



OMAHA COMMERCIAL MISSIONARIES WHO RECENTLY INVADED IOWA, ALONG THE ROCK ISLAND LINES.—Photo by Stigleman Studio, Council Bluffs.

Ragusa, Unconquered Foe of the Turk

KAGUSA?" said the man who was listening to the traveler in out-of-the-way places. "Where is it?" The traveler told him it was a Dalmatian seaport on the Adriatic.

"Well?" queried the man. In that "well" was summed up what the world at large today knows of the once famous little republic that was the Turk's one unconquered foe when the terrible Mohammedan invader overrun southern Europe.

But the twentieth century descendants of the handful of men who baffled for years, both in battle and diplomacy, the outnumbering hordes of onswearing Turks are perhaps prouder of this glory of their ancestors than of the fact that their fathers owned and sailed the town gave its name to the famed argosies of old. Their sentiment is that of one of their countrypersons of state:

"We are an exceedingly proud people. We have a right to be. We are in the very heart of the region south of Venice and east of the Adriatic that, since the coming of the Turk, has been an almost continuous battleground between Christian and Mussulman. Our Slavonic legends are full of bloody battles and heroic deeds. Few localities there are south of German Austria that have not been under Turkish rule at some time or other. But we—a more handful of men, even in our palmiest days—have never been under Mussulman rule. The Turk has never entered our gates except as a peaceful merchant. He has not left his impress upon us except in the matter of dress, and that we got second hand from the people about us. The Turk? Let us oppose him in Macedonia, and he will run from Ragusians."

Let the infrequent tourist within the gates of this once famous town listen long enough to a native, and he will hear many interesting things. He will be told that Ragusa for over 2,000 years was an independent republic, with a government similar to that which existed in ancient Sparta at the time of the Persian invasion. He will learn that Ragusa was the gateway of the Orient's trade with the Occident, and that its little rock-bound harbor was filled with fleets of argosies for centuries. He will hear how the Turk laid covetous eyes on the rich port, and struggled for its possession, all in vain; how once it was besieged for fifteen months by Saracens from the sea and Turks from the land, all in vain. In short, the eulogist of the deeds of his fathers will continue relating historical facts until the listener tires of how Turkish commander after commander and envoy after envoy met with discomfiture at the hands of the Ragusians of old; and when he does end, it will be with a proud flourish and a triumphant note:

"Ragusa, mark you, has never been conquered by the infidels."

The traveler, the while he listens, cannot help thinking of the contrast—the prosperous Ragusa of the time of the Crusades and several centuries after, the first port of Christendom and of the argosies; the Ragusa of today, dwindled

from 70,000 to 7,000 souls, a port into which only deckless coasters put with any regularity and from which scarcely a dollar's worth of merchandise is shipped to the markets of the west. The reflection of former glories is seen everywhere in this mountain and seaport town of a race, who, though never a warlike people, and given more to commerce than to the sword, would not and did not bend to the yoke of the Turk when seemingly more powerful communities about them succumbed before the onslaughts of the invader.

The reflection of former deeds has been resting on Ragusa since the days of the Armada, when the Ragusians turned many of their argosies into ships of the line, and joined fortunes with the Spaniard. Swiftly after that defeat, trade swerved to Venice; the argosies dwindled and crumbled; plagues swept the republic; earthquakes tumbled the town about the heads of the inhabitants; it became involved in the Napoleonic wars; Russia besieged it; the French took it; and finally, on Napoleon's downfall, it passed into the hands of Austria with the rest of Dalmatia, and ceased forever to be an independent power.

But now this little city, whose wily diplomatists and fortifications, which are still strong, saw to it that the Turks never entered its gates except as drivers of caravans, loaded with the precious products of the Orient, is arousing itself from its long lethargy. Along with the introduction of western dress by traveled Ragusians among their turbaned and killed fellow townsmen, the big, muscular, dark-skinned and fair-eyed descendants of old Romans, old Greeks and Slavs, have caught the modern commercial spirit. They are endeavoring to revive, in part at least, some of their former supremacy on the seas.

Five years ago a company of Ragusian merchants was formed with the express purpose of sending out modern argosies. They would have a line of ships belonging to that port that would bring the name of Ragusa once more before the commercial world. So the president of the company went to England to buy a big steamer, taking with him a captain and mate to officer the ship back. All Ragusa waited for months ahead, anxious that the return of the first modern argosy should be received with a memorial welcome.

The president fixed his choice on the old Liverpool steamer, known under the British flag as Lord Napier. It was big—over 4,000 tons—but that was the best that could be said of it. For two years it had been laid up on the mud flats of the River Tyne, condemned as unseaworthy by British maritime laws.

