

# THE TREASURE TOWER.

## A STORY OF MALTA.

VIRGINIA W. JOHNSON.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### A MALTESE GARDEN.

THE ISLAND OF Malta basked in spring sunshine. The glow of light was intensely brilliant on rock and rampart, after weeks of rain, and already suggested the speedy approach of blighting summer heat.

The harbor of Valletta wore the usual aspect of European animation. The Russian Corvette Ladislas had just cast anchor, having on board a young grand duke, who was making the tour of the world in a leisurely and princely fashion. Mercantile steamers came and went, amid puffing tugs, launches and yachts, while the native shore craft, the dhajisas, darted about laden with fresh fruit, or transporting nimble tailors and washerwomen in search of work. Occasionally a torpedo boat of sinister appearance glided through the throng of shipping, and vanished in some adjacent inlet, or the gig of a man-of-war cleft a passage with rhythmical flash and dip of oars, toward the quay.

One of the latter, quitting the side of her majesty's ship Sparrow, recently arrived from Suda Bay, brought Flag Lieutenant Curzon to the shore. The young man made his way through a noisy crowd, and ascended the steps to the city of Valletta.

Below him stretched the sparkling Mediterranean sea, and docks and moles thronged with shipping. Above him, towers, churches, palaces, with quaint balconies and a margin of stone wall, rose with a background of blue sky. His eye was attracted by wayside shrines at the angle of buildings, where lamps burned before saints gaudily adorned, shops displaying filigree ornaments of gold and silver, and whole webs of Maltese lace, and groups of soldiers, nuns and priests. His nostrils were saluted by the fragrance of flowers, coffee and those latent odors of the southern seaport, garlic and fish frying in oil. His ear was stunned by the jangled peal of church bells, mingled with the hum of voices.

Lieut. Arthur Curzon was supple and vigorous of form, and alert and decided in manner. His golden hair curled tightly on a small and shapely head, a closely trimmed beard framed a handsome face, with clearly-cut features, and lighted by a pair of keen blue eyes, capable of a great variety of expression. The sun-bronzed tint of the cheek, below the margin of a fair and open brow, revealed by the removal of the cap, and certain accentuations of resolution and maturity gradually deepening around the lips, alone redeemed the entire physiognomy from a youthful insouciance and merry audacity which were eminently attractive and boyish.

Climbing the stone steps from the port to the old town on the height of this most populous of islands, he may have aptly represented that "The sword of war opens the way of commerce."

Truly the officer was ready to cope with any adventure or danger which fate might have in store for him on this day of fitful spring weather. He came of a family noted for intrepid courage and originality of mind and character. A commonplace world, devoid of enthusiasm, pronounced the race eccentric, perhaps a trifle mad. Descended from Scandinavian sea rovers, who had settled on the northern coast of Scotland centuries ago, the Curzons numbered prelates, soldiers, and faithful followers of the Stuarts among their members.

The first object ever noticed by Arthur Curzon in infancy had been the portrait of an ancestor suspended above the chimney-piece in his grandfather's castle, wearing a helmet of different colored metals, a gold chain around the neck, and carrying a horn of the chase, studded with precious stones.

Lieut. Curzon had won honorable mention at the storming of Alexandria and aspired to promotion in the service by fresh exertion, when opportunity offered. For the rest, he was a sailor on shore for a holiday.

He directed his steps to the Strada Zecca, and paused before a palace of somber aspect, with a projecting roof which cast a deep shadow on the pavement below. The memory of the Knights Templar seemed to brood over the spot, undisturbed by modern innovation or change.

The visitor was met at the door by a servant with the intelligence that the mistress of the house was absent on an excursion. Mrs. Griffith had left a charming note, written on pink paper, in three lines of gigantic feminine chirography, urging the young officer

to return for 5 o'clock tea in event of his obtaining leave to come ashore that day.

Lieut. Curzon read the note and consulted his watch, which indicated the hour of 2. How should he while away the time until the return of his cousin?

