

AN EASTERN WOMAN.

(From the Swedish of Carl Snoilsky.)

BY NED P. MAH.

'Mid the alleys dense and narrow
Of Arab population,
Where the bathing houses vomit
Their vaporous exhalation,

We see a figure vanishing
More spirit-like than human—
A spectre with a snowy veil—
Just this—an Eastern woman.

Behind the thick and jealous gaze
Two eyes like ovals are glowing:
And, henna stained, a hand appears
Between its textures flowing.

With muffled feet she glides, as though
On secret trout or treason!
The being Islam has denied
The privilege of reason.

An outcast from the busy world;
A prisoner, who must measure
Her life's long days, yet all unused
Waste her heart's hidden treasure.

She is a rose, condemned to be
Endless 'mid budding roses;
An echo, powerful to respond
Whose silence late imposes.

A nightingale, whose melody
May never charm the hearing;
A well-spring, rock-bound at its source
Ne'er above ground appearing.

Son of the East, who at its spring
Hast poisoned life's fair river,
Thou hast thyself thy hearth and home
Made desolate for ever.

Therefore to noble action thou!
Shalt never more awaken
And leave joys of Paradise,
The fairest unpartaken.

Too late, O dreamer of the East
Who in weak ease rejoices,
Around thy couch a chorus hear
Of sad and angry voices:—

In vengeance since you us denied
Souls, thoughts and free opinions
Will we bring forth no free men more,
But rear a race of minions!

A SAFE ANCHORAGE.

"All right, youngster—you can go; but mind—no later than Tuesday, as the *Watchdog's* bound to be in on Wednesday."

The granting of that leave to young Harrison was the worst thing Singleton ever did in his life.

The *Runnymede*, seventeen-gun Corvette, was lying at Port Royal, homeward bound after four years on the North American and West India station; and we were only waiting the arrival of the *Watchdog* with the time-expired men and invalids to top our boom and be off. Such a jolly, happy ship we had been—"as happy as the *Runnymede*" had passed into a proverb. Our skipper, Sir Hugh Seymour, was as smart an officer as could be found in the service—so strict on duty as old "Pincher Fashaw," of Mediterranean renown; but a kinder man and better shipmate never stepped. "Work while you work, my lads, and then dance and skylark," was his motto; and the *Runnymedes*, one and all, bore it out in their practice. "Singleton, the first lieutenant, was a quiet thoughtful man, much liked in the ship; and, as for the rest of the officers, I need only say that, on the whole, perhaps a better set of men could not be found afloat.

My chief friend was the Doctor; but ours was a lifelong friendship. He and my father had been chums at Guy's, and the bond then formed lasted till the death of my dear father ten years before. When this left me almost alone in the world—for I was an only child, and my mother had died in my infancy—Doctor Mostyn seemed to transfer his love for his old friend to me, and watched over and cared for me as if I had been his own son. I had entered the service in the paymaster line; and at this time, at the age of thirty-six, I had six years' seniority as paymaster. When the *Runnymede* was put into commission, and Doctor Mostyn was gazetted to her, I was at home on half-pay; and I left no stone unturned to get my self appointed to the same ship. By great good fortune I succeeded; and we had spent four happy years together since then.

And he loved me none the less that he knew my secret—that the dearest thing in all the world to me was his only child Mary. When she was a wee toddling thing she had been my friend and playfellow, my "little chum;" and later on, though I was fourteen years her senior, she became my confidant and adviser. But I do not think that I was anything else to her except her "brother Douglas;" and, as yet, I had never asked her to hold me in a dearer relationship. When we left in the *Runnymede*, she was only eight; and, by her father's wish, I promised not to ask her to be my wife until we came home. He knew, at least, that she loved no one else, for she had never had a secret from him; and, as the time of our homecoming drew near, I tried to comfort myself as much as possible with this knowledge.

What was she like? Well, what shall I say? She was just a sweet, true English girl, full of fun and life, yet thoughtful beyond her years—not clever, perhaps, but possessing that good, sound common-sense that not all men, and not many women, can lay claim to. Pretty? I do

not think I ever troubled much about that. She was rather tall, slender, brown-haired, gray-eyed, and with such a smile! No, I cannot catalogue my Mary any better than that.

It was just four bells in the first watch, and the Doctor and I were taking a quiet quarter-deck walk before turning in. He seemed strangely sad, and spoke of a presentiment he had that he should never see home again.

