AUNT NANCY'S CONFESSION

BY LANDON CARTER

PETE was nothing more or less than the harmless "black sheep" of the family, one of those genial, loving, lovable ne'er-do-wells who, like Topsy, "jes growed"—he had been spoiled originally by being the only boy in the flock of girls, and consequently by Miss Rogers, his maiden aunt, to whose tender mercies he had been left when a mere tot, and, unlike most, instead of being awed by her acidity, he had quite won her heart by systematically taking, what in any one else would have been considered unpardonable, liberties.

"Now, what made you tear up that envelope?" asked Aunt Nancy, in a voice pitched like a clarionet. "Looks as if you'd always been accustomed to having things grow on trees. Now what's the matter with that envelope, any way? Say, I watched you address it, an' it looked correct, nothin' to scratch out—not even a smear."

Pete turned lazily, and with a good-natured yawn, replied: "You are right, Aunt Nancy, its only fault lay in its correctness. It may have been very silly," continued he, "but with such an important address as 'Mrs. Abraham Carter' staring me in the face, I felt like beginning 'Dear Madam,' whereas, without its stern atmosphere and influence, I could write much more naturally, informally and lovingly to the dear old soul."

"Now who taught you to be informal with 'dear old souls'?" asked Aunt Nancy, in tones that admitted of no compromise. "One more Christmas in the south and a few more Harvards and Yales, and you'd be patting the president's shoulders. Anybody would think that my envelopes and dollars, and sich like, was apples that would rot if not gathered. Now I want to know what 'poor old soul' you are loving so informally and naturally," continued this angular old maid, with an emphatic shake of her head, from either side of which dangled cork-screw curls.

"Oh, you needn't get jealous, Auntie," replied Pete, with a suspicious twinkle in his gray eyes, "for she's just a negro 'Mammy.'"

"A Who! A what?" cried the old lady aghast, "and did you visit her, too, when you were in Virginia?"

"Well, no, not exactly, although she certainly was the autocrat who managed the entire Byrd family, so it seems but fitting that I send her a line. Don't you think so, Auntie?"

"Don't know nothin' 'bout your niggers," replied she with a defiant sniff, "but what I do know is that there's a proper place for everything, and a kennel for a dog, a stall for a horse and a kitchen for niggers. It may be old-fashioned, but I ain't none of your Booker T. Washington women, nor no advocate neither for gentlemen corresponding with nigger 'mammies,' nor—"

"Pete! oh, Pete!" cried a merry, girlish voice from the hall. "May I come in? Where are you, anyway?"

"Now, there's one of your up-to-daters," said Aunt Nancy sarcastically.

"Here in the library," called Pete, rising and making for the door. "Come right in."

"And so you are really back from the south," rippled a girlish vision of 18. "Got any heart left at all? Oh,——Oh, I beg your pardon, Aunt Nancy," said she in surprised tones. "Didn't see you at all. Regular London mist today, inside and out."

"It don't appear to have dampened your spirits none," replied Aunt Nancy, with an ominous frown.

"No this kind of weather always drives the kinks out of my temper into my hair," said the girl with a total disregard for her hostess' sarcasm, "and then, too, I've got other reasons," added she mysteriously.

"Eh? Now give them to us, Jane," asked Pete, encouragingly, "for you look interesting."

"Yes," continued Jane, "I'm happy as a 'Sand Boy,' and free, yes free again," said she stretching out both arms to their full length and taking a long breath. "Positively, I feel like flying, and I've been out doors all day and breathed so much ozone that I really ought to float."

"What do you mean by being free?" asked Aunt Nancy, impatiently. "Anybody would think you'd been in jail."

"Engagement is broken. Just think of it, Aunt Nancy! The family came mighty near bulldozing me into marrying that Englishman, but I talked to them, and now have just come over to confide in you and Pete. Golly! but I just did miss being exported!"

"Well, I expect your home is a little peppery," said Pete, sympathetically, "so tell us all about it," said he, edging his chair up a little closer. "Now, what's the particular trouble?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, and everything in general. I always knew my love was of too collapsible and bubbly a material to last well, so yesterday he—my Johnny Bull," explained she, nodding frivolously at Aunt Nancy, "got oversentimental, grabbed and tried to kiss me. I didn't exactly share his enthusiasm," said she, still shaking her golden curls, "so ducked my head—he missed his aim, but as it was I caught it in the eye, and—and, er, well that's the beginning of the end."

