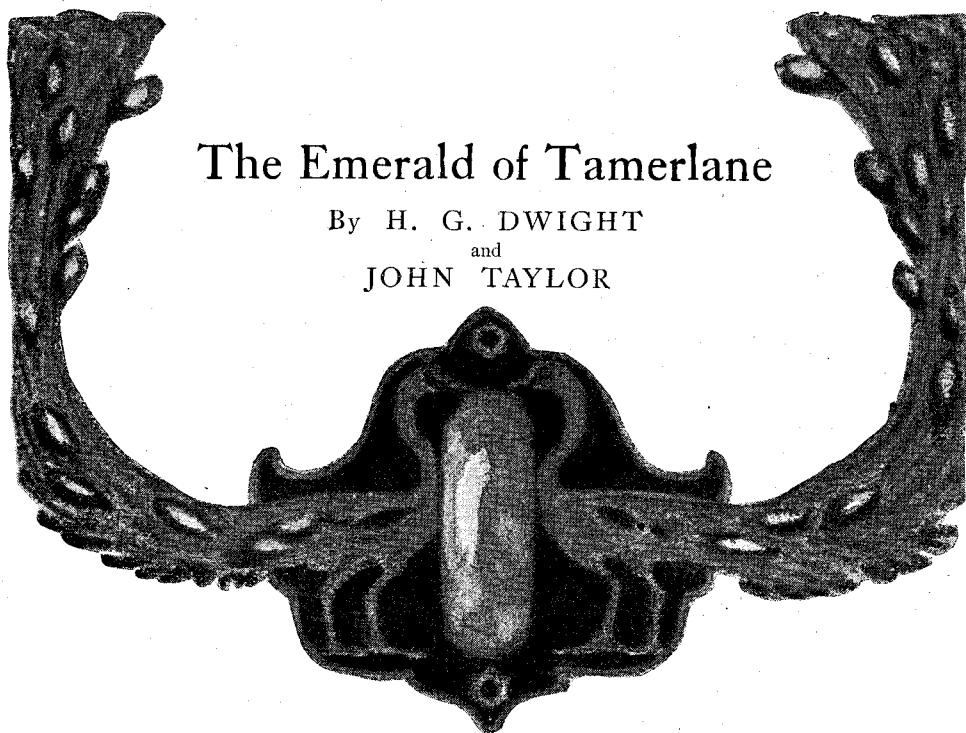


The Emerald of Tamerlane

By H. G. DWIGHT

and

JOHN TAYLOR



Illustrations by Wilfred Jones

“YOU cynical man!” cried the lady from Pittsburgh. She had wattles, and a jeweled lorgnette through which she made me aware of the disadvantage under which we who go about the world without shoulder-straps suffer in this day and generation. She leaned forward a little in order to obtain a better view of those worn by Mrs. Maturin’s general.

“Heavens!” I protested, “do you think me as young as that? A cynic is a doggish person who snarls. Now, I may be a dog, but at bottom I am as sentimental as a school-girl. At the same time I can’t help noticing that people are very seldom of one piece, and I understand them better if I put together or take apart the different pieces. Besides, what people do is not often im-

portant. What may be important are their reasons for doing it. Don’t you think?”

She did n’t. A waiter, bearing away her oyster-shells, widened the breach between us. Across it the lady from Pittsburgh confided to me that her husband, also without shoulder-straps, who sat at the left of our hostess, was in his quiet way working for Uncle Sam. I asked myself if her phrase did not perhaps contain an unnecessary preposition, for although half an hour before I had never heard of her, I had heard of him. He was one of those gentlemen who are so plentiful in Washington just now, full of good advice for the Government, and a little uneasy lest their particular good thing be looked into by some inquisitive commission. What his particular thing was I am too discreet to mention, but it was good enough to keep his wife’s wattles in the pink, not to say the purple, of condition, and to set them off by a quite

rococo display of diamonds. They confirmed me in an old persuasion of mine that a diamond is a stone for a chambermaid, and not for those rare members of that oppressed profession who are as good as gold.

I should say for the lady from Pittsburgh that this reflection probably came to me because fate, generally readier with a surprise than with a piece of good fortune, had put at my other side the famous Miss Sanderson, or the famous Mrs. Maturin, as she is now. She had in her hair some of those perfect emeralds which are the only jewels she ever wears. She explains that she has to, because she was born in May and because a romantic parent took it into his head to name her Esmeralda. Her explanation would be less convincing if the same person had not bequeathed her a *dot* as romantic as her name. Who bequeathed her that aureole of smoldering bronze hair—of the kind you read about in the short-story magazines, but never see—it is not for me to say. In such cases one usually suspects the beauty doctor. But no beauty doctor could achieve that ivory skin or those gray-green eyes which— Well, they were so much more lyric than I remembered that I myself could almost break out in the most approved magazine manner about moonlit pools in mountain forests, etc. So if the lady from Pittsburgh considered me an ill-natured dog, I counted myself a lucky one, after all. Not that Mrs. Maturin is witty or rich in recondite stores of gossip; but, then, she needs no such adventitious attractions. She has only to enter a room to have all eyes rest upon her with the pleasure that is given, say, by an orchid in an old silver-gilt vase.

In furtively giving myself that pleasure, amid the chatter about food conservation which went on above a delicious terrapin soup, it amused me to recall the last time I had seen Mrs. Maturin, there on the other side of the world—Miss Sanderson as she was then. Whereupon she suddenly paid me the compliment of turning away from her general long enough to say in a low voice:

"I've got it, you know. I'll tell you about it when I get a chance. I have n't forgotten that I really owe it to you. And it gave me Peter."