"If I could only see my Molly!" he said, with such a sigh. "Four-and-twenty years we've been married, and so many years of it I've been at sea! And now I feel that I shall never see her again."

I tried, but in vain, to reason him out of his fears—nothing would cheer him. We spoke then of Mary; and he told me how happy he would be if he knew that she would become my wife, for that he would gladly and entirely trust her to me.

"Remember when I am gone that I trusted you with all my heart," he said earnestly, throwing his arm over my shoulder as we leant over the side; "always remember that, Douglas."

How often since then have I remembered these words and that night—the calm, still tropical night, the deep, intense blue of the heavens flooded with the light of such a moon as northern latitudes do not know, the faint sweet breeze such a blessed relief from the day's interminable sunshine, with the sky like brass and the sea like molten lead! The water lay like a lake in the moonlight, the surface broken only into a momentary ripple by the sudden leap of some huge fish, or the black fin of some prowling shark.

Now and then came faintly the splash of oars from a distant boat, the bark of a dog, a far shout from some Port Royal negro hut, or the musical echo of the ships' bells. In the distance, to the left, the white houses of Kingston, deep in their coco-palms, crept up towards the feet of the great Blue Mountains, their placid breezy peaks standing like eternal sentries over the seething little world beneath them. To the right lay the long, low, palm-fringed shore of Port Royal; and right ahead gleamed the huge white hulk of the grand old *Aboukir*, so long the first thing to greet and the last to bid farewell to one on approaching or leaving Jamaica.

I had spent many happy days on the beautiful island, and had met with much kindness among its hospitable people—though my experiences were not exactly those of Tom Cringle; for the old times are changed, and the old planters gone, and the Jamaican of to-day belongs to a generation which knows not Aaron Bang or Mr. Wagtail. In ordinary circumstances I should have been very sorry to say good-bye to the place; but now my only desire was to get home and see Mary.

So once more I tried to cheer up the dear old Doctor; but he only smiled sadly and shook his head. I began to feel quite dismal myself; and, when five bells struck, I was glad to follow him below, and turn in, hoping that a good night's rest would restore him to his usual spirits.

The next day Harrison came back from Spanish Town, where he had been staying with an uncle he had there, a parson. He had enjoyed his holiday immensely, and had got a passage back to Port Royal in a Mexican barque bound to San Domingo. He had bought for a mere song, from the captain, a splendid large Guayquil grass hammock—a possession which he had long coveted—and he displayed it with pardonable gratification. It was a first rate hammock certainly, and honestly worth twenty-five dollars; and how he had got it for three I could not understand; and then, though afterwards unfortunately the reason became only too clear.

Wednesday passed, and we were all in readiness to weigh anchor as soon as the *Watchdog* should arrive. The Admiral had inspected us, and had complimented Sir Hugh upon the state of the ship and the ship's company, even going so far as to say that we were a pattern to the station. Thursday came, but still no *Watchdog*; and the skipper began to get impatient. After luncheon he sent to say that he was going to the *Aboukir*, and then on to Kingston, and wished me to accompany him. When I was ready, as I had a quarter of an hour to spare, I went to the Doctor's cabin to see if there was anything he wished me to do for him ashore. While we were talking, there was a knock; and the gun-room steward appeared.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but would you go to Mr. Harrison? He looked very bad while I was laying dinner, but now he's worse; and Mr. Fox told me to let you know." Mr. Fox was the senior sub-lieutenant.

The Doctor was off like a shot, and only returned just as I was going.

"Well, what's up?"

"I can't tell for an hour or two. I may be mistaken; but I'm afraid it looks uncommonly like—"

"Not yellow fever?" He nodded.

"But not a word, mind! It may be only liver, or fever, or ague. We mustn't alarm any one unnecessarily. Off you go—there's the gig piped away!"

As I hurried down the gangway and took my seat, I felt so completely capsize that when the skipper came over the side I hardly dared look at him, for fear my face should betray my agitation.

Was this horrid scourge to break out among us on the very eve of our departure for home? Was this to be the end of our jolly, happy cruise? Had the Doctor's foreboding pointed to this? I felt for a few minutes sick with fear—not for myself, for once at Rio I had been so nearly dead

from the fever that I believed myself almost proof now against any amount of it; but I knew too well what it is when it breaks out in a crowded ship in the West Indies.

