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Secrets of the Sultan's Harem.

Very Unusual Details of Turkish Family Life Told by an American Woman Who Visited for Six Weeks in the Sultan's Family

By Blanche Arral.

FOR six weeks I lived in the palace of Sultan Abdul Hamid. For that period I was entertained for the strange child women who were the objects of his successive caprices. I learned the secrets of their souls and bodies. I discovered that the existence of these toys of an Emperor of the East is a palace in fairyland with horror as a cornerstone.

Sluggish ease, sweets-stuffed bodies, empty souls, vague yearnings for a different life without will to seek it, silken selfishness, the slow death of the finest instincts of womanhood, I witnessed in the month and a half in which I sang and danced to entertain the human playthings of the most cruel monarch in the world. I talked with and listened to the three hundred spouses of the Emperor of the East. I learned the secrets of their souls and bodies, and my soul was filled with an infinite compassion for them. I would like to lead an army of women in an invasion of that relic of the middle ages, a country clinging barnacle-like to the twentieth century.

That which is of the most vital importance to every member of the harem is accredited rank. The dowager Queen of England was no more reluctant to resign the honors of reigning Queen of England than is the Sultana of Turkey her rank as the first lady of the harem. Her passing is more than a grief. It is a shame. She bows her head before the nation and passes into oblivion for the same reason that the Empress Josephine was divorced and banished, because she has failed to give the Emperor a son. If she achieves this the first wife remains the first, not only because she was the initial wife, but because she has earned the right by bearing a Sultan. She is for life the Sultana. She may grow old, and they are old at thirty in Turkey, and ugly, for theirs is the type of beauty that coarsens with age, but she is the head of the harem, the first wife, the Sultana to whom every woman, be she mere visitor or one of the three real or two hundred so-called wives must bend the knee.

Beneath her on the stairs of harem honor is the trio of other, and later, wives. Allah, generous deity of the Turks, permits, and has expressed in the Koran his consent that every true and pious follower of his may have four wives. The trio that follow the Sultana are known as hanims. They reside in the same palace with the Sultana, and treat her with reverence, which she returns with a distant condescension. Though outwardly all deference and admira- each of the hanims cherishes in the deepest, darkest corner of her heart a hope. If the Sultana should not bear a son, or if her son should die, the Sultana may divorce her and raise his faithful hanim to the rank of first wife. This ambition, about which no one of them would dare speak by day, visits their dreams by night. Ask one of the splendid-eyed creatures who she dreamed the night before and she will roll those eyes and smile secretively, but you know that if the most blissful of dreams visited her it was that she saw herself that greatest lady of Turkey, the most honored in the East, the Sultana.

But the hanims have one glory, envied of every woman save the Sultana. They accompany her in her drives. Veiled, they go forth each day for a drive, sending glances of curiosity and pride above the swathed veils that hide their brows and chins, their noses and lips.

Turkish women are the most inquisitive in the world.

Speak to the Sultana or a hanim of the women of the harem and she will say, "We are four, not counting, of course, our maids of honor and slaves." And this, from their point of view, is quite true, for they ignore the more than two hundred others, those women at whom they curl the lip as interlopers, beautiful playthings of a brief whim. To the legal wives all these others are women who dwell in the silence and the shadows, women who do not exist.

And do you think of these two hundred women as enjoying the close friendship of the Sultan? By no means. Of these women, whom we by courtesy call wives, and who are named according to the poetic fancy of the Sultan—Abdul Hamid named them his "graces"—there are six or eight reigning favorites. While they enjoy the royal favor they are the women of third rank in the royal household. When they lose it others are elevated to their places. Thus His Oriental Majesty, while possessing three hundred "wives" in name, has actually only a meagre ten or a dozen at a time.

Beneath these in rank, and despised by the reigning favorites, but curiously content with their fate of exemption from their ruler's admiration, are the nearly two hundred other women, the retired or unappreciated concubines. Theirs would seem to be an unhappy lot, but they view it with Eastern calm. If His Majesty tires of them their fate is either that, as a special mark of royal favor, he marries them to one of the officers of his court, who rises many grades in court rank through the alliance, or he simply forgets Fatima or Alma, who becomes a companion and gossip to the inmates of the harem.

I discovered that some of these women—I knew at least twenty of them—had been gifts to the Emperor of whom he never availed himself. As we receive unappreciated gifts at Christmas, which we place in the bottom of a bureau drawer and forget, so are these beauties, captured and brought to the palace by some officer of the court in hope of preferment for the service, presented to His Majesty, sent to one of the group of houses that is the harem, and forgotten.

