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In Macedonia

1889.

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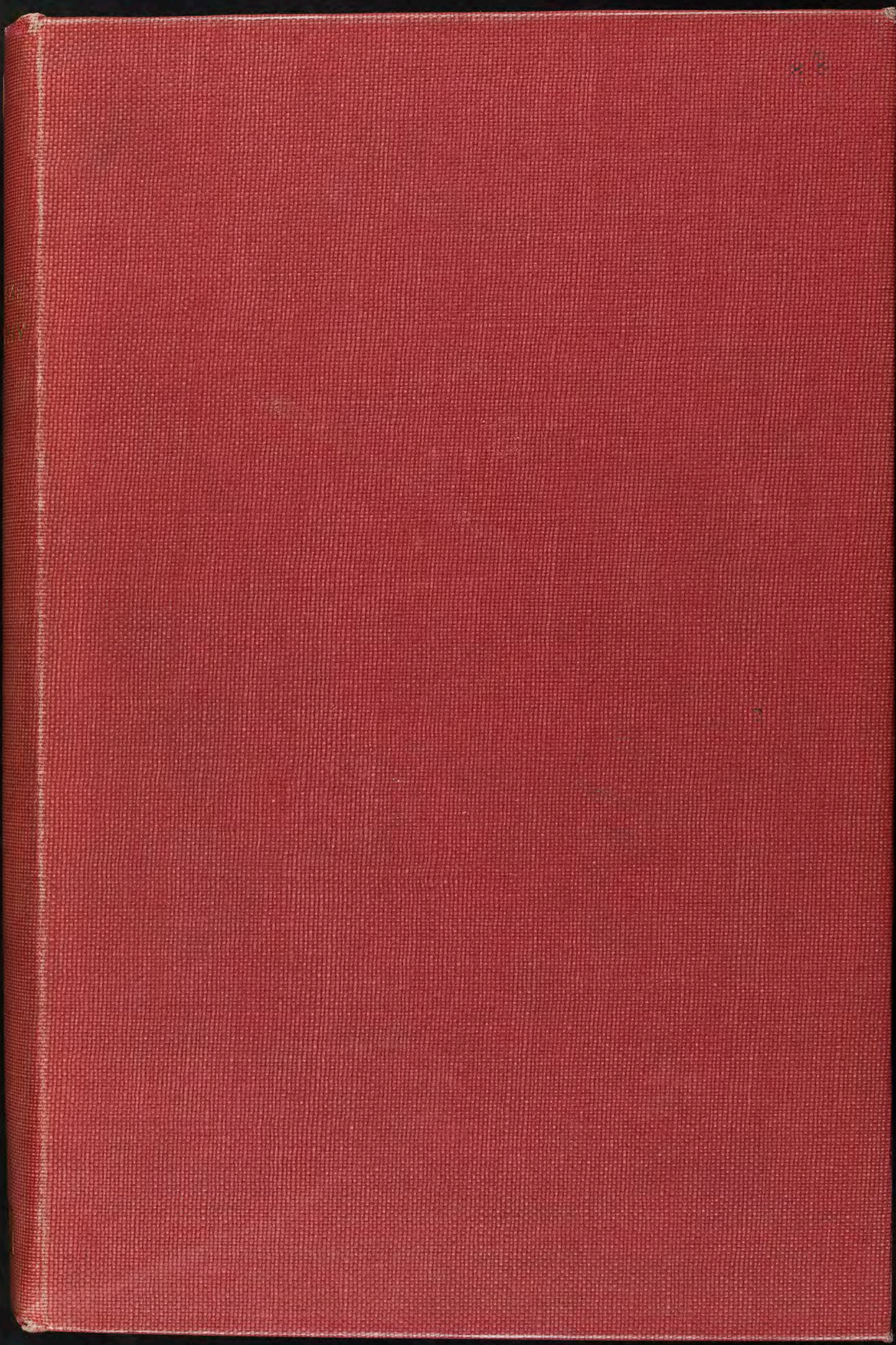
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## IN MACEDONIA.