Sir Hugh soon finished his business on board the *Aboukir*, and then we made at once for Kingston. There was hardly a soul about in town. It was one of those unbearably stifling afternoons when no one but "a dog or a naval officer" would show his nose out of doors if he could help it. But up and down hot, dusty Harbour Street hot, dusty Hanover Street, stifling King Street and George Street, dodged the skipper—out of the Post Office into the Custom House, and then back again to the Royal Mail office, and I after him; and he ferreted out his men so diligently—they must have blessed him, for every one seemed to be roused up from his siesta—that at last he got our business over. It was near sundown when at last we found ourselves on our way back; and my fears, which had lain dormant during the busy afternoon, had time to revive as I sat quietly by the side of the skipper, who was knitting his brows over a bundle of official papers. We had to leave some letters at the *Aboukir* for the secretary; and, as we pulled off for the *Runnymede*, the brief tropical twilight was fast darkening. Sir Hugh, having finished his work, began talking cheerily, when his keen eyes caught sight of an advancing boat.

"What can the Doctor be doing in the cutter at this time of night? I hope nothing's amiss."

Ah, I knew what was coming! As the two boats approached each other, we saw the Doctor in the stern sheets bending over a cot; and the poor fever-stricken wretch it contained was dear little Harrison.

"Cutter there!"—from the skipper.

"Sir!"—from the midshipman of the boat.

"Whom have you there, Mr. Compton?"

"Mr. Harrison, sir, sick with yellow-fever."

"Tell Doctor Mostyn to come to me at once on his return, with his report."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Give way!"—and off we shot again.

Not a muscle of Sir Hugh's face moved; but no human power could prevent the sudden pallor of his cheeks, as I heard him say softly to himself, "His poor mother!"—for Harrison was the only child of a widowed mother, herself a distant relative of the skipper's, and he had always taken more than ordinary interest in the lad. I knew well the thoughts that were passing through his mind. He told me afterwards that he believed he had then looked his last upon the boy; and so did I. But I may say here that, bad as he was, he managed to pull through; and months afterwards I met him on Southsea Common, leaning on his mother's arm, looking like a ghost. In time he got quite well again, and is now one of the most promising men in the service.

That was the beginning of a terrible time for us. We lost, by death alone, nineteen petty officers, seamen, and marines, all told, the third engineer, a sub-lieutenant, and the gunner; and there were nearly thirty who recovered.

It was all owing to that fatal grass hammock. The *Santa Anna*, the barque in which Harrison had returned to Port Royal, had picked up a passenger at Vera Cruz bound for Jacmel, who had died of yellow fever when a few days out; and his was the hammock which the Mexican had sold so cheap to Harrison. These facts came to light only some days after the fever had broken out among us, and then the barque was far out of reach. But the ill-fated hammock was bundled overboard at once, and many an evil wish sent after it.

At last the epidemic abated; our weary quarantine was ended, no fresh cases appeared, and our sick men were all in a fair way towards recovery. After being sent off on one or two short cruises, and being thoroughly disinfected, the time at last came for us to turn our backs on Jamaica, homeward bound; and at last I dared once more to think of Mary. Her father had written home by the mail just before we left, saying that he was quite well, and the fever at an end; and, as we should go home under sail, the letter would arrive long before us.

We were only a few days out from Jamaica, when the Doctor, who until now had seemed to bear a charmed life, began to show signs of failing health; and, after keeping up for several days, he was obliged to take to his bed. At first we feared that the fever had at last found him; but it was not so. He was simply worn out, mind and body, by the long strain of constant hard work and anxiety during the epidemic; perhaps, too, the poison of the fever had all the time been insidiously working on his not very robust constitution, enfeebled by long years of service in the tropics. But, any way, my dear old friend's days were numbered, and he never left his bunk until that sad day when we lifted him out of it, and loving and reverent hands committed his body to the deep.

I never left him, except in discharge of my duty. Night and day I watched by him, my own great grief nearly lost sight of in the thought that Mary's father was dying. Weak as he was, so weak that conversation was very difficult for him, he often spoke of her, and never without expressing his thankfulness for the hope that, as my wife, she would be cared for and comforted after he was gone.

The end came quickly at last. It was about two bells in the middle watch—one a.m. I had been sitting beside him for nearly two hours, as he lay in a sort of doze, his feeble breath alone giving any sign that he lived. But suddenly a strange disquietude seized him, and nothing

seemed able to bring relief or rest to the poor wearied frame. I saw that it was the approach of death. This continued until he became exhausted; and he again lay quite still, with his hand in mine, his face ashy pale, and looking sadly old and worn, and his breath coming in short feeble gasps. His lips moved, and I bent down to listen.

