

Last Stronghold of Slavery



J.W. Testers

In her first article, Miss Symson, an American girl and a trained investigator of social conditions, who spent some months in Constantinople and Turkey studying conditions there, revealed the revival of harem life in the old Ottoman empire, due to renewed activity in slave girl traffic. She told of the mantle of silence Turkish officialdom tries to throw over the harem and the details with which every inquiry is met. Miss Symson described the manner in which she finally secured an entrance to a harem, and her conversation with the fair inmates, from whom she learns that harems are still very numerous.

In the present article she gives the reasons for this new growth of harem life and shows how girls are obtained for Turkish harems.

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ARTICLE NO. 2.

WHAT built up the Empire of Harems?

The answer is grim. War. "All Christians and non-Muslims falling into Moslem hands during war are slaves." This was the Ottoman law. This built up the harems of the past.

The war in Asia Minor carried on by the Turks, today, repeats the story of slavery that all Turkish wars have told before.

Asia Minor is the twentieth century slave market. Its battlefields are the auction blocks to which women are brought for bartering among the victorious soldiery. Its devastated towns from the shores of the Black sea and down into the provinces of Anzora have been used by slave-dealers to carry on their trade.

The current war between the Greeks and Turks is furnishing an up-to-date market in women for harem-keepers of today.

No one unfamiliar with the change for the better as regards women in Turkey of late years, can appreciate how terrible the effect of the war has been. The war and its market of girls from war-districts have obliterated the difficulty of finding girls who were willing to go into a harem or parents willing to allow their daughters to suffer the indignity of being third or fourth wives.

The war furnishes girls too terrified to protest against harem life who can be bought from the soldiery who offer them for as low as two and three Turkish pounds. (Found is worth about 75 cents.) The man who couldn't afford to buy harem ten years ago, can afford what he pleases now.

The demoralization of the Armenian girls in the last few years, through the looting of the villages by the Turkish soldiery, has been tragic.

Armenian Recruits.

Girls who would never have gone into harems had the family been held intact, have drifted into them from the ruined districts around the Black sea, from Samzoun, Batum and Trebizond. Their lives were ruined, their resistance broken. Turks living in lower Anatolia have filled their harems to overflowing with these young women whom they were able to buy from the soldiery for a handful of coins. The war has enabled the country Turk to start the habit of haremlike all over again, just at a time when decreasing affluence and public opinion were mitigating it.

Two of the Armenian girls I talked to told tragic stories. They were born in Samzoun, a town noted for its beautiful women. They had fled before the Turkish army. Captured, they had been protected by a sergeant who appreciated the financial worth of their beauty. He sent them via secret routes to Constantinople to a "go-between" where both were married to the same man. The sergeant was well paid. Both seemed frankly relieved to have married and escaped the horrors they knew had fallen to other members of their family and close friends. I asked them how they could love a member of a race which had done their people so much harm and they started to cry. Both had been forced to accept the Mohammedan faith, and both were afraid to die in it.

Most of the women in the harems I saw were young, for youth is what is worth the buying.

The Armenians seemed to be in the very early twenties. The two I saw were older, but being of northern stock, naturally aged less quickly than orientals.

These girls, I say, were smuggled



COUNTRY HAREMITES WORKING IN THE FIELDS. THESE WOMEN ARE BOUGHT AND SOLD LIKE DOMESTIC ANIMALS.

into the country, for the most part, for deliberate selling. The Turkish girl who had married in the harem of Zari Bey had done so with her parent's consent, knowing she was to be third wife. The rest had not been consulted.

I found one girl, a Greek, who was being divorced by her husband because she was childless. She was being returned to her people in Albania, her husband cheerfully paying her expenses. He had two other wives, she said, both Circassians. The Circassians had been bartered to their present owner by the girl's parents, she further informed me.

All of these harem women were of peasant or slave stock, with the exception of the Armenians who came from all classes. The Turk has always married slaves, or held them as odalaks. From his daughters he has withheld education, in most cases, in order that no husband might object to her being intelligent. And intelligence is as contrary to harem life as beauty is necessary to it.

I heard of an English governess who had married the heir-pretender to the Arabian throne. He had another wife, a French woman, and numerous fair serving maids. They were at his villa in Biarritz at the moment. She had never regretted her marriage to him which was the result of a passionate attraction. This story was affirmed by the head of the American missionaries in Constantinople. He had known the governess when she was teaching the children of the prince by his first wife.

It is true that upon the signing of the armistice, all prisoners of war were supposed to be handed over to the allied governments. This should have saved many girls from harem life.

But the Turks have found ways to conceal their trafficking in girls. The famous Bride school at Samzoun is a significant example of their cleverness at concealment.

