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Title: A Turkish Woman's European Impressions

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Illustrator: Auguste Rodin

Release Date: November 23, 2015 [EBook #50540]

Language: English

Character set encoding: UTF-8

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A TURKISH WOMAN’S EUROPEAN IMPRESSIONS

[Illustration: ZEYNEB IN HER PARIS DRAWING-ROOM

She is wearing the Yashmak and Feradjé, or cloak.]

A TURKISH WOMAN’S

EUROPEAN IMPRESSIONS

BY

ZEYNEB HANOUM

(HEROINE OF PIERRE LOTI’S NOVEL

“LES DÉSENCHANTÉES”)

EDITED & WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

GRACE ELLISON

WITH 23 ILLUSTRATIONS

FROM PHOTOGRAPHS & A DRAWING BY

AUGUSTE RODIN

PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

LONDON: SEELEY, SERVICE & CO. LTD.

1913

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INTRODUCTION

In the preface of his famous novel, \_Les Désenchantées\_, M. Pierre Loti

writes: “This novel is pure fiction; those who take the trouble to find

real names for Zeyneb, Melek, or André will be wasting their energy,

for they never existed.”

These words were written to protect the two women, Zeyneb and Melek,

who were mainly responsible for the information contained in that book,

from the possibility of having to endure the terror of the Hamidian

régime as a consequence of their indiscretion. This precaution was

unnecessary, however, seeing that the two heroines, understanding the

impossibility of escaping the Hamidian vigilance, had fled to Europe,

at great peril to their lives, before even the novel appeared.

Although it is not unusual to find Turkish women who can speak fluently

two or three European languages (and this was very striking to me when

I stayed in a Turkish harem), and although M. Loti has in his novel

taken the precaution to let Melek die, yet it would still have been an

easy task to discover the identity of the two heroines of his book.

Granddaughters of a Frenchman who for \_les beaux yeux\_ of a Circassian

became a Turk and embraced Mahometanism, they had been signalled out

from amongst the enlightened women who are a danger to the State, and

were carefully watched.

For a long time many cultured Turkish women had met to discuss what

could be done for the betterment of their social status; and when it

was finally decided to make an appeal to the sympathy of the world in

the form of a novel, who better than Pierre Loti, with his magic pen

and keen appreciation of Turkish life, could be found to plead the

cause of the women of what he calls his “second fatherland”?

In one of my letters written to Zeyneb from Constantinople, I hinted

that the Young Turks met in a disused cistern to discuss the Revolution

which led Europe to expect great things of them. The women, too, met in

strange places to plot and plan—they were full of energetic intentions,

but, with the Turkish woman’s difficulty of bringing thought into

action, they did little more than plot and plan, and but for Zeyneb

and Melek, \_Les Désenchantées\_ would never have been written.

At the conclusion of his preface, M. Loti says: “What is true in

my story is the culture allowed to Turkish women and the suffering

which must necessarily follow. This suffering, which to my foreign

eyes appeared perhaps more intense, is also giving anxiety to my dear

friends the Turks themselves, and they would like to alleviate it.

The remedy for this evil I do not claim to have discovered, since the

greatest thinkers of the East are still diligently working to find it.”

Like M. Loti I, too, own my inability to come any nearer a solution

of this problem. I, who through the veil have studied the aimless,

unhealthy existences of these pampered women, am nevertheless convinced

that the civilisation of Western Europe for Turkish women is a case

of exchanging the frying-pan for the fire. Zeyneb in her letters to

me, written between 1906-1912, shows that, if her disenchantment with

her harem existence was bitter, she could never appreciate our Western

civilisation.

Turkish women are clamouring for a more solid education and freedom.

They would cast aside the hated veil; progress demands they should—but

do they know for what they are asking?

“Be warned by us, you Turkish women,” I said to them, painting the

consequences of our freedom in its blackest colours, “and do not pull

up your anchor till you can safely steer your ship. My own countrymen

have become too callous to the bitter struggles of women; civilisation

was never meant to be run on these lines, therefore hold fast to the

protection of your harems till you can stand alone.”

Since my return to London, I have sometimes spoken on Turkish life,

and have been asked those very naïve questions which wounded the pride

of Zeyneb Hanoum. When I said I had actually stayed in an harem, I

could see the male portion of my audience, as it were, passing round

the wink. “You must not put the word ‘harem’ on the title of your

lecture,” said the secretary of a certain society. “Many who might come

to hear you would stay away for fear of hearing improper revelations,

and others would come hoping to hear those revelations and go away

disappointed.”

In one of her letters to me, Zeyneb complains that the right kind of

governess is not sent to Constantinople. The wonder to me is, when

one hears what a harem is supposed to be, that European women have the

courage to go there at all.

The word harem comes from the Arabic “Maharem,” which means “sacred or

forbidden,” and no Oriental word has been more misunderstood. It does

not mean a collection of wives; it is simply applied to those rooms in

a Turkish house exclusively reserved for the use of the women. Only a

blood relation may come there to visit the lady of the house, and in

many cases even cousins are not admitted. There is as much sense in

asking an Englishman if he has a boudoir as in asking a Turk if he has

a harem; and to think that when I stayed in Turkey, our afternoon’s

impropriety consisted of looking through the latticed windows! The

first Bey who passed was to be for me, the second for Fathma, and the

third for Selma; this was one of our favourite games in the harem. One

day I remember in the country we waited an hour for my Bey to pass, and

after all he was not a Bey, but a fat old man carrying water.

The time has not yet come for the Turkish woman to vindicate her right

to freedom; it cannot come by a mere change of law, and it is a cruelty

on the part of Europeans to encourage them to adopt Western habits

which are a part of a general system derived from a totally different

process of evolution.

In the development of modern Turkey, the Turkish woman has already

played a great part, and she has a great part still to play in the

creation of a new civilisation; but present experience has shown that

no servile imitation of the West will redeem Turkey from the evils of

centuries of patriarchal servitude.

\* \* \* \* \*

By a strange irony of fate, it was at Fontainebleau that I first

made the acquaintance of Pierre Loti’s heroines. To me every inch of

Fontainebleau was instinct with memories of happiness and liberty.

It was here that Francis I. practised a magnificence which dazzled

Europe; here, too, is the wonderful wide forest of trees which are

still there to listen to the same old story.... From a Turkish harem to

Fontainebleau. What a change indeed!

The two sisters were sitting on the verandah of their villa when I

arrived. Zeyneb had been at death’s door; she looked as if she were

there still.

“Why did you not come to lunch?” asked Melek.

“I was not invited,” I answered.

“Well, you might have come all the same.”

“Is that the custom in Turkey?”

“Why, of course, when you are invited to lunch you can come to

breakfast instead, or the meal after, or not at all. Whenever our

guests arrive, it is we who are under obligations to them for coming.”

“What a comforting civilisation; I am sure I should love to be in

Turkey.”

I wanted to ask indiscreet questions.

“Have you large trees in Turkey with hollows big enough to seat two

persons?” I began.

Melek saw through the trick at once.

“Ah!” she answered, “now you are treading on dangerous ground; next

time you come to see us we shall speak about these things. In the

meanwhile learn that the charming side of life to which you have

referred, and about which we have read so much in English novels, does

not exist for us Turkish women. Nothing in our life can be compared

to yours, and in a short time you will see this. We have no right to

vary ever so little the programme arranged for us by the customs of our

country; an adventure of any kind generally ends in disaster. As you

may know, we women never see our husbands till we are married, and an

unhappy marriage is none the less awful to bear when it is the work of

some one else.”

“Do tell me more,” I persisted.

“The marriage of a Turkish woman is an intensely interesting subject to

anyone but a Turkish woman....”

\* \* \* \* \*

I left my new friends with reluctance, but after that visit began the

correspondence which forms the subject matter of this book.

GRACE ELLISON.

A TURKISH WOMAN’S EUROPEAN IMPRESSIONS

CHAPTER I

A DASH FOR FREEDOM

A few days after my visit to the Désenchantées at Fontainebleau, which

is described in the Introduction, I received the following letter from

Zeyneb:

FONTAINEBLEAU, \_Sept.\_ 1906.

You will never know, my dear and latest friend, the pleasure your visit

has given us. It was such a new experience, and all the more to be

appreciated, because we were firmly convinced we had come to the end of

new experiences.

For almost a quarter of a century, in our dear Turkey, we longed above

all for something new; we would have welcomed death even as a change,

but everything, everything was always the same.

And now, in the space of eight short months, what have we not seen and

done! Every day has brought some new impressions, new faces, new joys,

new difficulties, new disappointments, new surprises and new friends;

it seemed to both of us that we must have drunk the cup of novelty to

its very dregs.

On Sunday, after you had left us, we talked for a long time of you and

the many subjects we had discussed together.

Sympathy and interest so rarely go hand in hand—interest engenders

curiosity, sympathy produces many chords in the key of affection, but

the sympathetic interest you felt for us has given birth on our side to

a sincere friendship, which I know will stand the test of time.

We felt a few minutes after you had been with us, how great was your

comprehension, not only of our actions, but of all the private reasons,

alas! so tragic, which made them necessary. You understood so much

without our having to speak, and you guessed a great deal of what could

not be put into words. That is what a Turkish woman appreciates more

than anything else.

We, who are not even credited with the possession of a soul, yet guard

our souls as our most priceless treasures. Those who try to force our

confidence in any way, we never forgive. Between friend and friend

the highest form of sympathy is silence. For hours we Turkish women

sit and commune with one another without speaking. You would, I know,

understand this beautiful side of our life.

Since our departure from our own country, and during these few months

we have been in France, from all sides we have received kindness. We

were ready to face yet once more unjust criticism, blame, scandal

even; but instead, ever since we left Belgrade till we arrived here,

everything has been quite the opposite. All the European papers have

judged us impartially, some have even defended and praised us, but not

one censured us for doing with our lives what it pleased us.

But in Turkey what a difference! No Constantinople paper spoke of our

flight. They were clever enough to know that by giving vent to any

ill-feeling, saying what they really thought of our “disgraceful”

conduct, they would draw still more attention to the women’s cause; so

we were left by the Press of our country severely alone.

The Sultan Hamid, who interested himself a little too much in our

welfare, became very anxious about us. Having left no stone unturned

to force us to return (he had us arrested in the middle of the night

on our arrival at Belgrade on the plea that my sister was a minor, and

that both of us had been tricked away by an elderly lady for illicit

purposes) he next ordered that all those European papers in which we

were mentioned should be sent to him. As our flight drew forth bitter

criticism of his autocratic government, he must, had he really taken

the trouble to read about us, have found some very uncomfortable truths

about himself. But that was no new régime. For years he has fed himself

on these indigestible viands, and his mechanism is used to them by now.

I need not tell you that in Constantinople, for weeks, these forbidden

papers were sold at a high price. Regardless of the risk they were

running, everyone wanted to have news of the two women who had had

the audacity to escape from their homes and the tyranny of the Sultan

Hamid. In the harems, we were the one topic of conversation. At first

no one seemed to grasp the fact that we had actually gone, but when at

last the truth slowly dawned upon them, the men naturally had not a

kind word to say of us, and we did not expect it would be otherwise.

But the women, alas! Many were obliged officially to disapprove of our

action. There were a few, however, who had the courage to defend us

openly; they have our deepest and sincerest gratitude. But do not think

for a moment that we blame or feel unkindly towards the others. Have

not we, like them, had all our lives to suffer and fear and pretend

as captives always must do? Could they be expected to find in one day

the strength of character to defend a cause however just, and not only

just, but \_their own\_—their freedom.

Yes, my friend, we ourselves have lived that life of constant fear and

dissimulation, of hopes continually shattered, and revolt we dared not

put into words.

Yet never did the thought occur to us that we might adapt ourselves to

this existence we were forced to lead. We spent our life in striving

for one thing only—the means of changing it.

Could we, like the women of the West, we thought, devote our leisure to

working for the poor, that would at least be some amusement to break

the monotony. We also arranged to meet and discuss with intelligent

women the question of organising charity, but the Sultan came down

upon us with a heavy hand. He saw the danger of allowing thinking women

to meet and talk together, and the only result of this experiment was

that the number of spies set to watch the houses of “dangerous women”

was doubled.

Then it was that we made up our minds, after continual failure, that

as long as we remained in our country under the degrading supervision

of the Hamidian régime, we could do nothing, however insignificant, to

help forward the cause of freedom for women.

I need not tell you again all the story of our escape; it is like

a nightmare to me still, and every detail of that horrible journey

will remain clearly fixed in my mind until death. Shall I tell you

all that has happened to us since? But so much has been said about us

by all sorts and conditions of men and women, that you will no doubt

have already had an overdose. Yet I thought I understood, from the

sympathetic interest you showed us the other afternoon, that there was

much you would still like to hear. Have I guessed rightly? Then there

is nothing you shall not know.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

What a long and interesting letter! and from a Turkish woman too!

Several times I read and re-read it, then I felt that I could not give

my new friend a better proof of the pleasure that it had given me, than

by writing her at once to beg for more. But I waited till the next day,

and finally sent a telegram—“Please send another letter.”

CHAPTER II

ZEYNEB’S GIRLHOOD

FONTAINEBLEAU, \_Sept.\_ 1906.

When I was quite young I loved to read the history of my country told

in the Arabian Nights style. The stories are so vivid and picturesque,

that even to-day, I remember the impression my readings made on me.

[Alas! the profession of \_conteur\_ or \_raconteur\_ is one which has

been left behind in the march of time.] Formerly every Pasha had a

\_conteur\_, who dwelt in the house, and friends were invited from all

around to come and listen to his Arabian Nights stories. The tales that

were most appreciated were those which touched on tragic events. But

the stories contained also a certain amount of moral reflection, and

were told in a style which, if ever I write, I will try to adopt. The

sentences are long, but the rhythm of the well-chosen language is so

perfect that it is almost like a song.

What a powerful imagination had these men! And how their stories

delighted me! There were stories of Sultans who poisoned, Ministers

who were strangled, Palace intrigues which ended in bloodshed, and

descriptions of battles where conqueror and conquered were both crowned

with the laurels of a hero. But I never for a moment thought of these

tales but as fiction! Could the history of any country be so awful! Yet

was not the story of the reign in which I was living even worse, only

I was too young to know it? Were not the awful Armenian massacres more

dreadful than anything the \_conteurs\_ had ever described? Was not the

bare awful truth around us more ghastly than any fiction? Indeed, it

was.

How can I impress upon your mind the anguish of our everyday life; our

continual and haunting dread of what was coming; no one could imagine

what it means except those Turkish women who, like ourselves, have

experienced that life.

Had we possessed the blind fatalism of our grandmothers, we should

probably have suffered less, but with culture, as so often happens,

we began to doubt the wisdom of the Faith which should have been our

consolation.

[Illustration: A TURKISH CHILD WITH A SLAVE

Until a Turkish girl is veiled, she leads the life of an ordinary

European child. She even goes to Embassy balls. This is a great

mistake, as it gives her a taste for a life which after she is veiled

must cease.]

[Illustration: A TURKISH HOUSE

The Harem windows are on the top floor to the right.]

You will say, that I am sad—morbid even; but how can I be otherwise

when the best years of my life have been poisoned by the horrors of the

Hamidian régime. There are some sentiments which, when transplanted,

make me suffer even as they did in the land of my birth. I am thinking

particularly of the agony of waiting.

Do you think there is in any language a sentence stronger and more

beautiful than that which terminates in Loti’s \_Pêcheurs d’Islande\_—the

tragedy of waiting—with these words, “Il ne revint jamais”?

I mention this to you because my whole youth had been so closely allied

with this very anguish of waiting.

Imagine for a moment a little Turkish Yali[1] on the shores of the

Bosphorus. It is dark, it is still, and for hours the capital of Turkey

has been deep in slumber. Scarcely a star is in the sky, scarcely a

light can be seen in the narrow and badly-paved streets of the town.

I had been reading until very late—reading and thinking, thinking and

reading to deaden the uneasiness I always felt when something was going

to happen. What was coming this time?

By a curious irony of fate, I had been reading in the Bible[2] of

Christ’s apostles whose eyes were heavy with sleep. But I could not

sleep, and after a time I could not even read. This weary, weary

waiting!

So I rose from my bed and looked through my latticed windows at the

beautiful Bosphorus, so calm and still, whilst my very soul was being

torn with anguish. But what is that noise? What is that dim light

slowly sailing up the Bosphorus? My heart begins to beat quickly, I try

to call out, my voice chokes me. The caïque has stopped at our Yali.

Now I know what it is. Four discreet taps at my father’s window, and

his answer “I am coming.” Like a physician called to a dying patient,

he dresses and hastily leaves the house. It is three o’clock in the

morning \_à la Franque\_,[3] but his master is not sleeping. Away yonder,

in his fortress of Yildiz, the dreaded Sultan trembles even more than

I. What does he want with my father? Will he be pacified this time as

he has often been before? What if my father should have incurred the

wrath of this terrible Sultan? The caïque moves away as silently as it

came. Will my beloved father ever return? There is nothing to do but to

go on waiting, waiting.

\* \* \* \* \*

Let us change the scene. A Turkish official has arrived at our house,

he has dared to come as far as the very door of the harem. He is

speaking to my mother.

“I am only doing my duty in seeing if your husband is here? I have

every right to go up those harem stairs which you are guarding so

carefully, look in all your rooms and cupboards. My duty is to find out

where your husband is, and to report to his Majesty at once.”

This little incident may sound insignificant to you, yet what a tragedy

to us! What was to happen to the bread-winner of our family? What had

my beloved father done?

The explanation of it was simple enough. A certain Pasha had maligned

him to the Sultan in a most disgraceful manner. And the Sultan might

have believed it, had he not, by the merest chance, discovered that my

father was at the Palace when the Pasha so emphatically said he was

elsewhere. On such slender evidence, the fate of our family was to be

weighed! Would it mean exile for our father? Would we ever see him any

more? Again I say, there was nothing to do but wait.

\* \* \* \* \*

As we told you on Sunday, we Turkish women read a great deal of foreign

literature, and this does not tend to make us any more satisfied with

our lot.

Amongst my favourite English books were Beatrice Harraden’s \_Ships that

Pass in the Night\_,[4] passages of which I know by heart, and Lady

Mary Montagu’s \_Letters\_. Over and over again, and always with fresh

interest, I read those charming and clever letters. Although they are

the letters of another century, there is nothing in them to shock or

surprise a Turkish woman of to-day in their criticism of our life. It

is curious to notice, when reading Lady Mary’s \_Letters\_, how little

the Turkey of to-day differs from the Turkey of her time; only, Turkey,

the child that Lady Mary knew, has grown into a big person.

There are two great ways, however, in which we have become too modern

for Lady Mary’s book. In costume we are on a level with Paris, seeing

we buy our clothes there; and as regards culture, we are perhaps more

advanced than is the West, since we have so much leisure for study, and

are not hampered with your Western methods. And yet how little we are

known by the European critics!

The people of the West still think of us women as requiring the

services of the public letter-writer! They think of us also—we, who

have so great an admiration for them, and interest ourselves in all

they are doing—as one amongst many wives. Yet Polygamy (and here I say

a \_Bismillah\_[5] or prayer of thankfulness) has almost ceased to exist

in Turkey.

I know even you are longing to make the acquaintance of a harem,

where there is more than one wife, but to-day the number of these

establishments can be counted on five fingers. We knew intimately the

wife of a Pasha who had more than one wife. He was forty years old, a

well-known and important personage, and in his Palace beside his first

wife were many slave-wives; the number increased from year to year.

But again I repeat this is an exception.

We used often to visit the poor wife, who since her marriage had never

left her home, her husband being jealous of her, as he was of all the

others; they were \_his possessions\_, and in order to err on the safe

side, he never let them out.

