

THE DAILY OCCUPATIONS OF A TURKISH LADY.

BY A LATE LADY-RESIDENT IN TURKEY.



IT occurs to me that it may not prove uninteresting to describe the daily occupations of a Turkish lady, fettered as she is by a life which debars her from joining in the ordinary household duties that are binding on us. For imagine how different the existence of us Englishwomen would at once become if, though all the details of home life must be attended to, they nevertheless had to be carried on

without showing our faces to our tradesmen, or to our doctor, or to any one of our gentlemen acquaintances—if both we and our servants must manage to get through life and be constantly guarded and on our guard against being seen. Who would buy and sell for us? How should we ourselves be able to carry on the every-day business of life? Who would take our children out for exercise? What would become of the education of our boys and girls? We shall see by-and-by how all this is arranged, but we can at once perceive that in a land where women have not free egress from their homes, domestic life must become complicated and hindered in a variety of ways unknown amongst us. In fact, domestic life in Turkey is altogether different from ours, those arrangements on which much of the comfort of a family depends not being regulated by the mistress of the house. She has very little to do with household matters, and need not trouble herself with thoughts of economy in food and dress, for she is treated much as we treat our pretty caged birds, expecting them to be content with what is set before them, to eat and drink, to keep their gay plumage in good condition, and be happy, merry, and songful in their gilded cages. A Turkish lady is not, however, a mere dressed-up doll; she is quite aware that she has responsibilities, and tries to live up to what her religion (false though it be) teaches. The first duty of her day is to rise before dawn and perform the customary ablutions preparatory to prayer, and this in the cold winter weather is no pleasant task. She has gone to bed

ready-dressed, baggy trousers and all, and has only had to slip on her thick wadded jacket, or *heurka*, which takes the place of our dressing-gown; still, though she must scrupulously wash her hands and feet, and face, and ears in cold water, ejaculating as she does so such phrases as, "Oh, that my ears were opened to receive instruction!"—"Oh, that my hands were clean from evil deeds!"—and though she must stand with bare feet, she will nevertheless wait to adjust the niche of her prayer-carpet so that it may point directly to Mecca, and will never neglect the modest covering of white muslin thrown over the head, notwithstanding there is no eye to watch her in the retirement of her own room. Her slave, who has risen to wake her, and place her slippers, prays at the same time as her mistress, either in the same room or in a room adjoining; and, the last thanksgiving finished, the prayer-carpets are folded with reverential care and put into their wrappers; then both lady and slave creep again to their beds on the floor, and sleep soundly under soft wadded quilts, or *yourghans*, that have the merit of keeping off the damp mists which arise from the Bosphorus, and which blankets would only absorb. Even the flat pillows and mattresses are of wool, like the wadded quilt; the latter is not white, like ours, but has a facing of some bright alpaca, or coarse muslin, ornamented with a strange, old-fashioned pattern representing flowers or animals of most varied hues and proportions, not to be found in the canons of our art. The mattresses are in coloured casings of the same sort of pattern, and made for show as well as use. But we must suppose our lady to have awoke at last, and to have passed from her bed to her divan. This is no very great change, as she is still half asleep, and remains so till she has smoked her cigarette or pipe. Her slave at the same time serves her some strong coffee in a tiny cup like an egg-cup, which she usually drinks without sugar. She will perhaps smoke three or four pipes in succession before she rouses herself to the business of the day. The first thing is to wash her face and hands; and as she has no toilette-table a



A DANCING GIRL.

