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Board Works Jan 1 00

MIRAMICHI ADVANCE

Vol. 25. No. 4. CHATHAM, NEW BRUNSWICK, DECEMBER 7, 1899. D. G. SMITH, EDITOR & PROPRIETOR TERMS—$1.00 a Year, in Advance

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The "MIRAMICHI ADVANCE" is published at Chatham, Miramichi, N. B., every THURSDAY morning in time for despatch by the earliest mails of that day.

It is sent to any address in Canada, or the United States (Postage prepaid by the publisher) at ONE DOLLAR A YEAR, payable invariably in advance.

Advertisements, other than yearly or by the season are inserted at eight cents per line nonpareil, for 1st insertion, and three cents per line for each continuation.

Yearly, or season advertisements, are taken at the rate of $5.00 an inch per year. The matter, if space is secured by the year, or season, may be changed under arrangement made therefore with the publisher.

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E. A. STRANG

An Egyptian Harem

However natural or commonplace a thing may be, we have only to surround it with an air of mystery and it is instantly invested with an irresistible charm and a force of attraction, that subdues even the most indifferent, writes an English lady. Curiosity, that merciful characteristic which enables us in our deepest sorrows to take an interest in the affairs of our neighbor, reaches great heights even when means of its gratification are at hand. But when there are difficulties in the way, if our craving are satisfied in only slight degrees, if there is something still left in suspense—if tradition, taking advantage of the popular credulity, hints at horrors without unveiling them—this indeed is more than sufficient to awaken within the larger portion of mankind that master-passion of the world.

Life within the closed walls of a harem furnishes a good example of what is mysteriously commonplace, for here no newspapers reveal the domestic drama of the' Seraglio, as at home they cast publicity on each lengthy lawsuit or breach of promise case; so that the imagination, unhampered by facts, may range at will over thoughts of women sewn up in sacks and built into walls, children bowstrung and disappearing in the Nile, or a husband here and there suffocated among cushions by half a dozen of his jealous wives. All these things may, for aught we know, go on in harems, but the one we visited, presented no tragedy of any kind to the outward eye, although it could hardly fail to afford most abundant interest to any human creature of Western nationality, from the single fact that nothing, from eating and walking, to feeling and thinking, is done there as we do it.

This harem, in which we spent a couple of days, stood a few miles out of Cairo, in the center of a large, wall-surrounded garden, planted with date palms, olive trees, orange groved, with melon and gourd beds running among them.

The owner of this house, a wealthy Turk, was so courteous as to meet his guests at the village of Z——, about a mile from his residence, where he mounted us upon large white asses, richly trapped in crimson and gold, each led by a slave, while he with his sons and retainers accompanied us on horseback, making in all a goodly company and suggestive of something out of the Old Testament. On arriving at the harem garden we were admitted into its paradise of shade and rest by a heavy doorway, and a venerable old potentate who had headed our procession, on an ass, and at this juncture our bodyguard abandoned us, remaining without the walls, while we were left, to make our way alone toward the group of women whom we saw approaching by the stone-flagged walk that led to the house. They were evidently the wives of our friend, whose invitation to visit his harem, had given us an opportunity of satisfying in a slight dgree the interest we had long felt as to private life in Eastern countries.

These ladies were dressed in loose gowns of figured cotton, red and yellow shoes, without heels, and scarfs of all colors. Some of the younger ones were handsome, being not much browner in the face than those of Spanish origin, while their marvelously erect figures gave them an appearance of great dignity. One of the ladies present, Mirza by name, a niece of the Turk's, who had been born in Constantinople, was much more highly educated than the others, and able to talk French and when preliminary greetings were over we followed her and our new friends, through an archway into a square court, from whence we proceeded on a tour of inspection, through many large rooms on the ground floor, all of which were empty except the innermost chamber. Here we found a fat old lady sitting on a low bench, cutting onions into slices with a knife, and eating them, mouthful about, with a child. At her feet on the floor, sitting in the most perfectly graceful pose with her baby on her knee, was the beautiful Circassian wife of one of the Pasha's sons. The old lady told us, through Mirza, that her name was "Jessamine, the sweetness upon the walls of the home." This on the top of sliced onions was a little hard of understanding.