"SALONIQUE—*sâle et unique*," contemptuously ejaculated our captain as we ran up the Thermaic Gulf, and, strangers as we were, ventured to remark favourably on the distant view of Cassander's capital, rising up the low hills before us; and so saying he lighted a fresh cigarette, turned on his heel, and philosophically dismissed the unsavoury city from his mind until such time as he should be actually there. Not so ourselves. We had not yet trod its malodorous alleys or stumbled among its perpetual puddles, and we only turned from the approaching picture of gables, domes, minarets, and cypress-trees set in a straggling frame of white wall, to look back at the grand prospect now emerging behind us from the mists of sunrise; for hanging as it seemed in mid-air, with mighty base all enveloped in sea fog, with mile on mile of snow blushing rose-coloured in the morning sun, was Olympus itself, awful as of old. Among the mountains of Greece it has no rival; and indeed there can be few in the world that so immediately impress the beholder with a sense of magnitude. Seen, as it almost always is for the first time, from the sea, its height appears enormous, far beyond its actual measurement of not quite ten thousand feet, and the illusion is assisted by the vast snow-cap which in April comes far down its mighty sides. Its neighbours, both south and west, are by no means small, but it dwarfs them all alike, and verily one understands why the Giants piled Ossa upon Pelion to attain its summit. The snowy cone of the former was before us at the moment, and while we lay at Volo it seemed that nothing could be finer than Pelion's shaggy, riven sides, whereon Jason cut the timber for his Argo, and Chiron trained Achilles to be Homer's hero. But

seen from Salonica, at morning, mid-day, or evening, the superb seat of Zeus triumphantly attests the constant appositeness of Greek myth, which honoured it above all other mountains of the Mediterranean.

Once past the venal *douane* and inside Salonica, the force of both the captain's epithets is amply vindicated. The principal products may be summed as beggars, deformities, dirt, fruit, and Jews. The latter are lords and masters of the place, and almost make it appear a foreign city garrisoned by a handful of Turks. Even the ubiquitous and assertive Greek, who in most Levantine cities, and above all in his own country, is more than a match for the Jew (whence there are so few Jews in Greece) must yield to him here. For the first time one sees the Hebrew as he may have looked in the days of his independence: not as elsewhere occidentalized, pliable, transformed in outward habit and manner, if still bearing in his face the unmistakable signs of his origin; but erect, black-bearded, clad in the flowing robe of his fathers, conscious that he is of the dominant race, though his fez proclaims political allegiance to the Sultan. In these stern dark faces one sees at last the possible heroes of the Old Testament, if at the same time those that killed the prophets and consented to the stoning of Stephen. The women are picturesque, seldom really handsome, and in this are inferior to the Greeks. Seventy thousand Jews are there in Salonica at the smallest computation, out of a total population of some hundred and ten thousand: verily a city of Israel! Consequently the language of the place is the language of the Jews, a strange degraded form of Spanish, assuredly not understood in Seville, and rapidly approximating to the Levantine Italian.

The latter tongue, even in its purer form, will serve the traveller better than anything else in this city of varied and villainous speech; it bears enough resemblance to their hybrid tongue for the Jews to understand it; the Greeks speak it fairly well; there are many pure Italians in the town; and a Turk understands it as well as anything beyond his own language. Greek is spoken very generally and very well; Turkish is necessary to command respect, especially in the rural districts; but besides these three or four tongues, there is a medley of Bulgarian, Albanian, Wallach, and what not, which makes the old Via Egnatia which runs through the town a very street of Babel.

A bye-street in Salonica is a slum indeed, ill-paved and filthy and odorous to the last degree; but the quay is well-paved and fairly clean, and the best walk in Salonica, if only for the view of Olympus down the Gulf. Some three main streets run almost parallel with it, the middle one being in the line of the old Via Egnatia, paved during most of its long course, and the place above all others wherein to see the strangest sights of Salonica. There congregates a confusion of nationalities and of dirt unsurpassed at least in Europe. The street is of course narrow, and a walk along it from the place where the Vardar Gate ought to be, but is not, thanks to a Vandal of a pasha who built his house therewith some years ago, to the rickety arch of Constantine, is a difficult, if an amusing performance. Now come two or three tattered *zaptiehs* (mounted police), clattering along the pavement with horses as ragged as themselves; now a pasha rides more gravely by, though he is quite as dangerous, proceeding as he does, in a manner totally irrespective of foot-passengers; now a Bulgar, with a string of hares or unsavoury meats on a pole, swings his wares into your face as he turns to wrangle with a customer; there a dancing bear is blocking the way and snarling at the de-

lighted peasants who stand round him; here a string of camels, or two or three donkeys laden with perfect bushes of furze, must be avoided. These donkeys are often laden with long stakes for firewood or palings, and these, catching the spokes of passing wheels, spin their patient bearers round like whipping-tops. Everywhere are porters bearing on their bent backs those enormous and unwieldy loads which no man would ever carry out of Turkey; and all around such a confusion of high-pitched voices as can only be fitly compared to the parrot-house in the Regent's Park. Every one talks to every one else from the back of the little shops where they sit cross-legged behind their wares, and what with the intervening distance, and the multitude of competitors in the talking-match, a man with a weak voice would have no chance of a hearing; consequently the struggle for existence has eliminated such, and they do not exist at this day in Salonica.

