

'Here,' thought I, 'is where the boy passed his last conscious hour in Douai!'

I went in and seating myself before a modest *déjeuner*, soon succeeding in drawing mine bust into conversation.

'I have just come from the war in the East,' said I by way of introduction.

'Ah! Monsieur is from the war?' replied the garrulous Frank, rising at once to the bait, 'then perhaps he met M. Durand, the correspondent of the *Bulletin Quotidien*.'

'Durand?' said I reflectively—'oh, yes, I remember. Did you know him?'

'Do I know him! *Mais oui, le sèlerat!* He came from Douai, and I saw him the night before he went to the war. He has stayed out there in the East has he not?'

'Yes—he has stayed out there.'

'Ah the wretch! He was betrothed to one of the sweetest young girls in this city, but he didn't appreciate her and has stayed out there, no doubt living *à vie Turque* with its immoralities and horrors.'

'How do you mean?' queried I.

'Why, the night before he left, he came to Douai and dined at the very table at which you are sitting, monsieur.'

And then, instead of going to say "good-by" to his loved one, he got into some drunken brawl in the lower parts of the town, and had it not been for the goodness of a friend, who also loved Mlle. Sterelle, he would never have reached Paris in time to follow his duty. This friend happened to know that he had to leave, and saw him off to Paris, terribly intoxicated, and naturally the good people of Douai were very indignant.'

'And where does Mlle. Sterelle live now?'

'Ah, monsieur! Her father died suddenly, soon after Maxime departed, and left her alone in the world; and then, as she had never heard from Maxime, and heard, moreover, that he had decided to remain out there amid the horrible luxury of the East, she married M. Nicolas Dufoure—the *bon bourgeois* who has loved her long.'

'And did she love this M. Dufoure?'

'Not as she loved Maxime, of course, but—*que voulez vous?*—she was alone, deserted, with a business on her hands which she could not manage by herself, and she respected her present husband,—which is, no doubt, far better than loving him,—and she will be happier with him than she would have been with Maxime, who has turned out to be a drunkard and a sensualist.'

'Ah! and where does Mme. Dufoure live now?'

'At the top of the street, behind the Mairie, monsieur, where she and her husband carry on the business left behind him by the Baptiste Sterelle.'

I thanked mine host, and, having finished my *déjeuner*, betook myself in the direction of the Mairie.

I found the narrow street Maxime had described to me, and climbing its treacherous cobble-stones, saw at its head a well-to-do-looking haberdasher's shop, over the window of which was inscribed 'Nicolas Dufoure, successeur to Baptiste Sterelle.' I entered, ostensibly in quest of some cravates, to be served by a comely young woman, who advanced from behind the *comptoir* at the end of the shop. We were alone. Indeed, Douai seemed to be fast asleep in its intimacy, and I had no difficulty in getting into conversation with 'Madame, whom I learned at once so be Mme. Dufoure, *née* Euphrasie Sterelle.'

I opened the conversation, as I had done in the case of Père Larréze, with the statement of my recent return from the theatre of war, and, like the worthy restaurateur, Mme. Dufoure immediately asked me if I had known Maxime, and on my replying in the affirmative, added the question:

'Why did he stay in the East, monsieur?'

'*Parce que c'était plus fort que lui,*' I replied ambiguously.

'And when he left, he was *fiancé* to me,' exclaimed the little woman, indignantly.

'But you also, madame, have married elsewhere,' I ventured to suggest.

'And had I had not the right—did I not owe it to myself, to do so?' she returned. 'Maxime and I were betrothed to one another when we were only "so high," and though I had many an offer from some of the best matches in Douai, I remained faithful to my promise to him, for—I loved him. Well, monsieur, when this war broke out, he came to Douai—to see me?—not at all—to join in some drunken orgie in the lowest parts of the town, I know not where. But fortunately, M. Dufoure, who was there for business purposes, saw him and heard him read aloud, to his vile companions, my last letter to him. Oh! I know that it was so, for M. Dufoure remembered whole passages from it, which I recognised as having written. He was naturally indignant, for he had loved me almost as long as Maxime, but he sincerely hoped that Maxime would clear himself by letter, even going morning after morning himself to the post-office to see whether he had written. But no, he kept a silence as cold as that of the grave, and when my father died and left me alone in the world, I married M. Dufoure, who offered himself at once as my protector. And now he tells me that Maxime has remained in the East to live *à vie Orientale*. Bah! it is all that he was fit for. I do not regret him.' She paused, more to gain breath, I think, than anything else, and then added: 'When did you see him last, Monsieur, and where?'