On seeing our interest in their customs they became very friendly, and allowed us to examine their ornaments, generally necklets made of gold sequins strung together, and bracelets worn much larger and heavier than it is ordinary to see in our country. Mirza, our interpreter, told us she was engaged to be married to her cousin, Arten, her uncle's son, and showed us a ring that he had given her. It was a large, dull red stone in the shape of a cartouche, worn by her on the first finger, and it bore the inscription written in Persian characters, "There is a flower in the garden of Arten, and her name is Mirza."

In the same room where we found "Jessamine" eating onions, our friends exhibited to us the contents of a box that had come from Constantinople with Mirza ten years before. It was full of curiosities to them, because some of the things in it had belonged to one of the wives of Mirza's father, and she, we are told, had been half a European. It contained worn caps, gauze scarfs, and gold-embroidered dresses. The lady to whom all these treasures had belonged was a certain Princess A., who must have possessed a very remarkable individuality, as she succeeded in escaping from the conventional limits of her husband's house; the bravery of this step can only be appreciated by those who have seen something of the extraordinary restrictions among the upper classes in harem life.

Although we would like to have known many details of her story, even the simple facts, are sufficiently interesting to bear repetition here. Princess A. was the only child of a Turk and an Austrian lady; she had passed her earliest years in considerable freedom, as her mother had been her father's only wife they did not live in a harem, but mixed unveiled in Constantinople society. Here, after her parents died, she met the Turkish officer to whom she betrothed herself, agreeing to marry him on the understanding that she was to be his only wife.

When the ceremony was over she was taken to his house, and very soon made the distressing discovery that he had several wives besides herself. Mirza's mother being among the number. This piece of deception, considering her liberal upbringing, naturally put an end to all respect and affection on her side, and she resolved to leave him if possible, and seek the protection of European friends for herself, and with their assistance try to recover some of her money, of which she had about £1,500 a year. How Princess A. escaped she remembered only the awed consternation and murmured unbelief as the news of the flight was whispered among them. She knew that the escape must have been made during the night, and that help must have been given from within as well as from without, as she believed it impossible for her to make her way unaided through the dozens of sleepers who would line the path between her and freedom. If the harem in Constantinople in which she fled contained anything like the amount of human beings that we found under the same roof with Mirza, her escape must have been a work of amazing enterprise. For here there were about forty women, at least two dozen men servants, and more children than one could count; and it must be remembered that they don't sleep in rooms with a shut door, past which the quiet, collected fugitive might slip and gain the garden without detection, but their wicker beds are placed everywhere—in doorless rooms, blocking the passages, in rows round the courtyard, as sentinels on the flat roof, and outposts in the garden. She would have to thread her way through this labyrinth of reclining humanity in the hot darkness of the house, and outside under the light of a moon that would throw a fearful glare on the sleepers in this garden full of senseless shades. She managed to escape, however, and nothing is left of her except the old camel's hair box, the worn dresses, the faded scarfs and her story, which will doubtless be handed down from generation to generation as a warning against rebellion in women. We were glad to learn from Mirza that the Princess A. recovered some of her money through English influence, and continued to live in unveiled freedom until her death, which took place a few years ago in Constantinople. She had felt and suffered more, we hope, than falls to the lot of most harem ladies from the unfortunate circumstance that she had been brought up to enjoy and expect too much. After hearing this tale of rebellion we marveled at the expression of quiet pleasure apparent on the faces of those around us, for they seemed to be profoundly happy in performing the simplest and humblest laws of existence. The very reason of this placid contentment and indifference is one of the saddest features of their case, for their happiness under the circumstances in which they vegetate at the despotic will of others is in itself a degradation, and until the news is revealed to them that there are things in life beyond those which at present satisfy every desire of their hearts, there is little hope that they will have even the wish to aid in any movement for their emancipation that might be started by their fellow-women in Western countries, who enjoy the liberty of body and mind that is withheld from them. They seem to be able alone to make no greater effort toward happiness than that which is required by the feeble exertion necessitated in eating, dressing and sleeping.