"Lift me up," he whispered; and, as I raised him in my arms, he said faintly, "Take good care of my little Mary, Douglas."

Then his eyes closed, and I thought he was gone; but all at once he looked up again, a wonderful, beautiful smile lighted up his face, and a look of the tenderest love and the most perfect content shone in his eyes, while he seemed to be gazing past me. He stretched out both his arms, and in his own old voice—oh, such a happy voice it was!—he said softly—

"Why, Molly, love—you here, my darling?"

Then the glow faded from his face, and he sank back dead in my arms. As I laid him down gently on his pillow, three bells struck. I fell upon my knees beside him, and cried like a child because my Mary was fatherless.

We were home at last, having reached Portsmouth two days before we were expected, and the Captain's gig was waiting to take him to the Admiral. With his usual thoughtful kindness, he sent for me just before leaving.

"I know you wish to see Mrs. Mostyn as soon as possible," he said; and I am anxious too that she should first hear of her sad loss from you. When I come back, I shall be able to let you know if you can get away this afternoon. I suppose your books are ready?"

"Yes, sir, everything is ready for the Admiral's inspection; and Mr. Hammond, the assistant-paymaster, will remain on board, and look after things while I am away."

"Very good; I don't expect to be long gone."

And he very soon returned with the welcome news that we were not to be inspected until the next day; so in half an hour I was on my way to Southampton, which I reached about three o'clock, and a fly from Radley's soon took me up to the pretty little village, a couple of miles out, where the Mostyns lived.

It was a lovely day in early summer, and the whole world seemed jubilant with light, life, and gladness; but my heart was too heavy to take much pleasure in the lovely panorama that lay around me. How often had I pictured to myself this same journey I was taking! How happy it was to be! What a welcome would await me and him? And now it had come to this.

I left the fly at the inn, and walked up the hill to the breezy common where Greenbank stood—a long, low, cozy cottage, covered with ivy, wistaria, and roses, standing in a large and beautiful garden that used to be the dear old Doctor's pride and pleasure. The young servant who came to the door was a stranger to me; and, when I asked if Mrs. Mostyn was in, she looked scared and startled, and said confusedly—

"You can't see her, sir—that is—Oh, I'll tell Miss Mary!"

Ushering me into the dear old drawing-room, she hastened into the garden. The long French windows were open; and, as I looked out, I saw at the far end of the lawn a slight figure in a long black gown, tying up some carnations. As the servant spoke, she turned and hurried towards the house. It was Mary, but, oh, so thin and pale and sad! And why was she in black? But I had not time to think, for in a moment she was in the room and both her hands were in mine.

"Dear old Douglas! We did not expect the *Runnymede* for another couple of days. But where is papa? Why didn't he come with you?" I could not tell her the truth that minute, for her dress was half covered with crape, and a sudden terrible fear had struck me.

"No, he could not come with me; but I was able to get away this afternoon."

"Then he does not know—Has he not received my letter?"

"What has happened, Mary? The letters only came on board as I left. Who is it? Not—surely not—"

"Oh, yes—yes! It is my mother! Oh, poor, poor papa! What will he do?" And sinking upon the floor, she buried her face on the sofa, and cried as if her heart would break.

I had thought my task a hard one before, but now I felt absolutely appalled at the news I had to tell her. I sat down on the sofa beside her, and, drawing her head on to my knees, I began to stroke her hair softly, as I used to do when she was a child. Neither of us spoke for a while; I let her cry on, and presently she grew calmer, and began to recover herself. Then she told me the very little there was to tell.

"She caught cold one day through standing too long talking to the gardener—she wanted everything to be in order when papa came home—and it settled on her lungs, and turned to inflammation; and in ten days she was gone."

"When did it happen?"

"On the morning of the twenty-first. She was so happy, and so willing to go. Her only great longing was to see papa. And do you know, Douglas, I think her wish must have been granted her in some way. I thought she was asleep, for she had been lying so quietly, when all at once she said to me quite naturally, 'Why, Mary, there's your papa, my dearest Robert!' and as she spoke she passed away."

The day and the hour were those of her husband's death; her very words were almost the same as his! Was it possible that these two faithful souls had met at the supreme moment,