At the moment I was dull enough to wonder what she meant, for I had imagined that her fortune had given her Peter. But as she turned back from the general to Peter, across the table, she bent forward a little, and I saw his eyes light up as they looked for hers. It was pretty to see at that table where diamonds lit up double chins and pouched eyes from which all fire had long since faded. And no fortune could have bought that. It simply is not in the market.

Even as I told myself so, however, Peter's expression changed so abruptly, as he caught me looking at him, with so little of pride and triumph in his eye, that I could not help asking myself if I had misread his radio message. Was it conceivable that any dramatic complication of the human comedy could lie in wait among the lights and flowers of so polite a dinner-party? At any rate, nothing but an S. O. S. could have the passion of Peter's look, if it were not such a look as I first fancied. Yet why on earth should Peter be going down with all on board now, at our comfortable hotel, in our safe Washington, before the lovely eyes of his well-dowered Esmeralda? And if by any chance he was, what could she do to save him?

I paid for these untimely and fantastic ruminations by finding that the lorgnette of the lady from Pittsburgh was no longer turned in my direction. It now glittered upon young Rodman of the Intelligence Department, at her right, who had been the means of her making that ever delightful discovery with regard to the smallness of the world. At my left Beauty and Valor were already deep in the war. As for myself, whom fate has seen fit to withhold from the paths of glory, and upon whom two great ladies now turned a sufficiently unflattering pair of backs, I was not too piqued to be grateful for a mo-

ment in which to turn over the case of Peter and Mrs. Peter.

Yes, Mrs. Maturin was right. I suppose I had, after all, given her Peter. At any rate, I had accidentally set in motion the series of events that ended in so eugenic a marriage. I have lived long enough, however, to learn that it is never safe to say where a series of events has ended. And knowing Peter far better than I knew his wife, I could not help wondering whether the condition of equilibrium which had been arrived at was a stable one. Still, there had been that look across the table, and larger fortunes than Mrs. Maturin's have been spent on objects less worthy than Peter. He was young; I fancy a little younger than his Esmeralda. He was tall and well made; he was very nearly as good-looking in his way as she was in hers. He was no fool, either. He could ride, he could shoot, he could play every imaginable game, though somehow he could never carry off the stakes. And he was enough of an engineer or a mineralogist, or whatever an oil-man needs to be for an English company to send him out to Persia, of all places, to tap rocks and drill holes for their dark operations. The only thing was— Well, I wondered whether he would prove completely satisfactory as a husband. But, then, perhaps it is not the truly good young man who is most adored.

Peter, when I met him in Teheran, seemed by no means one of the truly good. I do not say it in disparagement, for I have noticed, in this ironic world, that

the truly good seem as capable of making a botch of their own and other people's lives as the rest of us, while the prodigal son appears to enjoy an undue share of immortality. Be that as it may, the sight of Peter across the table, chatting with the Honorable Miss Windham, brought it incongruously back to me that the first time I ever saw him was much later in the evening, between the shafts of a prehistoric victoria that he, together with a

young Russian attaché and a couple of youths whom I took to be in the telegraph, was trundling down the Lalazar, as it were, the Massachusetts Avenue of Teheran, with every sign of enjoyment. Who was in the victoria I don't know. Certainly not Mrs. Maturin then.

I afterward heard—in those places, you know, one hears everything about everybody—that although theoretically prospecting for oil among the mountains of Kurdistan, he was for the moment *persona non grata* in that temperamental land, where his investigations had included the wearers of veils. However, he was distinctly *persona grata* with Mr. Godet, the French hotelkeeper, who does much for the local color of Teheran. While there are a good many young men there, what with the legations, the two banks, the telegraph, and what not, and

while between one estate and another are there great gulfs fixed, in the most approved metropolitan manner, the young men vastly outnumber the young women of their own sort, or of any other sort, for that matter. And there are fewer things for them to do than in larger and less





IT IS HARD TO DENY BEAUTIFUL LADIES

exotic capitals. They therefore give themselves with the more zest to such simple distractions as may be found in any mining-camp. And one of their favorite distractions is to sack M. Godet's hotel. M. Godet takes these periodical devastations very philosophically. I suspect, in

fact, that he rather counts on them in a country where travelers are rare and of the less pecunious, if of the more adventurous, sort, such as military men, rug-buyers, missionaries, and music-hall artists. As for the young men, certain among them are mortgaged to M. Godet for life. It is quite a recognized institution of Teheran. The legation or the bank or the telegraph goes bond for its particular young man, and he goes without everything but pilau enough to keep him at his desk until he is square with M. Godet. Peter, being an outsider, might have fared more hardly if I had not been foolish enough, as a fellow-countryman, to sign my name to a certain scrap of paper drawn up between him and M. Godet. True, the wisdom of my folly had very soon been proved by the tearing up of that scrap of paper, not long after Peter's departure, by M. Godet himself. But the transaction enlightened me not a little on such topics as the budget of the Hôtel de Paris, the price of glass in Persia, etc. For Peter, they said, when he became a little exalted, cried out for air, and he never could wait to open the windows. He preferred to pitch the furniture at them. It never killed any one who happened to be passing below.

For all that, I liked Peter. There was something honest and human about him. We all have impulses to throw furniture, but not many of us have the courage of our convictions. Still, I had never dreamed that Peter would turn out so much the hero of fairy-tale as to marry the miraculous Miss Sanderson. She turned up in Teheran, too, a year or two after the war broke out, with a French maid and a mongrel Caucasian courier. The war had caught her in Kisliavodsk, one of those watering-places in the Caucasus. She had stayed in Russia, waiting for the war to stop, till she made up her mind that the longest way around was the shortest way home; and she sailed into the legation one day, with a letter from the embassy at Petrograd, desiring to be presented at court and to be shown the peacock throne.

