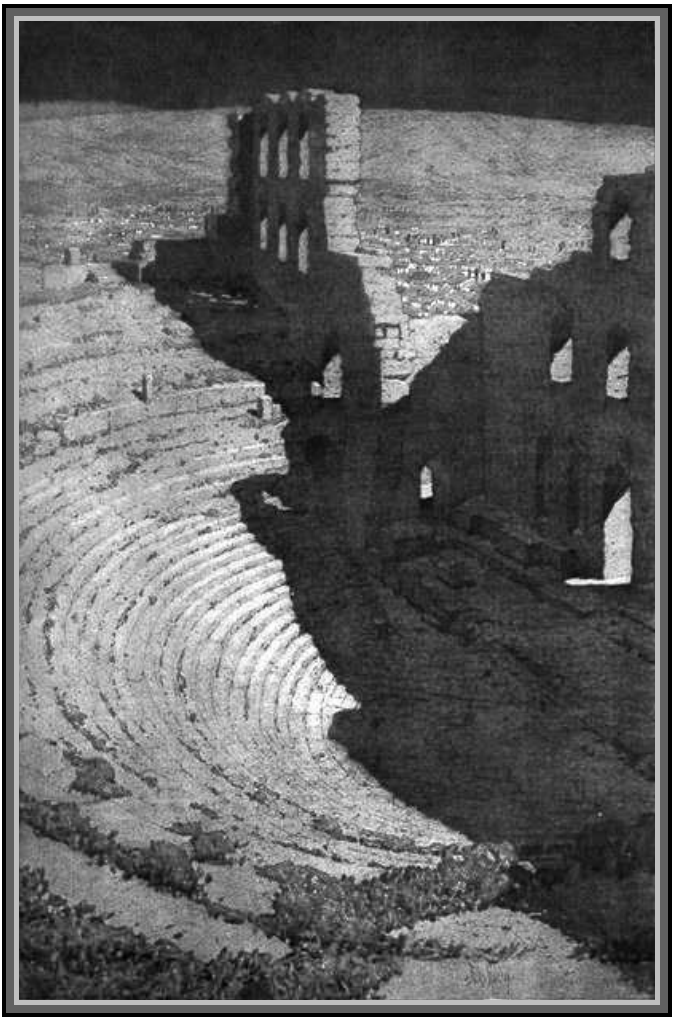
THE NEAR EAST

“Ancient Dalmatia, Greece and Constantinople”

[ILLUSTRATED]

By

ROBERT HICHENS



Illustrated by Jules Guerin

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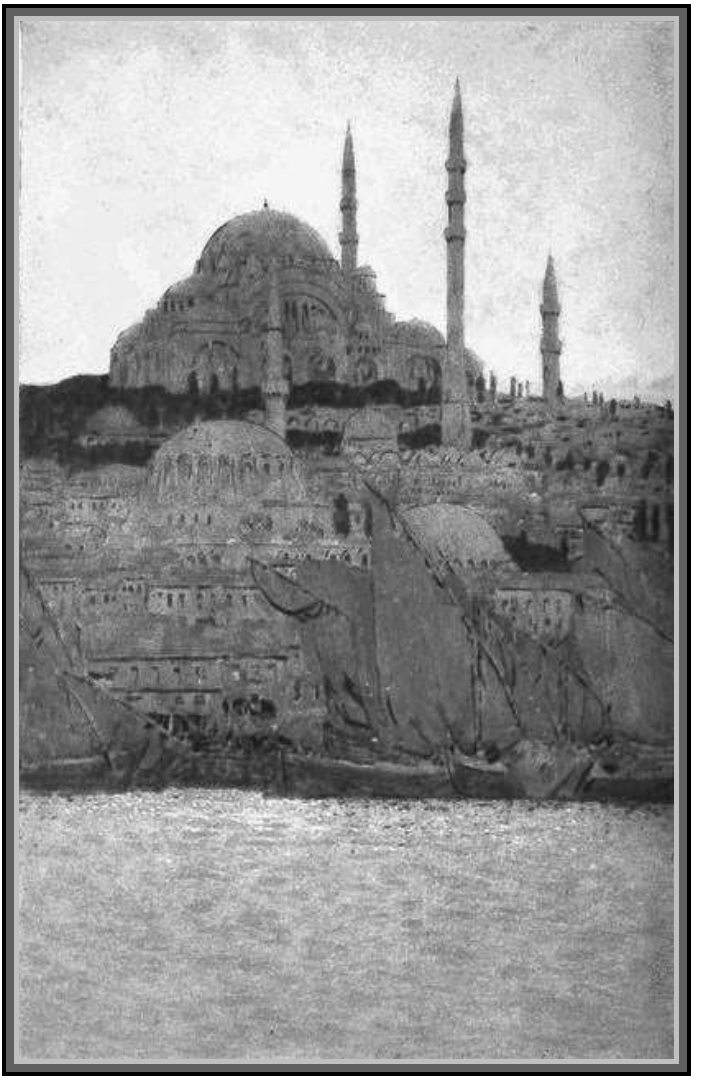
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"THE NEAR EAST"