Our friend, the first wife, was very beautiful, though always ailing.

Every time we went to see her, she was so grateful to us for coming,

thanked us over and over again for our visit, and offered us flowers

and presents of no mean value. And she looked so happy, continually

smiling, and was so gentle and kind to all her \_entourage\_.

She told our mother, however, of the sorrow that was gnawing at her

heart-strings, and when she spoke of the Pasha she owned how much she

had suffered from not being the favourite. She treated her rivals with

the greatest courtesy. “It would be easy to forgive,” she said, “the

physical empire that each in turn has over my husband, but what I feel

most is that he does not consult me in preference to the others.”

She had a son fifteen years old, whom she loved very dearly, but she

seemed to care for the fourteen other children of the Pasha quite as

much, and spoke of them all as “our children.” Although her husband had

bought her as a slave, she had a certain amount of knowledge too, and

she read a great deal in the evenings when she was alone, alas! only

too often.

The view of the Bosphorus, with the ships coming and going, was a great

consolation to her, as it has been to many a captive. And she thanked

Allah over and over again that she at least had this pleasure in life.

I have often thought of this dear, sweet woman in my many moments of

revolt, as one admires and reverences a saint, but I have never been

able to imitate her calm resignation.

Unlike our grandmothers, who accepted without criticism their “written

fate,” we analysed our life, and discovered nothing but injustice and

cruel, unnecessary sorrow. Resignation and culture cannot go together.

Resignation has been the ruin of our country. There never would have

been all this suffering, this perpetual injustice, but for resignation;

and resignation was no longer possible for us, for our Faith was

tottering.

But I am not really pitying women more than men under the Hamidian

régime. A man’s life is always in danger. Do you know, the Sultan was

informed when your friend Kathleen came to see us? Every time our

mother invited guests to the house, she was obliged to send the list

to his Majesty, who, by every means, tried to prevent friends from

meeting. Two or three Turks meeting together in a café were eyed with

suspicion, and reported at head-quarters, so that rather than run risks

they spent the evenings in the harems with their wives. One result,

however, of this awful tyranny, was that it made the bonds which unite

a Turkish family together stronger than anywhere else in the world.

Can you imagine what it is to have detectives watching your house day

and night? Can you imagine the exasperation one feels to think that

one’s life is at the mercy of a wretched individual who has only to

invent any story he likes and you are lost? Every calumny, however

stupid and impossible, is listened to at head-quarters. The Sultan’s

life-work (what a glorious record for posterity!) has been to have

his poor subjects watched and punished. What his spies tell him he

believes. No trial is necessary, he passes sentence according to his

temper at the moment—either he has the culprit poisoned, or exiles him

to the most unhealthy part of Arabia, or far away into the desert of

Tripoli, and often the unfortunate being who is thus punished has no

idea why he has been condemned.

I shall always remember the awful impression I felt, when told with

great caution that a certain family had disappeared. The family

consisted of the father, the mother, son and daughter, and a valet.

They were my neighbours—quiet, unobtrusive people—and I thought all the

more of them for that reason.

One morning, when I looked out of my window, I saw my neighbour’s house

was closed as if no one lived there. Without knowing what had happened

to them, I became anxious, and discreetly questioned my eunuch, who

advised me not to speak about them. It appeared, however, that in

the night the police had made an inspection of the house, and no one

has since then heard of its occupants, or dared to ask, for fear of

themselves becoming “suspect.”

I found out long after, from a cutting sent me from a foreign friend

in Constantinople, that H. Bey’s house had been searched, and the

police—and this in spite of the fact that he had been forbidden to

write—had found there several volumes of verses, and he was condemned

to ten years’ seclusion in a fortified castle at Bassarah.

This will perhaps give you some idea of the conditions under which we

were living. Constant fear, anguish without hope of compensation, or

little chance of ever having anything better.

That we preferred to escape from this life, in spite of the terrible

risks we were running, and the most tragic consequences of our action,

is surely comprehensible.

If we had been captured it would only have meant death, and was the

life we were leading worth while? We had taken loaded revolvers with

us, to end our lives if necessary, remembering the example of one of

our childhood friends, who tried to escape, but was captured and taken

back to her husband, who shut her up till the end of her days in a

house on the shores of the Marmora.

You have paid a very pretty compliment to our courage. Yet, after all,

does it require very much to risk one’s life when life is of so little

value? In Turkey our existence is so long, so intolerably long, that

the temptation to drop a little deadly poison in our coffee is often

too great to withstand. Death cannot be worse than life, let us try

death.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER III

BEWILDERING EUROPE

What a curious thing it was I found so much difficulty in answering

Zeyneb’s letters. To send anything \_banal\_ to my new friend I felt

certain was to run the risk of ending the correspondence.

She knew I was in sympathy with her; she knew I could understand, as

well as any one, how awful her life must have been, but to have told

her so would have offended her. Most of the reasons for her escape,

every argument that could justify her action, she had given me, except

one; and it was probably that “one” reason that had most influenced her.

In due time probably she would tell me all, but if she did not,

nothing I could do or say would make her, for Turkish women will

not be cross-examined. One of them, when asked one day in a Western

drawing-room “how many wives has your father?” answered, without

hesitation, “as many as your husband, Madame.”

Zeyneb had once told me that I succeeded in guessing so much the truth

of what could not be put into words. She had on one occasion said

“we never see our husbands until we are married,” and a little later

“sometimes the being whose existence we have to share inspires us with

a horror that can never be overcome.” Putting these two statements

together, I was able to draw my own conclusions as to the “one”

reason.... Poor little Zeyneb!

It seemed to me from the end of her letter, that Zeyneb would have been

grateful had I said that I approved of her action in leaving her own

country. To have told her the contrary would not have helped matters in

the least, and sooner or later she was sure to find out her mistake for

herself.

And who that noticed her enthusiasm for all she saw would have dreamt

of the tragedy that was in her life? The innocent delight she had

when riding on the top of a bus, and her jubilation at discovering an

Egyptian Princess indulging in the same form of amusement!

Zeyneb told me that \_economy\_ was a word for which there was no

equivalent in the Turkish language, so how could she be expected to

practise an art which did not exist in her country? It was from her

I had learnt the habit of answering her letters by telegram, and the

result had been satisfactory. “Eagerly waiting for another letter,” I

wired her. The following letter arrived:

FONTAINEBLEAU, \_Oct.\_ 1906.

A few days after our arrival began in earnest a new experience for

us. The “demands” for interviews from journalists—every post brought

a letter. Many reporters, it is true, called without even asking

permission; wanted to know our impressions of West Europe after eight

days; the reasons why we had left Turkey; and other questions still

more ignorant and extraordinary about harem life.

When, however, we had conquered the absurd Oriental habit of being

polite, we changed our address, and called ourselves by Servian names.

What an extraordinary lack of intelligence, it seemed, to suppose that

in a few phrases could be related the history of the Turkish woman’s

evolution; and the psychology of a state of mind which forces such and

such a decision explained. How would it have been possible to give the

one thousand and one private reasons connected with our action! And

what would be the use of explaining all this to persons one hoped

never to see again—persons by whom you are treated as a spectacle, a

living spectacle, whose adventures will be retailed in a certain lady’s

boudoir to make her “five o’clock” less dull?

“What made you think of running away from Turkey?” asked one of these

press detectives. He might as well have been saying to me, “You had

on a blue dress the last time I saw you, why are you not wearing it

to-day?”

“Weren’t you sorry to leave your parents?” asked another. Did he

suppose because we were Turks that we had hearts of stone. How could

anyone, a complete stranger too, dare to ask such a question? And yet,

angry as I was, this indiscretion brought tears to my eyes, as it

always does when I think of that good-bye.

“Good night, little girl,” said my father, on the eve of our departure.

“Don’t be so long in coming to dine with us again. Promise that you

will come one day next week.”

I almost staggered. “I’ll try,” I answered. Every minute I felt that I

must fling myself in his arms and tell him what I intended to do, but

when I thought of our years and years of suffering, my mind was made

up, and I kept back my tears.

Do you see now, dear Englishwoman, why we appreciated your discreet

interest in us, and how we looked forward to a friendship with you

who have understood so well, that there can be tears behind eyes

that smile, that a daughter’s heart is not necessarily hard because

she breaks away from the family circle, nor is one’s love for the

Fatherland any the less great because one has left it forever? All this

we feel you have understood, and again and again we thank you.—Your

affectionate

ZEYNEB.

FONTAINEBLEAU, \_Oct.\_ 1906.

You ask me to give you my first impression of France (wrote Zeyneb),

but it is not so much an impression of France, as the impression of

being free, that I am going to write. What I would like to describe to

you is the sensation of intense joy I felt as I stood for the first

time before a window wide open that had neither lattice-work nor iron

bars.

It was at Nice. We had just arrived from our terrible journey. We had

gone from hotel to hotel, but no one would give us shelter even for

a few hours. Was that Christian charity, to refuse a room because I

was thought to be dying? I cannot understand this sentiment. A friend

explained that a death in an hotel would keep other people away. Why

should the Christians be so frightened of death?

I was too ill at the moment to take in our awful situation, and quite

indifferent to the prospect of dying on the street. Useless it was,

however, our going to any more hotels; it was waste of time and waste

of breath, and I had none of either to spare. No one advised us, and no

one seemed to care to help us, until, by the merest chance, my sister

remembered our friends in Belgrade had given us a doctor’s address.

We determined to find him if we possibly could. In half an hour’s

time we found our doctor, who sent us at once to a sanatorium. There

they could not say, “You are too ill to come in,” seeing illness was

a qualification for admittance. But I shall not linger on those first

moments in Europe: they were sad beyond words.

It must have been early when I awoke the next morning, to find the sun

forcing its way through the white curtains, and flooding the whole room

with gold. Ill as I was, the scene was so beautiful that I got out

of bed and opened wide the window, and what was my surprise to find

that there was no lattice-work between me and the blue sky, and the

orange trees, and the hills of Nice covered with cypress and olives?

The sanatorium garden was just one mass of flowers, and their sweet

perfume filled the room. With my eyes I drank in the scene before me,

the hills, and the sea, and the sky that never seemed to end.

A short while after, my sister came in. She also from her window had

been watching at the same time as I. But no explanation was necessary.

For the first time in our lives we could look freely into space—no

veil, no iron bars. It was worth the price we had paid, just to have

the joy of being before that open window. I sign myself in Turkish

terms of affection.—Your carnation and your mouse,

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER IV

SCULPTURE’S FORBIDDEN JOY—M. RODIN AT HOME

Zeyneb and Melek left Fontainebleau and travelled to Switzerland by

short stages; their first halting-place was Paris.

They stayed for a week in the gay capital, and during that time Melek

and I visited some of the principal churches and monuments.

“Sight-seeing” was what the Hanoums[6] then called “freedom.” To them

it meant being out of the cage; tasting those pleasures which for so

many years had been forbidden. Their lesson was yet to be learnt.

We went one afternoon to see M. Rodin. Rising, summer and winter, at a

very early hour, the sculptor had finished the greater part of his work

for the day when we arrived; the model was resting, and he was talking

with the students, who had come to discuss their difficulties with him.

To me this opportunity given to young talent of actually seeing a

master at work was such a happy idea, I made the remark to M. Rodin.

“If only those who succeed,” he said, “be it in the difficult

accomplishment of their daily task, or in the pursuit of some glorious

end, had the courage to speak of their continual efforts, their

struggles, and their suffering, what a glorious lesson in energy it

would be for those who were striving for a place amongst the workers.

“Those who have arrived should say to those who are starting: At each

corner, there is suffering; at each turning some fresh struggle begins,

and there is sorrow all the time. We who have conquered have passed by

that road, you can go no other way.

“But when once they have got to their destination, the successful men

are silent. And they who are still on the way get tired of the daily

toil, knowing not that they who have arrived, have had the very same

experience.”

[Illustration: LES DÉSENCHANTÉES

From a sketch by Auguste Rodin.]

Many beautiful works attracted our attention that afternoon, the most

striking being Mary Magdalene, in repentant anguish at the feet of

her Master, Jesus; the Prodigal Son with his hands clasped in useless

regret towards a wasted and ill-spent life. Then there was a nude (I

forget the name by which she will be immortalised), her wonderful arms

in a movement of supplication, so grand, that the Eastern woman and I

together stretched out our hands towards it in appreciation.

The sculptor saw our movement, understood and thanked us; a few moments

later, conscious of our action, we blushed. What had we done?

I, the Scotch puritan, had actually admired one of those beautiful

nudes before which we, as children, shut our eyes. But the Oriental?

“In my country these marble figures are not seen,” she explained, “‘the

face and form created by God must not be copied by man,’ said our

Prophet, and for centuries all good Moslems have obeyed this command.”

“Do you know the legend of the Prophet’s son-in-law Osman?” she said.

“No,” I answered, “please tell me.”

“One day, long, long ago,” related Melek, “when the followers of Christ

had left their church, Osman entered and broke all the sacred images

except one. Then when he had finished his work of destruction, he

placed his axe at the foot of the figure he had left intact.

“The next day, the Christians discovering what had happened, tried to

find the guilty person. Osman’s air of calm triumph betrayed him.

“‘What have you done?’ they cried, rushing towards him.

“‘Nothing,’ he answered, ‘I am innocent; it is your Divinity who has

destroyed everything.’

“‘Our Divinity cannot move.’

“‘If your Divinity is lifeless,’ answered Osman, ‘why do you pray to a

God of stone?’[7]

\* \* \* \* \*

“In the Meandre valley in Asia,” went on Melek, “the sculptured heads

on the tombs are cursed. At Ephesus and Herapolis the Turcomans turn

away in horror from the faces that are engraven in marble; and never

are to be seen these Western pictures in stone, and statues erected to

the immortal memory of heroes.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The two Hanoums left for Switzerland.

CHAPTER V

THE ALPS AND ARTIFICIALITY

TERRITET, \_Dec.\_ 1906.

I wonder if you know what life is like in a big \_caravanserai\_

on the shores of Lake Leman in December. This \_hotel\_ is filled from

the ground to the sixth floor, and from east to west with people of all

ages, who have a horror of being where they ought to be—that is to say,

in their own homes—and who have come to the Swiss mountains with but

one idea—that of enjoying themselves. What can be the matter with their

homes, that they are all so anxious to get away?

I have been more than a month in this place, and cannot get used to

it. After the calm of the Forest of Fontainebleau and the quiet little

house where, for the first time, we tasted the joys of real rest, this

existence seems to me strange and even unpleasant. Indeed, it makes me

tired even to think of the life these people lead and their expense of

muscular force to no purpose.

But the doctor wished me to come here, and I, who long above everything

else to be strong, am hoping the pure air will cure me.

On the terrace which overlooks the lake I usually take my walks, but

when I have taken about a hundred steps I have to sit down and rest.

Certainly I would be no Alpinist.

One thing to which I never seem to accustom myself is my hat. It is

always falling off. Sometimes, too, I forget that I am wearing a hat

and lean back in my chair; and what an absurd fashion—to lunch in a

hat! Still, hats seem to play a very important rôle in Western life.

Guess how many I possess at present—twenty.

I cannot tell whom I have to thank, since the parcels come anonymously,

but several kind friends, hearing of our escape, have had the

thoughtfulness and the same original idea of providing us with hats.

Hardly a day passes but someone sends us a hat; it is curious, but

charming all the same. Do they think we are too shy to order hats

for ourselves, and are still wandering about Switzerland in our

\_tcharchafs\_?[8]

\* \* \* \* \*

Every morning the people here row on the lake, or play tennis—tennis

being one of their favourite forms of amusement. I watch them with

interest, yet even were I able I should not indulge in this unfeminine

sport.

Women rush about the court, from left to right, up and down, forwards

and backwards. Their hair is all out of curl, often it comes down; and

they wear unbecoming flat shoes and men’s shirts and collars and ties.

The ball comes scarcely over the net, a woman rushes forward, her leg

is bared to the sight of all; by almost throwing herself on the ground,

she hits it back over the net, and then her favourite man (not her

husband, I may mention), with whom she waltzes and rows and climbs,

chooses this moment to take a snapshot of her most hideous attitude.

What an unpleasant idea to think a man should possess such a souvenir!

And yet after tennis these people do not rest—on they go, walking and

climbing; and what is the use of it all?—they only come back and eat

four persons’ share of lunch.

At meal-time, the conversation is tennis and climbing, and climbing and

tennis; and again I say, I cannot understand why they employ all this

muscular force to no higher end than to give themselves an unnatural

appetite.

A friend of my father’s, who is staying here, tells me the wonderful

climbing he has accomplished. He explains to me that he has faced death

over and over again, and only by the extraordinary pluck of his guide

has his life been spared.

“And did you at last reach your friend?” I asked.

“What friend?”

“Was it not to rescue some friend that you faced death?”

“No,” he said, “for pleasure.”

“For pleasure,” I repeated, and he burst out laughing.

He spoke of this as if it were something of which to be proud, “and

his oft-repeated encounters with death,” he said, “only whetted his

appetite for more.” Was life then of so little value to this man that

he could risk it so easily?

Naturally in trying to explain this curious existence I compare it with

our life in the harem, and the more I think the more am I astonished.

What I should like to ask these people, if I dared, is, are they really

satisfied with their lot, or are they only pretending to be happy, as

we in Turkey pretended to be happy? Are they not tired of flirting and

enjoying themselves so uselessly?

We in Turkey used to envy the women of the West. We, who were denied

the rights of taking part in charitable works, imagined that the

European women not only dared to think, but carry their schemes into

action for the betterment of their fellow-creatures.

But are these women here an exception? Do they think, or do they not?

I wonder myself whether they have not found life so empty that they

are endeavouring to crush out their better selves by using up their

physical energy. How is it possible, I ask myself, that, after all this

exercise, they have strength enough to dance till midnight. Life to me

at present is all out of focus; in time perhaps I shall see it in its

proper proportions.

We go down sometimes to see the dancing. Since I have been here,

I perfectly understand why you never find time to go to balls, if

dancing in your country is anything like it is here. When we were

children of twelve, before we were veiled, we were invited to dances

given in Constantinople. I have danced with young attachés at the

British Embassy, yet, child though I was, I saw nothing clever in their

performance.

All the people at this dance are grown up, not one is under twenty—some

are old gentlemen of fifty—yet they romp like children all through the

evening till deep into the night, using up their energy and killing

time, as if their life depended on the rapidity with which they hopped

round the room without sitting down or feeling ill.

The waltz is to my mind senseless enough, but the lancers? “The ring of

roses” the little English girls play is more dignified.

It seems to me that women must forfeit a little of the respect that men

owe to them when they have romped with them at lancers.

To-night, I have found out, dancing here is after all an excuse for

flirting. In a very short while couples who were quite unacquainted

with one another become very intimate. “Oh! I could not wish for a

better death than to die waltzing,” I heard one young woman say to her

partner. His wishes were the same. Surely the air of Switzerland does

not engender ambition!

[Illustration: A TURKISH DANCER]

[Illustration: A TURKISH LADY DRESSED AS A GREEK DANCER

Turkish women spend much of their time dressing up.]

One gentleman came and asked me if I could dance. I said, “Yes, I

can \_dance\_,” laying particular emphasis on the word \_dance\_. But I do

not think he understood.

“Will you dance with me?” he asked.

“No,” I replied, “I \_dance\_ by myself.” He stared at me as if I were

mad—probably he took me for a professional dancer.

\* \* \* \* \*

When you come to stay with us at Nice, after we have had enough of this

pure air to justify our leaving Switzerland and these commonplace and

unsympathetic people, and we are in our own villa again and free to

do as we will, then we will teach you Turkish dances, and you will no

longer be surprised at my criticisms.

