

Choice Literature.

NEAR THE ROSE.

BY WILLIAM HENRY BISHOP.

(Concluded from last issue.)

Urania explained in tears, that it was only a friendly word of parting to Lysicrates whom it did not seem fair wholly to neglect, even though he had behaved so badly. Nor was there much more than this in the contents, but it was an indication of a wavering mood, and vigilance was redoubled.

This episode would seem to have put an end to all possibility of correspondence, but on the morning of the ceremony itself, Lysicrates found means of sending Urania a communication by means of her little brother, Pericles. This urchin, enjoying more freedom than usual, in the excitement of the occasion, ran out to gaze at one of those small street processions made in honour of the first day of a young Turkish boy's attendance at school. While he was shouting *huzza* with a gusto at the youthful hero of the festival, going by on a gaily-bedizened donkey, Lysicrates slipped the note, with the present of a handsome penknife, into his hand and arranged to have him bring him back the answer under a neighbouring archway.

He magnanimously offered to forgive all; he begged her to fly with him, and, to that end, to make some pretext for coming down to the confectioner's or even to her own doorway, as if for a breath of fresh air. He would have a carriage there and snatch her away, if need be, by main force. The answer was all the most ardent lover could desire; but this wild plan had no opportunity of being put in execution, for by accident Pandeli Panjiri happened upon his infant son and heir just as he was delivering the reply, and he endeavoured to seize it. The two men had a struggle over it in which Lysicrates succeeded; but, so far as discovery was concerned, it was just the same as if the result had been the other way.

In a little while Lysicrates Stauros came storming at the door of Pandeli Panjiri, almost beside himself, but he could obtain no admittance, and he had sense enough to know there was nothing he could accomplish there. His next resource was Agob Oglou, and he stormed even more violently at the door of the Armenian merchant.

"Admit him," said Agob Oglou, to his staid porter, Yusuf.

With his own hands he was putting the finishing touches to the bridal chamber, and to give an additional point of grim irony received the visitor there. The sight of these preparations, the modish upholstery, the little tables inlaid with ivory and pearl, the mirrors framed in gold and colours, the brazen-columned couch with its bespangled draperies, all of the freshest and costliest that money could buy, served to rob the luckless youth of any small vestige of self-control he had brought with him.

"We must fight! We must fight!" he exclaimed. "One of us must die to determine to which Urania shall belong."

"You overlook the trifling circumstance that she already belongs to me," returned the owner of the mansion, quite coolly. "She has chosen me of her own free will, and we are to be married within the hour."

"Here is her letter; read her opinions; and the clerk thrust the missive in the merchant's face with so much violence that the latter started back in much alarm.

On reading it, he bowed his head; he even beat his hand against his forehead, in his great surprise and dejection.

"It seems to interest you. Now will you give her up to me?" said the clerk sneeringly, recovering a certain coolness, and standing by like fate, with folded arms.

"Upon her own head be it—upon her own head be it!" almost screamed Agob Oglou. "Why did she not draw back while it was still time? Unhappy jade that she is, she shall go on to the bitter end. Am I to be made the laughing-stock of all Pera? All the devils in Eblis shall not take her from me now."

The proverb cautions us against the wrath of a patient man, and Agob Oglou was at the end of his patience. He called his servants and they quickly thrust Lysicrates Stauros out of the house. There the police intervened in the affair, as being now within their province, and marched off the disorderly looking figure they laid hold upon to the station-house.

Meanwhile Urania had set up in open rebellion. "*Patera* and *Mitera* [Father and mother]," she cried, "I will not marry Agob Oglou." She repulsed her maids, refused to allow herself to be dressed, and the fine scheme seemed wholly at an end. But the assurance that, no matter what became of Agob Oglou, she should never see Lysicrates again, the commands and appeals of her parents, even the noise of the controversy, her physical fatigue and something imperious—to a naturally amiable character—in the fixed hour of the ceremony so rapidly approaching, at last prevailed with her. Almost more dead than alive, she dried her eyes and suffered her wedding garments to be put upon her.