It is hard to deny the requests of beautiful ladies. The requests of Miss Sanderson were peculiarly impossible, because, in the first place, ladies are not presented at court in Persia, as they are in more modern monarchies, and because, in the second place, there happens to be no peacock throne. There was one once, with a history as wonderful as its canopy of jeweled peacocks, of which there remains nothing but a doubtful modern fragment. And there is now another, whose name refers not to its decoration, but to a certain Mme. Peacock who adorned the harem of Fat'h Ali Shah. The facts were set forth at considerable length some thirty years ago, in his important work on Persia, by Lord Curzon of Kedleston. But if every other traveler always demanded a sight of the peacock throne, and always went away doubting our account of the matter, how could eyes so romantic as those of Miss Sanderson be expected to waste themselves on the closely printed and none too thrilling pages of an ex-Viceroy of India? So I contented myself by pointing out to Miss Sanderson that the peacock throne had not been visible since the coronation of young Ahmed Shah, and that Teheran was full of dark rumors as to its having been sold, together with many other magnificent things belonging to the Persian crown. In the third place, however, the requests of the lovely Esmeralda were in particular impossible because of the moment which she chose for making them. It was the moment when the rivers of German gold poured out in Persia had begun to produce their effect. The holy war had been preached, the banks in the south had been looted, the gendarmes had gone over to the enemy after their Swedish officers, the battle of Kengaver had been fought, and Kermanshah and Hamadan had been taken by the Turks. Even in Teheran things were beginning to look very funny. I therefore urged Miss Sanderson to return to Russia while she could, and get home via Sweden or Siberia. As for going to India by way of the gulf, it was out of the question.



"THE ADORNER OF THE MONARCHY"

All the same, she did it! Impossible, I suppose, is a word not to be found in the dictionaries of lovely ladies who all their lives have seen the most obdurate doors fly open before them. And this lovely lady evidently had her share of the resolution, or of a certain indifference to the

realities of life, for which her sex is noted. Not that she took anybody into her confidence except Peter. Him she also took with her, to the vast amusement of Teheran, for whom the fantasies of the American virgin upon her travels are still more or less a novelty. The gossip was that she had discharged her courier and taken Peter on instead. Everybody knew that poor Peter was hard up. At any rate, I happened to know that he and Miss Sanderson had never heard of each other until I introduced them shortly before they disappeared. And that introduction was merely an accident. On such careless threads do hang the destinies of men.

As I considered it, eyeing the correct and opulent Peter, who now looked secure against the accidents of life, I had to think to remember just how we had turned so successful a trick, Providence and I. Oh, yes; an emerald, of course. Miss Sanderson had not taken me very seriously at first, and had gone over my head to the chief and then to the Russians. She had letters to them, too. But a few days later, when I ran across her at the French legation, she said she had about made up her mind to take my advice. Persia was too disappointing, what with the dirt and the ugliness and the discomfort and the obstacles everybody put in the way of her seeing the sights, if there really were any. She had even been unable to find anything in the bazaar.

I explained to her that in Persia nobody goes shopping in bazaars, if antiques were what she was after. The only thing was to get hold of a go-between, a sort of broker who has ways of getting into Persian houses and of getting out the treasures some of them contain.

"Then find me one," she promptly recommended.

It appeared that she did n't want rugs or tiles or miniatures or any of the other things that most people take home from Persia. She wanted an emerald, and a much better one than she had seen in the shops. It was then that I first heard of her fancy for emeralds. She had one that

belonged to Marie Antoinette. She had another that came from the magnificent collection of Abdul-Hamid. Why should n't she have a third out of the treasury in Teheran if the shah's jewels were really being sold? If I would n't show her the peacock throne, I might at least get her a go-between. The notion seemed to tickle her enormously, and she refused to be frightened by my warnings that she would have to keep her eyes very wide open and pay any number of commissions without knowing it, including a good fat one for me.

So it was that I handed her over to Peter. Not that Peter was the go-between. The go-between was a picturesque character known in Teheran as the adorer of the monarchy. The adorer of the monarchy, otherwise one Eprem Kahn, is really an Armenian, I believe. Just how he came to merit his flowery Persian title I cannot say, unless by virtue of his decorative beard, which he dyes scarlet with henna. Or perhaps it is because out of his back shop in Tiflis, which is his true headquarters, come most of the Rhages jars which adorn the collections of Europe and America. At any rate, the adorer of the monarchy is one of the greatest artists and most unmitigated rascals in Asia. There is very little in the way of Saracenic antiquities which the old scarecrow cannot turn out of that mysterious back shop of his in Tiflis, though he specializes in pre-Sefeyian pottery. The only trouble with it is that some of it is genuine. For in that sort of thing the adorer of the monarchy has the scent of a bloodhound. And he sticks that sanguine beard of his into every corner of western Asia where there may be battle, revolution, and sudden death, seeking what he may devour. Wherefore, I suppose, did he happen to be there in Teheran when we wanted him.

