

# A BIT OF TURKISH CHIVALRY

BY DEMETRA KENNETH BROWN

Author of "Haremlik"

OUR guest, a Greek in the employ of the Turkish government, finished telling us how in disguise he had managed to penetrate into the Tekhé of the Dervishes of Stamboul and witness one of their secret ceremonies. It was one to which only the most orthodox Mussulmans were admitted, and a Christian took his life in his hand if he tried to be present. In the silence that followed his words, the tapping of the hour by the *bektchi*, on his nightly rounds, came to us from sleeping Constantinople outside.

"And how often do these ceremonies occur?" I asked, breathless with interest.

"Twice a year. The next one will be at the end of March."

It was then the middle of February. I was sixteen years old at the time, and my imagination needed little to set it afire. I could not sleep that night for the haunting remembrance of the uncanny wonders to which I had listened. I did not even go to bed. I sat by the window and looked at the white minarets faintly gleaming against the dark-blue Oriental sky. Yonder was Stamboul, with its mysteries and its charms. I wondered which of all those graceful peaks reared itself above the Mosque of the Dervishes. My desire to see that of which I had heard grew ever stronger as the hours passed, until I could stay quiet no longer. I left my room and went to that of my brother. He was fast asleep, but with the unscrupulous cruelty of my years I awoke him.

He jumped up, rubbing his eyes. "What is it, child? Are you ill?"

"No," I said, settling myself on the foot of his bed. "Brother, I want to go to the Dervishes' dance next month."

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed. "Go

back to bed at once, or I shall think you have gone crazy."

"Brother, you have got to say that you are going to take me there."

My brother was thoroughly awake by this time. He looked at me with a kind of despair.

"But did n't you hear how dangerous it was—even for Damon Kallerghi? As for your going, you might as well prance off to prison at once."

"I don't mind going to prison, if I can see the Dervishes first," I persisted.

My brother was fourteen years older than I. He had been my playfellow and my instructor, and was now my guardian. Unfortunately, he was neither stern with me nor prudent himself. I knew that I could make him grant me this wish if I only stuck to it long enough; and when I returned to my room an hour later, I went to sleep delighted with the thought of the extracted promise.

The next six weeks passed slowly, although we were busy with a number of preparations. We had, of course, to be provided with Turkish clothes in every particular; and since, according to Osmanli custom, a lady never goes abroad alone, at least two other women on whose courage and discretion we could count had to be enlisted. It was not difficult to find men to accompany us. Any enterprise the aim of which was to outwit the Turks could not but appeal to Greeks. The two young men whom we chose were both government officials, but this did not in the least abate their enthusiasm for the enterprise.

At last the night of nights arrived. We met in our house, dressed there, and stole down the back way to two carriages awaiting us. These took us to the Galata

Bridge, whence we proceeded on foot. A faithful man-servant, dressed in Anatolian *salvhar*, headed the procession, carrying a lantern. We women came next, and our escorts followed a little way behind, since Turkish women never walk in company with men.

Stamboul in the daytime is clamorous and overcrowded. The hundred and one cries of its peddlers and shopkeepers come at one from all quarters, and in half the languages of the earth, while one can hardly move about for the congestion of people. At night it is as silent and dark as the tomb. As we hurried along the narrow, crooked streets, we heard the occasional tramp of the night patrol, the sharp yelps of the dogs at their scavenger work, and that was all. I had never before seen Stamboul at night, and I doubt whether I shall ever wish to see it again.

I began to realize the enormity of our enterprise, and to appreciate that had my brother been of a less adventurous temperament or a more careful guardian, we should never have been where we were at that hour. As we stumbled along over the ill-paved alleys, which little deserved to be called streets, the bravery with which I had confronted the idea of possible dangers oozed out of me. Born and brought up in Turkey, of a race which had had to acknowledge the Turk as its conqueror, I had naturally heard many accounts of his cruelty and ferocity, although in my personal experience I had always found him gentle and kind. Now, however, the tales of the nursery recurred to a mind which the consciousness of doing wrong made susceptible to fear. We were on our way to steal into a mosque the door of which was strictly closed against us. We were dressed in Turkish clothes, and Christian women were forbidden under a heavy penalty to dress as Turks, except in the company of Turkish women. We were all Greeks, and the Turks had been our hereditary enemies since 1453. Had I had the courage at this juncture to demand that we return, as I had insisted on coming, I should have been spared one of the most terrifying nights of my life; but I lacked this, and my shaky legs marched on through the unnamed and unnumbered streets to our destination.