She was conveyed to the bridegroom's house in a sedan-chair, followed by her ten bridesmaids, also in sedan-chairs, with gentlemen walking beside them. She was the saddest of all brides, yet very lovely, too, in her rich white silk robe, over which hung a veil of loose silver threads, as if she were some nymph of the fountain seen through its shining spray. Agob Oglou received her at the door of his house, and led her to the seat of honour in the principal parlour above. She rose to salute each guest in turn, as etiquette demanded. The archimandrite pronounced his benediction, the *combaro*, or best man distributed *bon-bons* among the guests; and thus, while Lysicrates Stauros (having been soon rescued from the lock-up) was tossing like a lunatic on his bed in his own chamber, under the guard of vigilant attendants, she was made hard and fast the wife of Agob Oglou.

Now, according to all good romancers, a tragedy of some sort should be here recorded—a fatal combat between the two men, or at least an elopement. But, whether former romancers have sometimes made mistakes or whether this was a very exceptional case, nothing of the kind happened. On the contrary, after no great while, Urania showed every appearance of being wholly cured. She made Agob Oglou a most excellent wife. There was really nothing against him but his looks, and we know how easily we get over objections on that score. Perhaps she had an unusually strong sense of duty, or an un-

common feminine talent for yielding; perhaps even the invincible obstinacy Agob Oglou had shown in carrying her off in spite of herself may have won him her regard; and no doubt the soothing influence of the ample luxury into the lap of which she had fallen had something to do with it. Tradition states, to be sure, that she once fainted away when her husband had taken her to the terrace *cafe* at the great artillery barracks of Schallil Pasha looking down over the Bosphorus, and when Lysicrates unexpectedly came in. She moped, too, when she heard from the gossip of some families she met at the *hammam* that he had lost all his savings in a desperate effort to get rich. But these, if correctly reported, were small episodes at best, without enduring influence. She grew buxom and comfortable-looking, her wonted smile returned, and when she had children to enlist her attention, it is probable that a score of Lysicrates could not have shaken her allegiance in the least.

Now the healing influence of time seemed even more remarkable in the case of Lysicrates himself. What! not that Lysicrates who had written despairing verses, who had wandered in the woods at Buyukdere, which nourish the springs of the capital, and along the side of Satan's Current at Bebek, meditating suicide, who had called upon gods and men to witness his misery, and had for a while left the country? Oh, no, that we cannot believe. Very well! but the proof of the statement is and probably little more is needed—that within three or four years he became a suitor for the hand of the next oldest daughter, the charming Olympia. Can it be possible that Lysicrates desired to marry another of the daughters of Pandeli Panjiri? Yes, it is true. He had given over his wildness and made by no means a bad start in the business way of late; time had thrown a haze over the old disturbance; he conciliated Panjiri, apparently dismissing all resentment, and the astute shipping-agent, who had always had some little compunctions about the past, met him half-way, and—now that things were looking up with him—thought him a very good fellow.

What is more, Lysicrates even went to Urania to induce her to aid him with her sister. She involuntarily sighed a little over such fickleness, but she felt that compensation was justly due him, and was glad if she might now have some small part in bringing it about. Agob Oglou was absolutely set against her having anything to do with him at first, but finding out what the object was he countenanced it, and many visits were necessary on this score.

"But you were so—there was so much trouble about you and my sister, how can you be in love with me?" replied the fair Olympia to his addresses, "I do not understand that?"

"Oh, those things get exaggerated! You must not pay attention to all you hear. Did I not bring you fig-paste? Was I not always looking forward to your growing up? You are the perfect type of which any predecessor could only have been the faint indication."

Now, as Olympia was not more averse to being complimented than any other of the fair sex at Constantinople, and he was almost her first serious admirer, and her father made no interference, it is quite possible that had she fewer distractions in other directions, things might have taken quite a serious course. But she was going to ambassadors' balls with her sister Urania and going out in her *caique* at Prinkipo in the summer—there were ten rowers, in suits of white Broussa silk, with red caps and sashes—and from these diversions she was suddenly rapt away by a gallant colonel of some foreign army, and there was the end of that.

