

# The New Woman of the Year 1908

## How Western Culture Has Burst the Doors of Turkish Harems



**BY CULTIVATING** a mind of her own the woman of Turkey is rapidly emancipating herself, after centuries of galling servitude to the lord

and master of her little world. No longer will she be the meek, self-effacing creature of the past; she has begun to wage a war for her rights—the inalienable rights of all women—and she is gaining her point.

For centuries, for instance, she has concealed her beauty with the hideous yashmak, a covering over her face, with only two slits for the eyes. She is now putting the yashmak away, and not even with mothballs. Instead of the bloomers and sashes, she is donning gowns made after Parisian fashions.

Instead of tending to canary birds and cats and nursing dolls in her harem, she has begun to read the latest foreign literature; instead of prattling childish gossip about some of the numerous other inmates of her husband's house, she hies herself to a teacher of languages. She is learning to paint and to play the piano.

Truly, she is the New Woman of 1908.

**N**OT without alarm have the conservative people of this steel-riveted, conservative and backward country viewed the steady evolution of woman during the past fifteen years.

Slowly and quietly the change of thought, the change in the status of woman was taking place, and unknown to men, the spirit of independence in the little bosom of the gazelle-eyed wife or daughter was growing.

Within the past year or so the Turkish woman has raised her head, drawn aside the humiliating yashmak and begun to express her opinion in determined tones to her husband, father and brother.

With feelings akin to horror, the orthodox Moslems have viewed the growing spirit of independence in the feminine heart, and not long ago the Sheikh-ul-Islam, head of the Mohammedan priesthood, issued orders to all the priests to discourage the adoption of western customs and ideas by the women in every pos-

sible way—by public exhortations and corporal punishment, if necessary.

sible way—by public exhortations and corporal punishment, if necessary. Opposed to the emancipation of the women are all of the "old Turks," a party which includes the state functionaries and the rigid church people.

According to Professor Hinneberg, a noted German traveler, who has contributed an article to a Berlin magazine on women's life in Turkey, no phase of public life in the Ottoman Empire has been so affected by western ideas as the culture and status of women.

Were a person who had visited Turkey fifteen years ago to visit the capital of the sultan this year he would be amazed by the changes in the feminine dress. And woman's dress, say sociologists and jokemakers—both of whom are pretty nearly right—is an index to woman's mental attitude.

Life in a Turkish home, under the old conditions, was not the pleasantest sort of existence to a young and ardent woman. It was confined and narrow; a woman was always under the closest espionage. She was unable to see any men, other than those of the immediate family, and her female companions were selected for her. Nowadays many of the women of the harems are not only allowed to receive their friends at will, but go out walking and shopping in the company of female relatives or friends.

Physicians, who were formerly debarred from administering medical aid to the women in their homes, are now freely consulted. The women select their own pas-



Turkish Woman in Her Home

Photo from Phila. Commercial Museum



Harem Windows for Centuries the only Outlook of Women upon the World.

such books will make in our manner of thought. Then, too, we got fashion journals. I remember that several of the women in the harem of the Prince Samy demanded French costumes. He finally ordered them, but prohibited them from wearing the dresses outside the harem."

Within the past year, however, travelers say, the change in the street costume of the women is striking. Many women wear dresses which are a sort of combination of the picturesque native costume and the European garments.

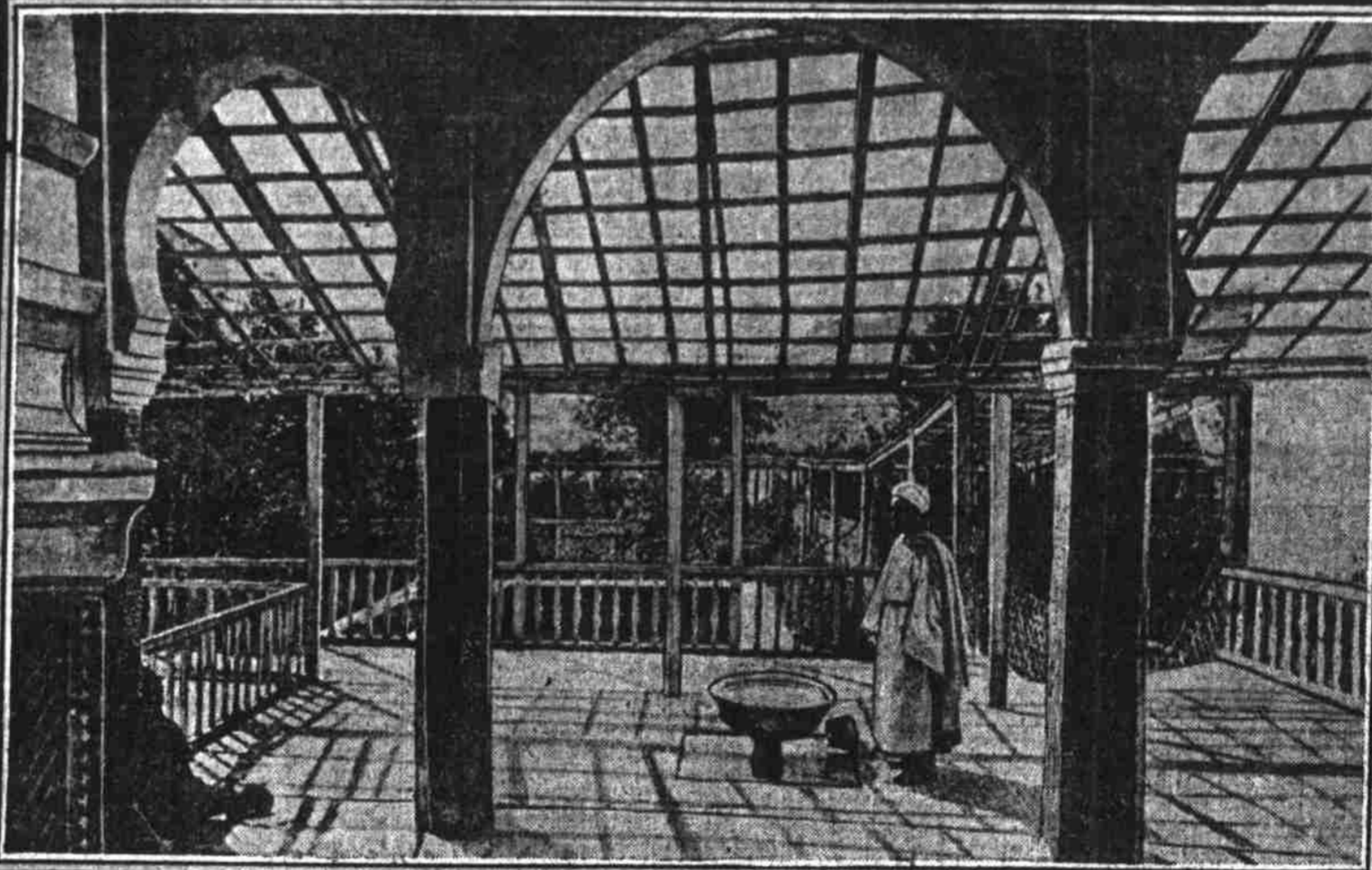
A significant indication of the change of position of the Turkish woman and her adoption of western customs is the use of the sewing machine in the Turkish home. During one year a single New York firm sold 60,000 machines in the land of the Sultan. American fabrics are also imported in large quantities.