We also in the drowsy warmth might have arrived at a state of similar apathy, but for the mental anxiety that must ever attend uncertainty as to meal-times. As hour after hour of the afternoon passed in conversation, our joy may be imagined when shortly before sundown we were requested to condescend to wash our hands in preparation for the principal meal of the day. We entered a room with taps round the wall; this whole apartment was the bath house, for the water fell from the pipes straight to the floor, and the fashionable harem way of dressing for dinner was to remove all clothes, and sit, stand or lie, under a spout of running water. It was a lengthy business, as, in addition to their own ablutions, two or three dozen children had to be caught and scrub bed, though this operation after their capture was attended with less difficulty, than at first would be supposed, for there is practically little trouble in dressing and undressing children that have nothing on. These preparations concluded, we followed our hostesses into a room on the opposite side of the court, with a long, low table down the middle. We seated ourselves round it on cushions, and each took possession of the flat piece of scone which supplied the place o a plate during the meal, those articles not being considered a necessary luxury. In the center of the table stood a large bowl full of white soup, from which everybody ate, taking as many spoonfuls as they chose from the common tureen with the long-handled wooden ladles provided for each guest. When this was removed a large piece of meat boiled to rags, took its place, and was speedily diminished under the violent treatment it received from us all, each one pulling a lump of meat from the joint with the fingers, and eating it off her own flat scone. We then had a curry of vegetables, followed by the Zagazig pudding, fruit and rice, called so from a native of that village having brought the recipe to the harem. Our meal was concluded by coffee, made in a corner of the room over red-hot charcoal in a copper pot, and poured thick into small glasses fitted in gold filagree cups. The lady who made this rather disagreeable beverage was the same who had removed the center dishes during dinner; she was black as a coal and bore the delightfully descriptive name, translated to us, of Lily in the Desert. When we had washed our hands in the basin handed round for the purpose, everybody went to bed, some to the roof, others to the court, garden or house. It was a very hot night, with a glorious full moon, and we asked to have our beds placed outside at a short distance from the harem buildings, the stones of which seemed never to cool day or night. There was such a luxuriance of growth around; the very shadows were weighted with fruit, and looked in their immovable blackness as if glued to the ground.

We stretched ourselves on the wicker beds, resolved to close our eyes to these fascinating distractions, but were assailed by a whirl of midges, gnats, mosquitoes—goodness knows what—that attacked from below, above, in every conceivable direction, and angrily drove us to the house. We climbed to the roof of the building to other wicker beds, but the countless millions of ants creeping over the stonework, round the wicker beds, up their legs and ours, without respect of person, reduced us to a state of mind bordering upon distraction, and forced us to descend to the house and the commonplace expedient of sleeping in a room. The chamber which they kindly put at our disposal was a large room, and we slept till Lily in the Desert came to rouse us with the words, "There is no God but one God, and prayer is better than sleep." We awoke speedily to the plainful consciousness that we were in for a bad day.

This means here, instead of rain and an easterly haar, the excessive heat that is brought by their kamseen wind. The sun blazed fiercely all day, and looked far away through the clouds of stinging hot sand and dust blown against, under and through every possible hole and crevice in the shelters erected to protect man and beast.

Our kind hostesses, doubtless noticing the state of liquid stupefaction to which their kamseen wind had blown us, proposed that a story-teller should be brought. When awaiting his arrival Mirza asked if we had such people in England. We told her that the population at home consisted largely of story-tellers, but that they did it generally unconsciously, and never took it up as a regular profession in our country. The man on this occasion who recited for our amusement, was one of their own servants; he sat cross-legged in a corner of the room and commenced to gesticulate and roar in an unknown tongue, to the great interest of everybody present, ourselves included.

This story, which appeared to take as long in the recital of events as in their performance, reduced the man to a state of great exhaustion, and the sight of him made us ten times hotter than we had been before. As it came to an end, however, we were refreshed by the officially announced news that the Pasha our father had come to drive us back to the regions of plates and forks, high collars, tight dresses and bare-faced women. We were about to enter again that society where ceaseless change and progress are the order of the day. It can never from that reason offer anything very original in the way of a curiosity, so relentless is the tide that bears us along. How full of pity then must our gratitude be to those who afford us the incalculable interest of remaining always the same! As we left the harem garden we turned in the thick heat to look back on the house shrouded in flying sand and dust, a somber spot full of childish human beings, their bodies allowed no liberty, the existence of their souls, a disputed point, yet still retaining, because indestructible, through generations of coercion and injustice, that most rare of human virtues, contentment, and that most precious of divine attributes, love.

X RAYS ON THE BATTLE FIELD.

No Army Medical Corps Properly Equipped Without an Apparatus.

It says much for the keenness and promptitude of the medical faculty in the Old World and the New in the pursuit of its beneficent mission that it turned at once to practical use the scientific discovery of X rays. Hospital surgeons seized upon the Roentgen rays to localize extreneous bodies which were the cause of mischief in the interior of their patients. With no less ardor army surgeons were quick to test the invention as a means of saving the lives jeopardized by the engines of destruction developed in modern warfare.

