

**EVENINGS AT ANTIOCH:  
WITH SKETCHES  
OF SYRIAN LIFE**

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Evenings at Antioch: With Sketches of Syrian Life by F. A. Neale

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**F. A. NEALE**

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## EVENINGS AT ANTIOCH.

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WITH

SKETCHES

OF

## SYRIAN LIFE.

BY

F. A. NEALE, ESQ.,

*Author of "Eight Years in Syria," and for some time attached to the Consular  
Service in that country.*

LONDON:

LONDON:  
EYRE AND WILLIAMS, 19, BOUVERIE ST., FLEET ST

1854.

W.T.

TO

SIMON ROOD PITTARD, ESQ.,

*Associate of King's College, London.*

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MY DEAR DOCTOR,

To your kind attention and skill, under Divine Providence, I am indebted for being enabled to complete the following work; and, as a humble test of my gratitude, I pray you accept of its dedication. No man can testify better than myself how well and how deserved is the fame you have acquired as an eminent physician; and though in these modern days of civilisation and advancement in every art, there are many men who are ornaments to your noble profession, few, I believe, can combine all the requisites you possess; for, at the same time that you administer relief to the ills of flesh, you possess the happy knack of keeping the mind amused, and of recalling stray thoughts from the gloomy regions where sickness is wont to make them apt to wander, and fixing them upon subjects amusing and in-

Probatum

structive, gleaned from your storehouse of knowledge. In the scientific world you are well-known and appreciated as an author, but even the greatest minds must bend occasionally and seek relaxation. Whenever this be the case, travel with me through the pages of this work into Antioch, and I trust your journeyings may be recompensed by the amusement and instruction I have endeavoured therein to combine.

I remain,

My dear Doctor,

Yours ever sincerely,

THE AUTHOR.

*London, April, 1854.*



## PREFACE.

IN the "Evenings at Antioch" I have endeavoured to render the reader familiar with the every-day occurrences of life in that ancient and delightful city. My abode there was under peculiar circumstances, and I enjoyed privileges such as are seldom accorded to European residents; for I was master of the languages of the country, I held a certain position in society, and, above all, I am happy to think, I was above that vain-glorying pride which is the foible of many of my countrymen, and which, consequently, presents an insuperable stumbling-block to their acquirement of such knowledge of the people, their habits and customs, as can be only obtained by mixing familiarly with them, and, by unassuming kindness, banishing that restraint which is natural amongst a humble people, who have ever been accustomed to the rod of the oppressor, and who have been from infancy taught to regard European residents and travellers in Syria in the light of so many Ayans and Effendis, accustomed in their own country to rule with a rod of iron over peasantry subject to the same miseries as are imposed by

their yoke. Now, to disabuse this erroneous impression was always my object; and at first I had many obstacles and prejudices to overcome before I could gain the implicit confidence of the native Syrians around me. Ever suspicious of the intrigues of Jesuits, they at first shunned me, under the idea that I was a missionary sent out to convert them. This opinion, however, I successfully combated, for my great partiality to riding and shooting soon convinced them that I was no priest; for, in addition to the indispensable beard, they imagine that all priests in the world, like their own, eschew the innocent recreations I have alluded to. By small degrees, however, I weaned them from their prejudices. I never hesitated to sit down and partake of their frugal evening repast, whenever chance carried me past their doors at the stated hours for meals, and when the invariable *fadthal*, or "Pray, join us," echoed on all sides. It was not likely that I, who had eaten (and amazingly relished it, too) curry and rice with palkee-bearers in the Wynard jungle, fishing up the rice like the best amongst them, should hesitate to dip into the same bowl with these Antiochians, fellow Christians or Turks. Besides which, I found them a step advanced in civilisation to the natives of India; for, though spoons are still a rarity, the thin bread of the country forms a capital substitute, and they, in common

with all Orientals, are extremely punctilious and scrupulous in their ablutions. Then, again, whenever any of them chanced to drop in when I was at dinner, or breakfast, or tea, I always made them sit down *à la Franca*, and eat with spoon and knife and fork, all which they managed amazingly well—only I never could convince them that tea or beer were suitable drinks for human beings. It was worth a Jew's eye to see the wry faces they made, and hear their exclamations, when for the first time in their lives they tasted either of these, to them, abominable beverages. Gradually the ice of formality thawed—fear disappeared—friendship, and, I trust, in many instances real heartfelt esteem, sprung up—long-practised prejudices were waived in my favour, and at my request.

At the houses of the Christians and Ansairiis I was welcome as welcome could be, and the Turks strove to out-rival each other in their hospitality with the former. The women mingled and conversed familiarly with me, and many a game of forfeits have I taught them to play; the very idea of which would have been scouted at, had they not been introduced at propitious moments. So time sped on, and I was reckoned as one of them, admitted at all hours, and became the confidant of all their secret sorrows or joy. Then, as far as in me lay, I tried to benefit the poor, by such medical aid