Fifth in the descending scale are the maids of honor. These wait upon the wives. Not upon those

women who are called by courtesy wives, whom the married quartette never meet and never mention, but the legal spouses of the Sultan. These correspond to the maids of honor of the queens of any court of Europe.

The sixth in the scale are the waiting women, a highly specialized class of servants who wait upon the maids of honor and upon the women who are never mentioned by the wives. These captives in the palace have not, as the queens, maids of honor of their own, nor even a waiting woman for each, but a group of them is served by one of the waiting women.

Seventh in the social descent from the Sultana is the group of special attendants, the entertainers as singers and dancers, the women of the wardrobe, the women who understand the subtle art of the perfumed bath.

The lowest grade is that of the women slaves, born in the palace, and children of slaves born in the palace. These perform the most menial services in the household of women. They are the scrub women and char women, the cooks and dishwashers. Like the rest of their sex they are deemed in Turkey creatures without souls.

Do you imagine that in the harem exists jealousy? Jealousy of rank, yes, but of that primal jealousy of the female for her mate there is or seems to be, none. The women gladly adorn each other for a visit to His Majesty's quarter of the palace. If the Sultan shows marked admiration for one of them, the others appear to be delighted, as a family are charmed when some one praises the youngest or prettiest of the household. The retired concubines lend the reigning favorites their jewels, that they may be more lovely in his royal sight. I observed this closely and studied it while singing for these women and I ascribe it to two causes. One is the lack of real affection or pride of the women for their fractional spouse. Having had no part in choosing him they do not love him. Another reason is the childlikeness of their natures. Were they women of fully developed brains and hearts they could not but be jealous. The trend upward of the human race is continuously toward monogamy.

When the ruler of Turkey, weary of affairs of state, wishes to rest in the society of women of his household, an aide-de-camp sends a mes-

The Sultan of Turkey and the 300 Ladies of the Royal Harem in the Order of Their Rank



The Sultan Himself

The Sultana His Principal Wife

His Three Secondary Wives and the Twelve Maids of Honor

The Six "Favorites" of the Sultan

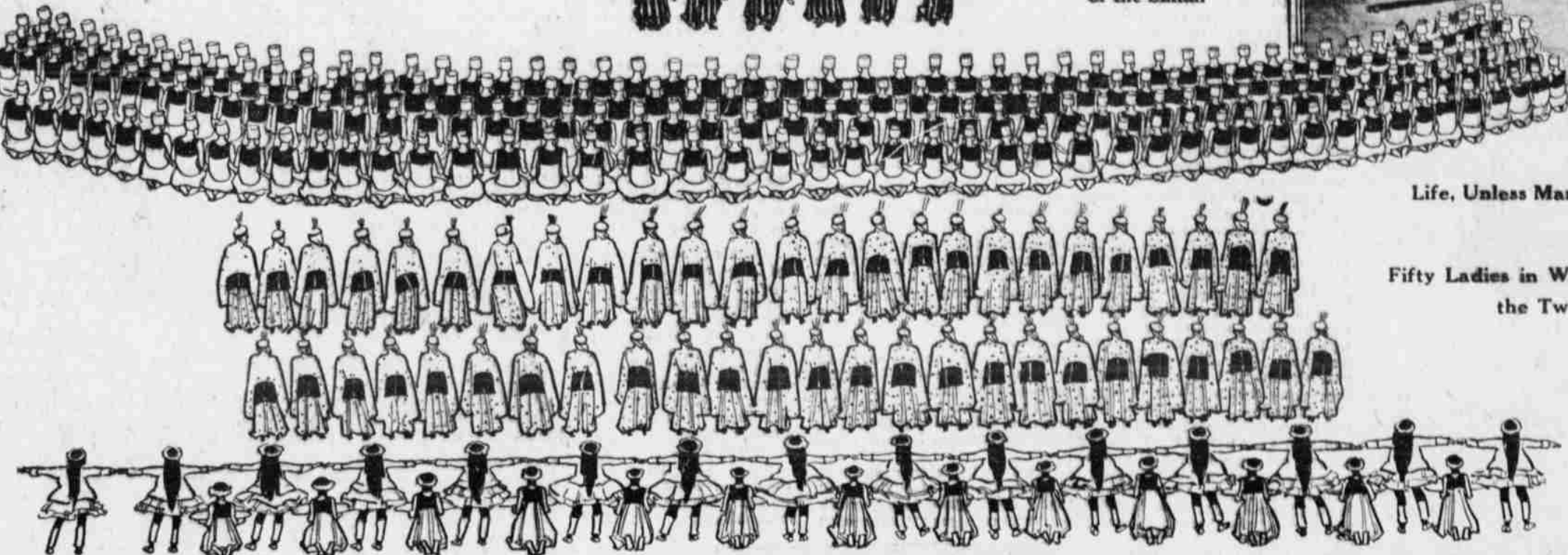


DOOR OF THE SULTAN'S HAREM WHICH IS GUARDED NIGHT AND DAY.

