

Select Literature.

THE TURKISH SLAVE; OR, THE DUMB DWARF OF CONSTANTINOPLE.

A STORY OF THE EASTERN WORLD. BY LEUTENANT MURRAY.

CHAPTER I.

CONSTANTINOPLE! what a crowd of oriental images throng before the mind's eye at the very mention of this illustrious East. Unlike the other cities of Europe, this gem of the Orient is not most interesting from historical lore, and the records of the past, but it still a vivid and living picture of all that fires the imagination, and delights the eye of the traveller. How peculiar are its people, made up of the quiet Armenian, the crafty, trading Jew, and the haughty Mussulman, with a sprinkling of Arabs from the desert, and slaves from the far East. And all these, with their varied and picturesque costumes, their indolent and dissipated habits, their luxurious mode of living, and their mysterious devotedness to the romantic creed of Mahomet.

Fair and beautiful, too, in itself, is this unequalled emporium of the East, with its hundreds of mosques, capped with golden minarets, rising in lofty and delicate beauty towards the blue vault of Heaven; its seraglio gardens, its closely crowded bazars, its many and luxuriant fountains, its costly bazaars, thronged with the accumulated riches of the East, and above all, its matchless Bosphorus, Golden Horn, and Valley of Sweet Waters—forming a constellation of local beauties and charms, that confound the traveller by their gorgeousness and number. Notary tale has yet recalled the beauties of Constantinople, no imagination exceeded its luxuriant elegance. Here, gentle reader, in this city of Constantinople, this fairest capital of the Mahometans, does our story commence.

The golden light of the western sky was gilding the lofty spires of St. Sophia, as the sun set behind the horizon, when a young horseman dashed down the projecting point of land that makes out from Stamboul towards Asia, known as Seraglio Point. At a signal from the rider, a heavy port was opened, and he rode within the walls that surround the royal grounds and palaces. What a proud home for a monarch was this! When a pain of his eye, cut off from the rest of the city by high walls, flanked by towers and embracing a circuit of a league, crowded with varied and beautiful foliage, dark and lofty cypresses, gilding cupolas, gay balconies, and glittering domes. All these were lit up at this twilight hour by a dreamy haze, by the soft light that came dimly across the silvery sea of Marmora, when the palace gate was opened, and the horseman before referred to passed within the sacred walls of the Seraglio.

The young horseman was evidently a Greek by his dress and bearing, but though he wore no turban of distinction, and bestowed his spirited Arab with a thoughtless yet easy grace, still the haughty guard saluted him profoundly, as he passed them, and dashed up the noble avenues like one accustomed to the luxuriance and beauty about him. His dress was of the picturesque style of his nation, and his tall-cup of crimson velvet, with its heavy tassels of gold, set off to perfection, the raven locks of the warrior. Picture to yourself, a clear, high forehead, large black eyes, with lashes that should have belonged to a female, a classical formation of features, with a mouth almost effeminately beautiful, relieved by the faint line of a dark, silky moustache; add a figure slightly below the ordinary stature, and yet somewhat undeveloped, and you have the likeness of the young Greek, as he rode within the precincts of the sultan's palace.

The high-bred charger stood as though he had been revived to the spot, when his rider, alighting, tossed the rein loose over his arching neck, pausing for a moment, to smooth with his hand the soft gloss of the beautiful animal's hide. Those who have never seen a true Arabian horse, can hardly conceive the beauty of such an animal—almost human in instinct, affectionate and docile as a child, proud and graceful in action, and as fleet as the wind. The Turk may like a favorite wife, but he loves his horse; he tends him constantly, feeds him with his own hands, talks to him, fondles him, lies by his side, or mounting him, skins the desert like a bird upon the wing. The finest animal in the world, believe us, is the full-blooded Arabian horse. In his quick, light, bounding action, scarce touching the ground, so proudly he prances—with delicate limbs, small-veined head, and fiery nostrils—a finely-rounded body, trembling with restrained and impatient energy—curving and haughty neck, with a black and flowing mane—who can blame his master for esteeming his Arabian as something almost human, and for loving him as though he were his own flesh and blood? It was thus that the horseman felt as he looked upon the proud animal that had just carried him so bravely through half a dozen leagues over the soft green carpet of the Valley of Sweet Waters, from whence he had just returned.

As the Greek turned to enter the royal hall, he encountered, by the side of the portal, a being which at first glance seemed to be not more than half human. With the body of a man, it was yet so deformed and ugly as to be painful to look upon. A large hump was on its back, throwing the spine most awkwardly away; one limb was much shorter than the other, and the arms were of remarkable length; add to these proportions, a face wrinkled and most singularly small, and a body dwarfed in development, and you have the semblance of the strange creature that stood by the sultan's portal. The only thing about the dwarf that was not repulsive, were his eyes, and these beamed upon the Greek with such a plaintive and gentle look, that a charm seemed to go with them; and he laid his hand kindly upon the poor deformed creature's head.

The dwarf was dumb, but held a cistern rose towards the Greek, which the latter received with tokens of pleasure, and thrust quickly into his bosom, while he bestowed a handful of sweetmeats upon the dwarf, that he had just brought from the bazaars, in the city, and with a gentle pat upon the strangely deformed creature's shoulder, and nodding kindly to him, he went in. The dwarf thrust the sweetmeats underneath into a fold of his dress, but the token of kindness that the Greek had bestowed upon him, was evidently working upon his poor brain, as he rubbed his long skinny hands cheerfully together, and his bright clear eyes followed the receding steps of the new comers. Thus turning away, the dwarf hobbled round a clump of cypress trees, using, at every other step, his hands, as well as his feet, in walking.