THE MOSQUE OF SULEIMAN AT CONSTANTINOPLE

THE NEAR EAST DALMATIA, GREECE AND CONSTANTINOPLE

BY

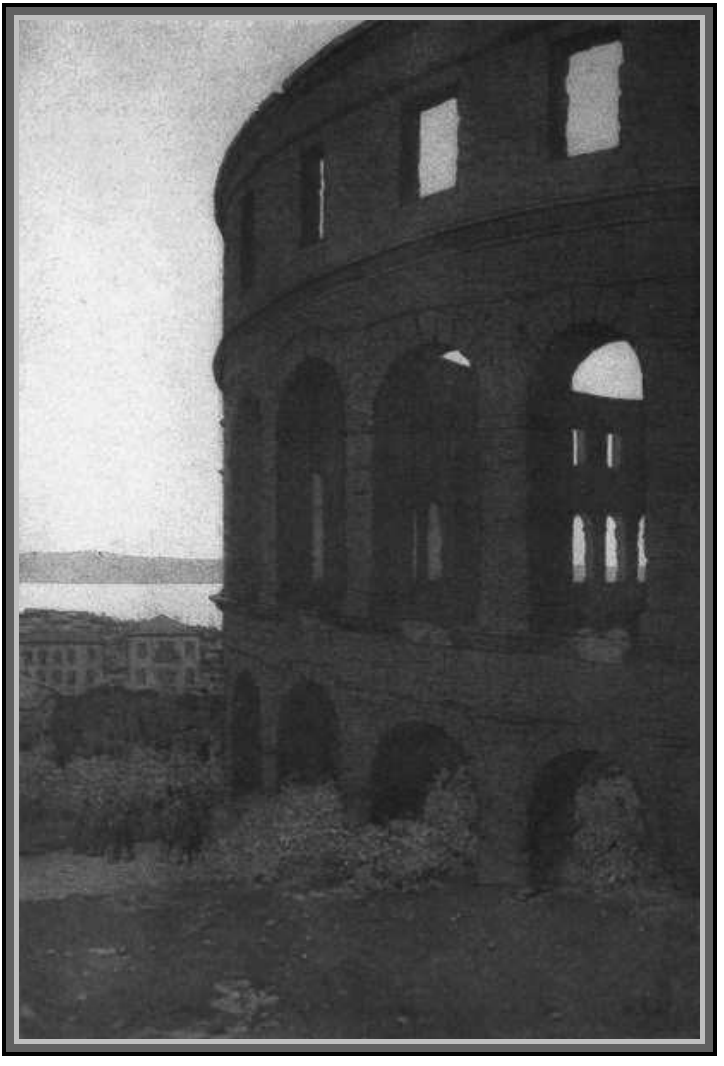
ROBERT HICHENS

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JULES GUÉRIN AND WITH PHOTOGRAPHS