A crew was picked up in Newcastle-on-Tyne. The sailors consisted of one American, a Spaniard, a Brazilian, a Russian and a Turk. The firemen were Swedish, Italian, Austrian, Argentinian and German. The cabin boy was Scotch. With this motley crew, the new argosy, renamed Balkan, left England, its rusty engines protesting at every revolution. The old, worn

sails were pulled out of the lockers and attempts were made to set them, but a puff of wind snuffed them as though they had been spider webs. Occasionally the engines stopped to rest, the steering gear refused to work and Balkan's course was like that of a drunken snake. The boats creaked and split open as they swung in the davits. The masts tossed back and forth from want of proper support. The sailors growled and cursed their officers openly for bringing them out on such an unseaworthy tub. Thus did the first of the modern argosies start for home.

The old, battered Balkan might have staggered to its new home without mishap, but it had yet to cross the Bay of Biscay, where many better vessels than it have floundered.

On the third night out a storm arose and tossed the old steamer about. Big seas washed over its decks. The deck seams had not been pitched for years, so the water entered freely and began to fill the hold, laden, not like the argosies of old, with Turkish and Indian silks, spices and fruits, but with English coal.

The crew attempted to set the steam pumps going, but they refused to work. The water rose, put out the furnaces and the engines stopped. Then all hands set to the task of bailing out with buckets, forming a chain up the engine-room companion. Thus they labored for two days, resting little and sleeping none at all. It was a fight for life, in which even the captain's daughter was obliged to take part.

On the third day the storm abated, and the crew gained on the rising waters in the hold. Then they rested—rested one whole day, lying almost senseless about the deck, while the old ship rolled aimlessly in the subsiding seas.

Finally the men were able to resume their labors, the pumps were put in order, wreckage cleared away, the furnaces rekindled and the engines again started going. Balkan resumed its course.

Seven days later a crowd of citizens of Ragusa stood watching the sea from the walls of the town. News had reached them by telegraph that their argosy would come that morning. When the sun rose, the turbaned and gaily-robed throngs on the stone quays, the roofs of the citadel and the adjacent cliffs made out the incoming steamer. It limped into the harbor, the first steamship to put in there in many a year. Intermingling with the enthusiastic cheers of the multitudes ashore the new argosy's anchor cable rattled through its hawse pipes. The little harbor, which in early days had sheltered fleets, was scarcely large enough for the big steamer to swing in.

The crew aboard caught the enthusiasm of the masses ashore, who had planned such a welcome as was given to the argosies of old. Flags and banners flew to all the masts, cannons were fired and the harbor echoed the cheers of sailors and populace in turn. The bells of the ancient monastery on the rocky ledge jutting out into the sea clanged a wild chorus of metallic peals and the old abbot, in white cassock, blessed them all from the walls of the monastery.

Soon the harbor was dotted with small boats covered with colored awnings and loaded with stalwart men and exceptionally pretty women of the Spanish blonde type, with golden hair, blue eyes and creamy brown skins, all going out to obtain a closer view of the big steamer, the first many had seen. The foreign sailors, few of whom had ever heard of Ragusa before shipping, answered every cheer from the rails.

That day a great celebration was held aboard the old Balkan. Wine, fruits, music and flowers were brought aboard by the prettiest girls of the town, who afterward danced on the deck with the sailors. The men who had safely navigated the ship home were as highly honored and as much feted as were the ancient mariners of the middle ages.

In the evening a ball was given, to which came all the city officials, sons of the old aristocracy that governed 100 years ago. The granddaughter of the last rector, who was elected monthly to govern the town when Ragusa was a republic, and whose power Napoleon crushed, danced with a common sailor. Each member of that crew, confirmed vagabonds, most of them, will ever remember when he came to Ragusa on the first of its new argosies.

Since then the same firm that bought Balkan has added several more steamers to its fleet. The old Balkan still steams the Mediterranean, nosing into all sorts of out-of-the-way ports with odd cargoes. Its official flag is the Austrian, but its house flag is the little old banner of ancient Ragusa. It has been much repaired and tinkered with, but it is only a question of a few more years before it, too, will join that old fleet of the past, the ancient argosies.

But at present the Ragusians are extremely proud of it—almost as proud as they are in their knowledge that in all that region which the Turk once overran they are his one unconquered foe.

ALBERT SONNICHSEN.

Pointed Paragraphs

Divorce pulls the feathers from the wings of love.

Although macaroni is hollow it is said to be a solid food.

Some men seem to believe that money was only made to make.

Some men waste a dollar's worth of time trying to save 5 cents.

Fortunate is the man who can give a good bank account of himself.

If a woman hesitates it must be owing to an impediment in her speech.

The question of precedence in this country is merely a question of hustle.

Women love men for what they are, and men love women for what they think they are.

Even an amateur organist can play a wedding march that is entirely satisfactory to the girl in the case.

Remorse is like a wooden leg; it helps a man on his way, but he can see where he'd be happier without it.—Chicago News.