The Greek, in the meantime, had entered the palace, receiving a pair of satin slippers at the door, in place of his boots, and now stood in the presence of the Sultan Mahomet, before whom he bowed low, in the style of the East.

address the page, for that was the post that the young Greek filled so near his presence.

"Highness," responded the page, bowing with profound respect.

"Were these Circassians purchased, as I directed, from the market to-day?"

"And the two Corgians that Brumah spoke of as about?"

"And are they in charge of our chief eunuch with the wail?"

"Highness, yes," still asserted the page.

"Did you satisfy the demand of the merchant?"

"Highness, to the uttermost charge," replied the Greek.

"You are a faithful servant, Alik, and my commands necessarily in your keeping."

"Highness, my only duty is to serve you faithfully."

"God is great," uttered the sultan, and nothing his beard but a look of approval, and again resumed the subject of his perfect tobacco, the exhilarating effect of which showed that its component parts, spirit, formed not a small portion.

The page bowed low, and, seeing by his master's expression that he would be left alone, to enjoy the wild dreamy mood induced by the continual exhalation of the favorite drug, passed on a side of the grand hall, and left the Turkish monarch alone.

The young Greek stepped into a deep alcove opening upon a projected balcony, that commanded a lovely view of the surrounding scenery. The alcove was built behind the profusion of satins and Cotton silks that formed the curtains, but throwing back the folds, he rested upon one arm, and looked out upon the lovely prospect afforded by the rising moon, as it poured its mellow light so prodigally along the Bosphorus and the Valley of the Golden Horn. It was enough to make poetry to the soul of an author, and the page seemed to gaze with his very soul, while he hummed an air of his native land. At this moment a step approached him so lightly, and at a moment when he was so much absorbed, that he did not hear it until it stopped by his very side.

"Esmah," exclaimed the page, in accents of undisguised pleasure, as he suddenly sprang to his feet, and contemplated the new comer, the exhibiting the boldest smile in the corner.

"Alik!" responded a soft, silvery voice, from beneath a veil that seemed to lend a loveliness to the wearer's face, by only half concealing it, while the large, dreamy eyes that were bent so tenderly upon the page, told the observer, in language not to be construed, that they were those of a lovely Circassian.

"How are you at liberty at this hour, Esmah?" asked the page, gently.

"In coming from the bath, I hid in the hall of fountains, and came on after the rest had passed into the gates of the harem."

"But they will discover thee, and blame, this conduct, Esmah."

"I have no fear."

"No fear, Esmah?"

"None."

"Suspicion is enough to condemn thee, Esmah. Dost not remember the two Corgians that were drowned in the Bosphorus, within this month, on mere suspicion?"

"True; and a faithful slave was sacrificed at the same time, as a party in the sin."

"As innocent, doubtless, of wrong as ourselves, Esmah!" said the page.

"True, Alik; but they are better off now, said the gentle girl, smiling.

"But they need not fear, Esmah, you would turn the boldest thoughts to love."

Taking the hand of the young and beautiful creature by his side, the page led her still nearer the balcony, and pointed, with inspiration in his look, to the splendid scenery before them. There lay the city, so quiet, that it seemed as if asleep; the moon danced with silvery light upon the star-shaped bay and among the gilded cupolas, while the salted breeze rode there, with their blood-red flags flouncing in the night-breeze. There lay the seven hills of ancient Stamboul, and a hundred gold-tipped minarets, conquering with the light, and the whole course of the Bosphorus, from Marmora to the Black Sea, belted in on either side by imperial palaces, valleys, hills, and mosques! How truly oriental was the picture.

"Beautiful!" whispered Esmah, leaning more closely upon the page's arm, as she gazed delightedly on the scene.

"It beautifies all enchanted to me by sharing them with thee," said the page, fondly.

"You seem never tired of watching this scenery, Alik. How often have I found thee in this very spot, said, looking deep into his soul-like eyes, with her dreamy orbs.

"Dearest, it is our trying place; but you, too, enjoy such a scene as this?"

"Ah, yes, since you have taught me so much, Alik, but I have seen these things from a child, and thought little of them, until seen with thee," said the fair girl, innocently.

"Dear Esmah," he answered, placing both her hands upon his breast; and holding them there, he looked tenderly into her languid and beautiful eyes. "I fear that what little I have taught thee, will serve to render thee more miserable."

"Impossible, Alik!" interrupted Esmah. "How is such a result possible, when I feel every hour that you have opened to me new scenes of enjoyment, that also are mine unshared."

"Nay, dearest, I fear that it may do so, by awakening within thy breast a realizing sense of thy true position. But I have loved thee so well, that I could not but speak out my whole soul to thee," continued the page, pressing still more warmly the soft hands he held in his.

"I have known no happiness unless shared with thee."

"Dear Alik," whispered the maiden, "all you have done is for the best, you could not do wrong with such noble principles to guide, and those which accustom your heart."

"In your kind consideration, Esmah, you make far too much of my poor deserts," said the page, to speak truly of them.

"Dearest! the moment you pressing again more tenderly with the hands he held."

Esmah's eyes were even more eloquent than words! And the page stood there like one entranced, drinking from the depth of their purity, and forgetting all else but her loveliness and how she bore for him. Few such moments may occur in a life time, and he realized that, scarcely wishing to break the soft spell that bound them, by his actions words.

"Mark!" said the page, starting and listening to catch some faint sound of footsteps, that he fancied to have heard approaching the spot where they stood.

To be continued.

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