'It was in the month of December, and at the Fall of Plevna, madame,' replied I, slowly, and was about to add, 'he was shot down within a few yards of me,' when a great wave of thought and commiseration surged up within my soul. Thought for the details of the horrible story of treachery and lies that unfolded itself before my mental vision, and commiseration for the little woman before me, and for her lover, our poor dead Maxime.

Obviously it was this self-same Dufoure who had stunned Maxime in the dark on his last visit to Douai, and who had stolen the letter he had seen fall from the boy's pocket—that letter which he had evidently committed to memory and declared he had heard Maxime read aloud. Obviously it was he who had suppressed Maxime's letters, if they had ever reached Douai, and on this basis of trickery, treachery, and lies, had supplanted the poor golden-headed boy, whom I had seen shattered by a shell.

A problem requiring almost instantaneous solution propounded itself to me as I stood in the little shop at Douai on that April afternoon. It was this: Here was Euphrasie, married, bound irrevocably and for life to this man who had won her by fraud, but for whom she felt a calm, permanent respect, if not a love like that she had given to Maxime; on the other hand, Maxime was dead, and it could do no good, but on the contrary must do a terrible harm, to fill her young life with a ghostly passionate regret.

To fulfil my promise to Maxime and shatter the woman's trust in the living out of a sentimental respect for the dead,

or not to do so, and by the breach of trust let her continue in the path of her duty as the wife of Nicolas Dufoure, untaunted by the knowledge of his crime, for crime it was—that was the question. Whilst I stood deliberating as rapidly as I could upon the problem, a short, sour-faced man entered the shop, and, casting an evil look at me said to Euphrasie:

'Madame Dufoure! I would it not be better to attend to your business instead of chattering to strangers?—and the little woman, courtesying to me, retired with a half-suppressed sigh to her *comptoir*.

So this was the husband of Euphrasie Sterelle. God help her, poor child! My mind was immediately made up—better, thought I, to let her make the best of her life, such as it is, than to mar the whole of it from now henceforth with the knowledge of her husband's baseness. Douai is a queer, primitive little place, and not much from the outer world disturbs the placidity of its provincial existence; the chances were that the story of Maxime's death would never reach the ears of Euphrasie Dufoure.

My mind was made up. I came away without executing my mission, and returned to Paris, where I sought Maxime's only living relation—a sister, the wife of a jeweller in the Palais Royal. To her I confided the whole story, and the souvenirs of Maxime, which I had religiously worn ever since I took them from his mangled body.

And Maxime's sister approved of my breach of trust.

DESCRIPTION OF A FLIRT.

FLIRTING is as universal as it is dangerous, and without doubt one of the most harmful and heartless practices in the world. Certainly there are 'flirts' and 'flirts,' and some flirtations are more innocent than others. For instance, two young people who are neither engaged nor amuse themselves with a mild flirtation, and do neither each other nor anyone else any harm; but if either of them has promised his or her affections elsewhere, and flirts merely for the sake of gratifying their vanity and receiving attention to which they have no right, then the flirtation is dangerous, and indeed sinful, especially when it inflicts needless pain on others.

When a girl does all in her power to make herself look her best, appear agreeable, and try to fascinate any young fellow in whose society she may chance to be thrown, her friends (lady ones in particular) will deem her 'a flirt'; but, after all, she has only done what was very natural under the circumstances, and only, perhaps, what they have often done themselves, for it's very human nature to seek admiration from the other sex. This, in its way, may be very harmless and innocent, but the danger of flirtation is that women will often out of sheer vanity or rivalry, lead men on, just for the sake of having the 'honour' (if of an offer they are well aware they intend to refuse. A flirt can do her mischief very quickly. Still waters run deep, and she has a thousand and one little shafts that fly very silently, and wound very deeply.