The city wall and citadel, so conspicuous from the sea, are no longer in a state of defence, nor could they be made so now. They would delay neither Greeks nor Austrians, whichever is to get this portion of the spoils of dismembered Turkey. But perhaps Greece had better confine her aspirations to Janina just at present, and not forget withal one or two facts. Turkish soldiers are ill-clad, ill-shod, and unkempt to the last degree, but they have proved over and over again that they can and will fight. Plenty of people who should know, assert that so far as sheer "give and take" went, they were as good men as the Russians in the last war; and, fine troops as are the Guards who strut about Athens, it may well be that the Turkish soldier of the line can fight quite as stoutly, and he has the advantage of numbers. The Turkish infantry, if ill-paid, is very well fed, and has a real *esprit de corps*, begotten of the devotion to the Padi-sha, which in its way is no less strong than the undoubted national spirit of modern Greece; and if the Powers

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were to stand aloof and see the battle out, the Turks might be nearer to Athens at the finish, than the Greeks to Constantinople or even Salonica. The latter perhaps are not wholly blind to this, and their present Premier is not likely to lead them astray; but, after seeing Salonica, one cannot but think that the "favourable conjuncture" will have to be very favourable indeed, if King George is to sit on the throne of Cassander and Boniface. The Jews will always be directly opposed to a Greek occupation, the foreign elements in the place apparently desire no change, and even among the villagers, so often quoted as favourable to Greece, we failed to find a preponderance of Hellenic blood. It is another matter in Epirus; there the population is at least as Greek as in Attica, the Turkish hold is weak, and putting aside historical sentiment, the Greeks have a real claim on Janina by the Treaty of Berlin. In Macedonia they can only justify their claim by a somewhat imperfectly understood past, for Demosthenes would hardly have comprehended the indissoluble integrity of Macedonia and Hellas, and might, were he to hear the phrase for the first time, even call it a barbarian lie invented in Pella; while if the Byzantine Empire be the justification—and the only really Greek Empire was that of Nicaea and its consequence at Constantinople after 1251—the historical argument becomes very hard to follow in a time when Greece herself was Frankish and when Salonica was Gencese, Bulgarian, or what not. Indeed, on this ground she might claim many other cities more accurately than Salonica.

The antiquities are fast disappearing before Time and the Turk. Of the Macedonian capital there is little or nothing to be found, though much lies buried under the crowded houses at a depth of ten or twelve feet, as witness the fragments and monumental inscriptions which are always turned up when the foundations of houses are disturbed; several have been found

recently in the Jewish quarter, but the stone-masons do not allow them to survive for long. An archæologist will always find new ones by searching stone-masons' yards and the like; but he will look in vain for many of those already published. Almost all will be of the Roman period, when Thessalonica had become an important military and commercial station, the capital of a province and the key of the Egnatian Way. Of Christian Thessalonica there are remaining the many churches now converted, though with little alteration, into mosques. Murray's Handbook sufficiently describes them all, and it only remains to be said that their future preservation depends on a foreign occupation, for the mosaics are fast being ruined and the pillars chipped and defaced; while the original pavements seem in most cases to have disappeared, for they have now a heterogeneous flooring of brick, fragments of Hellenic stone and what not, and their frequent use as barracks or receptacles for refugees does not tend to their advantage. Of the famous or infamous Hippodrome, the scene of Theodosius' massacre, no trace can be found; and the same may be said of most relics of antiquity for which one searches painfully at Salonica. The crowded town has swallowed them up. Occasionally in impenetrable gardens a broken column or two might be found, if an archæologist were allowed to search; but, worst of all, the imagination cannot play in these busy overcrowded streets as it can in open spaces. Not the least of the claims of Athens to be the most interesting ancient city in the world, rests on its open spaces. The Acropolis has only its ruins; weeds and grass grow between the stones and half bury the fallen fragments (save where the excavator has been at work during the last few years), and nothing obstructs the mind in its passage back to the day of former splendour. There is no jarring modernism, no break in the logical sequence of decay. Around lie the Pnyx, the Museum Hill, the Areo-

pagus; the wild waste of the southern slope, all alike deserted, all ready to be peopled by the flitting shadows of imagination, too delicate, too shy for the vivid colours, the moving throng, the noise, the dirt, the life of Salonica.

