

THE FAVOURITE SULTANA.

(Translated from the French of Victor Hugo.)

Some gentle victims let me save,
Fair Jewess, from thy ban!
Oh! cease so many lives to crave;
Why must his axe the headman wave
If thou but wave thy fan!

Away with frowns, young mistress mine:
My hand of beauty spare!
Queen and Sultana, power is thine,
Show mercy, nor to death consign,
Each night, some rival fair.

Thou comest, at that thought of woe,
All loving to my knee,
And ever at the feast I know,
When thy fond glances tender grow,
Those looks some death decree.

Soft are thy tones, but jealousy
Within thy bosom glows;
With thee no other spouse can vie,
Then, wherefore must each blossom die
To please one envious rose!

Thine am I: heed not, in my arms
When clasped thy beauty lies,
That, while one dame each to-morrow,
A hundred diamonds guard their charms
For me with burning sighs.

Leave them within their chambers lone
For half thy bliss to pine—
Let them, like waves, pass by, unknown—
Thine is my sceptre, thine my throne—
My very life is thine!

For thee with slaves my Empire teems,
For thee from cut the deep
Stemboat with spires unnumbered gleams,
And, cradled on the billow, seems
Some mighty fleet asleep.

For thee my Spahis' splendid show
To battle swiftly pours
One long-drawn, crimson-turbaned row,
Each of his mate's neck bending low,
Like sea-man at his oars.

Erzeroum, for high ways far renowned,
Bassora, Cyprus famed,
Fey, where rich golden dust is found,
Moult, where merchant-kings abound,
These are thy dower proclaimed.

Thine, too, is Smyrna, that the deep
Doubt fringes with silvery foam:
The Ganget's flood, where widows weep,
And Danube's five swift streams that leap
Down to their ocean home.

Do Davaour's pale lilies raise
Thine ire, or Grecian child?
Or negro girl, with eyes ablaze,
Who instinct, tigress-like, obeys,
And loves with frenzy wild!

Deem'st thou for ebony breast I care,
Or forehead white as day?
Thy charms are neither dark nor fair,
But still, methinks, some sunbeam rare
Hath gild thee with its ray.

No longer, then, the tempest call
Upon these blossoms here:
Enjoy in peace thy triumphs all,
But claim not that a head should fall
With every falling tear.

Beneath cool plane-trees, watch the wave
That Zephyr gently curls—
In baths of sweetest perfumes lave—
A Sultan must Sultanas have,
The ataghan, its pearls!

Montreal.

GEO. MURRAY.

LOIS: A SKETCH.

CHAPTER III.

"PASSAVANT LE MEILLOR."

—Old French War-Cry.

January has given place to June; instead of frost and snow, and bare branches overhead, a mid-summer sun is shining strong and bright, and the trees that grow around Kolver are green with the greenness of early summer. There is summer everywhere; in the joyous song of birds, in many colours of the gay rose that enrich the garden; and within the dark eyes and on the soft cheeks of Lois Dering, it seems to have also found an abiding-place.

She was standing by the open window of her husband's study, looking over the rich lawn to where the roses show beyond; and as she stands there in her clinging white dress, that is unrelieved by any colour, her lips curved into a happy smile, which is reflected in her sweet eyes, it is hard to recognize the girl with great tragic eyes who said "good-bye" to Robert Moreton some eight months ago.

"Lois."

At the sound of her husband's voice she turned her head.

"That," he said, holding out an envelope, "means, I suppose, that they have come home." The smile faded slowly, entirely away, as she took it; but her husband's eyes were bent upon letters, which had just arrived, so perhaps he did not observe it. Did not observe how the colour also faded away, and the shadow crept stealthily back into the sweet eyes.

But she said nothing, only opened the envelope, and drew forth from it a card gaily monogrammed, which requested the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Dering at a ball to be held a fortnight hence at Siston Manor.

She looked at it a moment, as if she could not comprehend its significance, and then in silence crossing to Sydney's side, laid it down on the table.

He took it up, and whilst reading it, held the hand that had placed it there, imprisoned in his; but he did not glance up at the face above him, only said gently, "I think we shall have to go, Lois, though we are not ball-going people."

Unfortunately, even we," with a smile, "have to consider the world sometimes."

Nothing more was said then or afterwards on the subject, and the dreaded day came round in due course, as days have a habit of doing, without respect to our feelings.