This "school" was housed in an old gray convent on the edge of the town of Samzoun, on the Black sea. It had been a home for beautiful nuns in the past. For the women of Samzoun are all very beautiful. After the Turks took possession of the town, the convent was used for those lovely Georgian and Armenian girls whom the officers fancied were worth more than the average captives.

They selected the girls for their beauty," said Sapa S.,—now a secretary in an office in Constantinople. "I had escaped from Samzoun before the town fell, but I know the details. My cousin told me. She was in the 'school.' Her name is Nivartia, and she was as lovely as a ripe fig, with black eyes and hair and a mouth as

red as wine. And skin like milk. You should have seen her!

"With 30 other girls she was taken to the old convent where the officers guarding them said they were to be put in school. For days the poor girls believed this lie. Then they noticed they were being brought down in groups from their sleeping quarters where they were kept guarded all day, to stand before officers and merchants, rich farmers and wealthy pashas. Then one, perhaps two, of the girls would be taken from the convent to another 'school,' the Turkish sergeant said, grinning.

"Then my cousin Nivartia suspected the truth. After the going away of Bakka, her dearest friend, who had been really bought by a silk merchant from Aleppo, she told the other girls what she feared was true.

Girls Try To Be Ugly.

"How they wept! They wept in their rooms that night with a soldier snoring against their door. Then they began rubbing garlic juice on their faces. They stole the garlic from the kitchen. It blistered the skin and made the eyes red, destroying for the time the lovely skin that made these girls so desired. They starved themselves to grow ugly. But the Turkish men admired them just the same.

"Then my cousin was chosen by a Turkish doctor who made her an honorable proposal. He said he would marry her, and only her, and that she was better off with him than some other Turks who might get her. Desperate, Nivartia accepted his suit. He took her to a villa outside of town and treated her like a royal bride. But she hated him. At the end of a month he received a letter from Constantinople which upset him very much. He said he had to go to that town at once on business, and while he was packing his bags she read the letter he had left, like a fool, in the pocket of the coat he took off.

"It was from his wife in Constantinople. She was rich and was sending him money to return with fine presents for her. She seemed to love him. He left that night and Nivartia promised to wait at the villa for him until he returned. At midnight she ran away and slept in the woods. The next morning she returned to the 'bride school,' saying she wanted to talk to her companions. She found that the doctor had arranged for the purchase of two of her best friends who were to be sent to his villa that night. He was starting a harem.

He had given my cousin a pearl ring which she was able to sell to a jeweler for very little, but enough

to take passage on a boat for Athens. There she met an American man who was visiting his parents. He fell in love with her and she married him as her first marriage had been a hoax.

"She sailed with him to Boston where he lived and they are very happy.

"But alas for the other girls in the 'bride school.' What American man could find them and take them away?"

The province of Anatolia has long been the stronghold for the fanatical old-fashioned Turk. Removed from contact with Europe, the old Turk, as he is called, has carried on his old national and religious habits, free from progress and change. He has carried on his harems in villages, farms and large towns.

His harems have expanded with the price of women dropping as it has in the last year of war. Within the past year 100,000 women from the war districts have flowed into country harems, for there is always work for women to do on a farm, and farms near Sivas, Erzurum and Edsere are now worked by haremites.

Sometimes their entry into the harem is accompanied by the old-fashioned details of a Turkish wedding. The bride is dressed in fine clothes and brought to her new home in a carriage. As she steps across the threshold, she is showered with Turkish candies and then handed a new broom with which she must sweep the floor. This is her sign of her submission to her new lord. After the bridal feast, her husband takes her to her new rooms and lifts the veil on her face.

But for the most part, she is taken to her new home like a new domestic animal bought at market. For she is, like them, meant for work.

I remember having seen, outside of Ergut, an old Turk walking by the side of the road. In the road were six women, struggling as they carried a long wooden pole, the size of a fair-sized tree. It was the harem of one Ali Hassan, I learned, carrying home a new ridge pole for the barn. Do not think harem is a synonym for luxury, perfume, chiffon trousers and tom-toms. Harem as a word means "hidden." Any woman who helps winnow wheat in a hot field, whose face is veiled is just as much a haremite as one of the beauties in the "Arabian Nights." The women carrying the ridge pole were "harem." The women feeding mulberry leaves to the silk worms at Bursa, a town famous for its regal silks, is "harem" if her veil is down. Mohammed, the prophet, said the veil was to be a sign of her virtue and a guard against the talk of the world.

By veiling herself, she protects her

War Built Up Empire of Harems and Is Today Chief Cause of Great Revival of the Traffic in Girls Among the Turks.