Dancing with us is a fine art. In the Imperial Harem more attention

is paid to the teaching of dancing than to any other learning. When

the Sultan is worn out with cares of state and the thousand and one

other worries for which his autocratic rule is responsible, his dancing

girls are called into his presence, and there with veils and graceful

movements they soothe his tired nerves till he almost forgets the

atrocities which have been committed in his name.

A Turkish woman who dances well is seen to very great advantage; a

dancing woman may become a favourite, a Sultana, a Sultan’s mother,

the queen of the Imperial Harem.

I can assure you a Western woman is not seen at her best when she

dances the lancers.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER VI

FREEDOM’S DOUBTFUL ENCHANTMENT

TERRITET, \_Dec.\_ 1906.

I am conservative in my habits, as you will find out when you know me

better, although Turkish women are generally supposed to be capricious

and changeable.

Every day you can picture me sitting on the same terrace, in the same

chair, looking at the same reposeful Lake Leman and writing to the same

sympathetic friends.

The sea before me is so blue and silent and calm! Does it know, I

wonder, the despair which at times fills my soul! or is its blue there

to remind me of our home over yonder!

In the spring the Bosphorus had such sweet, sad tints. As children when

we walked near its surface my little Turkish friends said to me, “Don’t

throw stones at the Bosphorus—you will hurt it.”

Lake Leman also has ships which destroy the limpid blue of its surface

and remind me of those which passed under my lattice windows and

sailed so far away that my thoughts could not follow them.

Here I might almost imagine I was looking at the Bosphorus, and yet, is

the reflection of snow-clad peaks what I ought to find in the blue sea

away yonder? Where are the domes and minarets of our mosques? Is not

this the hour when the Muezzins[9] lift up their voices, and solemnly

call the faithful to prayer?

On such an autumn evening as this in Stamboul, I should be walking in

a quiet garden where chrysanthemums would be growing in profusion.

The garden would be surrounded by high walls, giant trees would throw

around us a damp and refreshing shade, and the red rays of the dying

sun would find their way through the leaves, and my companions’ white

dresses would all be stained with its roseate hues.

But suddenly we remember the sun is setting. To the cries of the

frightened birds we hurry back quickly through the trees. How can a

Turkish woman dare to be out after sunset?... Ah! I see it all again

now—those garden walls, those knotted trees, those jealous lattice-work

windows which give it all an impression of distress! and I am looking

at it without a veil and eyes that are free!

\* \* \* \* \*

Even as I write to you, young men and maidens pass and repass before

me, and I wonder more than ever whether they are happy—yet what do they

know of life and all its sorrows; sorrow belongs to the Turks—they have

bought its exclusive rights.

In spite of our efforts not to have ourselves spoken about, the Sultan

still interests himself in us. In all probability, he has had us

reported as “dangerous revolutionists” whom the Swiss Government would

do well to watch. And perhaps the Swiss authorities, having had so many

disagreeable experiences of anarchists of late, are keeping their eyes

on us! Yet why should we care? All our lives have we not been thus

situated? We ought to be used to it by this time.

Around me I see people breathing in the pure air, going out and coming

in, and no government watches their movements. Why should \_Fate\_

have chosen certain persons rather than others to place under such

intolerable conditions? Why should we have been born Turks rather than

these free women who are here enjoying life? I ask myself this question

again and again, and all to no purpose; it only makes me bitter.

Do you know, I begin to regret that I ever came in contact with your

Western education and culture! But if I begin writing of Western

culture, this letter will not be finished for weeks, and I want news of

you very soon.—Au revoir, petite chérie,

ZEYNEB.

\* \* \* \* \*

TERRITET, \_Jan.\_ 1907.

Your letter of yesterday annoys me. You are “changing your \_pension\_,”

you say, “because you are not free to come in to meals when you like.”

What an awful grievance! If only you English women knew how you are to

be envied! Come, follow me to Turkey, and I will make you thank Allah

for your liberty.

Ever since I can remember, I have had a passion for writing, but this

is rather the exception than the rule for a Turkish woman. At one time

of my life, I exchanged picture postcards with unknown correspondents,

who sent me, to a \_poste restante\_ address, views of places and people

I hoped some day to visit.

This correspondence was for us the DREAM SIDE of our existence. In

times of unhappiness (extra unhappiness, for we were always unhappy),

discouragement, and, above all, revolt, it was in this existence that

we tried to find refuge. The idea that friends were thinking of us,

however unknown they were, made us look upon life with a little more

resignation—and you, my friend, who complain that “you are not free to

have your meals when you like,” should know that \_this correspondence

had to be hidden with as much care, as if it had been a plot to kill

the Imperial Majesty himself\_.

\* \* \* \* \*

When our correspondence was sent to us direct, it had to pass through

the hands of three different persons before we had the pleasure of

receiving it ourselves. All the letters we sent out and received were

read not only by my father and his secretary, but by the officials of

the Ottoman Post.

One day, I remember, the daughter of an ex-American minister sent me a

long account of her sister’s marriage, and she stopped short at the

fourth page. I was just going to write to her for an explanation, when

the remaining sheets were sent on to me by the police, whose duty it

was to read the letters, and who had simply forgotten to put the sheets

in with the others.

You could never imagine the plotting and intriguing necessary to

receive the most ordinary letters; not even the simplest action could

be done in a straightforward manner; we had to perjure our souls by

constantly pretending, in order to enjoy the most innocent pleasures—it

mattered little to us, I do assure you, “whether we had our meals at

the time we liked” or not.

\* \* \* \* \*

All around me little girls are playing. They wear their hair loose

or in long plaits, their dresses are short. Up the steps they climb;

they play at hide-and-seek with their brothers and their brothers’

friends. They laugh, they romp, their eyes are full of joy, and their

complexions are fresh—surely this is the life children should lead?

I close my eyes, and I see the children of my own country who at their

age are veiled. Their childhood has passed before they know it. They do

not experience the delight of playing in the sun, and when they go out

they wear thick black veils which separate them from all the joys of

youth.

I was scarcely ten years old when I saw one of my little friends taking

the veil, and from that day she could no longer play with us. That

incident created such an impression on us that for days we could hardly

speak. Poor little Suate! No longer could she dance with us at the

Christians’ balls nor go to the circus. Her life had nothing more in

common with ours, and we cried for her as if she had died.

But we were happy not to be in her place, and I remember saying to my

sister, “Well, at least I have two years before me; perhaps in a short

time our customs will have changed. What is the use of worrying so long

beforehand?”

“I am still more certain to escape, for I have four years before me,”

she answered.

Little Suate was veiled at a time when those delightful volumes of the

\_Bibliothèque Rose\_ were almost part of our lives. From them we learnt

to believe that some good fairy must come, and with the touch of her

magic wand all our destinies would be changed.

But to-day, when I am no longer a child, I ask myself whether my

great-great-grandchildren can ever free themselves from this hideous

bondage.

Melek is writing for you her impressions of taking the veil. They are

more recent than mine.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD-BYE TO YOUTH—TAKING THE VEIL

TERRITET, \_Jan.\_ 1907.

I am thinking of a sad spring morning of long ago. I was twelve years

old, but the constant terror in which I had lived had increased my

tendency towards uneasiness and melancholy. The life I was forced to

lead had nothing in common with my nature. Ever since I can remember, I

had loved the bright light, open horizons, galloping on horses against

the wind, and all my surroundings were calm and monotonous.

As time went on, I put off every day the moment for wakening, because

I had to open my eyes in the same room, and the same white muslin

curtains were always there to greet me.

How can I explain to you my jealousy at seeing how contentedly all the

furniture lay in the soft light which filtered through the latticed

windows of our harems? A heavy weight was pressing on my spirit! How

many times when the governess came into my room did she not find me in

tears!

“What is the matter, my darling?” she would ask, and under the

influence of this unexpected tenderness I would sob without even

knowing the cause of my sorrow.

Then I dressed myself slowly, so that there should be less time to

live. How was it, I wondered, that some people feared death? Death

would have been such a change—the only change to which a Turkish woman

could look forward.

In our house there was scarcely a sound; hardly were the steps of the

young Circassian slaves heard as they passed along the corridors.

Our mother was kind but stern, and her beautiful face had an expression

of calm resignation. She lived like a stranger amongst us, not being

able to associate herself with either our thoughts or our ideals.

The schoolroom where we worked the greater part of the day looked on

to a garden thick with trees and perfumed with the early roses. Its

furniture consisted of a big oak table and chairs, shelves full of

books, a globe, and three busts in plaster of Paris, of Napoleon,

Dante, and Mozart. What strange thoughts have those three men, so

different and yet so interesting, not suggested to me! What a curious

influence they all three had on my child mind!

It was in this schoolroom, twice a week, that we studied the Koran; but

before the lesson began an old servant covered up the three great men

in plaster. The \_Hodja\_[10] must not see these heathenish figures.

When the Imam arrived, my sister and I went to the door to meet him,

kissing his hand as a sign of respect. Then he used to pass his bony

fingers over our hair, saying as a greeting, “May Allah protect you, my

children.”

With the Hodja Effendi came into our schoolroom a perfume of incense of

burnt henna and sandal-wood. His green tunic and turban, which showed

he had visited the Holy Tomb at Mecca, made his beard so white and his

eyes so pale, that he seemed like a person from another world—indeed he

reminded me, not a little, of those Indian Fakirs, who live on prayers.

From the moment he sat down at the table, my sorrows seemed to

vanish for a while, and an atmosphere of calm and blessed peace took

possession of my soul.

“Only God is God,” he began.

“And Mahomet is His Prophet,” we responded, as we opened the Koran at

the place he had chosen for the lesson.

“Read, my child,” he said.

I took the book, and began to read the prayer, which is a rhythmed

chant. The Imam read with me in a soft, low voice, and when the chapter

was finished he murmured, “You read well, Neyr; may Allah protect you.”

Then he questioned us on the prayers we had learnt, on the good we had

to do and the evil to avoid, and his voice was so monotonous that each

sentence sounded like a prayer.

When we had finished, he asked, as he always did, to see our governess.

I went to find her in the garden, and she came at once.

As the Hodja could not speak English, he asked us to say to her, “You

have a fine face. Allah loves the good and the kind and those who go

the way they should go. He will be with you.” And before he went away,

taking with him the delightful perfume of incense, he shook the hand of

the Englishwoman in his.

[Illustration: TURKISH LADY IN TCHARCHAFF. OUTDOOR COSTUME

During the reign of Abdul Aziz (\_vide\_ text) Turkish ladies wore the

Yashmak in the street, now they wear a thick black veil through which

they can see and are not supposed to be seen. The women must always

wear gloves.]

Another day he came, and after the lesson he said to me, “Neyr, you are

twelve years old; you must be veiled. You can no longer have your

hair exposed and your face uncovered—you must be veiled. Your mother

has not noticed you have grown a big girl, I therefore must. I teach

you to love Allah, you are my spiritual child, and for that reason I

must warn you of the danger henceforward of going out unveiled. Neyr,

you must be veiled.”

I was not even listening to the Imam! An awful agony had seized and

numbed my soul; the words which he had uttered resounded in my brain,

and little by little sank into my understanding—“Neyr, you must be

veiled”—that is to say, to be forever cloistered like those who live

around you; to be a slave like your mother, and your cousins, and your

elder sister; to belong henceforth to the harem; no longer to play in

the garden unveiled; nor ride Arabian ponies in the country; to have

a veil over your eyes, and your soul; to be always silent, always

forgotten, to be always and always \_a thing\_.

“Neyr, you must be veiled,” the old Hodja began again.

I raised my head. “Yes, I know, Hodja Effendi, I shall be veiled, since

it is necessary.” Then I was silent.

The old Imam went away, not understanding what had happened to me, and

without my having kissed his hand. I remained in the same place, my

elbows on the table. I was alone. All around was deadly still.

Suddenly, however, Miss M. opened the door; her eyes were red. Gently

shutting the door and coming towards me, she said:

“Neyr, I have seen the Imam, and I understand that from to-morrow you

must be veiled.”

I saw the pain stamped on her face, but I could say nothing. Already

she had taken me in her arms and carried me into her room at the end of

the corridor, murmuring all the while, “The brutes!”

Together we wept; I, without unnecessary complaints, she without

useless consolation.

Once my sorrow had passed a little, I questioned my governess.

“You are English, are you not?”

“Yes, dear, I am English.”

“In England are the women veiled, and the children free?”

“The women and children are free.”

“Then I will go to England.”

“Silence, Neyr, silence.”

“Take me to England.”

“I cannot, Neyr,” she answered.

But all that day and all that night I dreamt of dear, free England, I

longed to see.

\* \* \* \* \*

The country house where we lived was large, with big rooms, long

corridors, and dark halls. Now and again carriages passed, bringing

excursionists to the neighbouring wood, and when we heard the wheels

rumbling over the uneven road, we rushed to the latticed windows to see

all we could.

Sometimes we used to go with Miss M. to see Stamboul, which was on the

opposite shore. Miss M. loved the town, and used to take us there as

often as possible. Sometimes we used to ride with my brother in the

country, and I loved to feel the wind blowing through my untidy hair,

but all that would be over now. Sometimes my father would take me to

see friends of his—foreigners they were—and the girls and boys played

together, and I laughed and played with them. But I understood that I

was only on the margin of their great life, that each day part of my

right to existence would be taken from me, a veil would soon cover my

face, and I would only be a Moslem woman, whose every aspiration and

emotion would be trampled under foot.

That moment had come.

\* \* \* \* \*

We were to go out with mother that afternoon. On my bed in the

monotonous room I disliked so much, a black mantle, a cape, and a veil

were placed.

Several persons had come to see me veiled for the first time. Awkwardly

I placed the pleated skirt round my waist, the cape over my shoulders,

and the veil over my face; but, in order that the tears which were

falling should not be seen, I did not lift it up again.

“Neyr,” asked mother, “are you ready?”

“Yes,” I answered, and followed her with my head up in spite of this

mourning. And from that day, from that moment, I had determined on

revolt.

MELEK (N. NEYR-EL-NIRSA).

CHAPTER VIII

A MISFIT EDUCATION

TERRITET, \_Jan.\_ 1907.

I began to write to you the other day of the influence which Western

culture has had on the lives of Turkish women.

If you only knew the disastrous consequences of that learning and the

suffering for which it is responsible! From complete ignorance, we were

plunged into the most advanced culture; there was no middle course, no

preparatory school, and, indeed, what ought to have been accomplished

in centuries we have done in three, and sometimes in two generations.

When our grandmothers could sign their names and read the Koran, they

were known as “cultured women” compared with those who had never learnt

to read and write; when a woman could dispense with the services of a

“public letter-writer” she was looked upon as a learned woman in the

town in which she lived, and her time was fully occupied writing the

correspondence of her neighbours.

What I call the disastrous influence was the influence of the Second

French Empire.

One day, when I have time, I shall look up the papers which give a

description of the Empress Eugénie’s visit to the East. No doubt they

will treat her journey as a simple exchange of courtesies between two

Sovereigns. They may lay particular emphasis on the pageantry of her

reception, but few women of that time were aware of the revolution that

this visit had on the lives of the Turkish women.

The Empress of the French was incontestably beautiful—but \_she was

a woman\_, and the first impression which engraved itself on the

understanding of these poor Turkish captives, was, that their master,

Abdul Aziz, was paying homage \_to a woman\_.

The extraordinary beauty and charm of the Empress was enhanced by

the most magnificent reception ever offered to a Sovereign, and

even to-day, one figure stands out from all that wonderful Oriental

pageant—a slight, lovely woman before whom a Sultan bowed in all his

majesty.

In honour of a \_woman\_, a jewelled palace in marble and gold was being

built, and from the opposite side of the Bosphorus the captives watched

it coming into existence with ever-increasing wonderment.

For a \_woman\_, had been prepared rose and gold caïques all carpeted

with purple velvet. From a magnificent little Arabian kiosk especially

built Ottoman troops from all corners of the Empire passed in review

before a \_woman\_; even her bath sandals were all studded with priceless

gems; no honour was too high, no luxury too great for \_this woman\_. The

Sultanas could think of nothing else; in the land of Islam great honour

had been rendered to a \_woman\_.

It was after the visit of the Empress Eugénie that the women of the

palace and the wives of the high functionaries copied as nearly as

they could the appearance of the beautiful Empress. They divided their

hair in the middle, and spent hours in making little bunches of curls.

High-heeled shoes replaced the coloured \_babouches\_;[11] they even

adopted the hideous crinolines, and abandoned forever those charming

Oriental garments, the \_chalvar\_[12] and \_enturi\_,[13] which they

considered symbols of servitude, but which no other fashion has been

able to equal in beauty.

As might be supposed, the middle class soon followed the example of

the palace ladies and adopted Western costume. Then there was a craze

for \_everything\_ French. The most eccentric head-dresses and daring

costumes were copied. To these Oriental women were given more jewels

than liberty, more sensual love than pure affection, and it mattered

little, until they found out from reading the foreign papers that there

was something else except the beauty of the body—the beauty of the soul.

The more they read and learnt, the greater was their suffering. They

read everything they could lay their hands on—history, religion,

philosophy, poetry, and even \_risqué\_ books. They had an indigestion of

reading, and no one was there to cure them.

This desire for everything French lasted until our generation. No one

seemed to understand how harmful it was to exaggerate the atmosphere

of excitement in which we were living.

With the craze for the education of the West, French governesses came

to Constantinople in great numbers; for it was soon known what high

salaries the Turks paid, and how hospitable they were.

If you had seen the list of books that these unfortunate Turkish girls

read to get a knowledge of French literature, I think you would agree

with me they must have been endowed with double moral purity for the

books not to have done them more harm.

For nearly thirty years this dangerous experiment went on. No parents

seemed to see the grave error of having in one’s house a woman about

whom they knew nothing, and who in a very short time could exert a very

disastrous influence over a young life. It was only when catastrophe

after catastrophe[14] had brought this to their notice, they began

to take any interest in their daughters’ governesses, and occupy

themselves a little more seriously about what they read.

When I look back on our girlhood, I do feel bitterly towards these

women, who had not the honesty to find out that we had souls. How

they might have helped us if only they had cared! How they might have

discussed with us certain theories which we were trying to apply

disastrously to our Eastern existence! But they said to themselves, no

doubt, Let us take advantage of the high salary, for we cannot stand

this tedious existence too long. And the Turkish women went on reading

anything that came within their reach.

Could these Turkish girls be blamed for thus unknowingly destroying

their own happiness? What was there to do but read? When all the

recognised methods of enjoyment are removed, and when few visits are

paid (and to go out every day is not considered ladylike), think what

an enormous part of the day is still left unoccupied.

In our grandmothers’ days, the women used to assemble in the evening

and make those beautiful embroideries which you admire so much. Others

made their daughters’ trousseaux, others told stories in the Arabian

Nights style, and with that existence they were content. Not one of

them wanted to read the fashionable French novels, nor had they any

desire to play the piano.

It was at the beginning of the reign of Abdul Hamid that this craze for

Western culture was at its height. The terrible war, and the fall of

the two beloved Sultans, woke the women from their dreams. Before the

fact that their country was in danger, they understood their duty. From

odalisques[15] they became mothers and wives determined to give their

children the education they themselves had so badly needed.

The new monarch then endowed the Ottoman Empire with schools for little

girls. The pupils who applied themselves learnt very quickly, and soon

they could favourably be compared with their sisters of the West.

This was the first step that Turkish women had made towards their

evolution.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the age of ten, when I began the study of English, we were

learning at the same time French, Arabic, and Persian, as well as

Turkish. Not one of these languages is easy, but no one complained, and

every educated Turkish girl had to undergo the same torture.