Of course, if it had been something really nice Miss Sanderson was after, like an eleventh-century bowl or a miniature by Behad, she would have been a lost woman. As it was, she knew a good deal more about emeralds than the ad-

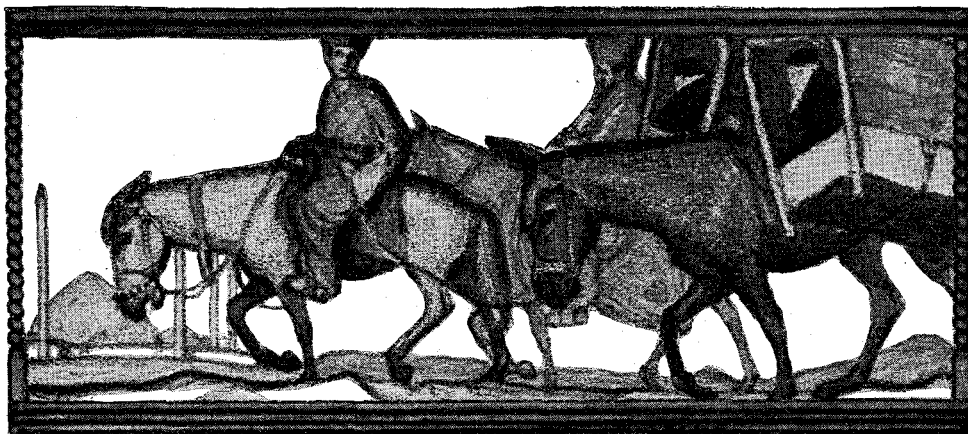
corner of the monarchy. I could as easily have conceived him taking an interest in mission furniture. The point was that those clairvoyant eyes of his, as black and deep as Avernus, yet humorously three-cornered, could find anything for anybody. They even say he was the one who found that French countess for Prince Salar-ed-Deuleh. However, for extra precaution I called in Peter. There were half a dozen obvious enough reasons why he was a better man for Miss Sanderson's affair than I, the most important being that I had something else to think about just then than trinkets for beautiful ladies. Things had already been looking rather funny behind the scenes in Teheran. They got funnier until that day when the fat little shah was stopped in the nick of time from running away to Ispahan and the Germans. His valuables had gone, his bodyguard had gone, he himself was on the point of going, when the British and Russian ministers demanded even more insistently than Miss Sanderson an audience with him. Precisely what they said to him has yet to be published, though we got a fairly reliable version of it before night. But the shah did not go to Ispahan.

Peter and Miss Sanderson did, however. The first definite news we had of them was from there, in a note of Peter's that came through as soon as the Russians had cleared the road. Not that the note brought any real news. It merely contained an inclosure for M. Godet and laconic thanks for my own part in that affair. Nor did we hear anything more about our enterprising pair before I had to leave Teheran myself. And here I had run into them again, alive and married in Washington! It was a common enough whirligig of life, but I was simple enough to be amused by it. I wished that blessed general would hurry up with his National Army. In the meantime I speculated as to which of Mrs. Maturin's emeralds was the Persian one. That, of course, must have been what she meant she owed me. What interested me more, though, was how they had managed to get

through the Turkish lines, and how long it had taken them to get married. They must have had adventures, those two.

If life were like stories, Esmeralda would at this point have turned back to me and have taken up her part in these reminiscences, or I would have prepared for it by shouting across the table at Peter. But both these young people were otherwise occupied, while the lady from Pittsburgh continued to be engrossed in Rodman and his aunts. I therefore plied my fork in undistinguished silence, outwardly trying to look intelligent and inwardly comparing the Shoreham (Washington hotel) with the Hôtel de Paris. If one was rather better appointed and the other a little livelier, it would be hard to say which of the two could collect queerer fish out of the seven seas. Washington and Teheran, for that matter, are a good deal alike. Neither looks quite like its part, and in both there is a great deal more news than ever comes out in any paper. I would not swear, either, that it is more reliable or less fantastic in one capital than in the other. What I found most fantastic, though, was that I, whose own affairs are far from glittering, should turn out to be a sort of Harun-al-Rashid, carelessly presenting a capricious lady with the jewel of her heart's desire and an unfortunate gentleman with a fortune and a wife. As I considered I began to feel the pride of the creator in his handiwork. After all, Providence needs a poke now and then. Even Mr. Belasco; would he do as well for us in that new play to which we were going after dinner? Which for some obscure reason reminded me of my newly married cousin Millicent, who did n't want her cook to make friends with the cook next door because the people in that house were Presbyterians. And so on, and so on.

DESSERT was in sight before the general finished what he had to say about the equipment of the National Army, whose deficiencies I hope he overstated. He then pronounced highly enlightening and



"WE HAD TO GO IN DISGUISE, YOU KNOW. I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE WIFE OF

worthy of being brought to the attention of the general staff Mrs. Maturin's report of the military preparations of India and Japan as observed from the port-holes of ocean greyhounds, the windows of first-class compartments, and the lobbies of the best hotels. And at last Mrs. Maturin turned to me.

"But where is it?" I demanded, beginning with what interested me least. "Which one is it?"

It was her turn to be mystified, having been occupied with affairs of state while I was mooning about her and Peter. But, noticing that my eyes were on the points of green light in her bronze hair, she came around quickly enough.

"Oh, it is n't there. It's—it's quite a story." She broke off. I was ready to believe her. But dessert was already on, and I had n't waited all that time to hear the threadbare old yarn of bargaining in Asia. "The funny part of it," Mrs. Maturin went on, "is that I saw the peacock throne after all—thanks to you." She leaned toward me as if to confide the most delightful of secrets. "That's where I got my emerald."

If jaws could drop, mine would have crashed into my plate. My partnership with Providence had gone rather further than I foresaw if it had been the means of providing the lovely Esmeralda not only with a historic precious stone, but one from a piece of furniture which does not exist. I began to feel vaguely uneasy. I

remembered what in my pride of a Harun-al-Rashid I had almost forgotten, that look of Peter's across the table. And so many questions suddenly surged up into the back of my head that I again asked the one which interested me least.