PICTURESQUE DALMATIA



THE ROMAN AMPHITHEATER AT POLA

CHAPTER I: PICTURESQUE DALMATIA

Miramar faded across the pale waters of the Adriatic, which lay like a dream at the foot of the hills where Triest seemed sleeping, all its activities stilled at the summons of peace. Beneath its tower the orange-colored sail of a fishing-boat caught the sunlight, and gleamed like some precious fabric, then faded, too, as the ship moved onward to the forgotten region of rocks and islands, of long, gray mountains, of little cities and ancient fortresses, of dim old churches, from whose campanile the medieval voices of bells ring out the angelus to a people still happily primitive, still unashamed to be picturesque. By the way of the sea we journeyed to a capital where no carriages roll through the narrow streets, where there is not a railway-station, where the citizens are content to go on foot about their business, and where three quarters of the blessings of civilization are blessedly unknown. We had still to touch at Pola, in whose great harbor the dull-green war-ships of Austria lay almost in the shadow of the vast Roman amphitheater, which has lifted its white walls, touched here and there with gold, above the sea for some sixteen hundred years, curiously graceful despite its gigantic bulk, the home now of grasses and thistles, where twenty thousand spectators used to assemble to take their pleasure.

But when Pola was left behind, the ship soon entered the watery paradise. Miramar, Triest, were forgotten. Dalmatia is a land of forgetting, seems happily far away, cut off by the sea from many banalities, many active annoyances of modern life.

Places that are, or that seem to be, remote often hold a certain melancholy, a tristesse of "old, unhappy, far-off things." But Dalmatia has a serene atmosphere, a cheerful purity, a clean and a cozy gaiety which reach out hands to the traveler, and take him at once into intimacy and the breast of a home. Before entering it the ship coasts along a naked region, in which pale, almost flesh-colored hills are backed by mountains of a ghastly grayness. Flesh-color and steel are almost cruelly blended. No habitations were visible. The sea, protected on our right by lines of islands, was waveless. No birds flew above it; no boats moved on it. We seemed to be creeping down into the ultimate desolation.

But presently the waters widened out. At the foot of the hills appeared here and there white groups of houses. A greater warmth, like a breath of hope, stole into the air. White and yellow sails showed on the breast of the sea. Two sturdy men, wearing red caps, and standing to ply their oars, hailed us in the Slav dialect as they passed on their way to the islands. The huge, gray Velebit

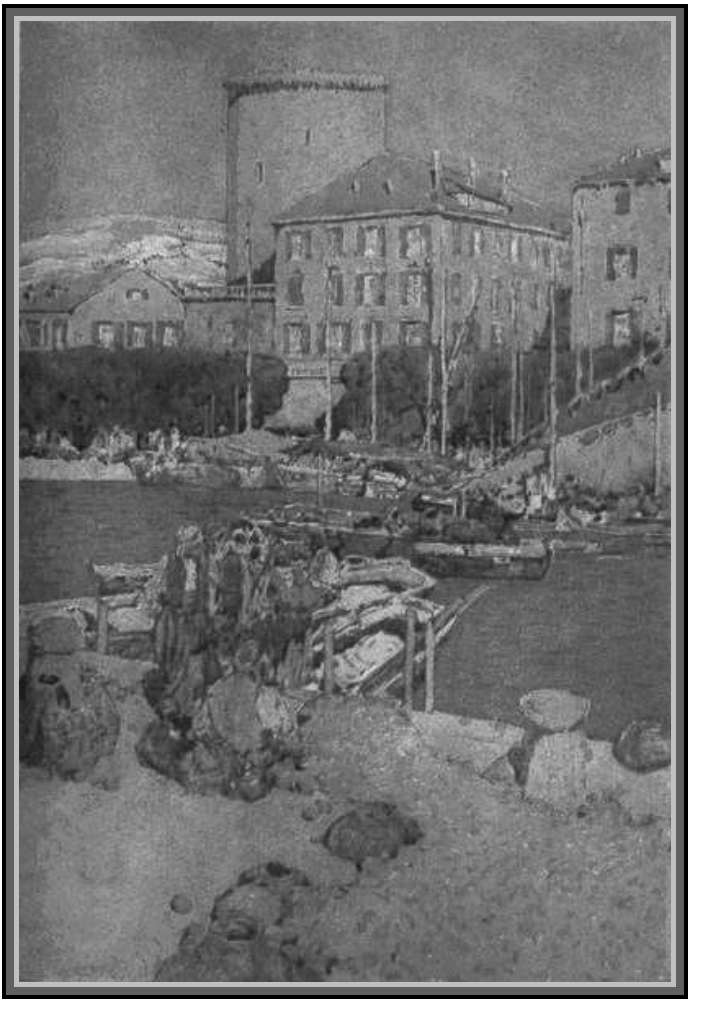
Mountains still bore us company on our voyage to the South, but they were losing their almost wicked look of dreariness. In the golden light of afternoon romance was descending upon them. And now a long spur of green land thrust itself far out, as if to bar our way onward. The islands closed in upon us again. A white town smiled on us far off at the edge of the happy, green land. It looked full of promises, a little city not to be passed without regretting. It was Zara, the capital without a railway-station of the forgotten country.