The man who had been the primary cause of our risky enterprise awaited us at

the arched gateway of the Tekhé. He signaled us to follow him, and we entered an ill-lighted outer courtyard. Thence we went down a steep staircase to an inner one that must have been considerably below the street level. My recollections of our movements for the next few minutes are hazy. We walked through one crooked corridor after another till we came to what looked like an *impasse*. A young Dervish was standing so flat against the wall that I did not notice him until Damon Kallerghi made a sign to him, to which he responded. Then he lifted the heavy leather portière, which I had taken to be the solid wall, and permitted us to pass under it, and, as it seemed to me, beyond any human protection. Up to this moment it was still possible for us to turn back; but when that leather portière closed behind us, we were in the dark Tekhé itself.

An insane fear seized me. What if our guide had entrapped us here to our destruction? I did not stop to reflect how much persuasion it had required to get him to conduct us on this hair-brained escapade: I was simply afraid, and my fear robbed me of every vestige of common sense. Fortunately, beyond trembling till my teeth chattered, I attempted nothing.

A few yards farther over the stone floor, and we were pushed into a stall, and another leather portière closed us in. This was the end of our journey. The front of the stall was covered with latticework, and through its holes we could look down into a cavernous square arena, dark, save for a big charcoal fire smoldering in the middle. Around the arena ran an arched promenade, and here we presently made out the reclining forms of many Dervishes of different orders, and numerous Mohammedan pilgrims, quietly smoking their pipes. The stalls on our right and left must also have been occupied, for we heard the scuffling of feet on the floor, and then silence.

I really cannot say how long we sat on our low stools, looking down on the weird scene beneath us, before the oppressive silence was broken by a fearfully plaintive sound which seemed to come from far away, and which, for lack of a better word, I shall have to call music. On and on it went, rising and falling, monotonous, dull, and melancholy. It penetrated the

whole place, seeming to drug the atmosphere, till one felt as if any phantasmagoria of the brain might be real.

It had another effect, this dreadful, insistent sound. After a few minutes a desire to shriek, even to bite, came over me, and I began rhythmically to tear my *feredjé* in time to the music.

From this condition I was roused by a strident yell, and looked through the lattice with renewed attention. The arena was beginning to fill with long-cloaked Dervishes carrying lighted torches. A mat was then spread near the charcoal fire, and on this the *sheik*, or abbot, of the brotherhood took his place, cross-legged. The nerve-racking music ceased while he offered a short prayer.

When this was over, other Dervishes came into the arena, received torches, and ranged themselves under the archways like caryatids. The maddening music started again, and the Dervishes, joining hands, made the round of the inclosure in a slow, dancing step, somewhat like the step of a dancing bear, gradually increasing the violence of their movements. Then each one took off his *taj*, or head-dress, kissed it, and passed it over to the *sheik*. The music grew faster, but lower in tone, and more infuriating. The Dervishes, with heads bowed and shoulders bent, danced more wildly about the smoldering fire. The long cloaks were thrown aside, and the men appeared naked, except for the band around their waists, from which hung long knives. They threw out their arms, as if in supplication, and bent back their heads in terrible contortions. Yells of "*Ya Hou!*" and "*Ya Allah!*" mingled with the music. Little by little the men lost every vestige of resemblance to human beings. They were creatures possessed by a demoniac madness. They shrieked and yelled inarticulately, their voices yet blending curiously well with the hellish music. When their frenzy reached its climax, they drew their knives from their belts and began stabbing themselves. The blood trickled down over their bodies, and added to the sinister aspect of the scene. After a while some of them began to throw themselves into the fire, and then with ferocious yelps to get out of it. Others, as if they were hungry wolves, and the fire their prey, fell upon it and ate the lighted charcoal. The smell of burning flesh was

added to the smell of sweat and blood, and made the close air almost unbearable.

When at last they could whirl no more, yell no more, stab themselves and eat fire no more, one by one they fell to the ground. The music became ever faster and fainter, as if it were agonizing with the men who danced to it, until, when the last man collapsed, it, too, ceased. The *sheik* then rose from his mat and went from one prostrate form to another, breathing into their faces, and administering to their wounds. He who died on such a night, it was said, would become a saint.

Dazed and shaken, we left our stall and stumbled along the corridors until we reached the entrance. There were other people, and I was vaguely aware of cries and sobs, but heeded nothing. I wished to get out of the Tekhé as if my salvation depended on it. At the outer door I gave a great sigh of relief, and ran on after our Anatolian with his lantern.

I was by no means myself yet, but a feeling of relief came upon me when the cold, damp air of the night struck my face. I was trying to get away from the music, which still clung to my nerves. For a considerable time I walked on until a hand touched my shoulder. Startled, I turned, and by the light of the moon, which had risen, looked into the eyes of a veiled woman who was a stranger to me. Other veiled forms surrounded me, none of whom I knew.