The Turks are trying hard to simulate an interest in antiquities, and, being entirely ignorant thereof, regard the less ignorant with jealousy. Anything found of intrinsic value goes into the vast grave of the Sultan's treasury, if not arrested previously by the greed or the complaisance of an official. A show is even made of preserving such dusty relics as inscriptions: seven comparatively valueless Roman *stelæ* are set up in state round the courtyard of the Konak, where the weeds grow over them and the children jump upon them. The usual archæological processes are not very well known yet in Salonica, and it needs some imperturbability to take a paper-impression either in the courtyard of the Konak or in the open. In the former, besides a gallery of soldiers, boot-blacks, beggars and so forth, your operations will be watched by the officials from the windows; and possibly you will be presently summoned courteously to the Bureau of Public Instruction up stairs. The Minister of Public Instruction (whose office, it need hardly be said, is a sinecure) has, as usual, nothing to do, and is the natural channel through which the Governor-General may obtain a nearer view of a foreigner who, under the mask of putting wet paper on useless stones, is doubtless making plans of the Konak for the benefit of Austria. The *modus operandi* is as follows: the Minister is very desirous to converse with any one interested in antiquities; will you follow the messenger? Leaving your impressions to the tender mercy of the wind and the boot-blacks, you comply, and are introduced in bad French to one of those dirty bureaux peculiar to Turkey, where no work is ever done, but where a Minister, a Secretary, and

one or two officers sit all day long drinking coffee, praying at intervals, and smoking incessantly. Presently comes the second part of the farce: the Governor has had an antique pin presented to him at Cavalla; will you be so good as to come into his room and tell him its value? You once more follow your guide, this time to a drawing-room upholstered in dirty yellow satin. The Governor enters; you *salaam*; the pin is produced, being a wholly valueless intaglio in a modern setting: you solemnly pronounce it genuine and priceless, and, your photograph having been mentally taken by the officials present, once more *salaam* and retire. To take a "squeeze" in the open is to be for twenty minutes the centre of a crowd consisting of all the dogs, boys and loafers of the particular quarter, an obstructor of traffic, and the mark of a hundred questions in half the languages of the Levant. Not that the crowd is troublesome or offensive—far from it; it helps in every way it can, by putting its fingers on and through the paper to keep it on the stone, and only the necessity of getting a nearer view compels it to block out all the available light; but the whole ordeal is distinctly novel and conducive to a certain slackness in future as to taking impressions in public places.

The town is safe enough, and the same holds good of the country for a few miles round. The streets are quiet at night in spite of the paucity of police and lamps, but there is no harm, and there may possibly be some good, in carrying a revolver; it will always scare a footpad in the town, if it is useless against a brigand in the country. Many travellers strongly discountenance the six-shooter in these countries; but the matter may be summed up in this wise: if a man has not self-control, if he is subject to sudden excitement or terror, he ought not to travel in the East at all: if he is none of these things then a revolver, which he will probably

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never use, will often give him a confidence which may enable him to go into queer places and among queer people, and do valuable work which he would otherwise have left undone. In extreme cases also it will serve against the fierce dogs on the mountains; in very extreme cases only, for he who slays the dog may have to do the same for the master. But if attacked by two or more dogs at once, for whom stick and stone have no terrors, a revolver must be used, or the matter may become serious, for the dogs are hardly to be distinguished from wolves; if one dog is killed it will be enough, sometimes a shot in the air will be sufficient, and then you must avoid the shepherd himself as you best can.

Two things have given Salonica a bad name; the massacre of the two consuls ten years ago, and the constant brigandage in the district. As to the former, it was the work solely of the lowest part of the populace, infuriated by a religious quarrel with the Greek Church, and finally inflamed by the gratuitous presence of the two consuls who were identified with the opposite party. The story was well enough known at the time. For some days the Mussulman population, already distracted by the political troubles which ultimately led to the deposition of Abdul Aziz, had been excited by the refusal of the Greek priests to give up to her parents a young girl who herself wished to enter the orthodox communion. On the fatal day a meeting was announced in one of the mosques in order to protest against this slight to the Mahometan religion, and nothing further would have occurred, had not the two consuls, impelled by a foolish curiosity, and relying on their inviolability, entered the place of assembly. They were recognized; the mob waxed furious at their insulting presence, and barred their exit. The leading Turks present stood round them as a guard, and for a long time kept the rabble at bay, and had the Governor sent at once for the men-of-wars' men from the harbour,

(the soldiers were accidentally in the country districts) all would have been well; but he lost his head, hesitated, the mob broke down all resistance and beat and hacked the unlucky consuls to death. In less than a week, seventeen ships of war were in the port. The Turks did all they could by way of reparation; they paid huge sums to the bereaved families, and hanged the ringleaders on the quay, some in bravado fitting the noose to their own throats and jumping off the ladder. But the office of the victims and the terrible circumstances of the crime have darkened and perpetuated the stain on the reputation of Salonica.

