

Last Stronghold of Slavery

Harems Still Maintained by Well-Off Turks, Though They Try to Hide Them From Public Knowledge.



Turkish Lady or Hanoum Wearing Old-Style Yashmak Part Face Veil.



Modern Turkish Girls Passing Former Harem.



Type of Servant Woman Employed in Turkish Harem.



Modern Turkish Woman, Dressed According to Dictates of Paris, But Wearing the Head Veil.

Reports that have come to America during the last year have stated that the war has changed the Turk; that he no longer keeps a harem or trades in slave girls in order to discover the truth of these statements, Miss Mary Symons, an American girl, and a trained investigator of social conditions, spent several months in the near east.

Miss Symons went first to Constantinople and there, after gaining an entrance into official Turkish circles, was able to view the inner workings of the harem system, and, with the assistance of various relief organizations, investigated the slave trade, which is still being surreptitiously carried on. Not only was she able to secure hitherto unpublished facts about the existence of the slave trade and the continuance of harem life, but she actually penetrated into a number of harems in Constantinople and talked with the inmates, a great majority of whom had been bought by their masters.

In a remarkable series of articles, of which this is the first, Miss Symons lays bare the actual conditions in the present-day conditions in the Turkish empire.

BY MARY SYMONS.

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ARTICLE NO. 1.

ARE there any harems left in Turkey?

Are there any more marble buildings flanked with palms and set like parks by the blue Bosphorus where seductive dancing girls and tender wives, culled like flowers from over the world, make up a domestic bouquet that delights the Turk, their owner, when he takes his ease?

Are there any more beauties, sent down to Constantinople from the hill towns of Georgia, whose yellow hair hangs below their knees, whose eyes are traced with the tint of kohl and jasmine paste, whose charms bring anguish to the wife whose beauty is fading, to the ennuich who sees a new menace to the peace he keeps with a whip over the harem?

Is the Turk living up to his reputation of having a private life like the public performance of comic opera? Did he ever have such an existence? Or was it all envy and exaggeration on the part of tourists?

That was what I came to Turkey to find out. What I have seen and heard will be told in these articles. But, first, let me say: The harem has always existed in Constantinople, and it exists today!

From the founding of the Turkish empire the male line have ruled the Ottoman empire without a break in the succession. No ruling family in Europe can say so much.

And each of these 35 sultans had a harem of 400 and 500 women, brought in by slave dealers and caravan drivers like precious silks and rugs or

boxes of sandalwood from distant lands.

In less than a thousand years, the descendants of "Black Osman," the warlike giant whose hands swung below his knees, whose thighs were those of an ox, have housed in their palaces tens and white palaces almost 18,000 women.

These women were stolen from their homes in the Caucasus, the Georgian province, Albania, Macedonia and Grecian towns where the classic profile of the women made them valuable articles of beauty. They came from the Armenians in Aleppo and Trebizond; thousands were shipped up from Arabia by Mohammedan camel drivers who tied gauze over the faces of their stolen captives that the desert sun might not stain the skin they hoped would tickle a sultan's fancy or at least open the purse of a wealthy pasha.

That was yesterday.

Are there any harems today?

The city of Constantinople gives the answer.

Harems Exist Today.

Ask the average well-to-do Turkish merchant on the Grande Rue de Pera if there are harems today in the city. This modern Moslem, in white spats and fez, will smile a polite denial. He will assure you in any language you may speak that he no longer exists. "They belonged to our grandfathers," he will say. "Nowadays we have one wife as do the Americans, the English. We are civilized now, not of the east."

And the man whose grandmother may have been a slave girl brought up from Samarkand and sold to his grandfather over a cup of coffee for 100 Turkish pounds will assure you that no harems are to be found.

Ask the government official—a pasha or bey, high up in the safe handling of desk details of the present war. "By Jove," he will exclaim in Oxford English, and the higher his position the more English his accent, "won't you dear Americans give over your idea that we Turks still have such delightful domestic habits?"

"Why, we can't afford them!" "I assure you, one wife is expensive enough what with Paris gowns and London hats. And with rent and food what it is here now!" He throws up his hands. "One nearly starves. We government officials haven't been paid for a year because of the war, you know. Don't look for luxuries like harems among us!"

Ask the Turkish women of almost

any class if there are harems in the city and she will say "yes."

But where do the occupants of harems come from today? And where are the harems?

The question is more difficult to answer today than it used to be, for the Turk hides his rare harem now as he never did before.