Two Hundred Retired Concubines Who Were Once Favorites, and Who Must Be Supported for Life, Unless Married Off to Friends of the Sultan.

Fifty Ladies in Waiting Who Are in Attendance on the Two Hundred Concubines.

Twenty-eight Dancers, Musicians, Manicures, Hairdressers and Entertainers of the Harem Ladies.



Zuleika, the Newest Favorite of the Sultan.



PHOTO BY OTTO SAKONY CO.

Mme. Blanche Arral, Who Was a Harem Visitor for Six Weeks.

few, dazzled by the splendor of the harem and luxury of life in the harem, voluntarily accompany the officers of the court.

Accepted as members of the harem (and in the house- hold, the lazy, fat-forming life begins. The women rise at eight, plunge into a perfumed bath, and eat in a leisurely manner their breakfast of fruit and rice and one of the green salads, remain for example, which they take with salt to clear their complexions. Then they saunter into the gardens and stroll about or sit among the flowers. A group of them, surrounding a tree and chattering and laughing as wholeheartedly

as school girls, is one of the prettiest sights I have seen in all Europe. While they chatter in the garden, or after they have gone back to loiter in their rooms, plates of fruit are served if they wish them, but they eat only two meals a day. The last is dinner, the hour for which differs in Summer and Winter, because it occurs two hours before sunset, since they must retire at sunset. Three times a day they pray, saluting to the ground, their faces toward Mecca.

All of the intervening time they spend at their toilers. A Turkish woman, having nothing else to do, dawdles over her dressing for three or four hours twice a day, once after breakfast, the other in preparation for dinner. Twice a week the entertainers of

the household or visitors like myself, dance or sing or read at a reception. The child women are easily entertained and are effusive in their praise. Occasionally they go forth in companies of eight to twenty, under guard of a black man, to visit other harems.

Thus their lives go on, being swallowed up in a marsh as sluggish streams trail way into the nothingness of a sodden meadow. I am unspeakably sorry for them. If, as when Abdul Hamid abdicated his throne and went into retirement taking only a handful of the women with him, these poor creatures are cast into the world, they are helpless. Hopefully they sink into a life of degradation. The women of Turkish harems are the helpless wards of a careless world.

A New Plan to Make Girls Behave

THE problem of maintaining discipline in schools exclusively for girls has difficulties well understood by most teachers in such institutions.

Frau Heinemann, head mistress of a girls' school at Lubeck, Germany, has recently set forth these difficulties in a magazine article; but the real value of the article lies in her account of a novel experiment which, contrary to her expectations, proved highly successful. Despairing of obtaining order and discipline by the ordinary methods, Frau Heinemann decided to allow the girls to govern themselves.

The girls accepted the idea with enthusiasm. "First of all it was

decided what the office-bearers should do. This was done by the girls themselves, who bought of many things that I could never have dreamed of," says Frau Heinemann. "Then the office-bearers were elected. To my astonishment the most disturbing members of the class headed the poll. In one class the first elected was a girl who continually came late to school. She was appointed monitor with two prefects, one of whom was famous in the school for her pranks, and the other a girl who constantly had 'unsatisfactory' as the mark for her work. At the same time some of the 'patrons' of the class were chosen to look after the classroom cupboard. "Then came the choice of punishments, which the girls sought to make more severe than their mis-

trous thought necessary. For gross forgetfulness girls were made to learn so many lines of verse by heart; for restlessness they were made to stand for ten minutes during a lesson. (The girls proposed that the time should be for a whole hour.)

"The girls wished for still severer punishments for grave cases, and proposed banishment from the class for a week. This I thought too severe, and they made it four days, to be applied only with my permission. But finally it was reduced to banishment for a single morning.

"The result was that the leaders of disorder soon became model members of the class. Once a month comes another election, and nowadays the honors of election are most keenly coveted."