"Well, if you was too good to be kissed, what do you suppose he wanted to marry you for?" asked Aunt Nancy with an uplifted chin, which conveyed unutterable meanings of scorn. "Like to be put in a glass cabinet an' hung up on a brass nail for exhibition, I suppose. Don't know what you young people is comin' to anyway. I never was crazy about kissing or marrying either, but if I'd decided and promised to do either, I'd have sense and force enough of character, too, to stand both. I most certainly don't know what you young people is comin' to," she again exclaimed with accumulated wrath. "Now here's Pete—my Pete—corresponding with a 'autocratic nigger.'"

"A WHAT!!!" exclaimed Jane. "A negro!"

"Quite true," said Pete, solemnly. "Met her in 'Old Virginia,' and was just writing to her when you burst in upon us."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Jane, incredulously.

"Certainly don't look as if you do," said Aunt Nancy, "you face is as blank as an oyster, ah' I can't see any particular reason why you can't shut your mouth."

"You see, it's this way," explained Pete hurriedly, in hopes of checking further sarcasm, "this old 'mammy' has been a regular mother to the Miss Byrds, whom I've been visiting, and she gave us such a royal time Christmas that more in the form of flattery than anything else I thought of writing to her, that's all."

"Well, but how in the name of sense could she? or rather was it in her power to give you royal times?" asked Jane, even more mystified.

"Oh, she just seemed the natural fountain head that regulated everything, and was never the round peg in the square hole, no matter what the complication, 'mammy' was all sufficient, and as to a matrimonial whooper-up she's the best ever—pity you didn't have her on hand last night, Jane," added he sympathetically.

"And still you came back single?" questioned Jane.

"Yes, but I made a very narrow escape, proposed to the wrong girl; but a fellow just naturally had to get sentimental, you know, what with mistletoe and candlelights and julips, to say nothing of an atmosphere simply permeated and saturated with 'the holy estate of matrimony,' and then, you know, Jane, I always was tender-hearted, and she looked so lonely and"——

"Oh, bosh!" interrupted Jane, "those kind of mistakes are nothing new on your part—however, what did she say?"

"Well, I don't remember exactly, but—er—she declined, and I didn't push the matter, because all the time I had a sneaking idea that it was the egg-nog and not my affections that was working overtime and"——

"Oh, do come to the real weddings, Pete, you are worse than fourthly and fifthly in sermons."

"Well, to begin, they were all colored affairs, you know, and each unique in its own way," said Pete.

"Colored?" asked Jane.

"Negroes," I mean, explained Pete, "but 'mammy's' granddaughter was the prize winner. It seems that for four years the butler had been playing 'fast and loose' with her affections, so this time 'mammy' took matters in her own hands, put both bride and groom elect's in a cart and sent them over to Richmond to buy the necessary 'glad rags,' wedding garments, I should have said. Well, on their return from the city, however, the groom got drunk, the mule ran away, and in which flight his wedding breeches and her wreath got lost, but in just such times as those 'mammy' shines, and nothing daunted, she went out in the barnyard and pulled some feathers out of an unsuspecting goose, which beautifully took the place of 'orange blossoms,' but with only a houseful of young ladies and very thin bachelors we had a terrible time substituting those pantaloons. Poor Miss Byrd was at her wits' end, when 'mammy,' as though possessed, rushed off to the attic and returned armed with a pair of ancestral pants, belonging to one of the departed Byrd grandfathers, and with the assitance of a drawstring and several safety pins they answered admirably, and after many more drinks the groom radiantly took his stand before the impromptu altar, and when asked by Mr. Turner, the Byrds' family minister, if he would have Marthy Ann, etc., with a Chesterfieldian bow and in stentorian tones he responded: 'I will, suh.' The ceremony was performed in the drawing-room, and Miss Byrd not only gave the bride away, but also loaned a family ring for the occasion, and then after the benediction Mr. Turner told the groom to 'salute his bride' (which is, I believe, a universal custom among the negroes), when in all humbleness, deference and generosity, the groom with another bow and comprehensive sweep of the hand, said, 'After you, suh.'