The causes and character of Macedonian brigandage are complicated by a possible political element; but it is no easy matter to learn the true state of the question. Turks and philo-Turks assert positively that it is supported by secret societies in Bulgaria and Greece, with the view of discrediting the Ottoman Government in the eyes of the Powers; but in spite of the preponderance of Greeks in the brigand bands, one is loth to believe in the complicity of the Greek nation, even through a secret society. In any case, the authorities are absolutely innocent of such foul play, and do what they can in the absence of an extradition treaty. It would be well, nevertheless, to be more careful, and not to allow notorious ruffians to harbour in Thessaly, as was asserted to be the case not long ago, for no diplomatic jealousies ought to give security to a blood-stained monster like the infamous Nicko, who was said to have lived for some time at Larissa. The taking of Colonel Synge was the least of this brute's misdeeds, the atrocious character of which shocked even his own villainous profession. Here is one which can be absolutely certified. Some years ago he took two little children, for whom he demanded four and three hundred *liras* respectively. The larger sum was paid, and, like a strict man of business, he gave up the child; in the second case he had to do with

poor parents to whom the sum demanded was an impossibility. Fifty *liras* were sent up, and sent back again. The wretched parents sold all that they had, raised a subscription, and got together another hundred. Nicko sent this back as before, with the brief message that, if he was not satisfied in three days, the child would not be living. He kept his word; the parents received the body in four quarters, and Nicko told his own horrified ruffians that business was business, in this as in anything else.

But be the causes what they may, the country is never quite safe, even though no cases of brigandage have occurred for months, or even years. The Turkish authorities do their best spasmodically; but they cannot clear out Olympus, so long as the dubious frontier-line runs among that mass of mountains. Nor do they quite seem to realize the full extent of the offence against society and the discredit to themselves which are involved in the continual existence of brigandage; for when they do lay the offenders by the heels, they often inflict upon them wholly inadequate punishment. A case like Colonel Syngé's galvanizes them into energy for the time, while an angry Consul threatens a visit from the Squadron, and the deduction of the ransom from the Cyprus surplus; but no one who knows Turkey can expect that to last. Let no one make a mistake about the character of a Greek brigand-chief: he is not a picturesque, chivalrous rascal, a King of the Mountains, a Byronic freebooter; he is a filthy, sordid, cruel trader in human flesh and blood, with as brutal an attention to business as the most unwashed, rum-drinking, slave-master of fiction. To be sure, he is not in the habit of keeping ladies in bondage, because it does not do to be encumbered with captives who cannot keep up with his band in the flight to the mountains; if he is obliged, as in the last case, to take the wife also, he sends her back to treat for the ransom.

This latter is a mere question of supply and demand, and an Englishman is worth a good deal more than any one else. Nicko began with a demand for £20,000 in the case of Colonel Syngé; and finally released him (thanks to the diplomacy and unremitting exertions of Mr. Blunt, the well-known Consul-General of Great Britain at Salonica) for £14,000 and forty gold watches, the latter being bought for something less than a pound apiece in Salonica. The money was paid in gold and every coin was counted and tested by the commercial robber, two or three which had become a trifle light being rejected: and, as Mr. Blunt's *kavass* ruefully remarks, they gave *him* nothing for bringing it all the way up the mountain. These brigands seem to treat their prisoners fairly well, so long as all goes right, giving them what food is procurable, and allowing them the use of newspapers and the like, sent up by their friends; while nothing delights them so much as to be regarded in the light of belligerent powers treating with the authorities on equal terms. But let any hitch occur, and they will threaten anything—from making their victim into a human bonfire with petroleum (as they did to Colonel Syngé), to simply going through the pantomimic action four or five times a day of cutting his throat. These pleasant threats, combined with the torture of bonds and the far worse agony of hope deferred, make a thirty days' detention in Olympus a terrible ordeal which leaves an abiding mark on those that have endured it.