He loitered in the shops and bought a festoon of lace in a helpless, masculine fashion, wherewith to cheer the declining years of a maiden aunt, dwelling in a provincial town of England, if permitted to escape the Malta postoffice. He bethought him of a bevy of little cousins in Devonshire, launching recklessly into the purchase of silver filigree crosses for their benefit. Then he decided to stretch his limbs by means of a country walk.

Quitting the streets of Valletta the young man soon left behind him the encircling fortifications, with a sense of freedom in movement after the cramping inaction of shipboard. The unattractive aspect of the country could not rob the spirits of the sailor on shore of unwonted elasticity. Before him extended a gray and nearly treeless region, broken by villages of flat-roofed houses clustered about the church with a dome. The intervening spaces were chiefly subdivided by stone walls, as a shelter from the wind for the crops fostered in the soil brought from Sicily.

The pedestrian paused at length, weary of the dusty highway. He glanced wistfully in the direction of the arid ledges of the shore, and the sea beyond, which glittered in the sunshine, with changing tints wrought by passing clouds, and broke in white foam among the rocks.

He chose a short cut to gain the shore. If the measure led to trespassing upon his neighbor's ground, he trusted to personal adroitness to extricate himself from all embarrassments.

He skirted a deserted chapel on a ridge, and was descending the slope beyond, when an object attracted his keen eye, and brought him to a halt in his rapid walk. A human hand and arm, clenched and rigid, as if in death, projected from the entrance of a half-ruined structure in his path. Had the arm not been thus extended, Lieut. Curzon would have passed on without noticing, especially the building. Strange whim of destiny!

He approached and peeped into the place. Shadows obscured the interior, but he recognized a temple, probably of the early Phœnician settlers of the island, built of rough blocks of stone. Traces of a primitive altar were discernible, still adorned with the rude idols of the twelve Children of the Sun, the Kabiri, once worshipped here. The spot was silent, humid, chill, save when a stray sunbeam filtered through the pervading darkness to gild the semblance of nearly effaced carvings, mere rudimentary hints of decoration, on wall and roof, or danced with a flickering motion above the pavement, weaving a pattern of mosaic with notes and shade.

An old man lay on his face, motionless, and with a fragrant of marble table overturned beside him on the ground.

The officer's first suspicion was of murder. Anticipating some accident, he lifted the victim of foul play, as he supposed, and speedily ascertained that no trace of violence was perceptible, either on the pinched and shriveled features, white hair, or small body. He was further reassured when the old man gave utterance to a feeble groan, and opened his eyes, with a manifest effort to collect his thoughts, bewildered by an interval of insensibility.

"The place would not be safe," he muttered in English. "No! No! Far from safe, this ruin."

"Do you live near by? If you can pull yourself together a little I will help you home," said Lieut. Curzon, in a tone of encouragement.

The old man was silent. He passed a trembling hand across his brow, and then shaded his eyes, the better to examine the face bending over him, while his own features expressed a scared surprise, agitation, and even furtive suspicion and distrust.



AN OLD MAN LAY ON HIS FACE.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing you," he retorted after a pause, and with perceptible petulance.

Lieut. Curzon smiled involuntarily. "Shall I call you—people?" he suggested, with unabated good humor.

"No. I must have stumbled over that fragment of table. How did you find me?"

His manner was more collected and confident, but he eyed the stranger

askance as he struggled to regain an upright posture.

"You have had a fainting fit, a vertigo, I fancy," said the officer, glancing around the spot, in the hope of describing some person to whom he might consign the human burthen thus unexpectedly cast upon his care. No aid appeared.

The old man placed his hand on the sleeve of his companion, as if to aid his vacillating movements. Lieut. Curzon was inspired by a sentiment of repulsion, mingled with the compassion of the strong for the weak. The hand, thin and nervous, resembled a claw, and the fingers, infirm yet groping, clutched at the muscular arm of the sailor with a disagreeable tenacity of hold. This member was the same which had attracted his notice, stretched forth from the entrance of the temple.

"Did I speak? Did I say anything—odd?" demanded the old man, eagerly. "Nothing of importance," was the brief rejoinder.