What I disliked most bitterly in my school days was the awful

regularity. My mother, rather the exception than the rule, found we

must be always occupied. As a child of twelve, I sat almost whole days

at the piano, and when I was exhausted, Mdlle. X. was told to give me

needlework. Delighted to be rid of me, she gave me slippers to work for

my father, whilst she wrote to “Mon cher Henri.” She took no notice of

me, as I stitched away, sighing all the while. In order to get finished

quickly, I applied myself to my task; the more I hurried, the more I

was given to do, and in a few weeks the drawers were full of my work.

Our education was overdone.

\* \* \* \* \*

So we Turkish women came to a period of our existence when it was

useless to sigh for a mind that could content itself with the

embroidery evenings of our grandmothers. These gatherings, too, became

less and less frequent, for women were not allowed out after dark,

no matter what their age.

[Illustration: “SILENT GOSSIP” OF A GROUP OF TURKISH WOMEN

They will often spend an afternoon in silent communion.]

[Illustration: TURKISH LADIES IN THEIR GARDEN WITH THEIR CHILDREN’S

GOVERNESSES

Little boys remain in the Harem until they are eight, after that they

are counted as men.]

Then it was, however, that, in spite of its being forbidden, I

inaugurated a series of “white dinner parties”[16] for girls only. This

created a scandal throughout the town. Our parents disliked the idea

intensely, but we remained firm, and were happy to see our efforts

crowned with success. Later, when we were married, we continued those

dinners as long as we dared, and then it was we discussed what we could

do for the future of women.

And what delightful evenings we spent together! Those \_soirées\_ were

moments when we could be ourselves, open our hearts to one another, and

try to brighten for a little our lives. The fourteen friends I most

loved in Turkey were all of the company of “white diners,” and all

those fourteen girls have played some special rôle in life.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am sending you a letter, written by a friend whom I shall never see

again.

“Since your departure,” she wrote, “we have not been allowed to go a

step out of doors, lest we should follow your example. We are living

under a régime of terror which is worse than it has ever been before.

“I want to implore you to work for us. Tell the whole world what we

are suffering; indeed it would be a consolation, much as it hurts our

pride.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I look around me and see all these happy children here in Switzerland

without one care, and again I say to myself, how unjust is life.—Your

affectionate friend,

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER IX

“SMART WOMEN” THROUGH THE VEIL

In answer to my query as to whether Caux had smart enough visitors to

justify an editor sending there a special correspondent, I had the

following letter from Zeyneb:

CAUX, \_Jan.\_ 1907.

The articles which I have written for you on the beauties of

Switzerland will possibly not appeal to the British public.

For a long time last night, when I returned to my room, I tried to

make you understand the intense delight I had felt in watching the

good-night kiss which the lovesick moon had given to the beautiful

lake, before going away far into space.

This moon scene reminds me more than ever of one of our magnificent

moonlights on the Bosphorus, and I am sure if you had been with me

on the Terrace you would have loved the moonlit Bosphorus for its

resemblance to Leman, and Leman for helping you to understand how

wonderful is the Bosphorus. But the poetry of moonlight does not appeal

evidently to the British soul, since they are clamouring for news of

people who are “smart.”

I have always wondered at the eagerness with which the society ladies

here seize the paper. Now I understand—it is to see whether their names

are included amongst people “who are smart.” What a morbid taste, to

want to see one’s name in a newspaper!

I could not tell you whether the people or the life at Caux would be

considered smart. They certainly are extraordinary, and the life they

lead seems to me to be a complete reversal of all prevailing customs.

From early in the morning till late at night they toboggan and skate.

Everything is arranged with a view to the practice of these two sports.

I cannot tell you the disagreeable impression that the women produce on

me, sitting astride of their little machines and coming down the slope

with a giddy rapidity. Their hair is all out of order, their faces

vivid scarlet, and their skirts, arranged like those of a Cambodgian

dancer, are lacking in grace. But this is not a competition for a

beauty prize; all that counts is to go more quickly down the course

than the others, no matter whether you kill yourself in the attempt.

That there are people in England who are interested in knowing who is

staying at a Swiss Hotel, the guests they receive, and the clothes they

wear, is an unpleasant discovery for me. I thought English people were

more intelligent.

One of the reasons for which we left Turkey was, that we could no

longer bear the degrading supervision of the Sultan’s spies. But is it

not almost the same here? Here, too, there are detectives of a kind!

Alas! Alas! there is no privacy inside or outside Turkey.

The people who interest me most are not the smart ladies, but the Swiss

themselves. They alone in all this cosmopolitan crowd know that the

sun has flooded with its golden tints the wonderful panorama of their

mountains, the lake stretches out in a mystery of mauve and rose, and

they alone have time to bow in admiration to the Creator of Beauty and

the great Poet of Nature.—Affectionately,

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER X

THE TRUE DEMOCRACY—THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SNOBBERY IN TURKISH LIFE

The two fugitives left Switzerland for Nice. Melek was in perfect

health, and still delighted with her Western liberty.

Zeyneb, although better, began more and more to see her new life lose

its glamour. But it was too late—there was no going back.

I wonder which of the two suffers more—the person who expects much

and is disappointed; or the person of whom much is expected and feels

she has disappointed. It seemed to me so often, I could often read in

Zeyneb’s eyes, “Was it worth it?” Was she like the woman of her own

country, counting the cost when the debt had already been incurred. I,

who thought I saw this, suffered in consequence.

Perhaps, as elder sister and ringleader in the preparations for their

flight, Zeyneb was feeling her responsibility. Would the younger

sister, when the glamour of freedom had passed, reproach her for the

step they had taken? That was a question that had to be left to the

uncertain answer of the Future.

A little while after they were installed at Nice, Zeyneb resumed her

correspondence with me.

NICE, 15\_th Feb.\_ 1907.

For a week now we have had the sun shining almost as in the East. After

the mountains and the snow of Switzerland, how good it is to be here!

I just love to watch the blue sky, the flowers and the summer dresses!

And I am warm again for a little while.

We are living at Cimiez, well up the hill, in a little villa surrounded

by a big garden full of flowers and exotic plants and a few cypress

trees; the only sad note in our whole surroundings, except for us its

name, the Villa Selma, for curiously enough our villa has a Turkish

name—the name of a friend for whom the sadness of life had been too

great, and who is now sleeping under the shade of the cypress in a

\_comfortable cemetery\_[17] in our own land. How strange that fate

should have directed our steps to a villa that bears her name, and

surrounded us with trees that remind us day and night of her past

existence.

Hardly had we arrived at Nice, when in a restaurant we met a lady

friend from Turkey, a friend whom the Sultan, in a fit of madness, or

shall I call it prudence, allowed to come to Nice with her husband and

children for a change of air. Our departure, no doubt, has made this

great despot think, and in order to prove to all his subjects how great

was his generosity, he had allowed this woman to travel alone as she

wished.

But we did not waste time discussing the psychology of Hamid’s

character, we were only too delighted to see one another. How many

things had we not to talk about! how many impressions had we not

in common! If only a snapshot had been taken of us and sent to

Constantinople what a very bad impression it would have made on our

poor captive friends away yonder. How they would have envied us!

Imagine! the next day we all three lunched together at Monte Carlo,

and that \_without our friend’s husband\_! We were seated on the terrace

overlooking the blue sea, and the newcomer was breathing in the “free

air” for the first time, whilst we, old refugees of a year, were

pleased to see her enthusiasm.

“When I think,” she said, “that only three of us are enjoying this

liberty compared to the thousands of poor women who have not any idea

of what they have been deprived, it makes me unhappy.”

But the weather was too fine for such sad thoughts. Near us a Hungarian

band was playing, and it seemed so in harmony with the surroundings.

Not one of the faces round us betrayed the least suspicion of sadness.

Could they all be happy, these unknown people? It really matters so

little—we are happy as prisoners to whom liberty has been given, and it

is at a moment like this that we appreciate it most.

At dessert, after having discussed many questions, we finally spoke of

the dear country which only she of us three would see again, and now, a

certain melancholy overshadows the table where a while ago we were so

gay.

The Orient is like a beautiful poem which is always sad, even its very

joy is sadness. All Eastern stories end in tragedy. Even the landscape

which attracts by its beauty has its note of sorrow, and yet one of the

many women writers who was introduced to us, and welcomed as our guest,

said to me: “I never laughed anywhere as I laughed in Constantinople.”

That was quite true, for I was witness of her delightful merriment,

always caught from one of us; for no one can laugh like a Turkish woman

when she takes the trouble.

The foundation of our character is joyous, persistently joyous, since

neither the monotony of our existence, nor the tragedy of the Hamidian

régime, nor the lamentable circumstances of our life has been able to

utterly crush laughter out of life. There is no middle course in Turkey.

But I told you that it was from studying the customs of Western Europe

that I was beginning to better understand the land I had left. If the

joys of freedom have been denied to Turkish women, how many worries

have they been spared. Are not women to be sincerely pitied who make

“Society” the aim and object of their existence? No longer can they

do what they feel they ought for fear of compromising a “social

position.” Is not the \_gaiety\_ of their lives worse even than the

\_monotony\_ of ours? Ofttimes they have to sacrifice a noble friendship

to the higher demands of social exclusiveness. How strange and narrow

and insincere it all seems to a Turkish woman.

I never made the acquaintance of the disease “snobbery” in my own

land. Here, for the first time, I have an opportunity of studying its

victims. There may be something wanting in my Turkish constitution

to prevent my appreciating the rare delight of a visit from a great

\_personage\_. Ambitious people I have often met—in what country do they

not thrive? There are many in Turkey, and that is only natural when

it is remembered the very limited number of ways for individuality

to express itself. But snobs! How childish they are! Can they really

believe I am a more desirable person to have at a tea-table since I

have been noticed by an ex-Empress? Only by inflicting their society

on people who obviously do not want them, and by “bluff”—another word

which does not exist in the Turkish language—can they be invited at

all. Not a single woman in the whole of Turkey would put so low an

estimate on her own importance! So snobbery would never get a foothold

with us.

You cannot know how this simple black veil, which covers our faces, can

completely change the whole conditions of the life of a nation.

What is there in common between you and us?

“The heart,” you will say.

But is the heart the same in the East as in the West? And what a

difference there is between our method of seeing things, even of great

importance. Ambition with us does not seek the same ends; pride with us

is wounded by such a different class of actions; and individuality in

the East seeks other gratifications than it does in the West.

How would it be possible for “snobbery” to exist in a country where

there is no society, and where the ideal of democracy is so admirably

understood; where the poor do not envy the rich, the servant respects

his master, and the humble do not crave for the position of Grand

Vizier?

I said there were ambitious people in my country, yes; but they are

still more fatalists. If a man has been unsuccessful, he blames his

“written destiny,” which no earthly being can alter. Is not this

resignation to the yoke of the tyrannical Sultan a proof of fatalism?

What other nation would, for thirty-one years, have put up with such a

régime?

It is only since I have seen other Governments and other peoples that I

can fully realise the passionate fatalism of the Turks.

Those “discontents,” whom I knew, were the true “Believers,” for

at least they knew how to distinguish between belief and useless

resignation. Their number, fortunately, grows every day. More and more

impatiently am I waiting for the result of a Revolution intelligently

arranged, the aim of which will be the Liberty of the Individual, and

the uplifting of the race.

\* \* \* \* \*

And yet a \_revoltée\_ though I was, I think I envied my grandmother’s

calm happiness.

“My poor little girls,” she used to say, “your young days are so much

sadder than mine. At your age I didn’t think of changing the face of

the world, nor working for the betterment of the human race, still less

for raising the status of women. Our mothers taught us the Koran, and

we had confidence in its laws. If one of us had less happiness than

another, we never thought of revolting; ‘it was written,’ we said, and

we had not the presumption to try to change our destiny.”

“Grandmother,” I asked her, “is it our fault if we are unhappy? We have

read so many books which have shown us the ugly side of our life in

comparison with the lives of the women of the West. We are young. We

long for just a little joy; and, grandmother,” I added slowly, and with

emphasis, “we want to be free, to find it ourselves.”

Did she understand? That I cannot tell, for she did not answer, but her

eyes were fixed on us in unending sadness; then suddenly she dropped

them again on to her embroidery.

In the autumn or in the spring our darling grandmother came to fetch

us to stay with her in her lovely home at Smyrna. I must add, to point

out to you another beautiful feature of our Turkish life, that this

woman was not my father’s own mother. She was my late grandfather’s

seventh and only living widow, but she treated all my grandfather’s

children with equal tenderness. Rarely is it otherwise in Turkey. She

loved us, this dear, dear woman, quite as much, if not more, than the

children of her own daughter, and we never supposed till we came to

the West there was anything exceptional in this attachment. Just as a

woman loves her own children, she cares for the children of a former

wife, confident, when her time comes to die, her children will be well

treated by her successor.

In our grandmother’s home life was just a lovely long dream; a life of

peace unceasing—the life of a Turkish woman before the régime of Hamid

and thoughts of Revolution haunted our existence. Every evening young

women and girls brought musical instruments. First, there was singing,

then one after another we danced, and the one who danced the best was

applauded and made to dance until she almost fell exhausted.

Towards midnight we supped by the light of the moon, either in our

garden or at friends’ houses; and we talked and danced and laughed, all

so happy in one another’s society, and none of us remembering we were

subjects of a Mighty Tyrant, who, had we been at Constantinople, would

have stopped those festivities by order of the police.

The gatherings in this house, covered with wisteria and roses, and

surrounded by an old-world garden, where flowers were allowed to

grow with a liberty of which we were jealous, were moments of joy

indescribable. It was good for us to be in a garden not trimmed and

pruned and spoilt as are the gardens of the West, but whose greatest

charm is that it can be its own dear natural self; to live in peace

when the meaning of terror had been learnt, and comparative freedom

when we had known captivity.

If ever you have a chance find out for yourself the difference between

the harems in the town and those of the country, then I know you will

understand the few really happy moments of my life.—Your affectionate

friend

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XI

A COUNTRY PICTURE

Sometimes in the summer afternoons, in large parties, and in big

springless waggons, we drove to the olive woods or the vineyards near

the seashore. In spite of our veils, we just revelled in the beauty

of the sky and the scenery all round. Sometimes we spent all day in

the country, lunching on the grass, and playing like children, happy,

though not free. Then we went for excursions—wonderful excursions to

the ruins of Ephesus and Hierapolis and Parganu. Those women who had

learnt Ancient History explained the ruins to the others, and all that

mass of crumbling stones took life and breath for us captives.

Many times, too, we stayed with the country people, who divided up

their rooms for us, and we lived their life for a time. Those were the

moments when I learnt to know and appreciate our fine, trustworthy,

primitive Turks. With what kindness they took care of us, paying

particular attention to our beds, our meals, our horses, even our

attendant eunuchs! Whole families put themselves at our disposal, and

very often they would not let us pay for anything we had had during our

stay. In no country in the world, I am sure, could such hospitality

and such cordial generosity be found, being as we were to them perfect

strangers.

One day at Gondjeli, after having visited the ruins of Taacheer, we

lost the last train home. One of our attendants, however, called on the

Imam, who was known throughout the village for his kindness. He and

his wife, a delightful woman whom I shall never forget, not only gave

us food and lodging for the night, but the next day begged us to stay

longer.

We were five women and three attendants. The meals offered us were

abundant; the beds, simple mattresses thrown on the floor, were

spotlessly clean, and ever so daintily arranged; and the next morning,

early, before we dressed, our baths were ready. When the moment of

departure came mother wished to leave them something for all the

trouble they had taken. But the old Imam answered: “My child, there

are no poor in our village. Each man here has his own little bit of

ground to till, and enough bread to eat. Why should he ask Allah for

more?”

I have often thought of those words. Every time I used to look at the

useless luxury of our Turkish households, the Imam’s little modest

dwelling and his kindly face rose up to reproach me.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XII

THE STAR FROM THE WEST—THE EMPRESS EUGÉNIE

NICE, \_Feb.\_ 1907.

We have just returned from Cap Martin, where we have had the pleasure

and honour of being introduced to the Empress Eugénie, the person of

all persons I hoped to meet in Europe. Never will she know how much

I have appreciated seeing her to-day, and all the charming past she

called back to my memory.

Imagine actually seeing in the flesh, the heroine of your grandmothers’

stories; the Empress whose beauty fascinated the East, the Empress

whose clothes the women copied, whose language they learnt, the

woman who had, though perhaps she may not know it, the greatest

influence on the lives of Turkish women. It seemed to me as I looked

at the ex-Empress, that I was back in Constantinople again, but the

Constantinople that my grandmother had known, the Constantinople where

the Sultan Abdul-Aziz reigned and the life of the Turkish women was one

of independence compared to ours.

The Empress remembered with great pleasure every detail of her visit to

the East. She spoke of the persons she had known, and asked for news of

them. Alas! so many were dead, and others scattered to the four corners

of the Empire!

She remembered the town, the Palaces, and the marble Beylerbei which

had been built specially for her. So kindly, too, did she speak of the

Sultan Aziz, saying how welcome he had made her, and how his people

loved him.

Was it possible without appearing unpatriotic to make her understand

that the lovely Palace in which she had stayed, the Palace which had

echoed with the sounds of Eastern music and dancing and singing, was

now being put to a very different usage? During Hamid’s reign Palaces

are not required for festivity, but captivity. Many unfortunate souls

have only known Beylerbei as the stepping stone to Eternity!

I should have liked to remind the Empress, had I dared, of the

impression her beauty had made on the women.

[Illustration: YASHMAK AND MANTLE (FERADJÉ)]

She is an old lady now, but she did not seem so to me. I was looking at

the Empress my countrywomen had admired, the Empress for whom they had

sacrificed their wonderful Eastern garments; I saw the curls they had

copied, the little high-heeled shoes she wore, and even the jewels she

had liked best.

“Are the women still as much veiled as when I was in Constantinople?”

asked the Empress; and when I told her that a thick black veil had

taken the place of the white Yachmack, she could hardly believe it.

“What a pity!” she said, “it was so pretty.”

The home in which I saw the Empress, reminded me of one of our Turkish

Islands. The sea was as blue and the sky as clear, and the sun, which

forced her to change her place several times, was almost as intense.

With an odour of pine wood was mixed a fragrant perfume of violets, and

the more I looked at it, the more Oriental did the landscape become.

Having spoken so much about the past and the people and the country we

have left for ever, it seemed to me that all of us had given way to the

inevitable Oriental sadness, yet we fought against it, for there were

other visitors there.

I shall always regret not having had the opportunity of seeing the

Empress alone; it seemed to me that so much of what I might have told

her had been left unsaid, and I know she would have been so glad to

listen.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XIII

TURKISH HOSPITALITY—A REVOLUTION FOR CHILDREN

NICE, \_March\_ 1907.

I can assure you, I do not exaggerate our Oriental hospitality. Go

to Turkey and you will see for yourself that everywhere you will be

received like a Queen. Everyone will want to be honoured by your

presence in their home.

The most modest household has its rooms for the \_mussafirs\_ or guests.

In wealthy establishments, the guest is given the choicest furniture,

the daintiest golden goblets and bon-bon dishes, the best and finest

linen and embroideries, a little trousseau for her own use, and slaves

in constant attendance.

I never remember sitting down to a meal without guests being present.

All our rooms for the \_mussafirs\_ were filled, and in this matter my

family was by no means the exception; everyone received with the same

pleasure. In England, I believe, you do have guest-rooms, but here in

France they do not understand the elements of hospitality.

You cannot imagine how it shocked me when I first heard a French son

paid his father for board, and that here in France for a meal received,

a meal must be returned. Surely this is not the case in England?