There are never brigands actually established in the plain of Salonica: their haunts are the district under Olympus, and the mountains near Monastir and Serres; but give them time to hear of a prize worth taking in the lowland, and they will come far and brave much to take it. Colonel Syngé's farm lay only three hours from the Vardar and was surrounded by a village, but the brigands attacked him and set his house on fire unmolested. Mr. Soutar was taken in the peninsula

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of Cassandra, the western prong of Chalcidice, by the brigands from Olympus, Manuel, Aristides, and Nicolas, who crossed the gulf with their band of ruffians in a *caïque*, and carried off their prize from the middle of a brigade of soldiers. This will show that no one, and least of all an Englishman after these enormous ransoms paid by the British Government, can ever be safe for long; and he must either make, as we did, short expeditions of two or three days only from a town, or take his chance. The old bands are now broken up, but some of their members are still at large, and the stray cases that occur from time to time near the mountains show that the danger still exists, and would become pressing did a suitable prize expose himself. Police and guards generally are not of much avail; they would, and indeed could, do little against an organized attack, while with the solitary highwayman the traveller himself could probably cope; but they certainly give an official air to the party which commands respect in the villages, and might make a weak band of brigands chary of attacking. In any case, if the Consul's advice is not implicitly followed, the captive traveller has no claim on his government for ransom. The brigand has, as a rule, no other calling; he is not an impecunious shepherd who takes to the road, as is so often the case in Albania, but his villainous trade is almost hereditary. He plays as a rule for his own hand, killing his prisoners if not ransomed, or if he be too hotly pursued, as in the terrible case of Mr. Vyner in Attica; but he doubtless takes to himself some credit for being a good if somewhat disreputable patriot.

At the other end of the great marshy plain lies all that remains of Pella. We left the city founded by the weak, cruel Cassander, still as full of life as it had been through all its long chequered history; we came, six hours later, to the city of the mighty Philip to find it as though it had never been.

A Roman fountain, two bits of fluted Doric columns near Alaklisi, a fragment of wall, some scattered rubbish, was all that we could find of the creation of one of the world's master-minds, the city whereby Philip signalized the birth of the Macedonian empire, the city which gave birth to Alexander and moulded the destinies of two continents. And yet beyond all doubt this is as Philip himself would have wished; that it is desolate today while Salonica lives, is only the sequence of his far-seeing, ever-happy schemes. No one who has stood on the site of Pella and looked at the dull marsh and level plain below, marking the remoteness of the sea and the absence of all strategical importance in the position, can suppose for one moment that it was intended for the permanent capital of the new Empire of Macedon. Little wonder that Alexander was suspected of a preference for an Asiatic capital. Why then did Philip found it? Study the history of the Macedonian people, read Alexander's speech to the mutineers at Opis (be it Arrian's or be it Alexander's), and it will become evident enough. Mr. Tozer, who is one of the very few who have been actually on the site, says that Philip wished to bring his people nearer to the sea than they had been at Vodina or Monastir; he should rather have said that Philip wished to bring his people into the plain, to make them from wild mountaineers the civilized world-conquerors that they became. Pella could never have been a port of consequence. When it was created, Macedonia was still shut out of her own seaboard and not yet prepared to assert her right thereto; but Pella in the plain proved the essential point of departure, whence the transformed highlanders marched to subdue their whilom rivals of Thrace, to crush in Olynthus the Hellenic monopoly of their seaboard; to annex Thessaly, to spare Athens, to traverse Asia from the Hellespont to the Hyphasis. Hence

the enormous interest of this vacant site, the more suggestive for its very vacancy.