A modern type of beauty for which Turkey is famed.

staying at the time they were procured for him by the governor of a Black Sea town. He was returning here in two weeks, but could not wait to see the girls then, but had them sent on to him at his villa on the Bosphorus. Ah! ah! The trouble he had! Those girls were fiends. Sisters. White and lovely as dawn. They tied a stocking over the mouth of the old woman who was taking them by boat from Samzoun to Constantinople just before they made the port of the sultan's city. Then they flirted with a miserable boatman—these dogs who act like unbelievers and speak to a Turkish woman on the street! They should send the girls home when they see they are acting in a manner unfit to women of the faith—and he was starting to row them across to Scutari where he promised he would hide them. But Pasha Haidredin came along the river in his steam launch and saw them. Then there was a scene!

"But you know how it came out." He lit a fresh pipe. "Those girls are happy now and mothers. Pasha Haidredin has married also two lovely Turkish girls. But he is wealthy. He can afford a harem. The poor man cannot, unless he can get the girls who have come from the districts of war."

Women Thought Happy.

The Turkish men always think the Turkish women are happy as members of a man-ordained harem. To be forced to obey a husband, prepare his plaff for his dinner, his tushah (vegetables in vinegar)—this makes the Turkish women happy, the men say. The women do not say much of anything. Often they are speechless from weeping.

Unfortunately, Constantinople, the regions in Anatolia and the coast of war-stricken Asia Minor are not the only districts where harems have been flourishing in undue vigor of late. The exchange of girls has spread east as far as Bagdad.

Unlucky girl to be taken by the Arabs! The Arabs are Moslems, fanatics, cruel, uncivilized. Their women wear two veils, one covering the forehead, the other coming up to the eyes. This leaves a slit for the eyes. The mouth is tattooed, the nails and the hair hennaed.

If they remain Christians, as some Armenian and Greek girls try to do, they are killed. If they turn Moslems, they are tortured by their consociates.

Armenian Girls' Story.

Two Armenian girls I knew had an experience in Bagdad that stirred me. "What would you do if you saw girls who resisted the advances of men desiring to put them in harems killed outright on the street? When some one asked you to enter his harem and seemed willing to treat you kindly, would you not accept rather than be maltreated by many soldiers?"

Gamila, sister of Refika, flashed her black eyes at me as she asked the question. I was getting, in Constantinople, her story, which had begun near the gates of the city of Aleppo.

"There was the war which came on. And wa, Refika and I were driven from our homes on the farm near Aleppo into the town. There we saw our two cousins sold to Turkish merchants of the town who had sold the girls the silk dresses they had on. We saw other girls killed who would not be sold. War is terrible. We were sold against our protests to two Turks living in Bagdad. They were traveling in the war district where they had come to sell corn and dates to the army.

"One, who was my husband, was the governor, Zade Bey. The other, Alle Kemal Pasha, my sister's husband, was director of the mails—a fine position with much robbery of the mails to fill his pockets, on the side. Both lived in Bagdad. Both kept harems. We were both favorite wives.

"Our houses adjoined each other and we used to wave at each other from the windows over the pomegranate trees. Both of us were honored by our husbands having dinner with us every night; many Turks who keep harems will not eat with their women. They did not beat us. On the contrary, they liked us. Beating would have been more pleasant. "One day my sister tried to send me a note by an old woman servant but the note was lost. The old woman saw my husband coming down the street and in her fear dropped the note in the gutter and when she went back for it the rain had swept it away. The note had said good-bye to me.

"My sister ran away. I did not know where. Her husband was wild with rage. They tried to beat me to

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TWO GYPSY TYPES BROUGHT INTO TURKEY BY THE SOLDIERY TO BE SOLD FOR HAREMS.



TURKISH BRIDE FROM ANATOLIA, IN MESCHLEK OR HOUSEHOLE. THIS GIRL CAME FROM THE BRIDE SCHOOL AT SAMZOUN.

Husband's honor and at the same time, seems to do most of his work, in discomfort.

Conditions Pitiable.

The conditions among the rural haremites I found most pitiable. They are slaves to work and to their husband's whims.

I found one girl, educated in Athens, in a farm harem near Eskishehir. She was a Georgian and had been a beauty. She was a fourth wife, spoke three languages, French, Greek and Turkish, and was tending goats for her fat husband who was busy in the field nearby making the other three wives work.

In the country harem there is no servant, but there is a wife for every task. The husband may be ignorant and ugly, yet his wives wait on him like slaves, (though they may be Armenian, Greek or Albanian girls of intelligence and some schooling.

The country harem is a treadmill that never stops grinding. And the force that drives it is women. Turkish government officials, in the provinces, have long mixed business with pleasure. Ill-paid by the government, they have taken up the trafficking in high-class girls as a side issue. In the old days this practice was more common than now, although graft is still what makes the Turkish government "go."

An official would set out for his new office, in Angora, say, with "commissions" to perform for friends in Constantinople. The "commissions" were always to find good-looking girls. They would search the