A look that accompanies the simple offering of a flower, the unnecessary pressure of the hand when bidding farewell, an almost imperceptible gesture of affection, may each and all send a wave of tumult to the heart, and cause a momentary throb of rapture; and yet the look, the touch, mean nothing—it is only 'flirtation.' Edna Lyall writes: 'No one has any right to raise feelings in another's heart they know they have no intention of satisfying.' The people who are most prone to flirt are generally the most heartless and selfish; they flirt just to amuse themselves, and *pour passer le temps*, utterly regardless of the heartache they may be giving their victims. Having no sensitiveness themselves, they cannot realise the pain impressionable people suffer at their expense. What to them is only an amusement, is life or death to others. Sometimes a woman will turn a flirt from desperation; her heart has been wrecked by past bitter experiences, and having found the fickleness of one man, she believes in none, and knowing she can love none enough to trust them, flirts indiscriminately with each and all that come in her way. For a broken heart cannot love or hope.'

Though it often knows how to flirt.

Flirts are like butterflies, they flutter from flower to flower, hover over it one moment, give it a passing kiss, and then off, away to the next that takes its fancy, to soon forget its very existence.

It is said that it 'takes two to make a quarrel,' and certainly it takes two to make a flirtation. It would be useless (or a flirt would term it 'no fun') to make pretty speeches and give tender glances to one who appeared quite unconscious you were trying to fascinate them. A little quiet scorn or silent contempt would soon disarm the most determined or proficient flirt in the world; for, after all, all flirtations are more or less shallow, as there cannot possibly be any depth of feeling.

A man rarely flirts with the woman he wishes or intends to make his wife. His respect for her would be too great to allow her name to be bandied about by the ever-ready gossips and scandal-mongers; and though, somehow, a flirt can get many admirers, she does not always get a lover, for 'admiration is not love,' and few could love and trust 'a flirt.'

EIGHT YEARS IN THE HAREM.—Between eight and nine years ago a young girl, named Anna Prokofyeff, then sixteen years of age, and of remarkable personal attractions, suddenly disappeared from her widowed mother's house in Odessa. The most searching inquiries were fruitlessly persecuted. It now transpires that after her abduction, Anna Prokofyeff was secretly carried to Constantinople, and eventually sold to a Salonica merchant, in whose harem she has remained until the recent death of her owner. From intelligence now received by friends it would appear that Anna was from the first treated with uniform kindness by the Salonica merchant, who, at his death, bequeathed to his favourite slave the whole of his property, consisting of four houses in Salonica, five trading schooners, and £15,000. The fair leecher, now only in her twenty-fifth year, and still possessing her remarkably youthful beauty scarcely impaired, has placed her two boys under the educational training of the Russian monks of Mount Athos, and to their abbot she has presented one of her schooners. She is now also converting one of her Salonica houses into a Russo-Greek free school.

THE TURKISH SULTAN.

THE SULTAN of Turkey is of medium height, rather short than tall, well proportioned in his person, and carrying bravely the weight of his onerous duties, though there are also moments when an old and careworn look comes across his face, and when he almost personifies the apathy we so generally connect with the Turkish character. His beard, cut into a slight point is black; so are his hair and eyes. The latter are tender in expression, but also penetrating, and he looks his visitors straight in the face with a scrutiny that seems to read their thoughts. What destroys the pleasant first impression made by these eyes is the constant look of uneasiness in them.

The fact is Abdul Hamid does not feel himself safe even in his own palace. He does not suspect any one in particular, but he is on his guard against every one. Few Padishahs have been beloved by their subjects as he. Indeed, he is to them quite a new type of Sultan, and they do not fail to appreciate the novelty. Here is a man who does not pass his days in a harem toying with his slaves. Here is a man who takes a real interest in the welfare of his people, who, far from following the example of his predecessors and leaving the reins of Government in the hands of some clever courtiers, insists on seeing and judging all for himself, down to the minutest particulars.

