. This was fresh passion week - & a general fast. We would advise travellers in place to avoid this time. However we started next day - in heavy rain - to the ruins of the temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae. We had a splendid ride in spite of the rain, uphill the whole way along a wild hill side covered with gnarled oaks, dead bracken &c & very rich colours - reddish brown soil appearing at times in patches - dark green moss - mistletoe - blocks of grey limestone. grand views of mountains all round. It began to clear as we descended upon ~~the temple~~ Bassae & the sun shone out as I raised my hat to the first Greek temple I had seen actually standing. It is one of the most

perfect temples extant - only 3 of the of the
columns out of 34 are have fallen. It is a
very beautiful specimen of Doric Architecture,
having been built about B.C. 438 by Iktinus
architect of the Parthenon. It is built of grey
limestone - and is so in exact accord with the
ents around - much scored & wrinkled with
age & tinged with beautiful rosecoloured &
orange lichen. But apart from beauty of form
the site of this temple is quite marvellous &
splendid. It stands 4000 feet above the sea
on a narrow platform running out S.
from a jagged range of limestone ents. Ents
rise all round. Below is a steep descent into
the valley of the Neda. Beyond rise the peaks of
Laconia & Messene & you get neeps of the sea
in the two bays. ~~Further~~ The snowy peak of
Taygetus is conspicuous to S.E. The whole
scene is grand & desolate beyond description.
We rode back & stayed at Andritzena again
the last night. Today we have had another
grand ride - glorious fine day - white clouds
- through very fine country - at first
wild - then wooded - down into the rich
plain of at the S. End of which stands
Megalopolis. I could write much more as far
as material goes, but I find it very difficult
to write letters out here. There is too much to say.
I am conscious of having written hitherto absolutely
stupid letters and yet not said half I meant to say.
It's twelve o'clock. I must to bed. May I only get a
few hours sleep. I have had little more to speak
of since we came in here. But daylight is visible.
Tomorrow we shall try to push through to Argos & hope
to be in Athens by Thurs day. Hope you are all well
& that I shall get some letters in Athens. At present I have
of course had none. Your affectionate brother
George.