It used to be improper to ask a Turk, "How is your wife?" He would have blushed at the inquiry. The fact that he had a wife or wives was a subject so delicate that it was ignored in the interests of Turkish refinement. The woman was so kept in subjection that to mention her was vulgar.

Ask about his wife today, and the Turk will reply politely with thanks. Ask him about his harem, and he will laugh politely, if he hasn't got one. Ask him about his harem and if he has one, he will laugh, equally politely, and give you an equally polite reply and no information.

If one wants to see harems in Constantinople now, one has to hunt for them.

They are like needles in a city much bigger than a haystack. Greeks, Armenians, Turkish women, all swear harems exist, but few people know where they are.

There is a little old man who has a stall for selling amber in the Grand Bazaar.

The Grand Bazaar is one of the sights of all Turkey. It was built by Sultan Bayazid in 1400 to afford a center to the merchants whose silks, laces and musks were brought from afar to cater to the tastes of the imperial harem.

It contains beneath its smoky roof

and among its intricately wound aisles, 4000 shops.

It has 100 doors.

Through these hundred doors, Turkish women have walked for centuries, hunting for the trinkets and silks they liked. In the old days attended by their eunuch who watched over them at their purchasing and paid for their fabrics and jeweled beads from the purse given him by his master, not trusting his charges with so much as a penny.

The little old man's stall is in the heart of the Grand Bazaar and not much bigger than a wardrobe trunk. With me, as guide and friend in my search for the truth about the Turkish women and the harems, was B-Effendi, as the Turks bowed and called him.

B-Effendi was a Britisher; a soldier of fortune who had lived many years in the east and gleaned from the people, not only their languages and customs, but their trust and respect.

"We thought we would see what you had that was new today, Sami," he explained to the little old man, who bowed, touching his fingers first to his forehead, then to his heart.

Sam'i at once giggled. His laugh was high and shrill and when he came down from behind his stall, I saw he reached only to my shoulder.

He pointed at his wares and we began bartering, according to our scheme, for some amber mouth-piece or kehrber, taken from the old water-pipes the Turks smoke. We admired one handsome one and asked

a price. At Sam'i's figure, we laughed and started to walk off. It is the customary way to start a barter in the east. Sam'i, not in the least expecting to get what he first asked, chuckled shrilly. "Zari Bey is in Paris. I know his tricks. Be quiet now."

What would B-Effendi and Madame the American give?

Former Eunuch Lends Aid.

B-Effendi leaned over the case and spoke in a low voice. "I'll give you what you ask, Sami," he said softly. "Really." And he held out a handful of Turkish paper pounds. His face was near the little man's. "If you'll answer truthfully one question."

Sam'i drew back, frightened, confused. He knew B-Effendi for a skillful bargainer. What had come over him?

"Are there any harems? And I'll give you more than you ask," and he drew more of my money from his pocket. "If you'll show Madame, the American, where they are." Sam'i wriggled behind his counter like a ferret. He shook his head violently and slammed the lid of his showcase as if to show he was through. Then he laughed, less nervously, shaking his head. "No."

"But there are harems, Sami," insisted B-Effendi in his soft, booming voice. His smile was the superior smile of the white man over the east. "I've seen girls being brought in from borderlands. To be taken where?" He waited. Then he held out the money and giggled it beneath the Turk's little nose. It was like a carrot being moved before the nose of a hungry rabbit.

Sam'i looked about him, to see if his neighbors were watching, and flicked the money behind the counter, into his pocket. He stared into the showcase and said a few words in Turkish. I heard numbers and the word for street. It was an address.

"At 9 o'clock tonight," B-Effendi said to me as we strolled down the aisle.

I asked how he knew Sam'i would be there; if he was to be relied upon, after all.

B-Effendi smiled slowly. "Oh, I dare say," he murmured without excitement. "A few years ago he was one of the most relied-upon men in the Ottoman empire. He was head eunuch at the old Sultan's harem."

Zari Bey's Harem.

That night we taxied up the road that runs by the Bosphorus to a point near Orta Koni, a lavish suburb of Constantinople, to see a harem. We three might have been starting up Riverside drive to a party except for the palm trees by the roadside and the strange figure of Sam'i, his fez silhouetted by the driver's shoulder on the front seat.

The villa to which we were going had belonged to an old Turkish admiral and was now owned by another old Turk, who was supposed to be in Paris at the Grand Prix races.