slave brings to her divan a silver basin, or *layan*, made with a perforated movable cover, which allows of the lady's washing in a stream of water slowly poured from the *ibrik*, or silver jug, without her eyes being offended by the sight of soapy water. With the Turks it is almost a moral obligation to wash in running water, and they think our way detestable. Even their baths, or *hamums*, are so arranged as to make this possible. The lady has now to consider what dress she will put on, and many suits will be brought her from her adjoining *hazna*, or box-room, and be spread out before her on the other divans of the room, there being no tables in the apartment. Each suit is neatly folded in its own wrapper, and forms a flat parcel which the bare-footed *haznajes*, or serving-women, carry daintily and silently on their open palms, and present with untiring patience till their capricious mistress does at last make her choice. The *gedjalik*, or night-suit, is then sent away to be ironed ready for night, and the lady attires herself for the day. Visitors who happen to be staying in the house are then admitted to chat and smoke whilst the important business of arranging the head-dress is going on. This requires great nicety, and occupies a large proportion of the time of dressing; and as our lady has not breakfasted we must suppose she is sipping her *tchorba*, or thin chicken broth made with rice, whilst her slave or a friend is twisting a piece of cardboard into a square of bright-coloured gauze, cornerwise. The mere dressing of the hair is not a long affair, as many ladies wear it cut short and just resting on the neck; but those who can boast of plentiful tresses usually plait it on each side, and let it hang down the back when they are at home, but knot it together if they are going out. There is no dressing-table before which the lady can sit at her ease whilst completing her toilette; so her slave has to stand, instead, holding a square hand-mirror during all the tedious process of making and putting on the head-dress; other slaves have to stand near to hand pins at the instant they are wanted, ready to anticipate the lady's slightest wish, lest she should fly out in a fit of impatience at supposing she is being kept waiting. Having at last leisure to think of something besides her toilette, the lady will rest a little and tell her rosary. This consists of ninety-nine beads, divided into three equal sets, and she repeats three chief phrases three-and-thirty times before she has completed one round. During this devotional exercise, which goes on in a low monotone, the lady will occasionally interrupt herself to give an order, or to nod an affirmative to some question asked of her in dumb-show. When she has finished, she will proceed to carry out some plan on which her mind has been dwelling all the time of her mechanical prayer. She will probably first direct her steps to her *hazna*, and there see that her personal attendants are occupied in some way. One will be cutting out a new *fustan*, or dress; another ironing the *yashmaks*, or squares of new muslin; and if their work does not please, they will have to go through it again. Perhaps a slave is working at machine-stitching, and her mistress may take her

place for a time. Both mistress and slave show themselves apt at working in this way, but the one will not care to persevere with the work, and soon goes off to complete her tour of inspection. The *yatak-khaneh*, or store-room for clean bedding, next claims her attention. This is a room in the basement, where piles of mattresses in clean covers line the walls, and soft, folded yourghans are kept ready for use. The presence of the mistress is very necessary from time to time in the *yatak-khaneh*, as she directs what materials shall be made into yourghans, and points out that the finest, which are composed of some very rich stuff—perhaps embroidered silk—shall be reserved for guests of the highest rank, and those of plain silk, figured alpaca, flowered chintz or muslin, be put into sets for such-and-such guests; this is an important duty, as every guest must have a bed whose richness befits her rank, and indicates the consideration in which she is held. It is the same with the mosquito-net which is arranged over each bed in summer; some are of plain white net, some of figured net, some of the very finest coloured Chinese gauze.

But at noon our lady has again to betake herself to her ablutions and her prayers, and either before or after will partake of the first substantial meal of the day, which corresponds to the French *second déjeuner*. We will not follow her through all the various courses—the *tchorba*, and roast lamb stuffed with rice and currants, the endless dishes of vegetables, pastry, sweets, and fruits, accompanied with bowls of sweet orange or cherry sherbet. If the lady has friends or relatives eating with her (her husband only very rarely joins her meal), she is not obliged by etiquette to remain at table till all have finished; indeed, it would be a great stretch of politeness to remain sitting longer than need be in a position which cramps one's nether limbs to a painful degree. The lady withdraws, therefore, as soon as she pleases, and washing the delicate fingers which have been dipped by turns into greasy and sweet compounds, she retires from the *yemek-oda*, or dining-room, to her saloon, where she again smokes and drinks coffee. This is the moment for her black attendant eunuch to come to pay his respects, and know the *khanum's* plans about going out in her carriage, or *caïque*, or to bring her some interesting bit of gossip. This black servant is in reality very much the master of the lady's movements, but he has tact enough to be very respectful, and only ventures to sit in her presence on a low, flat cushion, at her especial invitation. With the exception of the red, tasselled fez, these eunuchs dress *alla Franca* in the finest broad-cloth, long-tailed coats, and wear polished kid boots, chains, and rings. They are wonderfully suave in manner unless thwarted, and then they can be very savage. They will sometimes instigate a mistress to punish her slaves with great severity for a fault, and very often these semi-official talks will end in the disgrace of this or that *calpha* (slave). But if the lady intends to go out, she will not linger over her chat; on the contrary, the very idea of going out fills her with excitement, and she can think of nothing else. She hastily gives orders which *ninas* (mothers, or old lady