"People will seek here for traces of the Greeks and the earlier Phœnicians, but there only remains rubbish, you understand, absolute rubbish!" He broke off with a short laugh.

"Ah!" assented the other, drily.

The old man emerged from the temple, still clinging for support to the opportune aid vouchsafed him by chance. Lieut. Curzon, a trifle bored, submitted to the task of assisting him. What did it matter, after all? He had to deal with a feeble and aged creature, who was possibly a little cracked as regarded brains, and who had exceeded his strength pottering about a ruin, intent on archaeological research. Surely the old man's family must have looked him up in time, even if he had not taken the direction of the temple, and discovered the other fallen in a swoon.

The pair traversed a considerable distance, walking slowly and with some difficulty. The old man paused to rest occasionally, and wiped the moisture from his temples with his pocket handkerchief. He repeated, with a garrulous insistence, his first assertion that the temple contained no relics and was wholly unworthy of a visit on the part of a stranger. The conviction was gradually forced on the frank and unsuspecting mind of the sailor, that he inspired uneasiness



A YOUNG GIRL STOOD BESIDE A FOUNTAIN.

and fear in his companion, instead of any sort of confidence. Why? He could not determine. He checked a final allusion to the temple by a curt denial of personal interest in the relics of Malta. This decisive assertion was possibly misunderstood by the weakened faculties of age, as suspicion seemed to increase rather than be allayed.

They gained a high wall, such as elsewhere protected the fruit trees from the sirocco, and a house, which resembled a tower, was visible within the inclosure.

As they approached, a voice, youthful and fresh, proclaimed in Italian—"What would I like best as a fairy gift, Dr. Giovanni Battista Busatti? Very well then, I should like to be rich, very rich, incredibly rich! I might have a new dress in that case, and go to a ball. After my visit to the Monte di Pietà, you will understand that, my friend."

A man's voice replied, slowly and distinctly, with a slight vibration of emotion perceptible in the tone—"You are already rich in beauty and amiability, Signorina."

A laugh, deliciously pure and silvery, was the sole acknowledgment vouchsafed for the compliment.

An expression of amusement dawned in the bright, blue eyes of Lieut. Curzon.

On the other side of the garden wall dwelt a girl who longed to go to a ball. Was she pretty?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

How Bavarians Frighten Spirits.

In the little village of Egmonting, in Bavaria, a curious nocturnal exhibition has just taken place. A few minutes after midnight there suddenly appeared in the village a party of 150 armed men, mostly peasant proprietors, driving apparently some imaginary specters before them. Presently every man discharged his firearm. Many of the inhabitants who were indoors, behind strong barriers, trembled at the thought of the carnage that must have ensued.

Then a specially appointed person recited the "Record of Deadly Sins" by way of exorcising the spirits of evil supposed to be hovering about. As a rule, nobody dared venture out; but one more bold than his fellows did open his door and expostulated against such an unwarrantable disturbance of the night. But the firing party heeded him not. This ceremony of exorcising the evil spirits from the village continued for an hour. And as suddenly as the party had arrived so suddenly did they disperse. There was a strong smell of powder in the air, but not a trace of brimstone.

Bolata, a new discovery in the forests of Surinam, is a substitute for the rapidly disappearing india rubber and gutta-percha.

### STORIES OF PARROTS.

One Belonged to Queen Elizabeth and Lived High.

The very oldest parrot story on record comes down from Queen Elizabeth's day. She owned a fine talking bird, gifted with so much wit and good sense, her majesty was far fonder of him than her hawks and greyhounds.

He wore a ruff of bright ribbons about his neck, little gold bells on his feet, and, sitting on his royal mistress's shoulders, would give saucy answers to the noble ladies and gentlemen to whom her majesty gave audience.

One day, when the queen went on a water party in the royal barge, whether in fright or folly, Polly, who had been prowling about the boat, fell plump into the river.

A ferryman boldly jumped in and rescued the frightened bird. Then a dispute arose as to how much the man should be paid.

"Let us leave it to the parrot," said the queen. Polly, who had sat silently preening his bedraggled feathers, looked up, winked his round, red eyes and said in a gruff voice: "Oh, give the knave a groat!" and that put an end to the dispute.

