

only, to want any more walking than is needful for getting home. I am always glad to get to bed as soon as ever I've mended up my clothes, and done any other bit of sewing I have to do; and I've often fallen asleep over that; though of course I don't feel the tiredness anything like as much now as I did at first. One can always get used to anything in time; but I do wish there was better arrangements made about the food. They might have to employ more clerks, but it would make a deal of difference in our comfort, and prevent half of us from suffering as we do from indigestion and the like o' that. I've heard ladies say that Post Office clerks are always cross. I don't know that that's altogether true, but perhaps some of us are a bit sharp and testy, and you may put it down if you like to never being able to get a comfortable meal, and always being hurried.

"A shilling's worth of stamps, please."

"I want this telegram sent *at once*."

"Five pounds' worth of penny stamps, and make haste."

"I want to send a Post Office order to a lady in Wicklow, miss; and what's the nearest office to her place, can you tell me?"

"A packet of postage cards, and six halfpenny stamps; and please put a stamp on this for Hungary. Missis didn't know what it would be."

"Weigh these book parcels, please, at once; I want to send them by this delivery."

"What's the latest hour for the Mexican mail? and please cash this money order."

There! I've had all that and more dinned into my ears at the same time; and isn't it a stretch on one's

temper to attend to each without seeming hasty or abrupt?

Why, in the season we often sell as much as twenty pounds' worth of stamps in a day. In the autumn perhaps not more than half, and it's pretty well all in shilling's-worths and less.

We separate the town letters from the country ones, count them, and give the number on a yellow bill. Then, you know, we've to keep a constant eye on the telegraph for receiving telegrams, as well as sending them off; and to enter all the money orders, and keep a strict cash account of everything, and sell envelopes and book-covers, and attend to *that* Savings Bank, and keep all the little accounts balanced, and have a civil answer for every question, and not keep nobody waiting a single half-second longer than you can possibly help, and be always upright, intelligent, hungry, neat, tired, and good-tempered.

For eight shillings a week!

A charwoman gets half as much again—sometimes nearly twice as much—has less to do, is better fed, and isn't expected to bring either the dress or the qualifications (all of which take time, skill, and money to procure) which are expected from us.

Eight shillings a week, and your food—with no time to eat it in! It do seem a little, ma'am, look at it in what light you will; but there! it's just our sort for which it is difficult to get what is called nice, *respectable* employment, with nothing menial in it. There's many a born and bred lady in the Post Office for that very reason, and thankful and glad to get into it. Work is never too plentiful for any when there's such a number crying out and clamouring for it.

MY REAL TURKISH BATH!

A LADY'S EXPERIENCE IN EGYPT.



CAIRO is Oriental—therefore it is dirty; but it is also delightful. No pictures could be too bright of what we imagined the bath to be. My expectation of seeing beautiful women in Cairo had been woefully disappointed. They were exceedingly scarce in the streets; but we fancied the bath to be a kind of ladies' club, with marble halls, splashing fountains, and soft-cushioned divans, on which dark-skinned hours reclined. My sister and I pictured to ourselves white-robed attendants gliding noiselessly about,

amid a drowsy silence, and filled up our vision with chibouques, narghilis, sherbet, coffee, and delicious perfumes.

One fine afternoon we called for Madame Ali Mahomet and her daughter-in-law, according to appointment. They came out to us veiled up to the eyes, the long black silk cloak drawn over their heads, and all the gorgeous apparel underneath carefully concealed.

We stopped at a narrow passage which led directly into the outer hall of the bath. It was a large, dilapidated court, roofed in with planks. In many places these had fallen away, letting in a flood of warm golden light, that, like charity, covered a multitude of the sins of which the place was guilty. But alas, for our visions of marble halls, cushioned divans, and so forth! The interior of the court was surrounded with broad stone divans. These were covered with antiquated matting, apparently intended for the growth and protection of fleas. Intended or not, the fleas had taken advantage of such good cover to grow and multiply in a most alarming manner. A large stone basin, surrounded with seats, stood in the centre of the court. Women and children of all ages sat, lay, or walked about in every possible stage of undress. The noise made by this crowd of women was something

beyond description. However, bad as it was, it was nothing compared to an inner court, whither we presently penetrated.