At a little tremor showed itself in Lysicrates' investments in the stock market after this event, but they were all on the right side, and he went on and became a rich man.

Once more he returned to Urania.

"I am madly in love with your adorable sister, Thekla," he said, "will you not help me with her?"

Some scorn mingled with his confidante's sympathy this time.

"Have you no memory?" she asked.

"I have a heart, and it is crushed by the divine Thekla. Recall, I pray you, all the good you can think about me in the past and tell it to her to forward my cause."

Urania smiled at him, but with no great malice as yet.

"I shall not be averse to having you as a brother-in-law; I will do all I can for you," she said.

"You do not love me; it is not possible," the sprightly Thekla replied to his wooing.

"Did I not bring you lemon-drops? Was I not always delighted to sit by your side even when you were a child?" he argued. "You are the perfect type!"

"Oh, yes, of which nobody else could ever have been more than the dim indication," she cut in mockingly. "I know, you told that to my sister."

Pandeli Panjiri not only consented in the present instance but, since Lysicrates had become such a desirable *parti*, he was even delighted. Now, however, by a curious alteration of roles, it was the daughter that was intractable and obdurate. She coquetted with him just the least bit in the world, and then danced off with a handsome young Russian secretary of legation, and there was the end of that also. Lysicrates was as cruelly gored upon this horn of the dilemma as he had formerly been upon the other.

Urania was the recipient of his expressions of disappointment in this affair as in that of Olympia; and many more visits were necessary, though Agob Oglou by no means looked upon them with the same favouring eye when they were connected with defeat as with hopeful advance. However, Agob Oglou was suffering of late from over-zealous devotion to business, and his doctors did not permit him to give all the attention to current matters he was in the habit of doing.

When Lysicrates proposed to the next sister, Yessamina, Urania still bore with him, though distantly, but when he proposed to Aspasia, she crossed him off her books entirely. It had then become ridiculous, and a discourtesy, almost an insult to her. Yes, as the successive daughters of Pandeli Panjiri arrived at woman's estate, Lysicrates laid siege to all of them in turn, and he was by one and all rejected. Aspasia was in some respects the most fascinating of the younger set, but all were fashioned upon a most charming pattern and fortunate was she who belonged to it. Anais was black-eyed, Yessamina gray-eyed, Olympia was more-plump, Rumania the most tall and slender, Aspasia the most rollicking and Calypso the most sedate, but all had nearly the same taking ways, the same complexion and hair, the same roundness of contour, the same half-mischievous smile hovering about the corners of their amiable mouths.

Lysicrates wooed with a gallant intrepidity; he sent sonatas

to the musical one, whole parterres of symbolic flowers to the sentimental one, and illuminated prayer-books to her who had a religious streak. But his task became increasingly difficult. The sisters naturally communicated with one another, and he was hard put to it for new expressions of tenderness and a plausible accounting for his former infatuations. Any one with a less persistent nature would have given it up long before. The later comers upon the scene laughed at him to his face, as the earlier ones had been forced to do behind his back. His compliments of a past generation had a positive mouldiness in their venerable antiquity. Who could have believed this wrinkled, over-amorous old fellow had once been, as reported, a handsome, dashing young man?

These young women were so fair and flower-like that it was not possible any of them should remain long on the parent stem. Some aspirant, more or less worthy, plucked off one after another. Even the urchin Pericles, very much grown-up, had a wife and family of his own, and was established in a flourishing export trade.

At last even Calypso—she that had been baby Calypso in her nurse's arms—was wed. Then, and then only did Lysicrates Stauros abandon his long and vain pursuit, a quest which was in some respects pathetic, even while amusing. Great recklessness marked his next speculations on the Stock Exchange, and he lost most of the last gains he had acquired. Nor did he stop here; he gave full head to a general eccentricity that had more and more gained upon him. He abandoned all pretence to be a conventional member of society. He let his beard grow down to his waist, till he resembled a dancing dervish, and even got so low that the boys followed him mockingly in the street. At length he took a hut and small bit of land at Pancaldi, and led a hermit existence. He alternated this with wandering among the cypress groves of the cemeteries all about the city, or might even be found sitting on some turban-crested Moslem tomb in the distant cemetery of white and many-domed Scutari on the Asiatic shore.