"The dancing was out in the laundry and until then I never knew the real meaning of a 'Virginia break-down,' and as to suppers! Lord! never saw so much in all my life; a saddle of mutton, roasted pig with an apple in his mouth, hams, turkeys, possums—Um-m-m! No wonder the southerners are poor, but they certainly do understand how to live up to 'eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.'"

"Now, that's what I call a wedding," exclaimed Jane, enthusiastically. "A regular, happy, joyous, merry, Santy-Clausy kind of an affair. I wonder why we more highly civilized beings are forced into such solemn, harrowing, blood-curdling formalities. Golly!" said she, rising, "I feel right down sentimental and like recalling my Englishman. Oh, say, Aunt Nancy," added she, clapping her hands, as a very young girl might have done, "even you look interested—thrilled."

"Yes, now come, own up," said Pete, "and tell us your thoughts, Aunty."

"Well, I was thinking," said the old lady gently, "how nice it is to be young, and that if I'd known 'mammy' 40 years ago I might have—er that is, may be—there is no telling what might have happened," added she with a smile and faint blush.

"I believe she's human, after all," said Jane, in an undertone.

Some Prominent Characteristics of the Sultan Who Is Dying

THE condition of the sultan of Turkey is at last believed, in the inner circle at Constantinople, to be hopeless; but at Yildiz Kiosk the greatest show of optimism is made by the palace entourage as to their august master's health. A polite fiction, current through the ages respecting the health of the commander of the faithful, enjoins that the sultan can never be seriously ill; in fact, that he can never die. Then death or a harem intrigue removes him, and a similar fiction is applied to his successor.

The Palace Doctors.

The physicians forming the medical entourage of the sultan at Yildiz Kiosk are not without skill. Some, indeed, have studied at Berlin, Vienna, and Paris. But they, as a rule, are sovergly handicapped in ministering to his majesty. He takes his medicines badly, and has a morbid dread of the knife. He leans towards charms and exhortations, and at heart has far greater faith in plausible quackery than in genuine medical skill. His sedentary life has long caused an operation to be necessary; but he has shirked the application of the knife, and has gone on suffering agonies, which ointments and charms have but temporarily removed. It was solely through the earnest representations of the German ambassador that the sultan at last consented to the calling in of the celebrated Professor Bergmann. And, after the consultation, Dr. Bergmann was not allowed to operate. His majesty is suffering from a complication of diseases. He was to have been operated upon for appendicitis, but the evil day was put off. He is known to have Bright's disease, and now it is understood he is suffering from cancer.

The Sultan's Successors.

His majesty is getting on in years. He was born on September 22, 1842, and has reigned, as from the 31st of August last, 30 years. Who will succeed him? That is the question—a burning question in the near future. The heir presumptive is his brother, Mohammed-Rachad, who is two years his junior, having been born on November 3, 1844. But Abdul Hamid is sultan, and he has a will of his own, and he may, in nominating his successor, pass over the generally accepted claims of his brother and choose one of his own sons. His eldest son, Mehemed-Selim, has, I believe, no chance of being his father's selection. The favorite son is Abdul-Kadir, born February 23, 1878. But German influence, which today is all powerful in Constantinople, will have something to say in connection with the succession. It may opt for Mohammed-Rachad or for Abdul-Kadir, or for some dark horse among the sultan's numerous sons; in fact, for the one who will best serve German interests. The Turkish army, it should not be forgotten, has been modelled on the German plan, and the kaiser has lent the sultan some of his most distinguished officers to instruct the Turks in the art of war.

Sultan as Worker and Linguist.

