

CHAPTER XLI

MOTORING TO DELPHI

It was a delight, after an absence of twenty-four years, to be again in Greece. To climb again to the Acropolis, once more to marvel at the gold objects from Mycenae again to stand in the ruins at Eleusis, again to look out on the Bay of Salamis - all brought back cherished recollections of happy days in college and of a wonderful trip nearly a quarter of a century before.

This time Grace gave added joy by her presence, this time with color movies we photographed the Greek sunsets, this time by the light of the full moon we wandered among the ruins of the Acropolis and sitting on a rock in the mellow light and soft balmy air, dreamed dreams about the past, until the Parthenon seemed once more restored, the most perfect handiwork of man, and this time we erased our greatest disappointment of the trip so long ago - we visited the seat of the ancient oracle at Delphi.

Chartering an automobile, we drove out along the Bay of Salamis, past the temple of Eleusis, seat of ancient mysteries, and turned our course toward Mt. Parnassus, home of the Muses. It was the harvest season and Greek peasants were tending their goats and gathering their crops not very differently from their forefathers in the days of Ulysses. Some were beating out the grain with flails, others holding large dishes high above their heads, were slowly pouring grain so that the wind might blow away the chaff, others on their knees with grain spread out before them, were picking out bits of husk.

Women rode on donkeys, holding babies in arms. Over yonder a

woman leads her donkey, spinning wool as she leads. The bees are making the famous Hymettus honey and the sheep are taking a siesta under an improvised shade. Here is a cave in the rocks, reminiscent of Polyphemus, over there a curious little shack of straw in which a peasant and his family live while their melons ripen, and on beyond a beautiful view of Mt. Parnassus.

We stopped for lunch by a little brook, a girl from a nearby restaurant hastens to sweep up the leaves and make us comfortable. We had brought our lunch, but ~~Americanos~~ should be extended every hospitality even though they were not customers. We stopped on a mountain road to take a picture, and as Grandfather stood with his camera on the edge of the cliff, a youth learning to ride a bicycle - odd place to try to learn to ride a bicycle, was it not - ran into Grandfather, luckily squarely enough to send Grandfather down the road instead of over the cliff.

Soon thereafter the party was in the ruins of the Sacred Precinct of Apollo. Within the temple once sat an oracle over a cleft in the rocks, whence rose stupefying gases, and as she came under the influence of these gases, the oracle mumbled answers to prayers of pilgrims who had traveled many weary miles to learn in advance what the gods had decreed concerning their success or failure. These mumblings a priest announced from a rock outside the temple, usually so worded that whatever way the coming event transpired, the oracle would be right.

Of the beautiful temple of Apollo there are only the foundations and the cleft in the rock from which vapors no longer rise. But outside still stands the rock from which the priest spoke, and the "Treasury" at which Athenians deposited their votive offerings had been restored. Down the mountain side below may be seen the views of a Gymnasium and two

temples to Athena. Immediately above on the mountain side was a Greek theater and above that a stadium.

The day before in the Museum at Athens Grandfather had chanced to see Lorado Taft, the American sculptor whom Grandfather had met before. Grandfather, knowing that Mr. Taft had just returned from Delphi, inquired whether it would not be true that Delphi, being up on the mountain side, would be cool. Mr. Taft replied that if there was one place in the world which was hotter than any other, that place was Delphi. So all left wraps behind and, arriving at Delphi, found the place so cool that wraps would have been welcome.

No, the weather had not changed - it is only another version of the old story about three blind men who disagreed on what an elephant was like - one had felt the elephant's trunk and thought an elephant was like a huge coiling snake. Another felt the elephant's leg and insisted an elephant was very like a tree, while the third, who had encountered a whisk of the elephant's tail, thought an elephant was ~~most~~ like a broom.

From our hotel well up on the mountain side we could look far down into a little bay leading off the Gulf of Corinth, enclosed on all sides by mountains. Taft and his party had come by boat and spent the night in this enclosed bay, in the hot morning sun had ridden up the mountain on mules, visited the excavations in the middle of the day, rode down again in the hot sun and retired to staterooms which had grown hotter with each passing hour. To him it seemed the hottest place on earth.

Grandfather's party from Athens arrived by automobile, spent an hour or more just before sunset in the excavations, had large rooms at the hotel up on the mountainside, with a fresh mountain breeze blowing in the window, again in the early morning visited the excavations and had left

before the day had grown warm, resolving if ever again in summer time they visited Delphi they would come by automobile and would bring their overcoats.

On the way back we encircled Parnassus - just to think that on this mountain, so picturesque yet so easy for mortals to explore, lived Apollo and the Muses. Still Apollo and the Muses must perforce have some place to live, and what place could be lovelier for those devoted to beauty than Mt. Parnassus.

Again the party took lunch and again the driver, who did not object at noontime to demonstrating that he also was efficient as a butler, knew a good place to lunch. After passing many a shady wayside spot, which looked good to the ladies who again desired to eat, the driver about 2 p.m. drew up in front of a museum. What a place to eat lunch! To be sure, right in front of the main entrance was a fine shade tree, but what would the director of the museum say to those who would defame his sacred precincts by eating lunch before his front door? Americanos? Well, it would be quite all right. The museum director helped the chauffeur remove antiquities from a museum table and helped carry it out for the Americanos to spread out their lunch and also brought out museum chairs for the party to sit in comfort while they ate in his front yard. Where but in Greece can such good-natured effort to please be found?

Close by this museum was the funniest sight Grandfather ever found among antiquities of the distant past. Here on its haunches sat a lion as tall as the museum. Grandfather had seen its picture in a volume on Greek art and had been impressed by the dignified bearing of the famous and haughty lion - but, ha! ha! right on the very head of this pompous lion a pair of storks had built a nest. What would you think of

that? Perhaps you think Grandfather is kidding you, but to prove this preposterous tale Grandfather took a movie of the proud lion bearing on his erect head the nest of twigs, with mama stork in the nest presumably protecting baby storks from the hot sun, while papa stork stood proudly on the nest's edge. What do you suppose that dignified lion would have thought had he suddenly come to life and found a nest full of storks right where as King of beasts he should have worn a crown? Grandfather surmises the lion's thoughts would be entertaining but that personally he would rather be at a safe distance when the lion began to think them.

On the way back Grandfather concluded he would take another picture of bees making Hymettus honey and this time he would get a little nearer. Apparently the hum of the movie attracted the bees who began to evince a lively interest in this intruder. Grandfather realized that a quick move might prove fatal and backed slowly away without being stung, but quite convinced that he needed no further pictures of Greek bees.

The party was back in Athens in time for dinner and to enjoy another beautiful Greek sunset and then retired with a conviction that the trip to Delphi was never to be forgotten.