

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 ancient city. Unlike the modern cities of Europe, this gem of the Orient is not most interesting from historical facts, and the records of the past, but it still is a vivid and living picture of all that feeds 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 devotion 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 a golden minaret, rising in lofty and delicate beauty towards the blue vault of Heaven; its seraglio gardens, its closely guarded harems, its many and luxurious fountains, its costly bazaars, thronged with the accumulated riches of the East, and, above all, its matches Bosphorus, Golden Horn, and Valley of Sweet Water—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 luxurious 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 portulac 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 cypruses, gilding cupolas, gay balconies, and glittering domes. All these were lit up at this twilight hour by a stream of light from the high tower that came daily across the silver 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 bedrope 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 arabian like one accustomed to the luxuriance and beauty about him. His dress was of the picturesque style of his nation, and his tall, well-proportioned figure, with his heavy tassel 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, passing 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—so delicately he moves, small-headed, and fiery nostrils—a finely rounded body, trembling with restrained and impatient energy—so 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 Water, 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 upon 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 cinnamon 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 embedded 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.

"Alik!" said the sultan, removing for a moment the amber mouth-piece of his pipe from his lips to address the page, for that was the page 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?"

"Highness, yes."

"And the two Circassians that Brumah spoke to us about?"

"Highness, yes; they are in charge of our chief eunuch within the walls?"

"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, raising his hand in token of approval, and again resuming the tobacco pipe 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 by the profusion of satins and cottons, that formed the curtains, but throwing them aside, he looked out upon a scene that was almost too lovely to be believed, and he stood upon the balcony, as if he were gazing upon the 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.

"Emah!" exclaimed the page, in accents of undisguised pleasure, as he suddenly sprang to his feet, and confronted the new comers, the exhibiting of a velvet veil that seemed to lead 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, Emah?" 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, Emah?"

"I have no fear."

"No fear, Emah?"

"None."

"Suspicion is enough to condemn thee, Emah. Dost not remember the two Circassians 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, Emah!" said the page.

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

"But they need not fear, Emah, you would turn and among the gilded carriages, while the sultan's feet rode there, with their blood-red flags flaunting 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 Emah, leaning more closely upon the page's arm, as she gazed delightedly on the scene.

"It is beautiful, 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, she 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 Emah," 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 Emah. "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, Emah, you make me too much of my poor deserts," said the page, to speak truly of them.

"Dearest! the murmured, pressing again more tenderly with the hands he held.

Emah'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 own 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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