"Hanoum effendim," said the one who had touched me, smiling, "I am afraid you have lost your party, and by mistake have come with ours."

Her words were like a cold but vivifying bath.

"I must have done so," I replied, trying to avoid much conversation. "I will go back."

"Come with us for the night," she suggested.

Thanking her, I took to my heels. I had not paid much attention to the crooked streets traversed thus far, and as I absolutely lack the sense of location, I must now have gone in some other direction than that of the Tekhé; for after long running back and forth, and hiding in the by-streets whenever I heard any one approaching, I came to the awful conclusion that I could not find the Tekhé and, alone and unprotected, was lost in the streets of

Stamboul. I wondered, too, what the others were doing. Afterward I learned that, when they got to the entrance, one of the women of our party had fainted, and, to avoid danger, they had hidden in a dark passageway while waiting for her to come to her senses. In their excitement they did not notice my disappearance, and when they found it out, they searched high and low, finally deciding that the others should go home while my brother and one of the men hid near the Tekhé, thinking that sooner or later I should turn up there. It was only in the early morning that they went away, hoping that by some lucky chance I had reached home.

Meanwhile I was roaming far from the Tekhé, exposed to all kinds of dangers. I grew desperate. Horrible stories of the Greek revolution recurred to my mind: how our women were tortured to death by the Turks, and how, to avoid shame and torture, they had thrown themselves into the sea. If I could only reach the water! With that idea in my mind I ran in the direction in which I thought the sea lay. Fragments of prayer taught me in childhood, and long forgotten for lack of use, came back to me, and I began to pray. I was glad for the many saints in the Greek Church to whom I could appeal. I tried to remember where in the church was the particular niche of each of the saints. It took my mind from my danger, and gave it a definite object, as I hurried on.

Into the intensity of my prayers there broke the muffled sound of leather boots. The night patrol was on its rounds. I stood still. To all appearances I was a Turkish woman alone in the streets. The patrol would arrest me. What if I threw away the *feredjé* and the *yashmak*? Though as a Turkish woman I should be taken to prison, what my fate would be as a Christian I did not know, and the unknown fate was the more terrifying. The Turkish garb was my danger, but also my momentary protection.

I drew the black silk about me. While waiting for the approach of the night patrol, my mind acted quickly. I must belong to some man's harem, either as lady or slave. I was afraid that I might not act meekly enough for a slave; then it must be as somebody's wife. Whose should it be? The tall, stalwart figure of a certain Turkish cavalry officer flashed across

my mind's eye. I had not seen him for three or four years, but for a while he had fed my childish imagination. He looked much as the Greek heroes must have looked, and at the time when he was a frequent visitor at our house my head was full of Greek mythology. Moreover he had two or three wives, and I knew where he lived, since my brother had once taken me thither.

By the time the patrol had come near me I felt quite safe in the thought of the dashing figure and handsome face of the man I had chosen as my husband. I walked up to the patrol, though I was swallowing hard, and told them that I was lost, and wished them to take me to the police-station and send for Selim Arif Pasha, my husband. I addressed myself to the man who appeared to be the officer of the small band, and spoke very low, in order that he might not detect any hesitancy in my Turkish, though fortunately it was the first language I ever spoke.

He saluted in military fashion, divided his few men into two groups, and between them escorted me to the police-station. There a consultation took place between him and his superior, and the latter asked me where I had been, and how I had happened to lose my party.

I smiled sweetly at him. "I shall tell that to my husband, and he will tell you, if he thinks best."

This was so admirable a wifely sentiment that it left my inquisitor bereft of questions.

"It is a long way to your house," he remarked. "It may take some hours for your husband to come here."

"That does not matter, if you will only send for him."

He took me to a large room and locked me inside. I had no means of knowing whether he would send for Arif Pasha or not, but I argued to myself that the name was too big for a policeman to trifle with. It remained to be seen whether the Pasha would come at the summons, or would first go into his *haremlík* to find out whether one of his wives was really missing. And if he had several homes, as rich Turks often have, would he be at the address I gave, or would he be with another wife at another house, or possibly out of town?

My thoughts were far from roseate. I

sat on my stool praying to my Maker as I have never done before or since. I thought that after this experience I should become a very wise and careful woman. Alas!

The night grew older, and the grayish light gradually pierced the darkness, as I disconsolately wondered what would happen to me.

There were steps outside, the key turned, and Selim Arif Pasha entered the room, and shut the door behind him.

My father used to say: "Don't be humble with the Turks. They despise humility. Ask them what you want, and ask it as your right."

"Please be seated, Selim Pasha," I said, "and I will tell you all about it."

"And, pray, who are you?" he asked.

"I will tell you that also," I answered with as confident a manner as I was able to assume.