Abdul Hamid is one of the hardest working monarchs. He superintends every important detail of state—especially the diplomatic side thereof. No matter what hour of the night important cables or telegrams arrive, having bearing upon affairs of state, he must at once be made acquainted with their contents. He has a host of secretaries to attend to this work and to keep him hourly informed. Negligence would certainly cost a secretary his place, and maybe his life. These secretaries are conversant with all languages, and every really important article in a newspaper is at once marked out and brought to his majesty's attention. In this way he knows far more what is going on inside his own realms and outside of them that the czar of all the Russias. The Sultan knows more languages than is generally believed; but in his conversations with the corps diplomatique he, unless any member thereof can converse direct with him in Turkish, always employs an interpreter. Many a time has he fully comprehended the asides in their own tongues of the diplomatists who have met him in audience. The influence of Baron Chalice, the Austrian ambassador and doyen of the ambassadors, who is retiring from the diplomatic service, with the sultan was not so much due to his charm of manner and his wonderful tact as to the fact of his being able to converse direct with the padishah in Turkish. On one occasion when conversing with the late Sir Clare Ford, the British ambassador at Constantinople, respecting certain representations made to him concerning the Armenians, his majesty unconsciously let slip a big d——d. Abdul Hamid, by the bye, although, on his mother's side, undoubtedly of Armenian descent, has no love whatever for the Armenians. They, to his mind, are not only utterly impossible people, but are the most dangerous politicians and criminals in his empire.

His Easy Side.

Outside of the Armenians, and whom his majesty dislikes from the political as distinct from the religious standpoint, Abdul Hamid is by no means a religious intolerant. He, in fact, is far more tolerant than a Russian czar. He allows all within his realms freedom of religious thought so long as they do not use their religion as a means of political propaganda. According to him, a good Mohammedan should remain a good Mohammedan and a good Christian a good Christian; but politics should be, and must be, left severely alone by all sects within the Turkish empire. His majesty takes his amusements sadly; but he, as many European entertainers have discovered, is not a bad audience, and, in truth, is a very liberal patron. His tastes, indeed, are peculiar, and he much prefers a tumbler-contortionist show or a good sleight-of-hand exhibition to a first-class dramatic or musical entertainment. The German ambassador once got the entree of a German musical prodigy to Yildiz Kiosk. He fiddled and fiddled, and the sultan sat immovable, and at the end he yawned; but he loaded the prodigy with gifts, and the German ambassador was under the impression that he had provided his majesty with a delightful evening's entertainment.

Sultan of Turkey.

Sarah Bernhardt and Abdul.

In the days when Paul Cambon, the French ambassador to Great Britain, represented the interests of the French republic at Constantinople, Madame Sarah Bernhardt, who had been touring in eastern Europe, was desirous of giving a dramatic representation at Yildiz Kiosk. The sultan was willing, and the terms were duly arranged with the keeper of the wardrobe, the worthy pasha who has the control of all entertainments at Yildiz. But the pasha held out his hand for more backsheesh than La Belle Sarah felt inclined to give, and so the long-looked for representation did not take place. Sarah Bernhardt lost by it 1,000 pounds and the coveted order of the Chefekat. Hermann, the conjurer, knowing the ropes better than the great French actress, saw the keeper of the wardrobe, gave his show, and got his thousand pounds.

Yearning for a Friend.

The sultan's yearning for a friend has often been pathetic. This is brought out by Chedo Mijatovich in an admirable character-sketch in the "Fortnightly." Having heard that King Milan, sad and broken hearted, was alive in Vienna, the sultan invited him to come to Constantinople, and he asked the writer to espouse his cause in the following touching words:

"Knowing that King Milan is fond of you and trusts you, I called you to ask you personally to write to him to support my invitation. Write to him that I should feel happy to have him near me. He knows that all my sympathies are with him, and that his friendship is precious to me. Tell him that I have—thank God!—many good and faithful servants, but that I often feel quite lonely, and that I am longing with all my heart and soul to have near me a man to whom, as to a faithful and sincere friend, I could confide what I have in my heart, with whom I could freely exchange thoughts and take counsel, and with whom I could share joy and sorrow. I feel deeply that in Milan I should find such a friend. Write to him to come, that we as friends may help each other to bear bravely the load of our destinies."

Is not this an illuminating record of Abdul's heart hunger?

"Swallowed Entire Ironclads."

Another story illustrates the sultan's quiet humor.

"The grand vizier gave a grand dinner one evening at which, with the sultan's sanction, several court officers were present. One of these the next day gave the sultan a verbal report of the exhibition of magic power by a poor dervish which followed the dinner.

"'Would you believe it, sire,' he said, 'that poor dervish swallowed silver spoons one after the other? It was simply marvelous.'