Sam'i thought he was anyhow. "If he isn't," B-Effendi murmured, "we shall have a jolly time explaining how we happened to stop there."

We stopped near a gate. Sam'i walked to it and rapped. After many minutes, he was let in. After many more he let himself out and beckoned us with one arm. "He's gone," he chuckled shrilly. "Zari Bey is in Paris. I know his tricks. Be quiet now."

There was no one to be quiet for. We walked across a paved court and into a large door, already open. We passed through a French hall, decorated with statues in wall niches, and up a stair. "The hanoums (the married ladies) are excited at meeting their first American. Have no fear." Suddenly he paused. "You wait outside, B-Effendi," he begged.

"Back in the auto. If Zari Bey should accidentally return—" The Britisher laughed and turned back. "He's right," he whispered. "I hope they are pretty."

We went up the stairs alone.

Three Wives Interested.

They led into a large room. I heard feminine laughter at my side as I walked in and was pounced upon by three women who had been giggling excitedly. They patted my shoulders and kept saying "Enchantee" in French to acknowledge an introduction no one had made. Sam'i closed the door and left me alone. I faced them.

They flew about, each bringing me a chair. The oldest dropped her chair for a huge cushion which she doubled me up on, saying, "Sit like an old-style Turkish lady." And all screamed with laughter. They seemed to laugh like children—not over what was humorous so much as at what was unexpected.

I crossed my legs beneath me and tried to stare at my hostesses and their surroundings without having them notice it. Difficult because they all sat eyeing me with delight. Though I had come to study them I felt that I had unexpectedly proved to be the diversion of a dull domestic evening. They regarded me as a puppy regards his first toad found in the garden.

The room was a combination of Franco-Turkish hangings and rugs, cloisonne vases of fine blue, French prints, family portraits, mother-of-pearl inlaid tabourets and French divans, set with pillows. The opulence of the east was mixed with the pompousness of Paris. The effect was expensive and tasteless.

"How do you like Turkey?" the woman in the purple foedie inquired enthusiastically, and while I answered aimlessly, flatteringly, I stared at three Turkish women.

They were all beautiful. The two who looked to be younger, and were, they laughingly admitted, second and third wives, were in gray silk foedies. A foedje is a one-piece silk garment with a cape, and flowing sleeves, caught in at the waist by a hidden band. A costume graceful be-

yond words when worn for lounging. Naturally all were unveiled.

All three women were dark with a rich darkness that is eastern and voluptuous and well blown. Their eyes looked black because of the tinting with kohl around their lids; their finger tips were garnet colored with henna stains. Their mouths were red, but unpainted, I thought. Their beauty was that of lazy cats or sleepy tigers—in it was indolence, but excitement. From their manners and speech they might have been French middle-class women of no particular training or intelligence.

How They Came to Harem.

"I come from New York," I said, leadingly. "Where do you come from?" The first wife clapped her hands and an old woman servant appeared with coffee in silver-mounted cups. She offered us cigarettes with long pastebord mouthpieces, kadeif, a native cake of thread-like dough and sugar, and unpeeled green almonds. The two younger wives looked toward the first wife, awaiting her response.

She came from Tiflis, in Georgia, and her name was Gulezar, or Rose-garden. She told her story without any appreciation of its rarity to a western ear. She had been sold by her parents, who were not rich, to a Turkish government official who had seen her in the bazaar one morning with her mother. He was a traveler and wanted the girl, he explained, for a wealthy friend in Constantinople, who was willing to pay many hundred pounds for her hand in marriage.

Rose-garden thrilled at the thought of seeing a great city and of being worth so much money to a husband who had heard of her beauty from so great a distance. As a matter of fact, her future husband's friend had, for a commission, promised to "pick up a pretty Georgian" if he could find one for little money, and she was the selection. Her father was paid for her—a settlement was made, as she tactfully put it, and after being presented with a Turkish veil to hide her charms from the world now that she was to belong to a Turk, she set out, first by caravan, then boat, for her new home.

Her husband had taught her French and piano playing, dressed her well, and loved her for eight years. Then he married again. "They can marry four times if they wish," she added, as though justifying her husband's actions.

Second Wife's Experience.

The second wife was waiting for her chance to talk. Her name was Ecma, she said, Zephyr. Her father had been a camel driver in Arabia and was killed in a desert fight. Then the man who killed him took possession of her. She lived with him seven years, during which time he guarded her like a valuable marketable article. He sometimes beat her when she was not quick at learning the dance steps he had an old hag

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