Meanwhile Urania had crossed him off her books utterly, and perhaps hardly even knew whether he was alive or dead; for her it seemed as if he had never existed. But Agob Oglou's maladies went on increasing and he died, leaving her free. There is no telling just when Lysicrates, in his lonely way of life, heard this news. He went no more prominently into public on account of it, but, from that time he began to be more particular in his dress, and to make an effort to recover something of his former dignity, as if there were now a tribunal to which a regard for appearances was due, even though he cared nothing about it himself.

Urania's husband might have been dead a year and a half and she was living in a state of philosophic seclusion when Lysicrates presented himself at her house.

"This is of no avail," he said.

"I do not understand you," she stammered. She could not but feel sorry for him. She had hardly known him at first. His well-made black coat hung very loosely about his attenuated form, and a late removal of the bushy beard that had so long hidden his face from the sun, gave his complexion a peculiar pallor; he was like an apparition.

"Who is going to pay me for my wasted life?" he demanded quite sternly, "Of you I ask it—you, Mademoiselle Urania Panjiri."

"It was not my fault," she returned, still confused. "You wrote me that release, you!"

"Ay, yes, you say one thing, I say another. Well, what is the use? Providence wished it so," he interrupted. "But why does He not content us with our lot when He breaks down our most dearly cherished hopes? I wanted nothing but what was worthy and good."

Urania essayed no reply to reasoning that must have been indulged in by all of us.

"However, I have a plan," extending his hand with a certain briskness, "I am going away."

"Where will you go?"

"To America."

"You will not go to those desolate wilds," expostulated Urania, starting in genuine sympathy and horror. "You will not face an inclement climate, ferocious animals, the savage red men of Fenimore Cooper at your age? How can there be any need of anything so dreadful?"

"What difference can it make?" he replied, as with a sneer for his own luckless fate. "I shall not lack money; my savings have notably accumulated during my hermit life. It is very far away, that is the main consideration, and there at last perhaps I shall forget. I will live with my illusions, the children of my heart in a realm of shadows, I wanted but one thing in this world, one face, one form, and, failing that, nothing could satisfy me. All the years of my life I have tried and it is now too late to succeed."

"Why do you say that? Did you not court Olympia, Yessamina, Thekla, Calypso—every one of my sisters as well?"

He looked at her with a singular gaze, mournful but penetrated with the old fire.

"I cast them out of my heart"—he dashed his hand away from his breast, as if actually doing so—"they never had any real hold there. But you always remained; you know it very well, Urania Panjiri. I saw only you in them—as I can now see them faintly in you. At a certain age there was always one who approached you so nearly that I could imagine I saw your reflection in a dim mirror. But not one of them all ever equalled you nor ever can; you are peerless; you are still the most queenly, the loveliest of them all."

This was not quite true, for age had begun to tell upon Urania, but so flattering a view, even when misguided, was none the less pleasant to hear.

"Why do you think I have haunted you all these long years? Why did they please my fancy?" the lover went on. "You know our old saying, 'If one cannot have the rose, he yet wants to be near it.' That is the reason."

Urania remained silent, but continued to look at him with a very relenting air. A little while after this she said:

"Do not go to America! I will tell you something, though my sisters, when they hear it, may think it strange. I did my duty well by Agob Oglou. Since you still find me beautiful, I will still think you so; and brave. We may even yet have all the world before us."

A THREE weeks' special evangelistic services have been held in Trinity Church, Glasgow. Dr. Morrey conducted the meetings during the first week and in the last two Major Whittle led, assisted by Dr. Morrey and also by Miss Whittle; the latter contributed not a little to the success of the meetings by her impressive singing of solos.