But in that intervening fortnight the shadow that had been banished crept back, and took up its abode in Lois' eyes; the pathetic droop returned to the sweet mouth.

Once more Sydney Dering might have observed, had he been an observant man, how, whenever he looked up from his writing, the slight figure of his wife was seated on a low stool at his feet, or couched in an easy-chair by his open window, looking abroad with that far-seeing gaze that sees nothing.

Once more, whenever he went abroad, he found a small hand in his, heard a low voice beg to be allowed to go with him.

For, "if," was the unspoken dread deep down in Lois' heart—"if she should come over here, and find me alone again,—or, worse still, if he should come!"

And then she would rise from the piano, or her painting, or whatever was the occupation of the moment, and hasten down the passage with quick, nervous feet, to that room that she felt represented, as far as she was concerned, safety,—to that one whom she had never known unwilling, or unready to receive her.

"Besides the feeling of protection, it is a comfort that he is so absent,—that he notices nothing; does not observe when I am restless and unhappy, or when I am quiet and content, which is a rest," with a sigh, "because I need not even think how I am looking, or what I am saying, when I am with him. His mind is in his books; but I," with a quick, proud smile, "have his heart. Ah," clasping her hands together, "if I were to lose it!"

That great hall of Siston was gleaming with lights; men and women talking, flirting, dancing, quarrelling, were passing to and fro. Mrs. Moreton, resplendent in amber satin, was the admired of every one. Beauty such as hers could not fail to attract attention. But it did not touch the heart in the way that Lois Dering's did, for all that; and if votes had been taken on the subject, there would have been many given to the tall slender woman in trailing white satin,—the woman with the small dark head and dreamy eyes, who moved about with her hand on her husband's arm.

"You will give me a dance?" questioned Robert Moreton, almost eagerly,—an older Robert than we saw eight months ago, not precisely a happy-looking bridegroom; and Lois, at his words, shrank closer to her husband's side, and began some faltering excuse.

But Sydney interposed. "You must dance a little," he said, with a smile, "or people will say I am preventing you. And you should begin, for you know we are not going to stay very late. I am lazy," he went on, turning to Robert, "and not a ball-going man, as I dare say you may remember; so my wife is going to be obedient, and, in consideration of the long drive home, she has promised to leave early."

Mr. Moreton made no reply, beyond a muttered "Balls were not much in his line either," but offered his arm, which Lois took, and almost before she was aware of what she was doing, she found herself walking down the room with Robert, for the first time able to speak to him without fear of listeners, since that terrible eve of his marriage six months ago.

The time was in both their minds. In his, with the remembrance of that question he had asked, the answer to which in common loyalty he had not pressed. The drooping figure, the firelit room, the weeping woman, all were present before him now, and forbade all attempts on his part of common-place ball-room conversation.

With her there was but one remembrance,—that of the bitter words she had heard that night, the threat that had so terrified her; and involuntarily she raised her eyes and glanced round the room in search of the one whom it was her first thought to seek in time of trouble or perplexity. Yes, there he was, standing quite close beside her, though not apparently watching her, and across her troubled heart came a sensation of relief.

And with that sensation of relief she felt capable of thinking of some slight conventional phrase wherewith to break the silence which had hitherto sheltered her; and even as she was about to say it, through all the noise about her, was clearly borne to her ears a strange voice which said, as if in reply to a previous question: "Yes, he was awfully in love with her,—he only married the other for her money."

"And she?"

Something in the significance of the words arrested Lois' attention,—something in the words themselves helped her to a knowledge of whom they were speaking, and with a quick, terrified movement she raised her eyes to her husband's face, even as the voice made answer: "Married Dering for his."

Their eyes met, for he was watching her; and she strove to read in his if he had also heard, but there was no sign if it were so. With a sudden resolve, which blinded her to what others might think or say, "Let me go to him, Mr. Moreton," she faltered; and before Robert had realized what she meant, she was by Sydney's side.

"Ah, no, no!" she cried, her words coming out with something like a sob. And then, restraining herself with an effort, and slipping her arm quietly through his: "Sydney," she said, lifting her head proudly, her eyes flashing, and

a delicate colour rising in her cheeks—"Sydney, would you mind taking a turn round the room with me? I—"

"It is not very amusing for you," he answered gently, "to go to a ball and then to talk to your husband."