A number of young women, daughters of some of the most prominent men of Constantinople, have become famed for their painting and proficiency at music. Zeineb Hanum, daughter of Nouri Bey, the first secretary of the Ottoman State Department, has written a volume of poetry. Scores of women, the wives of prominent men, no longer wear the yashmak.

Chief among those who conduct a harem is the Commander of the Faithful, the sultan, who supports about 300 women. Even this despotic and inhuman ruler has contributed to the emancipation of the women of his nation, for his harem is run quite respectably. During the reign of the Sultan Mejid indescribable



In Bondage to the Conventions of Ages Photo by Phila. Commercial Museum.



A Harem Garden, the Usual Prison of Women



A Harem Beauty

times, and what is most significant is the growing desire to read foreign literature.

There is little opportunity in Turkey for female education, and only the daughters of very rich men enjoy the privilege of learning from European professors. Through the agencies of the missionary schools, however, many Turkish women have got ideas of modern civilization and western thought, and these ideas are no sooner implanted than they spread remarkably.

Escaping from the harem of her husband, Prince Samy, the Princess Sheref Hilmy Guiridy Zade, a daughter of the late Hilmy Pasha and a niece of the sultan, made her way to Paris several years ago, where she met the Russian Prince Urusoff. After obtaining a divorce she was married to him in London. The action of the princess at that time was unprecedented, and created great consternation in Constantinople.

There had been escapes from the harems be-

fore, but this action of a woman of so high rank created a precedent which stirred the hearts of the Turks with alarm. Their apprehension was well founded, for some time later the beautiful Salla Omaruni, daughter of a wealthy banker of Constantinople, escaped from the harem of her husband, an influential official, and also went to Paris. She was followed by several other women.

"The women of Turkey," declared the Princess Sheref Hilmy on her arrival in Paris, "are beginning to resent the close seclusion in which they are kept. A daughter is brought up with the view of marrying and obeying the husband selected for her if he is as ugly and repulsive as the monsters of the Bosphorus."

"Her hope of heaven, her religion teaches her, depends upon her submission to her husband. Until we knew better we were contented. But European books got into the harems and homes. We learned of the freedom which women enjoy in other countries. We learned that woman in Europe and America was not the slave of man; that she could select the man whom she wished

to love instead of marrying a polygamous monster.

"Then our hearts longed for freedom, and we resolved that we should be free. Within the last few years several foreign women have made their way into the harems, and the stories they told of the life in foreign lands whetted our curiosity and stirred and increased our unrest."

"I loved my husband, but the intrigues among the other women of the household disgusted me," she declared. "Many of the women are not satisfied to share the affection of the husband with many others. It is becoming customary for the wealthy parents to secure European teachers for the daughters. From them the women of Turkey got the first ideas of western life."

"Then we learned French and English, and books written in these languages drifted into the homes. I have read de Maupassant, Bourget and Zola. Our husbands do not see what we read and they do not know what a revolution

orgies were carried on in the harem. Abdul Aziz, however, when he ascended the throne undertook to reform the harem and insisted on its being conducted in a strictly proper manner.

Most of the women in the harem are recruited from the most beautiful women of the Circassian race. Before they are introduced to the royal master the women selected undergo a course of training for a year or two. They are taught all the arts of feminine coquetry, the various graceful dances and all the likes and dislikes of Abdul Hamid. Many are presented by the sultan to friends.

A woman presented by the sultan to one of his friends in marriage is greatly honored, and maintains the first place in her home. The growing feeling among Turkish women that they should be supreme in the affections of the husband—a desire in the heart of every woman—has raised the standard of home life.