"How soon did you young people make up your minds to get married? In Teheran?"

"Oh, dear, no! It was n't till we got to Bombay, and then we were driven into it. People kept making the most stupid mistakes—insisting on giving us the same room, and all that sort of thing. Of course it was a mad thing to do, to trail off like that with a man I had never seen or heard of the week before; but I was just wild to get that emerald. And Peter was such a sport, not like the rest of you old fogies in Teheran. And then out there in Persia, in sight of the war, things did n't look just as they would here. We had no end of a time, you know. I wondered afterward that I ever had the courage to go through with it. But," she added irrelevantly, "if it had n't been for that, I would have gone straight to Paris and cut Pierre Loti's throat!"

"Oh, dear!" I cried out in alarm, "why his? There are so many other throats that need cutting first. The kaiser's, for instance."

"Well, I doubt if even he is such an awful liar. I don't know why it is that people who write books give you such false impressions. They always lead you to ex-



THE ADORNER OF THE MONARCHY, AND PETER AND CLAUDINE WERE OUR SERVANTS' "

pect so much color and magnificence in the East, when it is mostly dirt and fleas or worse."

It was curious that a lady capable of discovering Kisliavodsk and of running away with a strange man into the jaws of the Germans should be incapable of seeing Persia through her own eyes. I might have pointed out to her that if the readers of books have made up their minds what a country ought to be like, the most candid writers of books have small chance against them, and that a Pierre Loti will make admirable prose out of the most unpromising material. But what I wanted to point out to her was that books at least get on with their stories faster than she was doing. Instead of which I remarked:

"The adorning of the monarchy is quite a character, is n't he? He must have worked the oracle very quickly for you to have scuttled off from Teheran as soon as you did."

She smiled.

"He did n't work it in Teheran. He worked it in Kum. That, really, was how Peter happened to go with us. My courier refused to when he heard about that little rumpus the Turks were stirring up."

"Kum!" I cried. "Why Kum, of all earthly places? I never heard of anybody going to Kum except on a pilgrimage to that shrine."

"Well, that's what we did."

I stared at her, for that shrine is one of

the most sacred spots in Persia. It is the last resting-place of Fatima the Immaculate, granddaughter I don't remember how many times great of the prophet, and sister of the Imam Riza, who flies over once a week from his own more famous tomb in Meshed to visit her. And few there are, of Christian birth, that is, who have seen it.

"You look as if you did n't believe me," said Mrs. Maturin. "But it was simple enough. Don't you remember how the shah tried to run away to Ispahan, and how he sent his things on ahead of him? Well, when he did n't turn up, they put the things into the shrine at Kum for safe keeping. The adorning of the monarchy happened to know about it. And you were quite right about the shah's being willing to sell some of his jewels. That was how we happened to go to Kum. Have you been there?"

I had to tell her that having spent three years within walking distance, so to speak, of it, I had never visited it.

"I had never even heard of it," she was frank enough to confess; "but it was more like Persia than anything else I saw. We had to go in disguise, you know. I was supposed to be the wife of the adorning of the monarchy, and Peter and Claudine were our servants! It was immense fun. But that costume is horribly stuffy, I assure you, and I could n't half see anything through that little strip of openwork in front of my eyes."

She almost left me speechless.

"Perhaps," I allowed myself to suggest, "that was why you liked it so much."

"I should n't wonder," she was again human enough to admit. "But there is really a lot of color there, besides those usual horrid mud houses and flat roofs. Miles before we got there we could see the dome of Fatima's tomb glittering like a great gold bubble above the plain, with iridescent mountains behind it. And as we got nearer we made out the big turquoise minarets around it, and smaller domes of peacock tiles and little blue-and-green tiled pinnacles above cream-colored walls. You have no idea how attractive it was."

That, I must confess, would ordinarily have been enough to quench my interest. When beautiful ladies call a place attractive, the game, so far as I am concerned, is up. But this was a different game.

"Did you really go into the shrine itself?" I asked.

"Of course we did. We had to, to carry out the comedy. And I don't know what it did n't cost us. They were dreadfully afraid we would betray ourselves and get them into trouble. They whisked us out in no time. I got only the vaguest impression through my strip of openwork of a dim-lighted octagon, and a catafalque covered with cloth of gold behind a tall silver grille. But it was worth it."

I was grateful to them, whoever they were, for delaying me no longer than necessary. It came to me a little enviously, though, that beauty and gold are indeed magic keys; also that dessert was disappearing all too rapidly; also that the lady from Pittsburgh was eyeing Mrs. Maturin through her lorgnette.

"Then they took us," the latter went on, "through a porcelain gateway into the loveliest little cloister I ever saw, all blue and green tiles, with a toy river running through it in a channel of mossy marble that widened in the center into a big oblong pool. Some enormous cypress-trees were reflected in it."

I thought it must have been very be-

coming to her, but I was too afraid of wasting time to tell her so.

"I hoped they would empty the pool and let us into a secret passage at the bottom of it or something like that; but they took us through a high-tiled porch at one end of the court into a sort of apartment where the shah stays when he makes pilgrimages to the shrine, all plaster arabesques stuck over in the quaintest way with bits of mirror glass."

"Was it there?" I asked desperately, perceiving signs of coffee.

"Not in the room where we sat down. There was nothing but rugs and couches. They served us tea and candies and ices, and they talked about the weather and asked how many children Peter and I had. They were frightfully embarrassing. And at last, one at a time, they began showing us things that the shah had sent there and wanted to sell."