"I should like it," she replied softly, laying her other hand on his arm—"just once, please, round the room."

Slowly they did as she asked,—she with her small head lifted, her dark eyes looking into his, and then the music striking up, told them another dance was beginning, and Lois' partner, coming to claim her: "Thank you, Syd," she said in a low voice, with sudden vehemence as she was about to leave him—"Thank you, Syd, so much!" Only Robert Moreton, left partnerless by reason of Lois' sudden flight, perhaps, observed them, but he could not forget the look with which she had left him and turned away with her husband.

"Of course," he muttered, impatiently,— "of course she is fond of him. Did I not tell her so it would be?" half defiantly as if it had been the fact of his telling it that had brought it to pass.

"Moreton has gone, or is going, back to America." The speaker was Mr. Dering, the scene his own breakfast-table, the audience his wife and mother, and the time a month later than the Siston ball.

"Back to America!" exclaimed old Mrs. Dering; "why, they have only just returned from there."

"Not they," corrected Mr. Dering. "Moreton is leaving his wife in England."

At those words Lois raised her eyes quickly, as if about to speak, but she said nothing, and her husband went on: "She—Florence—is going up to Scotland for a month or two, so I asked her if she would care to come here for a few days first."

"When?"

Lois was all eagerness now. "On Monday next; but she will not stay long—only a day or two. She said she would like to see you, mother."

"Ah, Sydney, then you will not be here?"

"No, Lois; I cannot help it. I must go to London as I arranged on Saturday; but I shall only stay as short a time as possible. London is not very tempting at this time of year."

"No," said Lois, kneeling by his side, and speaking more earnestly than the occasion seemed to warrant, "you must not say that. You must not want to come home because London is dull, but because I am here."

"Of course," he answered, throwing his arms about her, and raising her to her feet. "Of course you know how I shall weary till I see you again. The question is rather—No, no," interrupting himself, "we will not ask any questions, but just enjoy the time that is left to us. Let us go the organ; I have something I should like you to hear."

"Good-bye, dear wife," Mr. Dering was just starting for London, and Lois was hovering about him, saying and hearing last words, and for once Sydney seemed to have emerged out of his ordinary quiet self, and to be more disturbed than there seemed occasion for. "I wish you were coming with me. We have never been separated yet since we were married, have we? Take great care of yourself,—and do not fret or worry about anything. Will you promise?"

"Yes."

"And if you should really want me, you will send for me at once, will you not—to Gresham Place?"

"Yes. Ah, Syd," with sudden passion, "how good you are to me! You will be always kind to me!" imploringly.

"You are my wife, Lois," he said gently, drawing her towards him; "my dear wife. Good-bye, and God bless you."

He had kissed her and gone, but ere reaching the door he came once more to her side.

"Lois," stooping his head, and speaking very low, but more passionately than she had ever heard him speak before, "would you say, 'Dear Syd, I love you'?"

All in a second the colour died slowly away out of Lois' face. A mingling of utter surprise and many other feelings kept her silent, and in that second's space the glow faded out of Mr. Dering's face, leaving just the kind, gentle look he knew so well.

"Of course," she half stammered; but Sydney's voice cut her sentence in two.

"What nonsense I am talking!" he said. "Words are very unsatisfactory things,—deeds are much better;" and before the colour had returned to her cheeks, he was gone.

"Oh, Syd, Syd!" she cried, when she had realized this fact, sinking down on a chair and covering her face with her hands,—"why did I not say it? Oh, dear Syd, the very first thing that you have ever asked me to do!"

She wept inconsolably for some time; and then remembering that after all he was only going for a week, she dried her tears, with a resolve that the very first thing when he returned—"Ah, yes," she said softly to herself, "we shall see then."

But in the meantime Florence Moreton's visit had to take place.

She arrived on the Monday, as she had said—harder, colder, more unloving than ever, at least in Lois' eyes; but then, perhaps, she was hardly a fair judge of Robert Moreton's wife.

The day was got through somehow, Mrs. Moreton showing most clearly that her visit was paid to Mr. Dering's mother, not to his wife.

But Lois bore with everything. "It will not

last long," she thought. "Four more days and he will come home,—two more days and she will go;" for this was Tuesday, and on the following Thursday Mrs. Moreton had announced that it was her intention to depart.