Often have I tried to find a satisfactory explanation of this lack of

hospitality in the French. I put it down first to the cost of living,

then to the limited accommodation, then to the disobliging servants,

but I have now come to the conclusion that it is one of their national

characteristics, and it is useless to waste time trying to explain it.

Let us know as soon as possible when you are coming.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the description I have given you of our life in Smyrna you will

understand how sorry we were to return to Constantinople. Even the

delight of again seeing our parents could not console us. As soon as we

were back again began the same monotony and perpetual dread, and the

Hamidian régime made life more and more impossible.

[Illustration: MELEK IN YASHMAK]

The year that the Belgian anarchist tried to kill the Sultan Hamid, was

certainly the worst I have ever spent. Even the Armenian Massacres,

which were amongst the most haunting and horrible souvenirs of our

youth, could not be compared with what we had then to bear. Arrests

went on wholesale! Thousands were “suspect,” questioned, tortured

perhaps. And when the real culprit had declared his guilt before the

whole tribunal and had proved that it was he, and he alone, who had

thrown the bomb, the poor prisoners were not released.

It was in the summer. Up till then in the country, a woman could go

out in the evening, if she were accompanied, but this was at once

prohibited; every Turkish boat which was not a fishing boat was

stopped; in the streets all those who could not prove the reason

for being out were arrested; no longer were visits to the Embassies

possible, no longer could the ladies from the Embassies come to see us;

no “white dinners,” no meeting of friends. There were police stationed

before the doors, and we dared not play the piano for fear of appearing

too gay, when our “Sovereign Lord’s” life had been in danger.

Of course no letters could be received from our Western friends. The

foreign posts were searched through and through, and nearly all the

movement of the daily life was at an end. One evening my sister and I

went outside to look at the moonlit Bosphorus. Although accompanied by

a male relative, three faithful guardians of the safety of our beloved

Monarch stepped forward and asked for explanations as to why we were

gazing at the sea. Not wishing to reply, we were asked to follow them

to the nearest police station. My sister and I went in, leaving our

relative to explain matters, and I can assure you that was the last

time we dared to study moon effects. Never, I think, more than that

evening, was I so decided to leave our country, come what might! Life

was just one perpetual nightmare, and for a long time after, even now

in security, I still dream of these days of terror.

I remember full well what importance was given to the French 1st of May

riots. When I myself saw one of the strikers throw a stone which nearly

blinded a doctor, called in haste to see a patient, and saw his motor

stopped and broken to pieces and the chauffeur thrashed, I thought

of the days of our Armenian massacres—the awful days of Hamidian

carnage—and the 1st of May riots seemed to me a Revolution arranged to

amuse little children.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XIV

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

NICE, \_March\_ 1907.

There are habits, my dearest friend, which cannot be lost in the

West any more than they can be acquired in the East. You know what

a terrible task it is for a Turkish woman to write a letter—even a

Turkish woman who pretends to be Western in many ways. Can you, who

belong to a race which can quietly take a decision and act upon it,

understand this fault of ours, which consists of always putting off

till the morrow what should be done the same day? Thanks to this

laziness, we Turks are where we are to-day. Some people call it

\_kismet\_; you can find it in almost all our actions. Since we started,

now a year ago, I have been expecting an answer to a letter sent the

day after my arrival here. It will come; Allah knows when, but it will

come.

But I am as bad as my friend, you will say. Three weeks ago I began

this letter to you, and it is not finished yet, for all I am doing is

so strange and curious, I feel I must let you know all about it.

It was at Monte Carlo that I first saw and heard the wonderful operas

of Wagner. When I heard they were performing \_Rheingold\_, in spite of

medical advice not to go into a theatre, I could not keep away. Since

my childhood, I had longed to hear an orchestral interpretation of the

works of this genius. I seemed to have a presentiment that it would be

to me an incomparable revelation, and I was not disappointed.

Do you know what it is, to have loved music all your life and never

to have an opportunity of hearing a first-class concert? My father

used to invite the distinguished women artistes, passing through

Constantinople, to come to sing and play for us. He, too, was

passionately fond of music. But what I longed above all to hear was a

full orchestra, and Wagner! So that, when I was actually at Monte Carlo

listening to the entrancing work of this Master, it was as though I had

been blind all my days and had at last received my sight.

It was wonderful! It was magnificent! It moved my very soul! Why

should we regret having left our country when such masterpieces as this

are yet to be heard?

I did not want to stir. I wanted to remain under the spell of that

glorious music! But the theatre authorities thought differently, and in

a little while the beautiful performance of \_Rheingold\_ became one of

my most happy memories.

\* \* \* \* \*

The scene changes. From my first beautiful impression of music I

came to look upon that most degrading spectacle of your Western

civilisation—I mean gambling. I had never realised till now that

collective robbery could be so shameful! That a poor, unintelligent,

characterless being can come to Monte Carlo, ruin himself and his

family, and kill himself without anyone taking the trouble to

pity him a little or have him treated like a sick man, is to me

incomprehensible. When I told the lady and gentleman, who accompanied

me, the impression that their gaming-tables had on me, they smiled;

indeed they made an effort not to laugh.

I remained long enough to study that strange collection of heads round

the table with their expressions all so different, but the most hideous

which I have ever seen.

I had received that day two new and very different impressions; one the

impression of the highest form of art and the other the impression of

perhaps the saddest of all modern vices.

The whole night through I was torn between these two impressions.

Which would get the better of me? I tried to hum little passages of

\_Rheingold\_, and fix my attention on Wagner’s opera and the joy it had

been to me, but in spite of my efforts my thoughts wandered, and I was

far away in Turkey.

In our cloistered homes I had heard vague rumours of magic games, the

players at which lost their all or made a colossal fortune according

to the caprice of fate. But I did not pay much attention to this fairy

tale. Now, however, I have seen and believe, and a feeling of terrible

anxiety comes over me whenever I think of the honest men of my own

country, who are concentrating all their energies on the acquirement

of Western civilisation. They will not accept Europeanism in moderate

doses— they will drain the cup to the very dregs—this awful vice, as

well as drunkenness and all your other weaknesses.

In the course of time I fell asleep. I was back in Turkey enduring the

horrors of the Hamidian régime. \_Rheingold\_ was forgotten, and the

azure of the Mediterranean Sea, the flowers, and the summer dresses. I

went from scene to scene, one more awful than the other, but everywhere

I went and to everything I saw were attached the diabolical faces I had

seen at the Monte Carlo gaming-tables.—Your affectionate

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XV

DREAMS AND REALITIES

HENDAYE, \_July\_ 1907.

What a relief! What a heart-felt relief to leave Paris! Paris with its

noise and clamour and perpetual and useless movement! Paris which is so

different from what I expected!

We have had in Paris what you English people call a “season,” and I

shall require many months of complete rest, to get over the effects of

that awful modern whirlwind.

What an exhausting life! What unnecessary labour! And what a contrast

to our calm harem existence away yonder. I think—yes, I almost think I

have had enough of the West now, and want to return to the East, just

to get back the old experience of calm.

Picture to yourself the number of new faces we have seen in six weeks.

What a collection of women—chattering, irritating, inquisitive,

demonstrative, and obliging women, who invite you again and again, and

when you do go to their receptions you get nothing for your trouble but

crowding and pushing.

All the men and women in Paris are of uncertain years. The pale girl

who serves the tea might be of any age from fifteen to thirty, and the

men with the well-trimmed fingers and timid manners are certainly not

sixty, but they might be anything up to forty.

But where are the few \_intellectuelles\_? Lost between the lace and the

teacups. They look almost ashamed of being seen there at all. They

have real knowledge, and to meet them is like opening the chapter of a

valuable Encyclopedia; but hardly has one taken in the discovery, when

one is pushed along to find the conclusion of the chapter somewhere in

the crowd, if indeed it can be found.

As you know, since our arrival from Nice we have not had one free

evening. The \_Grandes Dames\_ of France wanted to get a closer view of

two Turkish women, and they have all been charming to us, especially

the elder ones.

Yes, charming is the word which best applies to all these society

ladies, young and old, and is not \_to be charming\_ the modern ideal of

civilisation? These women are all physically the model of a big Paris

dressmaker, and morally what society allows them to be—some one quite

inoffensive. But it is not their fault that they have all been formed

on the same pattern, and that those who have originality hide it under

the same exterior as the others, fearful lest such a blemish should

even be suspected!

But really, am I not a little pedantic? How can I dare to come to such

a conclusion after a visit which lasts barely a quarter of an hour?

At luncheon and dinner the favourite topics of conversation are the

pieces played at the theatres or the newest books. Marriage, too, is

always an interesting subject, and everyone seems eager to get married

in spite of the thousand and one living examples there are to warn

others of what it really is. This supreme trust in a benign Fate amuses

me. Every bride-elect imagines it is she who will be the one exception

to the general rule. Turkish women do not look forward to matrimony

with the same confidence.

Divorce has a morbid fascination for the men and women here: so have

other people’s misfortunes. And as soon as a man or woman is down—a

woman particularly—everyone delights in giving his or her contribution

to the moral kicking.

I must own, too, I cannot become enthusiastic about Mdlle. Cecile

Sorel’s clothes nor the grace of a certain Russian dancer. What I

would like to talk about would be some subject which could help us

two peoples to understand each other better, but such subjects are

carefully avoided as tiresome.

Do you remember how anxious we were to hear Strauss’s \_Salome\_

discussed, and what it was in all this work which interested these

Paris Society ladies?—nothing more nor less than whether it was

Trohohanova or Zambelli who was to dance the part of Salome.

That was a disappointment for me! All my life I looked forward to

being in a town where music was given the place of honour, for in

Constantinople, as you know, there is music for everyone except the

Turkish woman.

I had no particular desire to see the monuments of Paris, and now

I have visited them my affection for them is only lukewarm. The

Philistine I am! I wish I dared tell the Parisians what I really

thought of them and their beautiful Paris! I had come above all things

to educate myself in music, and now I find that they, with their

unbounded opportunities, have shamefully failed to avail themselves of

what to me, as a Turkish woman, is the great chance of a lifetime.

A WALK WITH PIERRE LOTI IN A WESTERN CEMETERY

Yesterday afternoon, accompanied by M. Pierre Loti, we visited the

cemetery of Birreyatou. Its likeness to Turkey attracted us at once,

for all that is Eastern has a peculiar fascination for Loti. There were

the same cypress trees and plants that grow in our cemeteries, and the

tombs were cared for in a manner which is quite unusual in Western

Europe.

To go for a walk in a burial-ground I know is exclusively an Eastern

form of amusement. But wait till you have seen our cemeteries and

compared them with your own, then you will understand better this

taste of ours. Oh, the impression of loneliness and horror I felt

when I first saw a Western cemetery! It was Père La Chaise, the most

important of them all. I went there to steal a leaf from the famous

weeping willow on Musset’s grave, and to my great surprise I found by

the Master’s tomb, amongst other tokens of respect, a Russian girl’s

visiting card with the corner turned down. But this was an exception.

How you Western people neglect your dead!

I could not for a long time explain to myself this fear of death, but

since I have seen here the painful scenes connected with it—the terror

of Extreme Unction,[18] the visit of the relatives to the dead body,

the funeral pomp, the hideous black decorations on the horses’ heads,

and last but not least the heart-rending mourning—I, too, am terrified.

We, like the Buddhists, have no mourning. The Angel of Death takes

our dear ones from us to a happier place, and night and morning we

pray for them. The coffin is carried out on men’s shoulders in the

simplest manner possible, and the relatives in the afternoon take their

embroidery and keep the dear ones company. It is as if they were being

watched in their sleep, and they are very, very near.

[Illustration: ZEYNEB IN HER WESTERN DRAWING ROOM

She is playing the oute, or Turkish guitar, which is played with a

feather. Although Turkish women are now good pianists and fond of

Western music, they generally like to play the oute at least once a

day.]

Yet here in the West what a difference! I shudder at the thought that

some day I might have to rest in one of these untidy waste heaps, and

that idea has been preying on my mind so that I have actually written

to my father and begged him, should I die in Paris, to have me taken

home and buried in a Turkish cemetery.

\* \* \* \* \*

COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

Did I ever tell you of my visit to the Comédie Française? Alas, alas!

again I have to chronicle a disappointment. I am trying to think what I

pictured to myself I was going to see, and I am not at all clear about

it. In my childish imagination I must have thought of something I will

\_never\_ see.

Naturally the piece played was \_Œdipus Rex\_. Every time I am invited

to the Comédie Française I see \_Œdipus Rex\_. It seems a particular

favourite in Paris, I am sure I cannot tell why.

The scenery was perfect, so were the costumes, but you cannot imagine

how uncomfortable I was when I heard the actors, together or one after

the other, screaming, moaning, hissing, and calling on the whole

audience to witness a misfortune, which was only too obvious.

All the actors were breathless, hoarse, exhausted—in sympathy I was

exhausted too, and longed for the \_entr’acte\_. Then when at last a

pause did come, I began to hope in the next scene a little calm would

be established and the actors take their task a little more leisurely.

But no! they cried out louder still, threw themselves about in torture,

and gesticulated with twice as much violence.

When I heard the voice of Œdipus it reminded me of the night

watchers in my own country giving the fire alarm, and all those Turks

who have heard it are of the same opinion. As I left the theatre tired

out, I said to myself, “Surely it is not possible that this is the idea

the Greeks had of Dramatic Art.”

What a difference to the theatre I had known in Turkey! Sometimes our

mothers organised excursions, and we were taken in long springless

carts, dragged by oxen, to the field of Conche-Dili in the valley of

Chalcedonia, where there was a kind of theatre, or caricature of a

theatre, built of unpainted wood, which held about four hundred people.

The troop was composed of Armenian men and women who had never been

at the Paris Conservatoire, but who gave a fine interpretation of the

works of Dumas, Ohnet, Octave Feuillet, and Courteline. The stage was

small and the scenery was far from perfect, but the Moslem women were

delighted with this open-air theatre, although they had to sit in

latticed boxes and the men occupied the best seats in the stalls.

During the \_entr’acte\_, there was music and singing, the orchestra

being composed of six persons who played upon stringed instruments. The

conductor beat time on a big drum, and sometimes he sang songs of such

intense sadness that we wondered almost whence they came.

That was a dear little theatre, the theatre of my childhood. Primitive

though it was, it was very near to me as I listened to the piercing

cries of alarm sent out by Œdipus. Would they not, these rustic

actors of the Chalcedonian valley, I wonder, have given a truer and

better interpretation of the plays of Sophocles?

A BULL-FIGHT

Guess, my dear, where I have been this afternoon. Guess, guess! I,

a Turkish woman, have been to a bull-fight! There were many English

people present. They are, I am told, the \_habitués\_ of the place, and

they come away, like the Spaniards, almost intoxicated by the spectacle.

This is an excitement which does not in the least appeal to me. Surely

one must be either prehistoric or decadent to get into this unwholesome

condition of the Spaniards. Is the sight of a bull which is being

killed, and perhaps the death of a toreador, “\_such a delightful

show\_,” to quote the exact words of my American neighbour? He shouted

with frenzy whilst my sister and two Poles, unable to bear the sight of

the horses’ obtruding intestines, had to be led out of the place in an

almost fainting condition.

As for myself, I admit to having admired two things, the suppleness of

the men and the brilliant appearance of the bull-ring. The women of

course lent a picturesque note to the \_ensemble\_ with their sparkling

jewels, their faces radiant as those of the men, their dark eyes

dancing with excitement, and their handsome gowns and their graceful

mantillas. But shall I ever forget the hideous sight of the poor horse

staggering out of the ring, nor the roars of the wounded bull? It was a

spectacle awful to look upon. What a strange performance for a Turkish

woman, used to the quiet of our harem life!

Perhaps, however, for those to whom life has brought no emotion or

sorrow, no joy or love, those who have never seen the wholesale

butchery to which we, alas! had almost become accustomed—perhaps to

these people this horrible sight is a necessity. Spanish writers have

told me they have done their best work after a bullfight, and before

taking any important step in life they needed this stimulus to carry

them safely through. I can assure you, however, I heaved a sigh of

relief when the performance was over, and not for untold gold would I

ever go to see it again.

After leaving the scene I have described to you, we followed the crowd

to a little garden planted with trees, which is situated in the Calle

Mayor and stretches along the side of the stream till it meets the

Bidassoa. This is the spot where, on cool evenings, men and maidens

meet to dance the Fandango. Basque men with red caps are seated in the

middle to supply the music. On the sandy earth, which is the ballroom,

the couples dance, in and out of the gnarled trees, to the rhythm of

dance music, that is strange and passionate and at the same time almost

languishing.

The music played was more Arabian than anything I have yet heard in the

West, but unfortunately the modern note too was creeping into these

delightful measures. The Basques with their red caps, bronzed faces,

white teeth, and fine manly figures, the women with their passionate

and supple movements and decorated mantillas, and the almost antique

frame of Fontarabia, proud of its past, hopeful for its future, were

all so new and so different to me.

But it is dark now, the dancing has ceased, the crowd has dispersed.

How good it is to be out at this hour of the evening. I, who am free

(or think I am), delight in the fact there are no Turkish policemen to

question me as to what I am doing.

\* \* \* \* \*

But alas! alas! I spoke of my freedom a little too soon. Even in this

quiet city can I not pass unobserved?

“Have you anything to declare?” a Custom House officer asks me.

“Yes,” I replied, “my hatred of your Western ‘Customs,’ and my delight

at being alive.”—Your affectionate friend,

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MOON OF RAMAZAN

HENDAYE, \_August\_ 1907.

You ask me to describe the life a Turkish woman leads during Ramazan.

The evenings of Ramazan are the only evenings of the year when she

has the right to be out of doors; the time when she seizes every

opportunity of meeting her friends and arranging interesting soirées;

the time when she goes on foot or drives to the Mosques to hear the

Imams explain the Word of the Prophet.

Need I remind you, unlike the women of the lower and middle classes,

who go out \_every\_ evening, the more important the family to which a

woman belongs, the more difficult is it for her to go out.

It is for the evenings of Ramazan that most amusements are arranged,

and our husbands, fathers, and brothers usually patronise the

travelling circus, Turkish theatre, performances of Karakheuz.[19]

The women on their side have their dinners, Oriental dancing, and

conversation which lasts deep into the night.

Amongst my most delightful remembrances of Constantinople are the

Ramazan visits to St. Sophia and the Chah-zade Mosque. From the height

of a gallery reserved for women, which is separated from the rest of

the church by a thick wooden lattice-work, hundreds of “Believers”

are to be seen, seated on the ground round the Imam, who reads and

preaches to them. All the oil lamps are lighted for the thirty days,

and the incense burning in the silver brasiers rises with the prayers

to Heaven. Not a voice is to be heard save that of the Imam (preacher),

and the most wonderful impression of all is that created by the

profound silence.

And yet children are there—little ones asleep in their mother’s arms,

little girls in the women’s gallery, whilst boys over eight are counted

men, and sit beside their fathers on the ground, their little legs

tucked under them.

[Illustration: TURKISH LADIES PAYING A VISIT

Every visitor is given coffee and cigarettes on arriving. The three

ladies shown are Zeyneb, Melek, and a friend seated between them. A

verse from the Koran hangs on the wall.]

On returning home supper is ready for three o’clock, and an hour later

the cannon announce the commencement of a fresh day of fasting.

After a short prayer in one’s own room, sleep takes possession of us

until late the next day, sometimes until almost four o’clock, when

everyone must be up and again ready for the firing of the cannon which

gives permission to eat and drink and smoke.

With us fasting[20] is more strict than it is in the West. From sunrise

to sunset, no one would dare to touch a mouthful of food or even smoke.