"Fancy!" I heard from my right.

"Some of them were quite nice," said Mrs. Maturin. "There were one or two big carpets, and a few of those funny old books full of gaudy little pictures that look like nothing on earth, touched up with gold. Pottery, too; the usual bazaar kind of thing, only better of its kind than usual. Then they showed us jewels—bowls of them! They were nothing very extraordinary, though, mostly rubies and pearls. I did n't have my veil down, either," she added. "They let me put it off in there. But I would n't let them put me off, even when they brought out two or three good enough emeralds. The adorning of monarchy—is n't he killing!—had got us permission to see the peacock throne, and I insisted that they must let us see it. So at last, very unwillingly, they took us into an inner room. It was full of boxes and bundles, piled helter-skelter on top of one another. They cleared off some of them till they came to an enormous case, which they opened with the most ridiculous little adzes you ever saw. And out of it they pulled a mountain of paper and old silks; but under them all was the throne."

Her voice had gradually been lifting,

and by this time the rest of the table was silent. What came to me that time was that a story is never quite the same for the different people who listen to it, and that no one there could possibly be listening quite so intensely as I, unless it was Peter. But if he was going down with all on board, he had evidently made up his mind to it. I caught that out of the corner of my eye."

"Did you sit on it?" asked the general, jovially.

"Of course I did," answered Mrs. Maturin. "And it was as uncomfortable as thrones are said to be. It was n't a chair at all, but a kind of longish platform set on seven curved legs, with two or three steps at one end. There was a balustrade around the platform, with enameled inscriptions in cartouches outside of it, and a high back. It ended in a jeweled peacock, with an outspread tail of turquoises, sapphires, and emeralds. But the most prodigious emerald of all was set in his breast."

"No diamonds?" demanded Pitts-
burgh.

"None that I remember," answered Esmeralda, "except in the peacock's crest. He was a wonderful peacock, but somehow he did n't look to me quite in keeping with the rest of the throne. And sure enough, the adorning of the monarchy said I was right. So many things have happened to that throne in all the centuries it has gone knocking around Asia, and the peacock is a modern restoration. But there is n't a particle of doubt about the rest of it. Whatever happens, I can say I have sat on the throne of Tamerlane! He began it, you know. And Jehan Shah, that Indian Mogul who built the Taj Mahal, finished it. And afterward it was looted from Agra by—who was it?" she asked, turning to me.

"Nadir Shah, in 1739, from Delhi," I replied with more particularity than perhaps was necessary. What could I do? I could n't, before all those people, point out that her history and her throne did n't go together. Besides, the liqueurs were being passed. Yet each was well enough

in its way except for the peacock. That I had never seen or heard of. But she had not been taken in by it. After all, I breathed more freely.

"Oh, yes; Nadir Shah." Mrs. Maturin took green chartreuse. "And after his death the Kurds got hold of it. But I never dreamed of anything so magnificent. The gold and enamel of the throne were crusted with precious stones, as if a swarm of gorgeous tropical beetles had descended on it. Never in my life have I seen so many emeralds. There was one splendid one on the right arm, uncut and very deep in color, where the hands of the shahs and the Moguls and Tamerlane and who knows how many other kings before him must have rested when they were granting life and death to the slaves at their feet."

"How interesting!" burst out the lady from Pittsburgh. "But what a pity you did n't see it in the palace, in its own setting, the way we saw the throne of the sultans in Constantinople! The ambassador happened to be a friend of my husband's, and as a very special favor he got us permission to see the old seraglio."

The infamous woman had the floor, and she did n't propose to relinquish it until she had told every last detail of that common experience, which was shared by hundreds of tourists every year before the war. I could have cut her throat much more easily than Mrs. Maturin could have cut Pierre Loti's. She had spoiled Mrs. Maturin's story, how utterly nobody knew better than I. And Peter's impassive countenance told me nothing. I shamelessly edged over to Mrs. Peter.

"Which one was it?" I whispered. "The one in the peacock's breast?"

She shook her head. "Too incredible!" She looked around the table, where every one but the lady from Pittsburgh was aware that it was time to go to the theater. The general, drumming a little on the cloth, favored me with a wink. Mrs. Maturin decided to whisper back. "The one on the arm. We had a terrific time about it. They nearly ruined me for life. Your commission must have been pretty

plump. And they made us swear the most awful oaths that we would never breathe a word as long as we lived. Then they sent us packing that night, out of a little side door, where our carriage was waiting, straight to Ispahan. I carried it in my hand all the way."

"But where is it?" I demanded. "Why on earth did n't you wear it to-night for me to see? Is it too precious?"

She hesitated so queerly that my dormant uneasiness stirred anew.

"Of course, if we had only been buying an emerald, we could have found one quite as good and for far less in New York, though Peter insists we could not. But, then, this was not an ordinary stone. After all, what jewel is, if you know its history? Peter had it beautifully mounted for me—in Agra, in sight of the Taj Mahal. As a matter of fact, though, it does n't look worth the fortune we paid for it."

"Nothing does," I said as much to myself as to her. "Life is like that. It is the pursuit we value, not the acquisition."