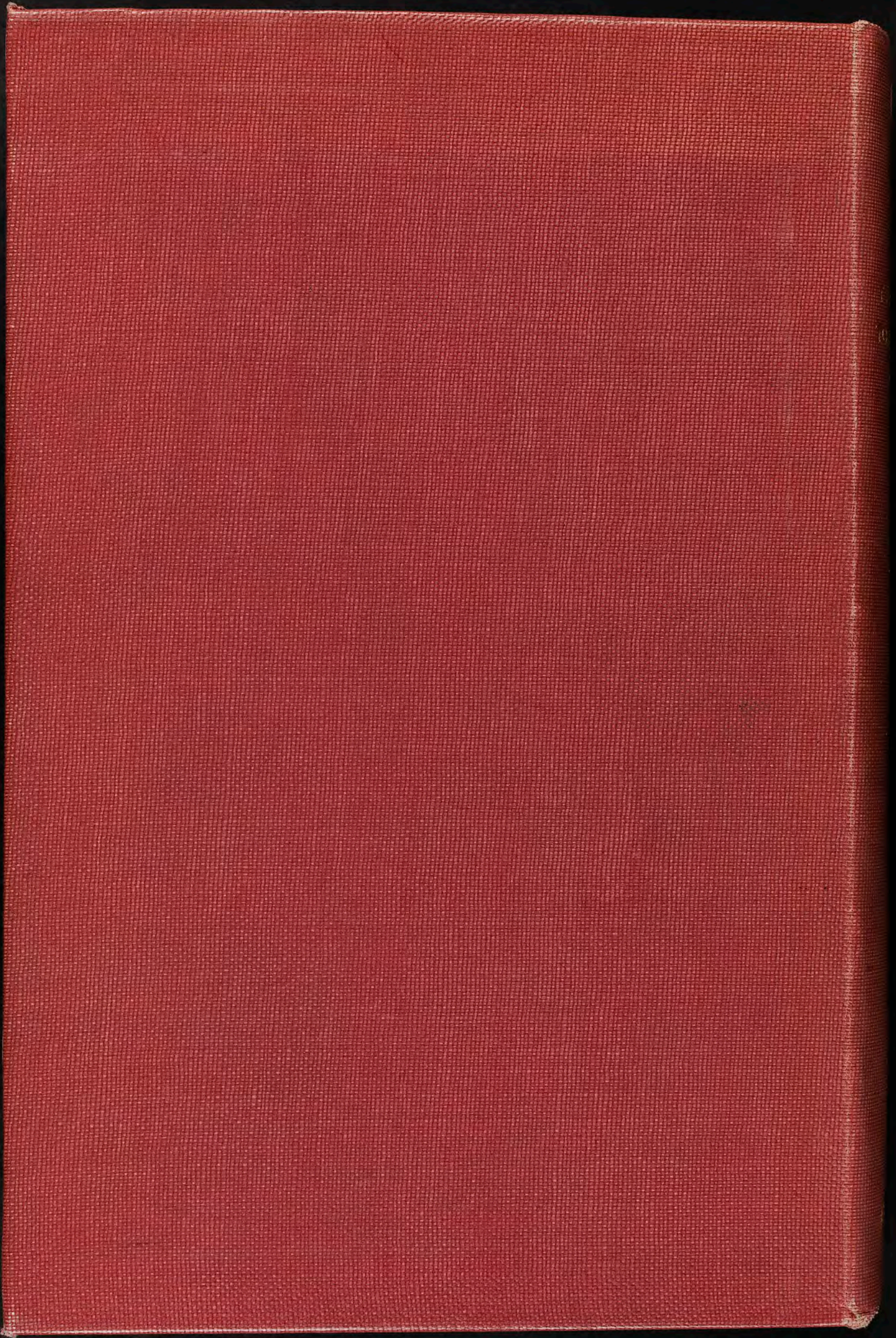
No one who looks at the marsh can believe in its having ever furnished decent communication with the sea; but at the same time its unhealthiness is probably mythical. We saw no signs of disease in Jenidjeh, and felt no bad effects from our stay there. It is accordingly not for the port or canal that an archæologist should search, but for the city itself in the neighbourhood of Alaklisi. The object of our visit was to estimate the possible success of such research, and we were compelled to admit that it was by no means assured. The site is so vast, the indications are so slight, and the difficulties of procuring labour and obtaining security would be very great in existing circumstances. Add to this that the whole site is under cultivation, and the proprietors must be bought out at a considerable cost from their fertile fields. If excavation be anywhere undertaken, it must be in the neighbourhood of the track which leads from Alaklisi across the main road, and which is marked by the two broken Doric columns aforesaid. The difficulties once overcome, much ought to be found, for neither Alaklisi nor Jenidjeh have stolen very much; the city wall seems mainly to have been quarried for the latter. An uninteresting, stifling, dirty place is this successor of Pella, in whose *khan* we slept in despite of noisy soldiers (collected there with a view to coming troubles on the frontier) and obtrusive entomological specimens. Far more interesting in many ways is the Bulgarian village of Alaklisi on the other side of the old site, with its barbarian population from whom we bought various relics of

Pella, including some eighty coins, for about five shillings sterling. Jenidjeh is full of refugees from Bulgaria, living in very holes of the earth, though, we were told, of good position in their own country. A wild-looking lot is that one meets between the Vardah and Jenidjeh, each sullen man sitting sideways on his mule or donkey, armed to the teeth, and riding silently on in Indian file. The customary salutations to the passing traveller seem little in vogue here, and altogether one hardly covets a more intimate acquaintance. The strangest group that we passed consisted of five dancing bears of all ages, sleeping peacefully in the sun by the side of their snoring masters! Animal life was further represented by numbers of buffaloes, used for draught, countless coneys or lemurs, cranes and herons in the marshes, and storks on trees and chimneys. Near the fountain of Pella an eagle has also taken possession of a tree, but he sailed away unscathed from an attack with our only available weapon of long range, a Martini rifle.