"'Do you say marvelous?' the sultan asked him. 'I do not see anything marvelous in the fact that a poor dervish swallowed a few of the grand vizier's silver spoons. That feat is as nothing in comparison with the feat which Hassan Pasha, my minister of the navy, used to perform. He swallowed entire ironclads without changing the color of his face for a moment.'

"Hassan Pasha was notorious for the boldness with which he diverted the moneys, granted for the ironclads, to the needs of his own renowned harem."

Can a Man Escape Destiny?

The sultan's grasp of the intricate emotional side of life is emphasised in the same article by his comments on the engagement of Madam Draga Mashin to King Alexander of Servia. He studies the photo of the handsome woman, admires her fine eyes, and then expresses his wonder that King Alexander should commit such a folly. By and bye he adds:

"But, after all, what right have we to complain? What right have we even to criticise? Can a man escape his destiny? And is it fair to forget what an irresistible power love has? Where is the strong man who is not weak when he finds himself alone with a woman with whom he is in love? And are we not all liable sometimes to commit follies? Does love ever ask what your father and mother will say to that? Does it ever listen to reason? I verily do not think we have a right to laugh at the folly of this young man. Poor Alexander is evidently deeply in love with Draga. All we can do is to wish for him that his love be crowned by true and lasting happiness. I will wire him my best wishes, but you must also let him know that I shall always rejoice to hear of his happiness."

Here one almost recognises the sympathy and understanding of a woman.

The Sultan's Superstitions.

The sultan is a mystic of the mystics; never was there in any age a ruler so thoroughly superstitious. He believes in dreams, in omens, the evil eye and all that sort of thing that go to make a man's life full of unrest. Recently, I believe, in view of the uncertainty surrounding the post of favorite soothsayer, the soothsayers have banded together and agreed upon a general line of prophecy and exhortation, so that when the sultan, disappointed with this or that wise man, calls in another, he finds him setting forth precisely the same prophetic policy. Even wise men, however inspired, must live. Despite his superstitious weakness, Abdul Hamid is really a strong ruler, and, from his standpoint, is a just one.

Dropping a Bottle From a Balloon

NO writer ever described the sensations of ballooning with such particularity as does A. W. Rolker in his article on "Sky Sailing, the New Sport," in the American Magazine for November. The author is a joy to the reader because he relates all the little things that you want to know. He is indeed a traveler returned from a land of wonders, possessed of a passion to tell what he has seen, and equipped with the power to write entertainingly.

Among the numerous specific facts that Mr. Rolker reports, the following are interesting:

"It is while discharging ballast to enter the higher altitudes that you get your first idea of the hair-trigger balance of the giant contrivance keeping you afloat. Your pilot takes a small wooden scoop no larger than an ordinary-sized soup ladle, digs into one of the sandbags and scatters a single 'shovelful' overboard. Up darts your balloon—100, 200, 300 feet. An ordinary-sized bottle of beer spilled overboard lightens the balloon enough to send it up 250 feet, and if you happen to be over a vacant field where you can drop the bottle itself without risk of killing anyone, the release of this weight will send you up another 300 feet. So delicately poised is your balloon once it has struck its balance that you could push it up or pull it down from 300 to 400 feet with strength equal to that of your little finger.

When a mere cloud passes between you and the sun, causing instant contraction of the gas in the balloon, the envelope becomes baggy and flaccid at once and you begin to fall, sometimes at the rate of 1,000 feet a minute, although you have no warning of this other than the statoscope and no sensation except the thrill as you see the alarming rapidity with which the earth comes nearer you. Three or four scooptuls of sand may be necessary to sacrifice before you again strike your balance, and the next moment the sun darts from behind the cloud, warms the balloon and the envelope tautens almost with a bang and you go kiting upward under your lightened load until you are obliged to open the escape valve to let out gas to prevent going up above your original level. Then it is that you begin to understand why the bugbear of the aeronaut is alternate cloud and sunshine, why he prefers sailing during the night, and why, if he does sail throughout a day, he mounts high above the clouds in continuous sunshine where the volume of gas in the balloon remains constant."

Rockefeller in voting said he "hoped for the best"—for himself and his gang, he meant.