No medical corps attached to an army, after the Cuban campaign last year and the present campaigns of the Americans in the Philippines and the British in the Transvaal, could be considered properly equipped without adequate provision of the Roentgen ray apparatus. No army doctor should take the field unless he understands the use to which it may be put for the speedy extraction from a wounded man of a bullet or other missile. The camera and the cinematograph, the magnet, and, most of all, the electrical generator, are appendages that will soon be regarded as indispensable to the army X ray outfit.

Radiography in war can hardly be said to be familiarized as yet. Nor are there many medical officers in any of the armies of the civilized Powers so far capable of utilizing the discovery to anything like a full extent. Much, however, has been done in this way, and great things may be expected from the experience it is hoped will be gained in the

PRESENT TRANSVAAL WAR.

One of the officers now voyaging to South Africa is Major W. C. Beevor, of the Army Medical Corps. He was employed on active service in the Tirah campaign against the Afridis in 1897, and then for the first time by the "sniping" sharpshooters of India's northwestern tribes. Last year, together with another army medical officer, Major Battersby, he fitted up an X ray room at Abadieh, on the Nile, near Omdurman, and after the battle by the use of radiography saved many limbs and lives of the British Soudanese and Dervish wounded.

Since then fresh steps have been taken to perfect the use of radiography on the battlefield. Especially has this been the case in regard to the form of electric motor necessary for X ray work. In the Soudan equipment a spectator would have wondered why a stationary tandem bicycle was being vigorously worked by Major Battersby's orderlies. They were generating electricity for the accumulators, and this ingenious device overcame in a great measure the difficulty experienced by Major Beevor in transporting with him heavy electrical batteries and chemicals.

Electrical influence machines, however, of improved pattern are rapidly superseding such rough and ready means of generating electricity. They have been employed in one form or another in both the Spanish-American and Graeco-Turkish wars. Now Major Beevor is taking with him, to be used for the first time in actual warfare, an influence machine which may be of the greatest service. It springs originally from the Wimshurst invention, consisting of two or more circular plates of varnished glass geared to rotate in opposite directions. Mr. W. R. Pidgeon improved on this and Major Beevor has carried on the evolution in his machine, which is adapted to stand the climatic conditions of the Transvaal and a great deal of rough usage. The new machine is at all times ready for work. You have merely to turn the handle or start a motor, and, as the wires are led directly from the machine to the Crookes tube, no batteries, Leyden jars or inductor coils are required.

NO WHEELED VEHICLE.

Eight miles due east, over the mountains from Catores Station, on the Mexican National Railway, is a city along whose steep, winding streets no wheeled vehicle has ever been known to pass, although it has a population of 40,000 people. The city takes its name from once being the stronghold and property of 14 of the most desperate and successful robbers that ever laid tribute on roads in Mexico. They discovered and for many years worked the rich deposits of silver that abound there. Strange to say, every piece of machinery, every pound of freight and every passenger to and from Catores is transported to-day, as for centuries past, either on the backs of men or mules. The streets are all paved, and run up and down hill, many of them at an angle of 45 degrees.

LAST LAUGH IS EVER THE BEST.

She married him in order to be revenged on her rival.

Ah! Then vengeance was hers.

No. It only took two months of married life to convince her that vengeance was her rival's.

WAR STRICTLY UP TO DATE

BALLOON SERVICE OF ENGLAND IS ALMOST PERFECTION.

Gold Beaters' Skin Supplants Silk for Envelopes—Wireless Telegraphy Will be Employed—Use of Modern Equipment of Deep Interest.

England is going into battle with a unique array of modern war equipments. Machine guns, motor cars and bicycles are not so novel, but wireless telegraphy is an up-to-the-minute accouterment the British will employ, while her balloon service has long been recognized as an integral part of her military system. Like all other first-class powers, England has for some years past had an army balloon department, a school of instruction in the use of such "air ships," and a staff of trained aeronauts to attend to their manufacture and working.