Zara, Trau, Spalato, Ragusa, Castelnuovo, Cattaro, Sebenico—these, with two or three other places, represent Dalmatia to the average traveler. Ragusa is, perhaps, the most popular and interesting; Spalato the most populous and energetic; Cattaro the most remarkable scenically. Trau leaves a haunting memory in the mind of him who sees it. Castelnuovo is a little paradise marred in some degree by the soldiers who infest it, and who seem strangely out of place in its tiny ways and its tree-shaded piazza on the hilltop. But Zara has a peculiar charm, half gay, half brightly tender. And nowhere else in all Dalmatia are such exquisite effects of light wedded to water to be seen as on Zara's Canale.

Zara, like other sirens, is deceptive. The city has a face which gives little indication of its soul. Along the shore

lie tall and cheerful houses,—almost palaces they are,—solid and big, modern, with windows opening to the sea, and separated from it only by a broad walk, edged by a strip of pavement, from which might be taken a dive into the limpid water. And here, when the ship tied up, a well-dressed throng of joyous citizens was taking the air. Children were playing and laughing. Two or three row-boats slipped through the gold and silver which the sun, just setting behind the island of Ugljan opposite, showered toward the city. Music came from some place of entertainment. A simple liveliness suggested prosperous homes, the well-being of a community apart, which chose to live "out of the world," away from railroads, motor-cars, and carriage traffic, but which knew how to be modern in its own quiet and decorous way.

Yet Zara had a great soaring campanile—it had been visible far off at sea—and tiny streets and old buildings, San Donato, the duomo, San Simeone; and five fountains,—the *cinque pozzi*,—and a Venetian tower,—the Torre di Buovo d'Antona,—and fortification gardens, and lion gateways. Where were all these? A sound of bells came from behind the palaces. And these bells seemed to be proclaiming the truth of Zara.



THE MARKET-PLACE AT SPALATO

Bells ringing in hidden places behind the palaces; bells calling across strange gardens lifted high on mighty walls; bells whispering among pines and murmuring

across green depths of glass-like water; bells chiming above the yellowing vines on tiny islands! Who that remembers Zara remembers not Zara's bells?

Walk a few steps from the sea, passing between the big houses which front it into the Piazza delle Erbe, and you come at once into a busy strangeness of Croatia girdled about by Italy. Dalmatia has been possessed wholly or in part by Romans, Goths, Slavs, Hungarians, Turks, Venetians. Now smart Austrian soldiers make themselves at home in Zara, but Italy seems still to rule there, stretching hands out of the past. Italian may be heard on all sides, but the peasants who throng the *calle* and the market-place and the harbor speak a Slavonic dialect, and in the piazza on any morning, almost in the shadow of the Romanesque cathedral, and watched over by a griffin perched on a high Corinthian column hung with chains, which announce its old service as a pillory, you may hear their chatter, and see the gay colors of costumes which to the untraveled might perhaps suggest comic opera.