The cleverest parrot ever known was the property of a poor actor named O'Keefe. The bird not only talked cleverly, but sang sweetly in a tenor voice. His favorite song was "God Save the King," but not a sound would the parrot make on Sunday.

He enjoyed church going and sat solemnly on the back of a pew, paying the most respectful attention to all that was said.

One day, when the sermon proved very long, and tiresome, the good clergyman arrived at an impressive pause, just to give weight to his words, and the sober-sided parrot screamed out, "Amen! amen! now let us be off!" and scuttled out the door, near which his master sat, leaving the weary congregation, and after a bit the good-natured clergyman, too, laughing heartily.

The fame of this parrot's achievements reached the royal palace, whereupon King George commanded him to sing before the court.

When Polly entered the royal presence and was ordered to sing "God Save the King," not a sound would the bird make. Then his majesty, put in quite a rage by this obstinate discourtesy, stalked out of the room.

Hardly had the door closed, however, when the parrot broke gallily into the national anthem, in a voice so fine that the king delightedly re-entered the room and offered O'Keefe a princely sum for so gifted a bird.

O'Keefe loved his feathered friend too dearly to part with him, and, tucking Polly close to his breast, under his shabby coat, begged his majesty's leave to keep him.

When the parrot died the British museum bought the skin and stuffed it, and to-day Polly is to be seen in the museum at Oxford.

A learned Philadelphia Polly sang charmingly both in German and English. He loved to sit in a sunny back window and toss seed and crumbs to hungry city sparrows; not only were his feelings hurt, but he would scream and scold, unless permitted to bless all the family good-night and good-morning.

He enjoyed the companionship of a mate which laid several eggs, but could never hatch them, so in despair they set out to adopt some children.

Poking about the room one day they chanced upon a box in which were three tiny gray kittens, with which the mother parrot was delighted.

Though the kittens struggled, she gathered them under her wings, and after a while the cat gave her babies entirely into the bird's care.

The parrots learned to drink milk at the same saucer with their adopted children, and the kittens trotted contentedly about at their foster parents' heels and had rough-and-tumble games together on a sunny back porch.

#### A Remarkable Feat.

Joseph Alexander of Newburg, N. Y., was 91 years of age last January, but is in full possession of all his faculties.

Last month in a heart shaped design on a sheet of paper 2½x2 inches, he drew a circle the size of a ten cent piece. With a pen he wrote the Lord's Prayer within the circle, and the whole of the 103d Psalm in the heart-shaped space. When in Washington recently he wrote on a piece of paper the size of a postal card matter containing 12,400 letters, besides the Lord's prayer in each of the four corners. This remarkable piece of work for such an old man has been placed in the Smithsonian Institution.

#### A Story Sam Jones Tells.

Rev. Sam. Jones tells this story on himself: "I seldom address an audience that I don't think of the words of the good old colored woman after I had preached to a great concourse of colored people on one occasion. This large, fat, old colored woman—I suppose she would weigh 200 pounds—came up to me and gave me her hand and said: 'God bless you, Brudder Jones; you is everybody's preacher and every nigger loves to hear you; and, Brudder Jones, you preaches more like a nigger than any white man that ever lived, and, Brudder Jones, you have got a white skin, but, thank God, you have got a black heart.'"

#### A Humiliating Fact.

The first American flag made of American materials was raised over the capitol at Washington on Feb. 24, 1866. All the previous flags had been made of English bunting, but this was of American make and given by Gen. B. F. Butler.

# Spring Makes the Time

To many people Spring and its duties mean an aching head, tired limbs, and throbbing nerves. Just as the milder weather comes, the strength begins to wane, and "that tired feeling" is the complaint of all.

The reason for this condition is found in the deficient quality of the blood. During the winter, owing to various causes, the blood becomes loaded with impurities and loses its richness and vitality. Consequently, as soon as the bracing effect of cold air is lost, there is languor and lack of energy. The cure will be found in purifying and enriching the blood.

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