"Where is Mr. Dering staying in town?" she asked at dinner on Wednesday night; and his mother replied, "At 4 Gresham Place." "I shall go and pay him a visit whilst I am in London," she went on. "I daresay I shall find him in, and I particularly want to see him before I go to Scotland."

As she spoke she looked full into Lois' eyes, with calm, insolent triumph.

"He will be glad to see you, Florence," said old Mrs. Dering. "He is very fond of you," with a little smile at the unsmiling beauty by her side.

"Other people," she said, with a little stress on the words, "have rather put me out of his good graces, I fear."

"Impossible."

"So I should have thought," she replied shortly; and there the conversation ended,—all conversation as far as Lois was concerned. Her thoughts came faster and faster. If she could only get a moment alone to collect them in!

At length the dinner was over, and she was at liberty to retire to her own room, and think over what was coming.

"Oh, what is she going to do?" she cried, pressing her hands together. And after a moment: "If she tells him what she told me, what will he think? Ah, he will believe her—I know he will. He is so unobservant,—sees so little of what is going on about him that the doubt will find a place in his heart. And," with sudden passion, "he will remember how I said 'Good-bye' to him,—how I would not say I loved him when he asked me,—and he will never know that—Ah," breaking off suddenly, "I could not bear it! It would kill me."

But rising to her feet, and with an effort calming herself, "I must see her. She shall be forced to say what she is going to do."

With hasty steps she traversed the passages that lay betwixt her room and Mrs. Moreton's, and knocking at the door, was bidden to enter.

Florence looked surprised, though, when she saw who obeyed her voice, but she said nothing, leaving it for her visitor to state the cause of her appearance. There was something in the way she turned her head, shading her eyes with a feather fan all the while from the glow of the lamp—something so calm, so relentless,—that it made Lois feel herself small and pitiable, and in the wrong, as she stood before her. But any certainly was better than this terrible doubt. "What are you going to see my husband for?" she asked, in tones that she could not prevent from trembling, try as she might.

"I am going to see him," replied Florence, crossing her small feet on the stool before her, and turning her head back to the contemplation of the empty fireplace, "to tell him what his wife forgot to tell him when she married him,—that she was in love with Robert Moreton all the time that she was triding with him, merely for the pleasure of preventing him from marrying me,—the girl whom it was always intended he should marry;—but that at last prudence triumphed over love, as in such a case it is very likely it would do,—so she married him for what he could give her,—leaving Robert Moreton to console himself with me. I shall also tell him how I warned his wife," with a little scornful emphasis on the word, "that if she would confine her flirting to the past, I would say nothing about my discoveries."

"Mrs. Moreton," interrupted Lois, "you are a hard woman,—an ill-tempered woman,—and you hate me; still you are truthful. I think; and," clasping her hands, "even if you do believe some of the terrible things you say of me, you would not stoop, surely, to tell a lie, to see how much you can make my husband believe, just for the sake of being revenged on me?"

"I shall tell him," went on Florence, in that same cold, hard voice, utterly heedless of Lois' passionate interruption, "how you came to our ball, talked to my husband, and how, the next morning, he told me—his wife—that England was unbearable to him, and that he should go back to America. I may be very blind, but not quite so blind as not to be able to see the cause and effect there."

"No," as Lois would have interrupted, raising her feather fan slowly, "I do not care to hear your excuses,—you can keep them for your husband. It remains, of course, to be proved yet, whether he will take your word or mine."

"I was going to make no excuses," said Lois quietly, proudly, in the pause that followed. "I should think that I had descended to your level if I banded words with you." And without another syllable she left the room.

But alone in her own apartment her courage gave way. The enemy had not altogether had the worst of it, and Lois' aching heart echoed many of her bitter words.

"Was I doing wrong all the time," she cried, as she paced up and down, "when I was trying so hard to do right? Ah! why did I not tell him all! How I wish now I had! I wish I had had any one to warn me—and I am all alone, quite alone now! If she makes him believe her now, when he is everything to me,—ah, it will kill me! Oh, Syd, Syd, dear Syd! my husband, my only friend! why did you leave me?"

She was crying now, bitter, salt tears, that flowed almost unconsciously, as she paced the room, or paused to look forth at the deepening gloom of night.