When we are lucky enough to have Ramazan during the winter months the

fasting hours are shorter, but when it comes in the month of August

“Believers” have to fast for sixteen hours, and the labourers suffer

much in consequence.

Imagine how long a soirée can be, when you begin dinner at half-past

four! What must we not think of to amuse our guests, for no one dines

alone! The Oriental hospitality demands that every evening friends

should assemble, and acquaintances come without even letting you know.

When people are known to be rich, the poor and complete strangers come

to them to dinner. I remember being at one house which was filled to

overflowing with women of all classes, most of whom had never before

even seen the hostess.

At the Palaces a special door is built, through which anyone who wants

to dine can enter, and after the meal money is distributed. You can

understand while this patriarchal system exists there is no reason for

the poor to envy the rich. Turkey is the only country in Europe which

in this respect lives according to Christ’s teaching, but no doubt in

the march of progress all these beautiful customs will disappear.

I have often thought when in a Western drawing-room, where one stays

a few minutes, and eats perhaps a sandwich, how different are our

receptions in the East. We meet without being invited, talk till late

in the night, and a proper supper is served.

It surprises me, too, in the West to meet such poor linguists. In

Turkey it is quite usual to hear discussions going on in five European

languages without one foreigner being present.

Wait till you have taken part in some of these Ramazan gatherings, and

have seen what hospitality really is, then you will understand my

rather slighting remarks about your Western society.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am constantly being asked how a Turkish woman amuses herself. I have

a stock answer ready: “That depends on what you call amusement.”

It sounds futile to have to remind my questioners that amusement is

a relative quality, and depends entirely on one’s personal tastes.

The Spaniards are mad with delight at the sight of a bull-fight—to

me it was disgusting; and yet, probably, were those bull-fights to

take place in Turkey, I should enjoy them. We used to have in the

country exhibitions of wrestling at which whole families were present.

Travelling circuses were also a favourite amusement, but during the

last years of Hamid’s reign Turkish women have been forbidden the

pleasures of going to a travelling theatre and Karakheuz, the most

appreciated of all the Eastern amusements.

Tennis, croquet, and other games are impossible for us, neither is

rowing allowed: to have indulged in that sport was to expose myself to

the criticism of the whole capital.

Although the people of the West are so fond of walking as a recreation,

the pleasure that a \_Turkish\_ woman can obtain from a walk is

practically non-existent, and most of us would be insulted if asked, as

I have been in Paris, to walk for two hours.

We are fond of swimming, but how is this taste to be indulged when

women are only allowed to swim in an enclosed place, surrounded by a

high wall? Surely the only charm of swimming is to be in the open sea.

Those who are fond of music have either to go without, learn to play

themselves, or take the terrible risk of disguising themselves as

Europeans and go to a concert.

Towards 1876 we began playing bezique, but that craze did not last

long, and a short time afterwards cards were considered bad form. The

\_Perotes\_,[21] however, still remain faithful to card-playing, and have

more than one reason to prefer this pastime to all the others in which

they might indulge. Unlike the \_Perotes\_, we Turkish women never played

cards for money.

You might think from my letters that travelling in the country was

quite an ordinary event for women of our class: on the contrary, it is

quite exceptional, and perhaps only ten families in all Turkey have

travelled as we travelled in our own country.

So you see a Turkish woman is not very ambitious for “amusement” as you

Western people understand the word. When she is allowed to travel in

foreign countries as she likes, I believe she will be more satisfied

with her lot.

All the Turks I have met since I came to Europe are of my opinion, but

we shall see what will happen when their theories are put into practice.

Since it has been my privilege to meet my countrymen I have found

out what fine qualities they possess. Indeed it is wrong for custom

to divide so markedly our nation into two sexes and to create such

insuperable barriers between them. We shall never be strong until we

are looked upon as one, and can mix freely together. The Turks have

all the qualities necessary to make good husbands and fathers, and yet

we have no opportunity of knowing even the men we marry until we \_are\_

married.

How I wish that nine out of every ten of the books written on Turkey

could be burned! How unjustly the Turk has been criticised! And what

nonsense has been written about the women! I cannot imagine where

the writers get their information from, or what class of women they

visited. Every book I have read has been in some way unfair to the

Turkish woman. Not one woman has really understood us! Not one woman

has credited us with the possession of a heart, a mind, or a soul.—Your

affectionate friend,

ZEYNEB.

\* \* \* \* \*

The year of 1908 was a year of mourning for Zeyneb and Melek. For them

began that bitter period, when a woman has the opportunity of judging

independence at its true value, without a father and a substantial

income as buffers between them and life.

\* \* \* \* \*

During that year, too, Melek married.

Zeyneb remained alone.

CHAPTER XVII

AND IS THIS REALLY FREEDOM?

LONDON, \_Nov.-Dec.\_ 1908.

About a week ago,[22] whilst you were writing your first letter to me

and speaking of the beautiful Eastern sun that was shining through your

latticed window, what a different experience was mine in London. I was

walking by myself in the West End, when suddenly, the whole city was

shrouded in one of those dense fogs to which you no doubt have become

accustomed. I could not see the name of the streets nor the path at the

opposite side, so I wandered on for a little while, only to discover

that I had arrived back at the same place.

There was no one to show me the way, and the English language that I

had spoken from infancy seemed of no use to me, since no one took any

notice of my questions.

I looked in vain for a policeman. Your London policemen are so amiable

and clever. Whatever difficulty I have, they seem to be able to help

me, and the most curious of all curious things is, they will not accept

tips! What wonderful men! and what a difference from our policemen in

Constantinople! In Constantinople, I trembled almost at the sight of a

policeman, but here I cannot imagine what I should do without them.

However, after losing myself and getting back always to the same point,

I finally struck out in a new direction, and walked on and on until,

when I was least expecting it, I found that just by chance I was safe

in front of my club. You can perhaps imagine my relief. It seemed to me

as if I had escaped from some terrible danger, and I wonder more and

more how you English people manage to find your way in one of these

dense fogs.

When I got into my club, I found your letter waiting me, and the

Turkish post-mark cheered me just a little, and made me forget for a

while the hideous black mantle in which London was wrapt.

On those evenings when I dine at “my club” (see how English I have

become!) I eat alone, studying all the time the people I see around me.

What a curious harem! and what a difference from the one in which you

are living at present.

The first time I dined there I ordered the vegetarian dinner, expecting

to have one of those delicious meals which you are enjoying (you lucky

woman!), which consists of everything that is good. But alas! the food

in this harem has been a disappointment to me. Surely I must not accept

this menu as a sample of what English food really is.

On a little table all to myself, I was served with, first of all, rice

which was cooked not as in Turkey, and as a second course I had carrots

cooked in water! After sprinkling on them quantities of salt and pepper

I could not even then swallow them, so I asked for pickles, but as

there were none, that dish was sent away almost untouched to join the

first. Next I was served with a compote of pears without sugar, but

that also did not come up to my expectations. I ate up, however, all

my bread and asked for more. Then the waiter kindly went from table

to table to see how much he could collect, brought just a handful, and

informed me he really could not give me any more. But I told him it was

not enough. “I want a very large piece,” I said, so finally he decided

to consult the butler, went to the kitchen, and brought me back a loaf

to myself.

All this while, the curious people around me had been staring at me

devouring my loaf, but after a while they wearied of that exciting

entertainment, their faces again resumed their usual calm expression,

and they went on once more talking to one another. Sometimes, but not

often, they almost got interested in their neighbour’s remark, but as

soon as the last words were uttered again they adopted a manner which

seemed to me one of absolute indifference.

As you know, I do not swear by everything Turkish, but you must now

admit from experience that when once the Danube is crossed the faces

to be seen do express some emotion, either love or hate, contentment

or disappointment, but not indifference. Since I left Belgrade, I have

tried, almost in vain, to find in the Western faces the reflection of

some personality, and so few examples have I found that their names

would not certainly fill this page. Here in London I met with the

same disappointment. Have these people really lost all interest in

life? They give me the impression that they all belong to the same

family, so much alike are they in appearance and in facial expression.

[Illustration: ZEYNEB WITH A BLACK FACE-VEIL THROWN BACK]

In the reading-room, where I spent my evening, I met those same people,

who spoke in whispers, wrote letters, and read the daily papers. The

silence of the room was restful, there was an atmosphere almost of

peace, but it is not the peace which follows strife, it is the peace

of apathy. Is this, then, what the Turkish women dream of becoming one

day? Is this their ideal of independence and liberty?

Were you to show my letter to one of my race she would think that I

had a distinct aversion for progress, or that I felt obliged to be

in opposition to everything in the countries where I was travelling.

You know enough of my life, however, to know that this is not the

case. What I do feel, though, is that a \_Ladies’ Club\_ is not a big

enough reward for having broken away from an Eastern harem and all the

suffering that has been the consequence of that action. A club, as I

said before, is after all another kind of harem, but it has none of

the mystery and charm of the Harem of the East.

How is one to learn and teach others what might perhaps be called “the

tact of evolution”—I mean the art of knowing when to stop even in the

realm of progress?

I cannot yet either analyse or classify in a satisfactory way your

methods of thinking, since in changing from country to country even the

words alter their meaning. In Servia, Liberal means Conservative, and

Freemason on the Continent has quite a different meaning from what it

has here; so that the interpretation I would give to an opinion might

fail to cover my real meaning.

Do not think that this evening’s pessimism is due to the fog nor to my

poor dinner. It is the outcome of disillusions which every day become

more complete. It seems to me that we Orientals are children to whom

fairy tales have been told for too long—fairy tales which have every

appearance of truth. You hear so much of the \_mirage\_ of the East,

but what is that compared to the \_mirage\_ of the West, to which all

Orientals are attracted?

They tell you fairy tales, too, you women of the West—fairy tales

which, like ours, have all the appearance of truth. I wonder, when the

Englishwomen have really won their vote and the right to exercise all

the tiring professions of men, what they will have gained? Their faces

will be a little sadder, a little more weary, and they will have become

wholly disillusioned.

Go to the root of things and you will find the more things change the

more they are the same; nothing really changes. Human nature is always

the same. We cannot stop the ebb or flow of Time, however much we try.

The great mass of mediocrity alone is happy, for it is content to swim

with the tide. Does it not seem to you, that each of us from the age

when we begin to reason feels more or less the futility and uselessness

of some of our efforts; the little good that struggling has brought

us, and the danger we necessarily run, in this awful desire to go full

speed ahead? And yet, this desire to go towards something, futile

though it be, is one of the most indestructible of Western sentiments.

When in Turkey we met together, and spoke of the Women of England, we

imagined that they had nothing more to wish for in this world. But

we had no idea of what the struggle for life meant to them, nor how

terrible was this eternal search after happiness. Which is the harder

struggle of the two? The latter is the only struggle we know in Turkey,

and the same futile struggle goes on all the world over.

Happiness—what a mirage! At best is it not a mere negation of pain, for

each one’s idea of happiness is so different? When I was fifteen years

old they made me a present of a little native from Central Africa. For

her there was no greater torture than to wear garments of any kind, and

her idea of happiness was to get back to the home on the borders of

Lake Chad and the possibility of eating another roasted European.

\* \* \* \* \*

Last night I went to a banquet. It was the first time that I had ever

heard after-dinner speeches, and I admired the ease with which everyone

found something to say, and the women spoke quite as well as the men.

Afterwards I was told, however, that these speeches had all been

prepared beforehand.

The member of Parliament who sat on my right spoilt my evening’s

enjoyment by making me believe I had to speak, and all through the

dinner I tried to find something to say, and yet I knew that, were I

actually to rise, I could not utter a sound. What most astonished me

at that banquet, however, was that all those women, who made no secret

of wanting to direct the affairs of the nation, dared not take the

responsibility of smoking until they were told. What a contradiction!

Since I came here I have seen nothing but “Votes for Women” chalked all

over the pavements and walls of the town. These methods of propaganda

are all so new to me.

I went to a Suffrage street corner meeting the other night, and I can

assure you I never want to go again. The speaker carried her little

stool herself, another carried a flag, and yet a third woman a bundle

of leaflets and papers to distribute to the crowd. After walking

for a little while they placed the stool outside a dirty-looking

public-house, and the lady who carried the flag boldly got on to the

stool and began to shout, not waiting till the people came to hear her,

so anxious was she to begin. Although she did not look nervous in the

least she possibly was, for her speech came abruptly to an end, and my

heart began to beat in sympathy with her.

When the other lady began to speak quite a big crowd of men and women

assembled: degraded-looking ruffians they were, most of them, and a

class of man I had not yet seen. All the time they interrupted her, but

she went bravely on, returning their rudeness with sarcasm. What an

insult to womanhood it seemed to me, to have to bandy words with this

vulgar mob. One man told her that “she was ugly.” Another asked “if she

had done her washing,” but the most of their hateful remarks I could

not understand, so different was their English from the English I had

learned in Turkey.

Yet how I admired the courage of that woman! No physical pain could be

more awful to me than not to be taken for a lady, and this speaker of

such remarkable eloquence and culture was not taken for a lady by the

crowd, seeing she was supposed “to do her own washing” like any women

of the people.

The most pitiful part of it all to me is the blind faith these women

have in their cause, and the confidence they have that in explaining

their policy to the street ruffians, who cannot even understand that

they are ladies, they will further their cause by half an inch.

I was glad when the meeting was over, but sorry that such rhetoric

should have been wasted on the half-intoxicated loungers who deigned

to come out of the public-house and listen. If this is what the women

of your country have to bear in their fight for freedom, all honour to

them, but I would rather groan in bondage.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have been to see your famous Houses of Parliament, both the Lords

and the Commons. Like all the architecture in London, these buildings

create such an atmosphere of kingly greatness in which I, the democrat

of my own country, am revelling. The Democracy of the East is so

different from that of the West, of which I had so pitiful an example

at the street corner.

I was invited to tea at the House of Commons, and to be invited to tea

there of all places seemed very strange to me. Is the drinking of tea

of such vital importance that the English can \_never\_ do without it?

I wonder if the Turks, now \_their\_ Parliament is opened, will drink

coffee with ladies instead of attending to the laws of the nation!

What a long, weary wait I had before they would let me into the Houses

of Parliament. Every time I asked the policeman where the member of

Parliament was who had invited me, he smilingly told me they had gone

to fetch him. I thought he was joking at first, and threatened to go,

but he only laughed, and said, “He will come in time.” Only when I

had made up my mind that the tea-party would never come off, and had

settled myself on an uncomfortable divan to study the curious people

passing in and out, did my host appear. I thought it was only in Turkey

that appointments were kept with such laxity, but I was reminded by the

M.P. who invited me that I was three-quarters of an hour late in the

first place.

[Illustration: A CORNER OF A TURKISH HAREM OF TO-DAY

This photograph was taken expressly for a London paper. It was returned

with this comment: “The British public would not accept this as a

picture of a Turkish Harem.” As a matter of fact, in the smartest

Turkish houses European furniture is much in evidence.]

[Illustration: TURKISH WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE COUNTRY

They are accompanied by the negress.]

I was conducted through a long, handsome corridor to a lobby where

all sorts of men and women were assembled, pushing one another,

gesticulating and speaking in loud, disagreeable voices like those

outside of the Paris Bourse. Just then, however, a bell rang, and I was

conducted back past the policeman to my original seat. What curious

behaviour! What did it all mean? I spoke to the friendly policeman,

but his explanation that they were “dividing” did not convey much to

my mind. As I stood there, a stray member of Parliament came and looked

at me. He must have been a great admirer of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, for

he wore a monocle and an orchid in his buttonhole.

“Are these suffragettes?” he asked the policeman, staring at me and the

other women.

“No, sir,” answered the policeman, “ladies.”

It was too late for tea when my host returned to fetch me, but the

loss of a cup of tea is no calamity to me, as I only drink it to

appear polite. I was next taken up to the Ladies’ Gallery, and was

sworn in as one of the relations of a member who had given up his

ladies’ tickets to my host. The funny part of it was, that I could

not understand the language my relation spoke, so different was his

English from the English I had learnt in Turkey. But what a fuss to

get into that Ladies’ Gallery! I had no idea of making a noise before

it was suggested to my mind by making me sign a book, and I certainly

wanted to afterwards. What unnecessary trouble! What do you call it?

Red tapeism! One might almost be in Turkey under Hamid and not in Free

England.

But, my dear, why have you never told me that the Ladies’ Gallery is a

harem? A harem with its latticed windows! The harem of the Government!

No wonder the women cried through the windows of that harem that

they wanted to be free! I felt inclined to shout out too. “Is it in

Free England that you dare to have a harem? How inconsistent are you

English! You send your women out unprotected all over the world, and

here in the workshop where your laws are made, you cover them with a

symbol of protection.”

The performance which I saw through the harem windows was boring

enough. The humbler members of the House had little respect for their

superiors, seeing they sat in their presence with their hats on, and

this I am told was the habit of a very ill-bred man. Still perhaps this

attitude does not astonish me since on all sides I hear complaints

of the Government. It is a bad sign for a country, my dear. Are you

following in Turkey’s footsteps? Hatred of the Government and prison an

honour! Poor England!

I was very anxious to see the notorious Mr. Lloyd George. Since I

have been in London his name is on everyone’s lips. I have heard

very little good of him except from the ruffians at the street corner

meeting, and yet like our Hamid he seems to be all-powerful. For a

long time, I could not distinguish him in the crowd below, although my

companion spared no pains in pointing him out. I was looking for some

one with a commanding presence, some one with an eagle eye and a wicked

face like our Sultan, some one before whom a whole nation was justified

in trembling. But I still wonder whether I am thinking of the right man

when I think of Mr. Lloyd George.

There is not much excitement in your House of Commons, is there? I

prefer the Chamber of Deputies, even though some one fired at M. Briand

the day I went there. There at least they are men of action. Here some

members were so weary of law-making, that they crossed their legs,

folded their arms, and went to sleep whilst their colleagues opposite

were speaking. I thought it would have been more polite to have gone

out and taken tea, as the other members seemed to be doing all the

time. It would have given them strength to listen to the tiresome

debate.

To me, perhaps, the speaking would have been less unbearable if the

harem windows had not deadened the sound, which, please notice, is my

polite Turkish way of saying, they all spoke so indistinctly.

The bell began to ring again. The members of Parliament all walked

towards the harem to this curious direction, “Eyes to the right and

nose to the left.”[23] And at last my friend took me away.

\* \* \* \* \*

We went to see a performance of \_Trilby\_ at His Majesty’s Theatre the

other night. I liked the acting of the terrible Svengali, but not the

piece. As a great treat to me, my friend and her husband had us invited

to supper in the roof of the theatre with the famous Sir Herbert Tree.

I could not help saying, “I preferred not to go, for Sir Herbert Tree

frightened me.”

However, we went all the same, and had a delightful supper-party. For

some reason or other the manager was our host, and I was thankful not

to eat with Sir Herbert Tree. As we came away my friend asked if I was

still frightened now we had eaten with him.

“But we have not eaten with him,” I said.

“Indeed we have,” she said.

“Is the person with whom we had supper the horrid Svengali?” I asked.

“Why, of course,” she answered, laughing.

As you know, this is not my first experience of a theatre, so there is

no excuse for me. But I can assure you no one would ever dream that

Svengali was made up. What a pity it would have been for me to have

gone through life thinking of your famous actor as Svengali. I think

that when actors have to play such disagreeable parts, they should show

themselves to the public afterwards as they really are, or \_not\_ put

their names on the programme.

\* \* \* \* \*

I saw another play at His Majesty’s in which the principal rôles were

played by children. You cannot imagine how delightful I found it, and

what a change it was from the eternal \_pièce à thèse\_ which I had

become accustomed to see in Paris. The scenery indeed was a fairy

panorama, and the piece charmingly interpreted. What astonished me was

to see that both men and women took as much delight in it as the young

folks. Only mothers in Paris would have brought their children to see

such a moral play.