But whatever the defects of Pella as a site, whatever the dulness and deadness of its marshes, one need only lift one's eyes to the glorious mountain ring encircling it in a half-moon from the superb Olympus to the long white-capped blue line running down in front of Cavalla. It was worth the journey to stand in the centre of that gorgeous arc, even had the site of Pella no other interest; and we left the solitary plateau, if with subdued hopes of resuscitating the city of Philip, at least with an understanding of the motives of its foundation.

D. G. HOGARTH.

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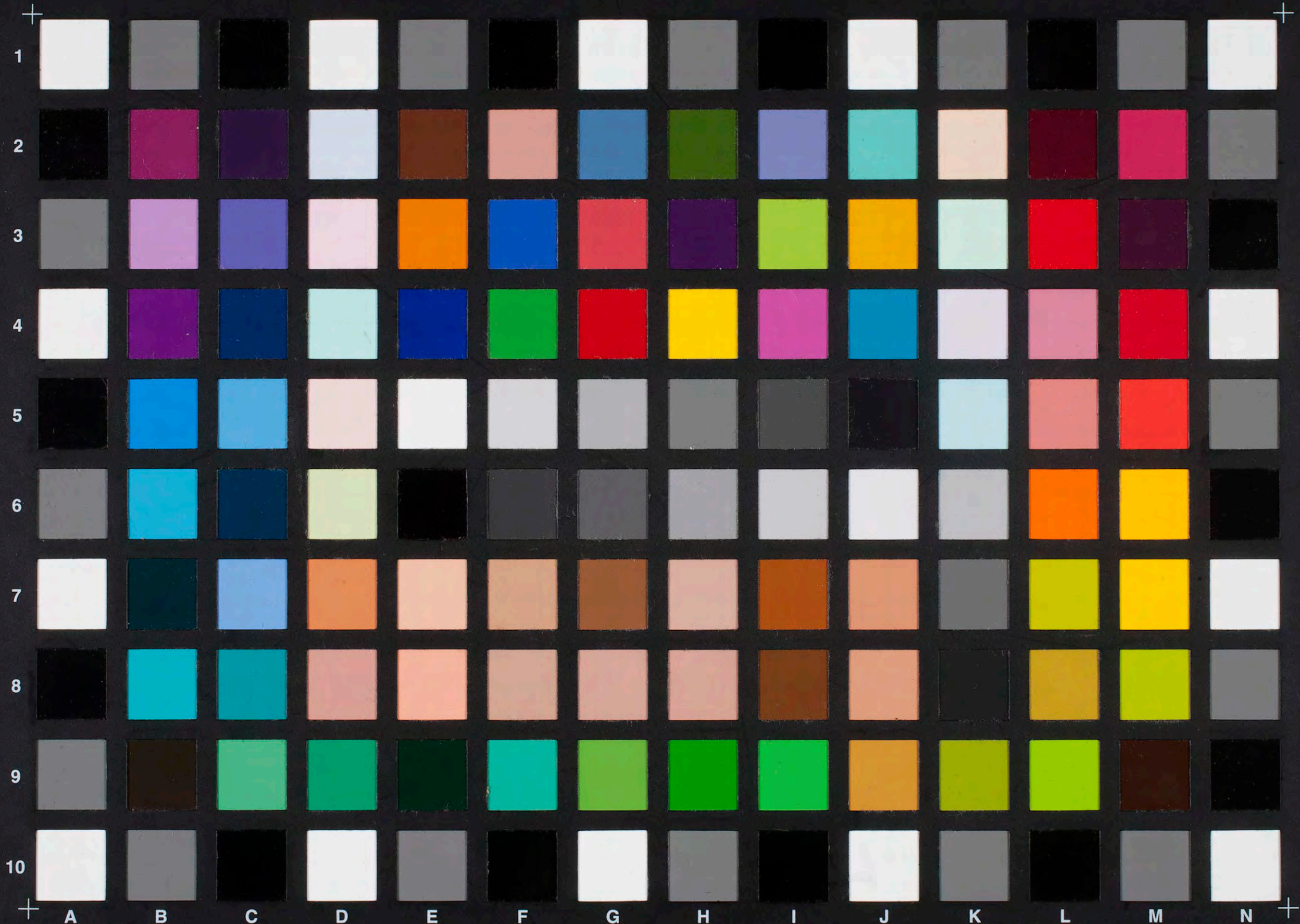


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