For obvious reasons, the utmost secrecy is observed as to the composition of the "envelope," or outer casing of the balloon, for upon the material employed therein largely depends the utility of an air ship of any description. In the days when silk "envelopes" were in use, the adventurous aeronaut was continually exposed to difficulty and danger. For instance, if the silk were not thickly varnished, it let the air in—with singularly disastrous results to the occupants of the car. If, on the other hand, it were varnished, the casing became so brittle that it was constantly cracking, and thus causing unwelcome escapes of gas.

THE AERONAUTIC PROBLEM.

Consequently the problem with which the military aeronaut was confronted was that of discovering a material which should combine in one lightness, strength and imperviousness to the atmosphere. For a long time the task seemed to defy human ingenuity. The art of "belligerent aeronautics," however, is one that stands for any pronounced period. As a result, after repeated experiments, the balloonist's efforts have now been crowned with success. The fabric at present adopted for the manufacture of the "envelopes" of war balloons at Aldershot consists chiefly of what is known as gold-beaters' skin, which is delicately described by an English journal as the "lining of the internal portions of the anatomy of cattle." This is soaked in a potash solution and treated with isinglass and alum water. The various sections are then sewn together into an air-tight homogeneous mass. The extreme lightness of the material thus prepared may be estimated from the fact that its 2,500 square feet of surface, the ordinary size of a war balloon "envelope," weighs but 170 pounds. Such a case is capable of holding 10,000 cubic feet of gas, and of raising a dead weight of 70 pounds.

As a general rule, the car in which the aeronaut is carried is made of wicker, with a band of hickory wood to bind it. In size, the following are the measurements usually adopted: Height and width, 2 feet 3 inches; length, 3 feet 6 inches. It is attached to a hoop by means of the best Italian hemp rope available. This hoop is connected with the cord network that incloses the whole of the balloon's "envelope." The "breaking strain" of this rigging is something over 500 pounds; nevertheless, it weighs but one pound to the hundred feet.

OUTFIT IS ELABORATE.

With so much paraphernalia about it the complete outfit of a balloon section is necessarily rather elaborate. First of all, there is the balloon itself, with its "envelope," valve, net, car, hoop, grapnel, spare rope, aeronautical instruments and ballast. Then there is the wagon on which it is packed, and to which is attached a drum with a wire rope, for holding the balloon captive when necessary, and a telephone apparatus for communicating with the occupants of the car. Finally, there is a second series of wagons, containing the cylinders of compressed hydrogen for inflating the "envelope."

As to the uses to which a balloon can be put in warfare they are so many and varied that they cannot be more than lightly touched upon here. Foremost among them, of course, is that of reconnoitering the enemy's position, photographing his camp and sending reports, chiefly by means of pigeons, of such observations to headquarters. Then, despite the fulminations of the recent Peace Congress against the proposal, it seems extremely likely that they will also be used for dropping explosives from the clouds onto the ground occupied by a hostile force. Indeed, special shells for this purpose are a part of the equipment of all war balloons. Accordingly, in the next great European campaign, when both sides are similarly provided, and war balloon thus meets war balloon, then, indeed, "will come the tug of war." Especially thrilling would be a duel to the death, under these circumstances, between two rival aeromotives. It would also be one in which the danger would be equally shared by spectators as well as principals.

EASY GOLD MINING.

Men, Women and Children Pick the Metal Up From a Sandy Beach.

Probably there is but one place in the world where gold may be picked up from a sandy beach. Yet on Cape Nome, on Norton Sound, Behring Sea, Alaska, men, women and children are enriching themselves after precisely this fashion.

Only a few weeks ago a discouraged miner who had been lured to the Cape Nome district by what he had come to consider false hopes espied gold under his feet as he sat is his tent on the beach. Within an hour he had laid the foundations of a fortune.

Now for a dozen miles or more along the beach there may be seen a throng of independent diggers. Never before has such easy mining been heard of. A small, square bit of beach will yield from $10 to $15 an hour. The entire yield of the beach district is said to be about $30,000 a day.

Business of all kinds has responded to the beach boom. The headquarters for the gold territory is Anvil City, where fancy prices were immediately put upon all ordinary commodities. For meals the miners pay from $1.50 to $2.50 each; for a bed in a tent, $1.50; for beer, 50 cents a glass, and for a mutton chop, $1.25.

Existence through the winter will be rather difficult, as fuel is even scarcer than food. Many of the "beachcombers" intend to meet the trying features of the climate by setting up large tents on the beach, where they will live, cook and sleep and at the same time do their mining under cover.

A faultless complexion is a thing of beauty, but it will not remain a joy forever.

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