He drew up a stool and sat down opposite me. Then I told him the whole adventure, adding that I had sent for him to get me out of the scrape.

When I had finished, he threw back his head and laughed heartily. "So you are my wife, are you?" he exclaimed.

I laughed, too, tremendously relieved that he was not angry with me.

"I remember you well now," he went on, "and if you are not any better disciplined than you were a few years ago, you will make a troublesome handful of a wife," and again he roared. "I told your precious brother once that if he did n't use more discretion in bringing you up, you would keep him pretty busy. And now what do you think I can do for you?"

"Why, I thought you would just get me out of here, and drive me home."

Arif Pasha looked at me with a kind of puzzled exasperation. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Sixteen."

"Well, can't you see that if I drove you home at this hour your reputation would be ruined?"

"Oh!" I exclaimed blankly. "Then what must we do?" I was quite willing to leave it all to him.

A fresh access of merriment overcame the Turk. He laughed till the tears came into his eyes. I stood by, inclined to join in with him, yet not quite sure whether it

was directed against me or not. In truth, there was a sardonic humor in the situation which I did not understand until some hours later.

"Did ever a man find himself in such a position!" he gasped, wiping his eyes. "Here I am routed out of bed at an unearthly hour, and dragged across Stamboul to a police-station, to discover myself possessed of a Greek wife I never knew I had—and to get her out of jail!"

He went to the door and clapped his hands. To the soldier who responded to the signal he said a few words, and then returned to me.

"I have sent for coffee and something to eat."

"But I don't want anything to eat. I only want to go home," I said petulantly.

"Pardon me," he said with severity, "but I am not accustomed to speak twice to my wives. They do what I say without objections."

"But I'm *not* your wife," I retorted, nettled at his lofty tone.

"No? I thought you said you were," and again his laugh filled the room.

When the coffee and *galetas* were brought in, I ate meekly, and they tasted good. The hot coffee, especially, warmed me, and made things seem much more cheerful than they had.

When we had finished eating, he said to me: "Now, Mademoiselle, my carriage is down-stairs, but I have explained to you why I cannot drive you direct to your home."

"Suppose you take me to your home, and tell your favorite wife about it," I suggested.

His dark-blue eyes danced. "You think she will believe me, Mademoiselle?"

"Why not?"

He shook his head. "When you are a woman, you will understand many things you do not now, and I hope you will still have cause to trust men as you do now. But, Mademoiselle, they are not all trustworthy, and women are right not to believe what they say."

He caressed his clean-shaven chin and became lost in thought. Presently he unfolded his plan, and even in my youth and impatience I began to see that the sole object of all his precautions was to get me into my house in such a way as to save me from any breath of scandal.

The sooner we left the station-house the better it would be. He spoke a few words to the police-officers, and then told me to follow him. There was a closed coupé awaiting us, and when we were in it, he pulled down both curtains. "We are going on a long drive until it becomes respectable daylight. Then we shall go to your house, as if I were bringing you back from a visit to one of my wives."

It was after nine o'clock when we reached my home.

"Now," he said, "arrange the *yashmak* so that it will look like a European scarf, and hold your *feredjé* as if it were a silk cloak, and don't look frightened. I will get out and ring the bell, and stay here talking and laughing with you for a minute. If you see people whom you know, bow cordially to them, and do not act as if there were anything unusual in the situation."

When the servant answered the bell, I came out of the carriage, and Arif Pasha, bending over my hand, said:

"Mademoiselle, tell your brother that I shall forget ever having seen you to-night."

"Thank you," I said.

Of the man who opened the door, I asked: "Is my brother in?"

"No, Mademoiselle. He has been here several times this morning, but is out now. He seems to be in some kind of trouble."

"As soon as he comes in, tell him I should like to see him."

It was a haggard and miserable brother who came to my room an hour or so later.

After telling him all my adventure, I repeated Selim Arif Pasha's message.

My brother gave me a long, thoughtful look.

"Do you know," he said at last, "that Selim Arif and I have been deadly enemies for the last three years?"



## LEADERS OF MEN

BY FLORENCE EARLE COATES

WHEN they are dead, we heap the laurels high  
 Above them, where indifferent they lie;  
 We join their deeds to unaccustomed praise  
 And crown with garlands of immortal bays  
 Whom, living, we but thought to crucify.

As mountains seem less glorious, viewed too nigh,  
 So often do the great whom we decry  
 Gigantic loom to our astonished gaze,  
 When they are dead.

For, shamed by largeness, littlenesses die;  
 And, partizan and narrow hates put by,  
 We shrine our heroes for the future days,  
 And to atone our ignorant delays  
 With fond and emulous devotion try,  
 When they are dead!