But we were not left to observe "the manners and customs of the Egyptians" at our leisure. Wasseli and Hossua, our companions, gave us to understand that we must disrobe. We did as we were told; and I deposited my garments with a sigh on mats where the fleas were evidently playing leap-frog. In a short time our party was very little better off than "Malbruck's" mourner—*qui ne portait rien*. We were then provided with pattens, to prevent our falling on the wet, slippery floor. Not recognising the fact that I did not know how to walk in pattens, I started off alone. As might have been expected, I nearly measured my length on the floor. However, I was solemnly held up by two attendants, and stumped away as well as I could into the next room. It was low, small, and octagonal in shape. The inevitable stone basin and seats were in the centre. When we came in, a number of old women and young girls were occupying the seats. In one corner of an alcove was a large water-trough, which was being filled with boiling water. We took in these preparations without understanding them very well. We had imagined "the bath" to be one of hot air, and not of hot water. We had no objection to be stewed by the former, but strongly disliked the idea of being boiled in the latter.

The time was past, however, for us to decide for ourselves: we could only submit; but when the attendants, arming themselves with palm-fibre and soap, proceeded deliberately to wash us in the above-mentioned water, it was almost more than flesh and blood could bear. We had but three Arabic words between us, none of which meant "cold." I frantically demanded *moir* (water). They granted my demand by saluting our shoulders with douches of the scalding water, till I almost felt as if my skin was peeling off me. I have ever since a fellow-feeling for that unfortunate blackamoor whom his master tried to wash white. Our attendants were quite pitiless. Eyes, nose, mouth, ears—everything was covered and filled with the stinging white soap which they used. If we resisted at all, an attendant from behind would suddenly overwhelm us with some of the water—a measure which, repeated several times, reduced us to complete passiveness. They might truly write up over that alcove Dante's motto over the gates of the "Inferno"—*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate*.

I was very much surprised at the wonderful fairness of the women I saw at the bath. There were hardly any beautiful ones amongst them, except perhaps the door-keeper. She had a thoroughly Eastern type of features: a broad, low forehead, slightly aquiline nose, and lips rather full. However, her beauty was rather spoilt by the loss of one eye—unfortunately, a

most common event in the East. The rest of the women had but two claims to beauty—the peculiarity of their complexions, and, in general, the colour of their hair. Their skin was of a peculiar white, devoid of a trace of colour—the *teint mât* that is often so much admired. This wax-like skin contrasted beautifully with the colour of their hair, a light brown, with golden *reflets* through it—the hair that Titian painted sometimes. There were only a few women who had dark skins and dark hair, such as we had expected to see. Our dragoman's daughter-in-law, little Hossua, was charmingly pretty. She was very small—in fact, she seemed to have put all her growth into her eyes—immense grey, with black eyelashes about a yard long, more or less. Her skin was fair, but she had not that queer white look of some of the golden-haired women. They were, I should think, daughters of Circassians and Georgians, who are renowned for the whiteness of their skins.

After all the scalding was over, and my four tormentors had finished excoriating me with palm-fibre, we were again given those objectionable pattens. In parenthesis, I will say that the natural duskiness of my skin had given place to a lively crimson, like that of a boiled lobster. I wanted to reject my former enemies, the pattens. I was not allowed; so, in blind obedience, we shuffled back to our divan in the outer hall. Our companions proceeded to dress, dripping as they were. My sister and I, driven by necessity, stole some towels belonging, I think, to the next group. We were soon dressed and ready for the carriage; but we did not leave without some *souvenirs* in the shape of fleas.

Notwithstanding many little inconveniences, I was very glad I had gone, for it was one of the most picturesque scenes I ever beheld. The grey, dusty hall; the strange-looking figures, some reclining in a state of *kef*, greatly enhanced if not altogether produced by the cigarette between their lips; others sitting up and shrieking like Bedlamites; the little naked children crawling about on all-fours; the pigeons flying tamely in through the broken roof; and, above all, the warm rays of the sun striking down on a group of fair brown-haired girls lounging beside the basin of water, made altogether a picture not easily to be forgotten.

The whole affair was a delightful, though in some parts rather painful, experiment. To any lady visiting Cairo in search of novel sensations, I should say: "Go to the bath." The physical sensations are certain. Never have I come across water so boiling, palm-fibre so hard, soap so stinging, and last but not least, fleas of such size or with such strength of jaw. And as for novel mental sensations, of those she can herself be the only judge. I certainly never enjoyed anything more curious and interesting in the way of travelling adventure than my first and last visit to a Turkish bath.