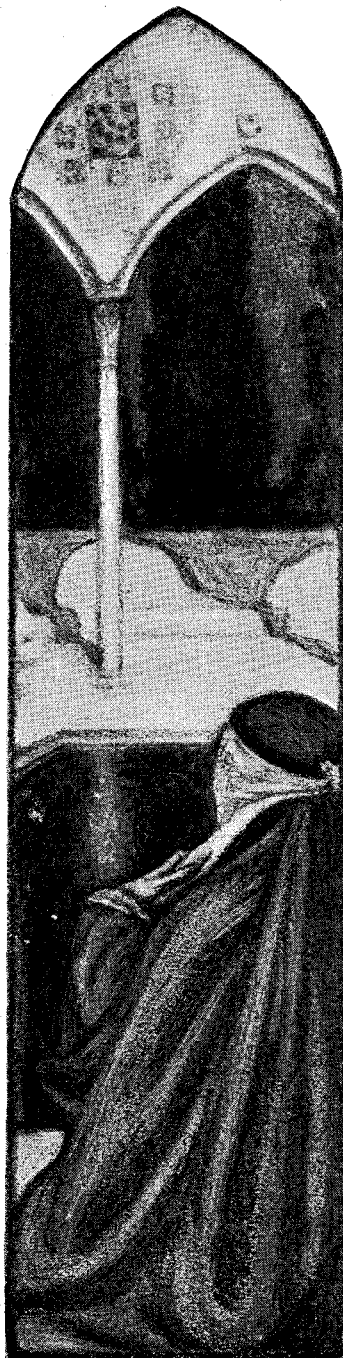
"What I mean," she explained, "is that it does n't show for what it really is. Those uncut stones never do, you know. And they don't go with modern clothes. So I want to have it cut. It's the only thing on which we differ, Peter and I. You would never guess how sentimental he is."

I somewhat perfunctorily began to assure her that sentiment is coming

into fashion again when our hostess at last gave her signal, and we all stood up.

In the moment of confusion that followed I saw Peter join his wife. I also saw, as I pulled away the chair of the lady from Pittsburgh, that she, she of the wattles and the diamonds, and not the lovely Esmeralda, had been the one to save Peter this time. In fact, I saw that you never can tell when life will turn dramatic in your hands, even at so polite a dinner-party as ours. I saw it the more distinctly because it was so invisible. The thing was "a drama of small, smothered, intensely private things," as Henry James says. Nevertheless, it made me impatient for the play, for which we were already late. Mr. Belasco, of course, would arrange everything very much better, with tears and smiles in their proper order. Here everything had been too long drawn out in the beginning and too much jammed at the end. The end, indeed, was just what was lacking, now that Mrs. Maturin had given it so disquieting a twist, and what I stood small chance of getting hold of in that confounded box at the Belasco.

So I followed the others out of the dining-room much less concerned about my hat than about the whimsicalities of playing Harun-al-Rashid. Not that I minded my own fix, now that I took in what it might mean to have a beautiful lady beholden to



"THE LOVELIEST LITTLE CLOISTER I
EVER SAW"

one for an emerald of Tamerlane. The worst was that they might think I really had taken a commission from that old terror in Teheran. Nor could I feel too sorry for Mrs. Maturin. I had done my best for her and I had given her due warning. If she had been taken in, if she had paid a shah's ransom for a bit of green paste out of the back shop of the adorning of the monarchy, it was her own fault. What a magnificent hoax, though, pulled off in how artistic a manner! Mr. Belasco himself could n't have staged it better, or have her so unaware of having been taken in. And, after all, she could afford her little caprices. Besides which, she had Peter to show for it. He was more of a jewel than perhaps she knew. If she did n't, she still had her famous eyes and her famous hair. Those were genuine enough and rare enough, in all conscience, and nothing could rob her of them except time.

But Peter, poor old Peter, who could always play a game, but who could never carry off the stakes, what would time do for him? Peter disturbed me more than anything. Had he been taken in, too? Or—I must confess I was black enough to put that question to myself—had he helped to take Esmeralda in? He would almost have been justified in doing it, hard up as he was at the time. In any case, he must have come in for a very tidy little commission. Otherwise how could he possibly have squared M. Godet so soon? And I wondered if he was capable of the sentiment with which his wife credited him when she confided to me that he did n't want the emerald cut. But if it was cut,—there could be no doubt it would be if Mrs. Maturin had so made up her mind,—and if the historic jewel did turn out to be a sham, what then? Of course I did not know for sure; I generally do jump at wrong conclusions. Still, it was a very pretty little predicament even if the stone was genuine. For—

At the cloak-room door I suddenly felt a hand in my arm. It was Peter's. He showed no trace of my self-consciousness.

"Let's walk around to the theater," he proposed. "A breath of air will be nice

after all that cackle. I have told Esmeralda. She's going to take the general in our car. Do you mind?"

I did n't. As for Peter, he at once began to talk quite naturally about Teheran. It amused me, on H Street, to go back to the Lalazar. My news was a little later than Peter's, and I was able to tell him details of the Turco-German invasion, the recapture of Hamadan, the adventures of several of our friends. Half a dozen of the young men he had known in the Hôtel de Paris had already met their fates in France, in Macedonia, in Mesopotamia, in Poland. They had, at any rate,—one or two of them,—been released in the most unexpected of ways from their obligations to M. Godet. M. Godet himself, for that matter, had not let his collection of I. O. U.'s stand in the way of going home and taking his own part in Armageddon.

These matters kept us from turning down to the Belasco when we reached the corner of Lafayette Square. We compromised by striking into it, and presently Peter announced:

"I have enlisted, too—in the aviation. They took me this afternoon. I'm on the ragged edge of being too old for it, but I'm as fit as a fiddle, and I passed all those whirligig things they put you through better than any of the youngsters."

No one, of course, is any longer surprised by anything. I heard myself make the usual remarks, with a wave of my hand toward Lafayette and Rochambeau, standing on their pedestals among the Washington trees. Peter smiled a little.