Ah, but I must tell you I have at last seen an Englishwoman who does

not look weary of life. She is Miss Ellen Terry. How good it was to see

her act. She was so natural and so full of fun, and enjoyed all she

had to say and do, that her performance was a real joy to me. I wish I

could have thanked her.

\* \* \* \* \*

I just love your hansom cabs. If I had money enough I would buy one

for myself and drive about seeing London. You get the best view of

everything in this way. When I first stepped into one I could not

imagine where the coachman sat; he called out to me from somewhere,

but I could not find his voice, until he popped his fingers through a

little trap door and knocked off my hat, for I cannot bear to pin on my

hat.

“Here I am,” he answered to my query, and he thought he had a mad-woman

for a fare.

\* \* \* \* \*

One night when I returned to my club after the theatre, there was one

lonely woman seated in the reading-room near the fire. She seemed to

me to be the youngest of all the ladies, although you may say that was

no guarantee against middle age. I don’t know how it was we began

to speak, since no one had introduced us, but she imagined I was a

Frenchwoman, hence probably the explanation of the liberty she had

taken in addressing me. Yet she looked so sad.

“You French,” she said, “are used to sitting up a good deal later than

we do here.”

“I thought,” I said, “the protocol did not bother about such trifles.”

“Ah, now you are in the country of protocols and etiquette,” she

answered.

She must have been asking me questions only as an excuse to speak

herself, because she took really no interest in my answers, and she

kept on chattering and chattering because she did not want me to go

away. She spoke of America and India and China and Japan, all of which

countries she seemed to know as well as her own. Never have I met in

my travels anyone so fond of talking, and yet at the same time with a

\_spleen\_ which made me almost tired.

I concluded that she was an independent woman, whose weariness must

have been the result of constant struggling. She was all alone in the

world; one of those poor creatures who might die in a top back-room

without a soul belonging to her. Her mind must have been saturated

with theories, she must have known all the uncomfortable shocks which

come from a changed position, and yet she was British enough to tremble

before Public Opinion.

“But do you know why I travel so much?” at last I had the opportunity

of asking her. “Like Diogenes who tried to find a \_Man\_, I have been

trying to find a FREE woman, but have not been successful.”

I do not think she understood in the least what I meant.—Your

affectionate friend,

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CLASH OF CREEDS

LONDON, \_Jan.\_ 1909.

I am indeed a \_désenchantée\_. I envy you even your reasonable illusions

about us. We are hopelessly what we are. I have lost all mine about

you, and you seem to me as hopelessly what you are.

The only difference between the spleen of London and the spleen of

Constantinople is that the foundation of the Turkish character is dry

cynicism, whilst the Englishman’s is inane doggedness without object.

In his fatalism the Turk is a philosopher. Your Englishman calls

himself a man of action, but he is a mere empiric.

I quite understand now, however, that you do not pity my countrywomen,

not because they do not need pity, but because for years you have

led only the life of the women of this country, women who start so

courageously to fight life’s battle and who ultimately have had to

bury all their life’s illusions. Now, I see only too well, there are

beings for whom freedom becomes too heavy a burden to bear. The women I

have met here, seem to have been striving all their lives to get away

from everything—home, family, social conventions. They want the right

to live alone, to travel as they like, to be responsible for their own

lives. Yet when their ambition is realised, the only harvest they reap

after a youth of struggle is that of disenchantment.

Yet I ask myself, is a lonely old age worth a youth of effort? Have

they not confused individual liberty, which is the right to live as one

pleases, with true liberty, which to my Oriental mind is the right to

choose one’s own joys and forbearances?

\* \* \* \* \*

Is it not curious that here, in a Christian country, I see nothing of

the religion of Christ? And yet commentaries are not lacking. Every

sect has the presumption to suppose its particular interpretation of

the words of Christ is the only right interpretation, and Christians

have changed the meaning of His words so much, and seen Christ through

the prism of their own minds, that I, primitive being that I am, do

not recognise in their tangled creeds the simple and beautiful teaching

of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of the carpenter Joseph.

Sometimes it seems to me that the religion of Christ has been brought

beyond the confines of absurdity. Would it not be better to try and

follow the example of Christ than to waste time disputing whether He

would approve of eating chocolate biscuits on fast-days and whether

wild duck is a fasting diet, whilst duck of the farmyard is forbidden?

To me, all this seems profanely childish.

The impression these numerous creeds make on me is like that of members

of the same family disputing with one another. What happens in the case

of families happens in the case of religion. From these discussions

over details follow, first mistrust, then dislike, then hatred, always

to the detriment of the best interest of them all.

I went to a Nonconformist chapel the other evening, but I could not

bring myself to realise that I was in a chapel at all. There was

nothing divine or sacred either in the building or the service. It was

more like a lecture by an eloquent professor. Nor did the congregation

worship as we worship in the East. It seemed to me, as if it was not

to worship God that they were there, but to appease the anger of some

Northern Deity, cold, intolerant, and wrathful—an idea of the Almighty

which I shall never understand.

It astonished me to hear the professor calling those present “miserable

sinners,” and as I was one of the congregation I was not a little hurt,

for I have nothing very serious on my conscience. But the Catholics,

in this respect, err as much as the Protestants. Why this hysteria

for sins you have not committed? Why this shame of one’s self, this

exaggerated humility, this continual fear? Why should you stand

trembling before your Maker?

[Illustration: THE BALCONY AT THE BACK OF ZEYNEB’S HOUSE

The house is covered with wistaria.]

[Illustration: ZEYNEB AND MELEK

The Yashmak is exceedingly becoming, the white tulle showing the lips

to great advantage.]

While I was still inside the chapel, a lady came up and was introduced

to me. We walked down the street together, and in the course of

conversation she discovered I was not even a Nonconformist, nor a Roman

Catholic, but a heathen. And she at once began to pity me, and show

me the advantages of her religion. But what could she teach me about

Christ that I did not already know? Unfortunately for her she knew

nothing of the religion of Mahomet, nor how broad-minded he was, nor

with what admiration he had spoken of the crucified Jesus, and how we

all loved Christ from Mahomet’s interpretation of His life and work.[24]

\* \* \* \* \*

As usual here, as in other Christian countries, marriage seems an

everlasting topic of interest. I was hardly seven years old when I was

taken for the first time to a non-Turkish marriage. It was the wedding

of some Greek farm-people our governess knew. We were present at the

nuptial benediction, which took place inside the house and which seemed

to me interminable. After that, everyone, including the bride, partook

of copious refreshments. Then, when we had been taken for a drive in

the country, we returned to dinner, which was served in front of the

stable. After the meal we danced on the grass to the strains of a

violin, accordion, and triangle. That is the only Christian marriage

I had seen till 1908, and I was astonished to find how different a

Christian wedding is here.

What is the use of an organ for marrying people? And twelve

bridesmaids? The bridal pair themselves look extremely uncomfortable

at all this useless ceremonial, to which nobody pays any particular

attention. Every bride and bridegroom must know how unnecessary are

all these preparations, and how marriages bore friends. Yet they go on

putting themselves to all this useless trouble, and for what?

Each person invited, I am told, has to bring a present. What a wicked

expense to put their friends to. Oh, vanity of vanities!

How is it possible not to admire the primitive Circassians, who when

they love one another and wish to marry, walk off without consulting

anyone but themselves?

\* \* \* \* \*

I am also disappointed at the manner in which divorce proceedings

are conducted in England. What a quantity of unkind words and vile

accusations! What a low handling and throwing of mud at each other,

what expense, what time and worry! And all simply to prove that two

people are not suited to live together.

To think that, with the possibility of such a life of tragedy, there

are still people who have the courage to get married! It seems to me

there are some who take marriage too seriously, others who do not take

it seriously enough, and that others again only take it seriously when

one of the partners wants to be liberated.

How sad it is! And what good can be said of laws, the work of human

beings, which not only do not help us in our misfortunes, but extend

neither pity nor pardon to those who try to suffer a little less.

During the time I lived away yonder and suffered from a total absence

of liberty, I imagined that Europe respected the happiness and the

misfortunes of individuals. How horrible it is to find in the daily

papers the names of people mercilessly branded by their fellow-men for

having committed no other fault than that of trying to be less unhappy,

for having the madness to wish to repair their wrecked existence. To

publish the reports of the evidence, the sordid gossip of menials,

the calumnies, the stolen letters, written under such different

circumstances, in moments of happiness, in absolute confidence, or

extreme mental agony, in which a woman has laid her soul bare, is

loathsome. Is it not worse than perjury to exact from a friend’s lips

what he only knows in confidence? Poor imprudent beings! They have had

their moments of sincerity: for this your sad civilisation of the West

makes them pay with the rest of their broken lives.

\* \* \* \* \*

For a long time I have wanted to make the acquaintance of Mr. W. T.

Stead, who is known and respected in the East more perhaps than any

Englishman. I had no particular reason to go and see him except that he

knew my father at the first Hague Conference. So, one day I was bold

enough to jump into a hansom and drive to his office. I was asked whom

I wanted. I asked for Mr. Stead.

“Who wants him?” I was asked.

“I do,” I replied.

“Give me your card.” But as I had no card I wrote on a slip of paper:

“The daughter of a Turkish friend of the Hague Conference will be so

pleased to see you.”

He received me at once. There was so much to talk about. He spoke so

nicely of my poor dead father, questioned me about the Sultan, about

the country I had left, about the Balkans, about Crete, and the Turks

themselves. More than an hour we talked together, and when finally I

rose to go he said to me: “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No,” I said, thanking him very kindly.

“Then it was simply to see me,” he went on, “that you came.”

“Yes,” I said, “it is a friendly visit.” He laughed heartily.

“Do you know,” he said, “that is the first time that this has happened

in my life.”

Then he was kind enough to send for tea, and the tray was put down on

the table among the papers and the journals, and he showed me signed

portraits which he had collected during his travels, among them the one

that my dear father had given him at The Hague. He then gave me his

own, and signed it, “To my only Turkish lady friend.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I saw him for a little while in Paris on his return from

Constantinople, and he came back really enthusiastic. He was much in

sympathy with the Young Turks, though he had much also to find fault

with. He despised but pitied Abdul Hamid, and hoped that an \_entente\_

between England and Turkey could be arranged, but his ideas were quite

unpractical. His policy was purely sentimental, and his suggestions

impossible.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have had the pleasure, since I have been here, of seeing two

diplomatists with whose voices I was familiar for many years in

Constantinople. My father highly esteemed them both; they often came to

see him. When they had drunk their coffee, sometimes my father sent for

us to come and play and sing to them, and from behind a curtain they

courteously thanked us for our performance.

Although I had so often heard their voices I never had an opportunity

of seeing a photo of either of them, and I can’t tell whether I was

agreeably surprised or not. Have you ever tried putting a body to a

voice?

\* \* \* \* \*

What a magnificent city London is! If you English are not proud of

it, you ought to be. It is not only grand and magnificent but has an

aristocratic look that despises mere ornament.

Here in London I have a feeling of security, which I have had nowhere

else in the world. It is the only capital in Europe I have so far seen

that gives me a sense of orderliness not dependent on authority. It

seems to me as if English character were expressed even in the houses

of the people. You can tell at a glance what kind of people dwell in

the house you are entering. How different is Paris! What a delight to

have no concierge, those petty potentates who, as it were, keep the key

of your daily life, and remedy there is none.

For the first time since I left Turkey I have had here the sensation of

real home life. As you know, we have no flats in Turkey, and have room

to move about freely—room for your delightful English furniture, which

to me is the most comfortable in the whole world.

Like ours, the houses here are made for use, and their wide doors and

broad passages seem to extend a welcome to you which French houses

hardly ever do. In France you smell economy before you even reach the

door-mat.

You who are in Turkey can now understand what I have suffered from this

narrowness of French domestic life. You can imagine my surprise when,

the morning after my arrival here, a big tray was sent into my room

with a heavy meal of eggs, bacon, fish, toast, marmalade, and what not.

I thought I must have looked ill and as if I needed extra feeding, and

I explained to my hostess that my white skin was not a sign of anæmia

but my Oriental complexion: all the eggs and bacon in the world would

not change the colour of my skin. She was not aware that the Mahometan

never eats pork, and like so many others, seemed to forget that bacon,

like pork, came from a forbidden source.

I do not find London noisy, but what noise there is one feels is

serving a purpose. Life seems so serious; everyone is busy crowding

into twelve hours the work of twenty-four. We Turks take no heed of the

passing hours.

The Englishmen remind me of the Turks. They have the same grave

demeanour, the same appearance of indifference to our sex, the same

look of stubborn determination, and, like the Turk, every Englishman

is a Sultan in his own house. Like the Turk, too, he is sincere and

faithful in his friendships, but Englishmen have two qualities that

the Turks do not possess. They are extremely good business men, and in

social relations are extremely prudent, although it is difficult to say

where prudence ends and hypocrisy begins.

[Illustration: THE DRAWING-ROOM OF A HAREM SHOWING A BRIDAL THRONE

On the Bridal Throne the Turkish woman sits on her wedding day to

receive her friends’ good wishes. It remains the chief seat in the

harem; in the Imperial Palace it is a fine throne, in poor houses only

a glorified chair, but it is always there.]

[Illustration: A CORNER OF THE HAREM

This Turkish lady collected the ribbons of the battleships on the

Bosphorus, and they are hanging on the wall.]

But if Englishmen remind me of Turks, I can find nothing in common

between English and Turkish women. They are in direct contrast to

one another in everything. Perhaps it is this marked contrast that

balances our friendship. A Turkish woman’s life is as mysterious as

an Englishwoman’s life is an open book, which all can read who care.

Before I met the suffragettes, I knew only sporting and society women.

They were all passionately absorbed in their own amusements, which

as you know do not in the least appeal to me. I suppose we Turkish

women who have so much time to devote to culture become unreasonably

exacting. But everywhere I have been—in England, Germany, France,

Italy, and Spain—I have found how little and how uselessly the women

read, and how society plays havoc with their taste for good books.

Englishwomen are pretty, but are deficient in charm. They have no

particular desire and make no effort to please. You know the charm

of the Turkish woman. The Englishwoman is pig-headed, undiplomatic,

brutally sincere, but a good and faithful friend. The Turkish

woman—well, you must fill that in yourself! I am too near to focus her.

But now that I have seen the women of most countries, you may want to

know which I most admire.

Well, I will tell you frankly, the Turkish woman. An ordinary person

would answer, “Of course,” but you are not an ordinary person, so I

shall at once give you my reasons. It is not because I am a Turkish

woman myself, but because, in spite of the slavery of their existence,

Turkish women have managed to keep their minds free from prejudice.

With them it is not what people think they ought to think, but what

they think themselves. Nowhere else in Europe have I found women with

such courage in thinking.

In every country there are women—though they may be a mere handful—who

are above class, above nationality, and dare to be themselves.

These are the people I appreciate the most. These are the people I

shall always wish to know, for to them the whole world is kin.—Your

affectionate friend,

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE ENEMY’S LAND

VENICE, \_Oct.\_ 1911.

You will say perhaps I am reminded of the Bosphorus everywhere, just

as Maurice Barres is reminded of Lorraine in every land he visits.

Yet how would it be possible not to think of the Bosphorus in Venice,

especially when for so many years I have had to do without it? Here,

there is the same blue sky, the same blue carpet of sea, the same

sunset, and the same wonderful sunrise—only gondolas have taken the

place of caïques.

All day and part of the evening I allow myself to be rowed as my

gondolier wishes from canal to canal, and I am indignant I did not

know sooner there was a place in Europe where one could come to rest.

Why do the French and Swiss doctors not send their patients here? They

would be cured certainly of that disease from which everyone suffers

nowadays, the fatigue of the big towns.

But since so many illustrious poets have sung the praises of Venice

what is there for me to say? I prefer to glorify it as the Brahmins

worship their Deity, in silence.

The Venetians do not appreciate Venice any more than I appreciated

Constantinople when I lived there. They have no idea how lovely Venice

is, but prefer the Lido, where they meet the people of all nations,

whose buzzing in the daytime replaces the mosquitoes at night.

On our way here, the train went off the rails, so we had to alight for

some time: then one of the party suggested that we should visit Verona,

and I was very delighted at this happy idea.

It was midnight. We walked along the narrow streets of the deserted

city. The town was bathed in a curious, indescribable light, and it was

more beautiful than anything we could have seen in the daylight, when

perhaps the noise would have killed its charm. I hope that fate has not

decreed that my impression of that silent sleeping city shall ever be

destroyed.

I travelled to Venice in a compartment marked “Ladies only,” not

because I have any particular affection for those “harem” compartments,

but because there was not a seat for me with my friends. An old

English spinster was my companion. She welcomed me with a graciousness

that I did not appreciate, and at once began a very dull and

conventional conversation.

Presently, however, two Italian officers came in, and politely excusing

themselves in their language, sat down. They said they had been up

all night, had been standing from Milan, and had to go on duty when

they reached Venice, and begged the old lady politely to allow them a

quarter of an hour’s rest.

The spinster did not understand, so I translated.

“Disgraceful,” she said and ordered them out. But still the officers

remained. Then turning to me she said, “You who must be Italian, please

tell them what I think of them.”

I told her, “It was not my rôle to interpret such uncharitable

language.”

Then the officers turning to me, said in Italian, “Although English,

you are much kinder than your companion; please tell her we only want

to stop a quarter of an hour, and there is absolutely no danger for

her.”

Rising, the old spinster looked for the alarm signal, but finally

decided to call the guard, who ordered the officers out. Before they

went, however, they pulled out their watches and asked me to thank her

for her kind hospitality: they reminded me that they had what they

wanted, a quarter of an hour’s rest.

Luckily our arrival at Venice meant good-bye to this disagreeable

old creature, whose type flourishes all over the Continent, even in

Constantinople, and who sacrifices on the altar of respectability

everything, even charity.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now I understand the enthusiasm of those who have spoken of Italy.

Nothing one can say is sufficient eulogy for this land of sunshine and

poetry and tradition.

I am told by the people of the north I shall be disappointed when I see

the south, but that does not disturb my impression of the moment. I am

worshipping Venice, and everything there pleases me.

[Illustration: A CAÏQUE ON THE BOSPHORUS]

[Illustration: TURKISH WOMEN IN THE COUNTRY]

To me it seems almost as if it were the home of the ancient Greeks,

with all their artistic instincts and roguery, all their faults, and

all their primitive charm. From my open window, which looks into a

canaletto, I heard the song of a gondolier. His voice was the sweetest

I have ever heard; no opera singer ever gave me greater pleasure.

Now that I know the number of his boat, I have engaged him as my

gondolier, and every evening after dinner, instead of wasting my time

at Bridge, I go on to the canal, leaving it to the discretion of my

guide where he takes me; and when he is tired of rowing, he brings me

back. All the time he sings and sings and I dream, and his beautiful

voice takes me far, far away—away from the unfriendly West.

Amongst its other attractions, Venice has an aristocracy. They are poor

certainly, but, with such blood in their veins, do they need riches?

And surely their charm and nobility are worth all the dollars put

together of the vulgar Transatlantics who have bought the big historic

palaces of Venice. I feel here as I felt in London, the delight of

being again in a Kingdom, and I can breathe and live. How restful it

is, after the nervous strain of the exaggerated Democracy of France.

\* \* \* \* \*

BRUSSELS, \_Nov.\_ 1911.

I have had this letter quite a fortnight in my trunk. I did not want to

send it to you. Somehow I felt ashamed to let you see how much I had

loved Italy—Turkey’s enemy.