duennas) are to attend her, which calpha is to act as *chibouquejee*, or pipe-bearer, carrying her little *tchanta*, or hand-bag filled with a provision of choice tobacco and leaflets of silver paper with which to manufacture a supply of cigarettes for immediate consumption. To do this properly she requires a tiny wooden funnel and ramrod; she must also be sure to take the small amber or jewelled mouth-piece into which the cigarettes are to be fitted. The lady hurries off to a small room near the door by which she is to leave the house. Here coffee is served her the last thing before she puts on her *yashmak*, or muslin head-piece. This last has to be adjusted with the utmost care, as the wearer would have a very comical appearance if it were at all awry. Again the slaves hold the mirror and the ever-needed pins. The lady darkens her eye-brows and eye-lashes, and shrouds herself in the snowy muslin, which is either a foil to her beauty, or softens a not too brilliant complexion. The *yashmak* on, she sits waiting for her carriage, or *caïque*, looking through the *kaffés*, or wooden trellis-work blind, which is always a favourite amusement. The last thing she puts on is the heavy over-cloak, or *feridjee*, which has to be held together, grasped by the left hand, and kept so nearly all the time it is worn. We will suppose the *caïque*, or long narrow boat, is the chosen conveyance; the lady reclines in the bottom of it on crimson cushions, the old *nina* beside her, and her slaves opposite. The eunuch sits on the arched top behind the *khanum*, and holds a very large fringed umbrella over her head. The *caïque* glides through the azure waves, perhaps it stops at the Sweet Waters of Asia, and the party alights to take a turn in the pretty sheltered valley where many other such parties are strolling, or sitting on carpets in picturesque groups, discussing sweetmeats or fruits, and criticising and envying the Frank ladies who are promenading arm-in-arm with their husbands or gentlemen friends. Very likely the *khanum* here meets her children, both boys and little girls, who have been away from her care in the hands of the *lollahs*, or men-attendants, since the early morning. The mother laughs with her children, plies them with sweets, and gives them some coins to spend, looks on amused at their antics, admires their knowingness and clever speeches. She lets them, however, go their way, and she will, after a time, tear herself from the gay scene and go off again in her *caïque* to pay some visit. We will not follow her here, visits having been so often described. The *khanum* may stay on her way home to rest beside some *tchesma*, or fountain, for all Turkish women love to sit and sing softly to themselves by the water-side.

Once returned home, the *khanum* is divested of her outer wraps by waiting handmaidens. Again she rests on her divan, smokes, sips coffee, and retails the news of the day to those visitors who have arrived in her absence, or to the *ninas* and upper *calphas* of her household. Shortly before the dinner-hour she may expect a ceremonious visit from her husband, and she finds enough in his short conversation to last her

as texts for her own during the whole evening. Her children come to be fondled at this time, but presently she sends them away till dinner, whilst she prepares for the prayer at sunset. As the sun goes down one Turkish day ends and another begins, and the precise moment of twelve o'clock is marked by the sudden quavering cry of the *muezzin* from the *madneh* or gallery of the minaret. This moment varies with each day, and therefore the Moslem waits, watch in hand, ready to set it to the correct time as soon as the call to prayer resounds—for on knowing the right hour depends the faithful discharge of prayer five times daily. Dinner succeeds the prayer, then chit-chat, then a quiet game at cards (the favourite one being something like our cribbage), or draughts, or backgammon fills up the time till two hours after sunset, when the last prayer prescribed for the day has to be observed. It should be noticed that there is a prayer to be said three hours before sunset, but if the *khanum* is out visiting she omits this, or perhaps says it on retiring to rest. The latter part of the evening may be spent in various amusements. If it is winter, old jewellery is got out; its resetting is planned; sometimes it is broken up, and the stones then serve to amuse their possessor evening after evening, for she will arrange and rearrange them on a piece of white paper, tracing, by means of a pencil, such odd designs as the stones may happen to form. But a more pleasant way of spending the evening is in receiving visitors of high rank, and the hostess will then frequently call for a performance from her dancing girls (who at other times are occupied as waitresses, ironers, &c.). These girls, four or five together, perform certain wonderfully awkward gyrations, to the sound of their own plaintive singing and the clashing of castanets. The dance usually represents a love-story, which is chosen by the leading dancer (according as it ends tragically or happily) to suit the mood of the mistress. Another favourite way of spending the evening is to listen to a concert of singing girls, who sit in a semi-circle and accompany their voices with the *kemengeh* (violin), the *ood* (lute), the *kanoon* (dulcimer), and the *tar* (tambourine). Professional players—Armenians, Greeks, and Syrians—are occasionally permitted to give an entertainment in the harem, and are stationed in a part of the room which is curtained off from the audience. Such a concert will sometimes be kept up till past midnight, the *khanum* and her friends never wearying of the romantic, chanted love-ditties. When the lady does retire to her low couch, she will probably call for a story-teller to sit near her and go over again the oft-told tale of adventure and faithful love, which has so powerfully excited her imagination as to have scared sleep for the time. The monotonous accents, rising and falling in the same repeated cadence, will at last hush the listener to repose; then the tired story-teller, who is probably the slave in attendance, will steal softly away to her bed, and silence will settle down upon the household till cock-crow shall arouse them to recommence such another day on the morrow.