"I don't know very much about right and wrong and our debt to France and all the rest of it; but I'm not used to being a quiet family man, you know, and you feel like a fool rolling around here in a limousine while over there—"

He broke off abruptly, drawing me in the direction of our theater. He might be fit as a fiddle, but it struck me as I glanced at him under an electric light that he looked worn, as if, perhaps, he had been required to produce itemized accounts and



"HE WAS A WONDERFUL PEACOCK, BUT SOMEHOW HE DID N'T LOOK TO ME QUITE IN KEEPING WITH THE REST OF THE THRONE"

had found it difficult. He had nothing of his own, not even the oil company now, and with the best possible intentions there seemed no likelihood of his obtaining anything commensurate with his position as the husband of Mrs. Maturin. Charming as his wife was, I should expect to find her a rather precise paymaster. That was an element of the situation which I had not taken in at first in considering what we had brought about, Providence and I. At any rate, Peter would never be able to slide the bill for an extremely large and exquisitely cut emerald into his postage account, the less so as I don't suppose he

wrote three letters a year. But long before our winding path brought us back to the street I had absolved him. If he had sowed his wild oat or two, he had never been a cad. He could not have known, poor wretch, what he was letting himself in for. He had never been one to go smelling around antiquity shops. He had not known until he took the emerald to be mounted. And after the commission, the emerald must have become a thing too terrific to explain. Had the marriage been, perhaps, an attempt at reparation which might not succeed? At any rate, Peter had always needed air in moments

of exaltation. Well, he would get it. He would no doubt get medals, too. They made me, as we sauntered toward our belated theater-party, a sufficiently interesting picture. I seemed to see against a background of sanguine mist, with perhaps a low black cross visible in it, the image of a Mrs. Maturin, no longer young, fingering an emerald now never to be cut, which was all that was left to her of the most romantic episode of her life. But what I saw most clearly was that life is an egregiously jumbled-up mess, and that many nameless things, not to be mentioned in official histories, must lie behind the momentous decisions of life. And then at last we reached the lighted doorway of the theater. For some reason or other we both hesitated to go in and admire the well-arranged passions and admirable upholstery of Mr. Belasco.

"That was a rum affair you started us off on, was n't it?" Peter suddenly exclaimed. "But, after all, it was only fair that you should hear the rest of the story. Did my wife tell you the end?"

I hedged.

"She told me that she got the emerald."

But I found the courage to add, "She also told me that she was debating whether to have it cut."


"Oh, did she?" uttered Peter, slowly. "Well, you know how women are. They hate to come to a decision. So I decided myself. I made up my mind this morning to end the thing and take it, after all, to the jeweler."

"I hope," said I, "that the jeweler was properly impressed with the emerald of Tamerlane. What did he say?"

Peter threw away his cigarette and started into the lobby.

"He had nothing to say. When I got there I found my pocket had been picked. It's the more awkward because I can't help wondering if some one in the recruiting office did n't nab it when I was taking my physical examination. I hardly like to accuse any one there, especially at such a time as this. But I don't know how I shall tell my wife. I was so late getting home that she went on to the dinner without me. She'll be frightfully upset. And you know what the police are. I'm afraid we shall never see it again. Heavens! Look at that clock!"





The Religion of a Man of Letters

A Presidential Address to the Classical Association

By GILBERT MURRAY

Author of "Four Stages of Greek Religion," etc.

IT is the general custom of this association to choose as its president alternately a classical scholar and a man of wide eminence outside the classics. Next year you are to have a man of science, a great physician who is also famous in the world of learning and literature. Last year you had a statesman, though a statesman who is also a great scholar and man of letters, a sage and counselor in the antique mold, of world-wide fame and unique influence.¹ And since, between these two, you have chosen, in your kindness to me, a professional scholar and teacher, you might well expect from him an address containing practical educational advice in a practical educational crisis. But that, I fear, is just what I cannot give. My experience is too one-sided. I know little of schools and not much even of passmen. I know little of such material facts as curricula and time-tables and parents and examination-papers. I sometimes feel, as all men of fifty should, my ignorance even of boys and girls. Besides that, I have the honor at present to be an official of the board of education; and in public discussions of current educational subjects an officer of the board must in duty be like the heroine of Shelley's tragedy: "He cannot argue, he can only feel."

I believe, therefore, that the best I can do when the horizon looks somewhat dark not only for the particular studies which

we in this society love most, but for the habits of mind which we connect with those studies,—the philosophic temper, the gentle judgment, the interest in knowledge and beauty for their own sake,—will be simply, with your assistance, to look inward and try to realize my own confession of faith. I do, as a matter of fact, feel clear that, even if knowledge of Greek, instead of leading to bishoprics, as it once did, is in future to be regarded with popular suspicion as a mark of either a reactionary or an unusually feckless temper, I am nevertheless not in the least sorry that I have spent a large part of my life in Greek studies, not in the least penitent that I have been the cause of others doing the same. That is my feeling, and there must be some base for it. There must be such a thing as *religio grammatici*, the special religion of a man of letters.

The greater part of life both for man and beast is rigidly confined in the round of things that happen from hour to hour. It is ἐπὶ συμφοραῖς, exposed for circumstances to beat upon; its stream of consciousness channeled and directed by the events and environments of the moment. Man is imprisoned in the external present; and what we call a man's religion is to a great extent the thing that offers him a secret and permanent means of escape from that prison, a breaking of the prison walls which leaves him standing, of course, still in the present, but in a pres-

¹Sir William Osler and Lord Bryce.