I left Venice the day after the Declaration of War, if such a

disgraceful proceeding would be called a Declaration of War. For a long

time I could not make up my mind that that nation of gentlemen, that

nation of poetry and music and art, that nation whose characteristics

so appealed to my Oriental nature, that nation whom I thought so

civilised in the really good sense of the word, could be capable of

such injustice.

Even in the practice of “the rights of the strong” a little more

tact could have been exercised. Surely it is not permissible in the

twentieth century to act as savages did—at least those we thought

savages.

In a few years from now, we shall be able to see more clearly how the

Italian Government of 1911 was able to step forward and take advantage

of a Sister State, whose whole efforts were centred on regeneration,

and no one protested. What a wonderful account of the history of our

times!

When I think that it is in Christian Europe that such injustice passes

unheeded, and that Christian Europe dares to send us missionaries to

preach this gospel of Civilisation—I curse the Fate which has forced me

to accept the hospitality of the West.

\* \* \* \* \*

PARIS, \_Feb.\_ 1912.

Two chapters more seem necessary to my experience of the West. I submit

in silence. Kismet.

Hardly had I returned from Brussels than I became seriously ill. Do not

ask me what was the matter with me. Science has not yet found a name

for my suffering. I have consulted doctors, many doctors, and perhaps

for this reason I have no idea as to the nature of my illness. Each

doctor wanted to operate for something different, and only when I told

them I had not the money for an operation have they found that after

all it is not necessary. I think I have internal neuralgia, but modern

science calls it “appendicitis,” and will only treat me under that

fashionable name. At Smyrna, I remember having a similar attack. My

grandmother, terrified to see me suffering, ran in for a neighbour whom

she knew only by name. The neighbour came at once, said a few prayers

over me, passed her magic hands over my body, and in a short time I was

healed.

Here I might have knocked up all the inhabitants of Paris: not one

would have come to help me.

“The progress of modern science” was my last illusion. Why must I

have this final disappointment? Yet what does it matter? Every cloud

has a silver lining. And this final experience has brought me to the

decision, that I shall go back to Turkey as soon as I can walk. There

at least, unless my own people have been following in the footsteps

of modern civilisation, I shall be allowed to be ill at my leisure,

without the awful spectre hovering over me of a useless operation.

One night I was suffering so much that I thought it advisable to send

for the doctor. It was only two o’clock in the morning, but the message

the concierge sent back was, “that one risked being assassinated in

Paris at that hour,” and he refused to go.

The next day I had a letter from my landlord requesting me not to wake

the concierge up again at two o’clock in the morning. And this is the

country of liberty, the country where one is free to die, provided only

the concierge is not awakened at two o’clock in the morning.

This little incident seems insignificant in itself, but to me it will

be a very painful remembrance of one of the chief characteristics of

the people of this country—a total lack of hospitality.

If our Oriental countries must one day become like these countries

of the West, if they too must inherit all the vices, with which this

civilisation is riddled through and through, then let them perish now.

If civilisation does not teach each individual the great and supreme

quality of pity, then what use is it? What difference is there, please

tell me, between the citizens of Paris and the carnivorous inhabitants

of Darkest Africa? We Orientals imagine the word civilisation is a

synonym of many qualities, and I, like others, believed it. Is it

possible to be so primitive? Yet why should I be ashamed of believing

in the goodness of human beings? Why should I blame myself, because

these people have not come up to my expectations?

This musing reminds me of a story which our Koran Professor used to

tell us. “There was once,” he said, “in a country of Asia Minor, a

little girl who believed all she heard. One day she looked out of her

window, and saw a chain of mountains blue in the distance.

“‘Is that really their colour?’ she asked her comrades.

“‘Yes,’ they answered.

“And so delighted was she with this information that she started out to

get a nearer view of the blue mountains.

“Day after day she walked and walked, and at last got to the summit of

the blue mountains, only to find grass just as she would have found it

anywhere else. But she would not give up.

“‘Where are the blue mountains?’ she asked a shepherd, and he showed

another chain higher and farther away, and on and on she went until she

came to the mountains of Alti.

[Illustration: MELEK ON THE VERANDA AT FONTAINEBLEAU]

“All her existence she had the same hopes and the same illusions. Only

when she came to the evening of her life did she understand that it was

the distance that lent the mountains their hue—but it was too late to

go back, and she perished in the cold, biting snow.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I do not know if there is another country in the world where

foreigners can be as badly treated as they are here; at any rate they

could not be treated worse. They are criticised, laughed at, envied,

and flattered, and they have the supreme privilege of paying for all

those people whose hobby is economy.

Everything is done here by paradox; the foreigner who has talent is

more admired than the Frenchman, yet if he does anything wrong, there

is no forgiveness for him.

An Englishwoman I knew quarrelled with a Frenchwoman, and the latter

reproached her with having accepted one luncheon and one dinner. The

Englishwoman (it sounds fearfully English, doesn’t it?) sent her

ex-hostess twelve francs, and the Frenchwoman not only accepted it but

sent a receipt. If I had not seen that receipt I don’t think I could

have believed the story!

Another lady, whose dressmaker claimed from her a sum she was not

entitled to, was told by that dressmaker, unless she were paid at once,

she would inform the concierge. Tell me, I beg of you, in what other

country would this have been possible? In what other country of the

world would self-respecting people pay any attention, far less go for

information, to the vulgar harpies who preside over the destinies of

the fifteen or twenty families who occupy a Paris house?

When I have been able to get my ideas and impressions a little into

focus, I intend to write for you, and for you only, what a woman

without any preparation for the battle of life, a foreigner, a woman

alone, and last but not least, a Turk, has had to suffer in Paris.

You who know what our life is in Turkey, and how we have been kept

in glass cases and wrapt in cotton wool, with no knowledge of the

meaning of life, will understand what the awful change means, and how

impossible for a Turkish woman is Western life.

Do you remember the year of my arrival? Do you remember how I wanted

to urge all my young friends away yonder to take their liberty as I

had taken mine, so that before they died they might have the doubtful

pleasure of knowing what it was to live?

Now, I hope if ever they come to Europe they will not come to Paris

except as tourists; that they will see the beautiful things there are

to be seen, the Provence with its fine cathedrals and its historic

surroundings; that they will amuse themselves taking motor-car trips

and comparing it with their excursions on a mule’s back in Asia; that

they will see the light of Paris, but never its shade; and that they

will return, as you have returned from Constantinople, with one regret,

that you couldn’t stay longer.

If only my experience could be of use to my compatriots who are longing

as I longed six years ago for the freedom of the West, I shall never

regret having suffered.—Your affectionate friend,

ZEYNEB.

CHAPTER XX

THE END OF THE DREAM

MARSEILLES, 5\_th March,\_ 1912.

It is to-morrow that I sail. In a week from to-day, I shall again be

away yonder amongst those whom I have always felt so near, and who I

know have not forgotten me.

In just a week from to-day I shall again be one of those unrecognisible

figures who cross and recross the silent streets of our town—some one

who no longer belongs to the same world as you—some one who must not

even think as you do—some one who will have to try and forget she led

the existence of a Western woman for six long, weary years.

What heart-breaking disappointments have I not to take away with me!

It makes me sad to think how England has changed! England with its

aristocratic buildings and kingly architecture—England with its proud

and self-respecting democracy—the England that our great Kemal Bey

taught us to know, that splendid people the world admires so much,

sailing so dangerously near the rocks.

I do not pretend to understand the suffragettes or their

“window-smashing” policy, but I must say, I am even more surprised at

the attitude of your Government. However much these ill-advised women

have over-stepped the boundaries of their sex privileges, however

wrong they may be, surely the British Government could have found some

other means of dealing with them, given their cause the attention they

demanded, or used some diplomatic way of keeping them quiet. I cannot

tell you the horrible impression it produces on the mind of a Turkish

woman to learn that England not only imprisons but tortures women; to

me it is the cataclysm of all my most cherished faiths. Ever since I

can remember, England had been to me a kind of Paradise on earth, the

land which welcomed to its big hospitable bosom all Europe’s political

refugees. It was the land of all lands I longed to visit, and now I

hear a Liberal Government is torturing women. Somehow my mind will not

accept this statement.

Write to me often, very often, dear girl. You know exactly where I

shall be away yonder, and exactly what I shall be doing. You know even

the day when I shall again begin my quiet, almost cloistered existence

as a Moslem woman, and how I shall long for news of that Europe which

has so interested and so disappointed me.

Do you remember with what delight I came to France, the country of

Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité? But now I have seen those three magic

words in practice, how the whole course of my ideas has changed! Not

only are my theories on the nature of governments no longer the same,

but my confidence in the individual happiness that each can obtain from

these governments is utterly shattered.

But you will say, I argue like a reactionary. Let me try to explain.

Am I not now a woman of experience, a woman of six years’ experience,

which ought to count as double, for every day has brought me a double

sensation, the one of coming face to face with the reality, and the

other, the effort of driving from my mind the remembrance of what I

expected to find?

You know how I loved the primitive soul of the people, how I sympathise

with them, and how I hoped that some scheme for the betterment of

their condition would be carried out.

But I expected in France the same good honest Turks I knew in our

Eastern villages, and it was from the Eastern simplicity and loyalty

that I drew my conclusions about the people of the West. You know now

what they are! And do not for a moment imagine that I am the only one

to make this mistake: nine out of ten of my compatriots, men and women,

would have the same expectation of them. Until they have come to the

West to see for themselves and had some of the experiences that we

have had, they will never appreciate the calm, leisurely people of our

country.

How dangerous it is to urge those Orientals forward, only to reduce

them in a few years to the same state of stupidity as the poor

degenerate peoples of the West, fed on unhealthy literature and

poisoned with alcohol.

You are right: it is in the West that I have learned to appreciate my

country. Here I have studied its origin, its history (and I still know

only too little of it), but I shall take away with me very serious

knowledge about Turkey.

But again I say, what a disappointment the West has been. Yes, taking

it all round I must own that I am again a \_désenchantée\_. Do you know,

I am now afraid even of a charwoman who comes to work for me. Alas! I

have learned of what she is capable—theft, hatred, vengeance, and the

greed of money, for which she would sell her soul.

I told the editor of a Paris paper one day that I blushed at the manner

in which he encouraged dirty linen to be washed in public. “All your

papers are the same,” I said. “Take them one after the other and see if

one article can be found which is favourable to your poor country. You

give the chief place to horrible crimes. Your leading article contains

something scandalous about a minister, and from these articles France

is judged not only by her own people but by the whole world.”

He did not contradict me, but smiling maliciously, he answered, “Les

journalistes ont \_à cœur\_ d’être aussi veridique que possible.”

(“Journalists must try to be as truthful as possible.”) A clever

phrase, perhaps, but worse than anything he could have written in the

six pages of his paper.

But perhaps I am leaving you under the impression, \_désenchantée\_

though I be, that nothing has pleased me in the West. Not at all! I

have many delightful impressions to take back with me, and I want to

return some day if the “Kismet” will allow it.

Munich, Venice, the Basque Countries, the Riviera, and London I hope to

see again. Art and music, the delightful libraries, the little towns

where I have worked, thought, and discovered so many things, and a few

friends “who can understand”—surely these are attractions great enough

to bring me back to Europe again.

The countries I have seen are beautiful enough, but civilisation has

spoiled them. To take a copy of what it was going to destroy, however,

civilisation created art—art in so many forms, art in which I had

revelled in the West. It was civilisation that collected musical

harmonies, civilisation that produced Wagner, and music to my mind is

the finest of all its works.

But there are books too, you will say, wonderful books. Yes, but in the

heart of Asia there are quite as many masterpieces, and they are far

more reposeful.

\_6th March.\_

This morning early I was wakened by the sun, the advance-guard of what

I expect away yonder. From my window I see a portion of the harbour,

and the curious ships which start and arrive from all corners of the

earth. Again I see the Bosphorus with its ships, which in my childish

imagination were fairy godmothers who would one day take me far, far

away ... and now they are the fairy godmothers who will take me back

again.

I like to watch this careless, boisterous, gay crowd of Marseilles.

It is just a little like the port of Échelles du Levant with its

variegated costumes, its dirt, which the sun makes bearable, and the

continual cries and quarrelling among men of all nations.

All my trunks are packed and ready, and it is with joy and not without

regret that I see I have no hatbox. Not that I care for that curious

and very unattractive invention, the fashionable hat, but it is the

external symbol of liberty, and now I am setting it aside for ever.

My \_tchatchaff\_ is ready, and once we have passed the Piræus I shall

put it on. How strange I shall feel clad again from head to foot in a

black mantle all out of fashion, for the Turks have narrowed their

\_tchatchaffs\_ as the Western women have tightened their skirts. It will

not be without emotion, either, that I feel a black veil over my face,

a veil between me and the sun, a veil to prevent me from seeing it as I

saw it for the first time at Nice from my wide open window.

Yet what anguish, what terrible anguish would it not be for me to put

on that veil again, if I did not hope to see so many of those I have

really loved, the companions of my childhood, friends I know who wanted

me and have missed me. Even when I left Constantinople, you know under

what painful circumstances, I hoped to return one day.

“The world is a big garden which belongs to us all,” said a Turkish

warrior of the past; “one must wander about and gather its most

agreeable fruits as one will.” Ah! the holy philosophy! yet how far

are we from ever attempting to understand it! Will there ever come a

personality strong enough, with a voice powerful enough to persuade us

that this philosophy is for our sovereign being, and that without it we

shall be led and lead others to disappointments?

During the time I was away yonder, I believed in the infallibility of

new theories. I had almost completely neglected the books of our wise

men of the East, but I have read them in the libraries of the West,

where I have neglected modern literature for the pleasure of studying

that philosophy, which shows the vanity of these struggles and the

suffering that can follow.

I am longing to see an old uncle from the Caucasus. When we were

young girls he pitied us because we were so unarmed against the

disenchantment which inevitably had to come to us.

“You are of another century,” we said to him. “You reason with theories

you find remarkable, but we want to go forward, we want to fight for

progress, and that is only right.”

Ah! he knew what he was talking about, that old uncle, when he spoke of

the disenchantment of life.

“You are arguing as I argued when I was a little boy, and my father

gave me the answer that I have given to you. My children,” he

continued, “life does not consist in always asking for more: believe

me, there is more merit in living happily on as little as you can, than

in struggling to rise on the defeat of others. I have fought in all

the battles against the Russians, and had great experience of life,

but I remind you of the fact merely lest you should think me a vulgar

fatalist in the hands of destiny. I, too, have had many struggles, and

it was my duty.”

What a lot I shall have to tell this dear old uncle! How well we shall

understand each other now, how happy he will be to see that I have

understood him! We shall speak in that language which I need to speak

again after six long years. Loving the East to fanaticism as I do, to

me it stands for all that glorious past which the younger generation

should appreciate but not blame, all the past with which I find myself

so united.

I will tell this dear old uncle (and indeed am I not as old and

experienced as he?) that I love my country to-day as I never loved it

before, and if only I may be able to prove this I shall ask nothing

more of life.

\* \* \* \* \*

NAPLES.

I can only write you a few lines to-day. The sea has been so rough that

many of the passengers have preferred to remain on board. Some one

impertinently asked me if I were afraid to go on shore, but I did not

answer, having too much to say. Around me I hear the language which

once I spoke with such delight; now it has become odious to me, as

odious as that Italy which I have buried like a friend of the past.

Now there is a newspaper boy on board crying with rapture “Another

Italian victory.” He offers me a paper. I want to shout my hatred of

his country, I want to call from Heaven the vengeance of Allah on these

cowardly Italians, but my tongue is tied and my lips will not give

utterance to the thoughts I feel. I stand like one dazed.

Surely these accounts of victory are false. Are not these reports

prepared beforehand to give courage to the Italian soldiers in their

glorious mission of butchering the Turks, those fine valiant men who

will stand up for their independence as long as a man remains to fight?

At last I go and lock myself in my cabin, so as not to hear their

hateful jubilation, but they follow me even to my solitude. Some one

knocks. Reluctantly I open. It is a letter. But there must be some

error. Who can have written to me when I particularly asked that I

should have no letters until I arrived?

But the letter came from Turkey, and the Turkish stamp almost

frightened me: for a long time I had not the courage to open it. When

at last I slowly cut the envelope of that letter, I found it contained

the cutting of a newspaper which announced the death of the dear old

uncle whom more than anyone I was longing to see again.

Outside the conquerors were crying out, even louder than before, “More

Turkish losses, more Turkish losses.” I folded up the letter and put it

back in its envelope with a heart too bitter for tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

What did it all mean? What was the warning that fate was sending to me

in this cruel manner? \_Désenchantée\_ I left Turkey, \_désenchantée\_ I

have left Europe. Is that rôle to be mine till the end of my days?—Your

affectionate friend,

ZEYNEB.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Yali = a little summer residence resorted to when it is

too hot to remain in Constantinople itself.

[2] The Turkish women with whom I lived in Constantinople

read the Bible by the advice of the Imam (the Teacher of the

Koran) to help them in the better understanding of the Koran.

I may add that Zeyneb’s knowledge of our Scriptures, and her

understanding of Christ’s teaching, would put to shame many

professing Christians in our Western Churches.

[3] French time.

[4] When I asked a Turkish friend to write in my album, to my

surprise and pride she wrote from memory a passage from \_Ships

that Pass in the Night\_.

[5] Prayer which all devout Moslems say before beginning a

work.

[6] Hanoum = Turkish lady.

[7] The answer to such an observation is obvious, but I prefer

to present the Hanoum’s anecdote as she gave it.—G.E.

[8] Tcharchafs = cloak and veil worn by Turkish women when

walking out of doors.

[9] Muezzins = the religious teachers amongst the Mohammedans,

whose duty it is five times a day to ascend the minaret and

call the faithful followers of Mohammed to prayer from the

four corners of the earth.

[10] Hodja = teacher of the Koran.

[11] Babouche = Turkish slippers without heels.

[12] Chalvar = Turkish pantaloons, far more graceful than the

hideous harem skirts, which met with such scant success in

this country.

[13] Enturi = the tunic, heavily embroidered, which almost

covered the pantaloons.

[14] The Western governesses, in so many cases, took no

interest in their pupils’ reading, and allowed them to read

everything they could lay their hands on. With their capacity

for intrigue, they smuggled in principally French novels of

the most harmful kind. Physical exercise being impossible

to work off the evil effects of this harmful reading, the

Turkish woman, discontented with her lot, saw only two ways of

ending her unhappy existence—flight or suicide; she generally

preferred the latter method.

[15] Slaves.

[16] They were called “white” because they were originally

attended by unmarried women only, and they all wore white

dresses.—G. E.

[17] It sounds strange to the Western mind to speak of a

“comfortable cemetery,” but the dead are very near to the

living Turks; the cemetery is the Turkish woman’s favourite

walk, and the greatest care is taken of the last resting-place

of the loved ones.—G. E.

[18] The editor is not responsible for the ideas expressed in

this book, which are not necessarily her own.

[19] Karakheuz = Turkish performance similar to our Punch and

Judy Show.

[20] Zeyneb has forgotten that as well as Fridays and various

fast days, every Catholic receives the Holy Communion

fasting.—G. E.

[21] Inhabitants of Pera. There is no love lost between these

ladies and the Turkish women proper. I personally found many

of them very charming.—G. E.

[22] I received this letter in Constantinople, where I was

staying in a Turkish harem, having travelled there in order

to be present at the first debate in the newly-opened Turkish

Parliament.—G. E.

[23] I leave my friend’s spelling unchanged—G. E.

[24] It may be reasonably urged in reply that Zeyneb’s

criticism of our Christianity is far from adequate. But I have

preferred to present the impressions of a Turkish woman.—G. E.

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO.

Edinburgh & London

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