There is a wildness of the near East in this medieval Italian town, a wildness which blooms and fades between tall houses of stone, facing each other so closely that friend might almost clasp hand with friend leaning from window to opposite window. Against the somber grays

and browns of façades, set in the deep shadows of the paved alleys which are Zara's streets, move brilliant colors, scarlet and silver, blue and crimson and silver. Multitudes of coins and curious heavy ornaments glitter on the caps and the dresses of women. Enormous boys and great, striding men, brave in embroidered jackets, with bright-red caps too small for the head, silver buttons, red sashes stuck full of weapons and other impedimenta, gaiters, and pointed shoes, march hither and thither, calmly intent on some business which has brought them in from the outlying districts. It varies, of course, with the changing seasons. In the latter part of October and beginning of November most of the male peasants were selling very large hares. Live cocks and hens were being disposed of by many of the women, and it is a common thing in Zara to see well-dressed people bearing about with them bunches of puffed-out and drearily blinking poultry, which they have bought casually at some corner; by the great Venetian tower; or near the round, two-storied church of San Donato, founded on the spot where once stood a Roman forum, whose pavement still remains; or perhaps by San Simeone, close to the palace of the governor, where under the black eagles of Austria the sentry, in blue and bright yellow, stands drowsily in the sunshine before his black and yellow box.



ZARA—PIAZZA DELLE ERBE

Sometimes the peasants bring live stock to church. One morning, on a week day, I went into San Simeone, to which Queen Elizabeth of Hungary gave the superb arca of silver gilt which contains, it is said, the remains of the saint. I found there a number of peasants, men and women, all in characteristic costumes. Only peasants were there. Some were quietly sitting, some kneeling, some standing, with their market-baskets set down on the pavement beside them. In a hidden place behind the high altar, above which is raised the great, carved sarcophagus, priests were droning the office. A peasant in red, with a gesture, invited me to sit beside him. I did so,

and he whispered in my ear some words I could not understand; but I gathered that something very important was about to take place. Every face was expectant. All eyes were earnestly fixed upon the sarcophagus. A woman came in, carrying in her arms a turkey, which looked anxious-minded, crossed herself, and waited with us, gazing. The droning voices ceased. A sort of carillon sounded brightly. We all knelt, the woman with the turkey, too, as a priest in scarlet and white mounted the steps which divide the altar from the area. There was a moment of deep silence. Then the great, glittering, and sloping lid, with its recumbent figure of the saint, slowly rose between the bronze supporting figures. My peasant friend touched me, stood up, and led the way toward the altar. I followed him with the rest of the congregation, and we filed slowly up the steps, and one by one gazed down into the dim coffin. There I saw a skull, and the vague brown remains of what had once been a human being, lying in the midst of votive offerings. On the fingers of one hand, which looked as if made of tobacco leaf, were clusters of rings. The fat, bronze faces on each side seemed smiling. But the peasants stood in awe. And presently the great lid sank down. All made the sign of the cross. The market-baskets were picked up, and the turkey was restored to the sunlight.



THE HARBOR OF MEZZO

Close to San Simeone are the cinque pozzi—five fountains in a row, with iron wheels above them. They are between four and five hundred years old, and lie almost at the foot of the Venetian tower, near a Corinthian column and the fragments of a Roman arch. Just behind them some steps lead up to one of the delicious shady places of Zara. Mount them, and you will have a happy surprise such as the little Dalmatian cities are always ready to give you.

You have been walking away from the sea, with your back to the harbor, and here is another, but minute, harbor nestling under a great fortress wall above which, in a garden, some young soldiers are idly leaning and laughing under trees with leaves of gold and red-brown. Brightly painted vessels, closely packed together, lie on the blue-green water. Beyond them are the trees of Blažeković Park. And just beneath you, on your right, is the great, yellow stone Porta di Terra Ferma, with its winged lion of St. Mark. Beyond, over the narrow exit from the harbor, the landlocked Canale di Zara, which sometimes, especially at evening, reminded me of the Venice lagoons, lies glittering in the sun. And a Venetian fort on the peak of Ugljan shows like a strange and determined shadow against the blue of the sky.

The great white campanile which dominates Zara, and which from the sea looks light and graceful, is the campanile of the duomo, Sant' Anastasia, and was partly built by the Venetians, and completed not many years ago. From the narrow street which skirts the duomo this campanile, though majestic, looks heavy and almost overwhelming, too huge, too tremendously solid, for the little town in which it is set. And, its blanched hue, beautiful from the sea, has a rather unpleasant effect against the deep, time-worn color of the church, the façade of which, with its two rose windows, one large,