Personally, he is most benevolent and kind-hearted, and scarcely a month passes that he does not contribute some large sum out of his private purse to alleviate suffering among his subjects, irrespective of race or religion. His character may be summed up as having for its dominant note an extreme caution, and it is endowed with an unusual faculty for work. In manner he is exceedingly polite, especially in his treatment of European ladies. Indeed, he understands the rare art of making himself respected by all with whom he comes in contact.

Abdul Hamid gets up early. His toilet does not detain him long; indeed, it might detain him longer according to European codes. Dressed, he at once devotes himself to recite the prescribed prayers, after which he drinks a cup of black coffee, and instantly afterward begins to smoke cigarettes, a pastime that he continues all day almost without intermission, for he is an ardent smoker. Breakfast ended, he arranges family affairs, when these require his attention, as is almost always the case with so large a family, and of such varied ages and needs. This done, he quits the harem and goes into the sekanlik. Here he receives the reports concerning Court affairs. Towards ten o'clock his Court secretary and chief dignitaries appear, bearing the day's dispatches and reports.

These handed in, the Sultan seats himself on a sofa, with, on his right, these documents, and on his left a pile of Turkish newspapers and extracts from the European press, translated into Turkish for his benefit by a translation bureau specially appointed to that end. His lunch, which follows the dispatch of this business, is most simple—little meat, a fair amount of vegetables. The meal ended, he will take a walk in the park or row in a little boat upon one of the lakes it incloses, always accompanied by a chamberlain or some high dignitary. After taking two hours' exercise in the air he returns to his sitting-rooms where he holds an open reception, or else presides over some committee meeting.

An hour or two before sunset he once more goes out for a walk. His dinner is as simple as his lunch. His favourite food is pillaw sweets, and very little meat. He never touches spirituous liquors, in due obedience to the commands of the prophet, but he drinks large quantities of sherbet and eats a great deal of ice cream. Dinner over he receives company in the sekanlik, or he will retire into the harem, where his daughters play and sing to him. He himself on these occasions will often seat himself at the piano, an instrument he plays fairly well. For painting, for fine arts in general he has no taste. His women, too, find him very cold, but he is devoted to his children and also much attached to all the members of his family.

NOT IN HIS DAY-BILL.

SIGNOR BLANK is one of the best fellows imaginable. He has a fine, deep baritone voice which has been his means of livelihood ever since his boyhood. He is, probably, one of the best known professional singers in the country. We had arranged a 'social evening' at our place for Wednesday night last, and the Signor had been invited. Of course we expected to hear him sing, but aside from that he has so many other entertaining qualities that we wanted him, 'sing or no sing,' and so invited him.

We live in a large family hotel on the west side of the town. The 'party' was held in the private parlours of one of the boarders, and when the Signor arrived I had to escort him through the large public parlour. 'There he is. Isn't he going to sing?' and similar exclamations from a bevy of young ladies greeted the Signor's ears as we ran the gauntlet of the parlour. The Signor was evidently 'flustered' and I made up my mind not to ask him to sing at all.

After introducing the Signor to my friends we engaged in a general conversation and then young Leonard asked the Signor to sing. The Signor looked at me as if in protest, but before I had a chance to say anything he had taken a seat before the piano and commenced.

There was a flutter of excitement out in the hall and the door was suddenly opened, disclosing the eager and expectant faces of a dozen or more uninvited young ladies.

The Signor sang only one song, and then signified his intention of departing. He had only come, he said, to make his excuses, as he had had a prior engagement. I explained to him that we hadn't invited him merely to hear him sing, and then the Signor had something to say on this subject.

'Oh, I understand that very well,' said he, but I'll tell you, though, that I am often invited to dine out, and almost before I have taken my coat off I am asked to sing. It is sing before dinner, sing after dinner, and sing at any and all times. Among friends I don't mind it so much, but even then it is apt to become just a trifle monotonous. Now if you had only invited me here to play a little game of draughts—'

'Signor,' said I, 'we'll get up a game for your special benefit next Saturday night, and you won't be asked to sing unless you win.'

'That's different,' replied the Signor, with a smile. 'I'll be on hand.'