

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN A TURKISH HAREM." *

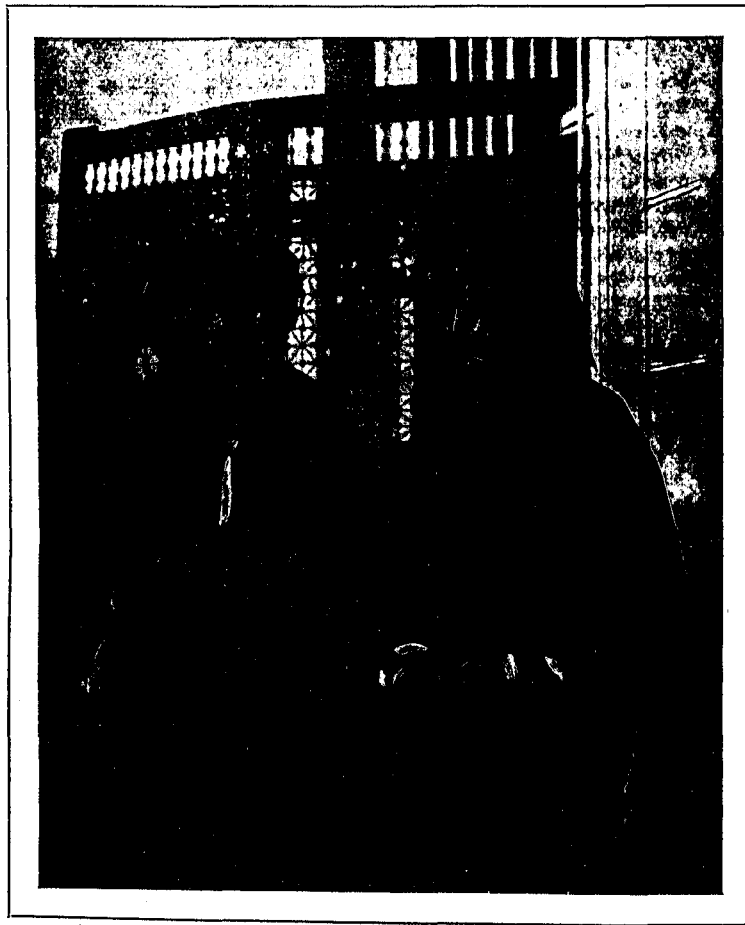
Published at the psychological moment, when Europe, indeed the whole civilised world, is awaiting with breathless interest the result of the Allied fleets' progress up the Dardanelles, this absorbing diary of Miss Grace Ellison's experience of the Turkish nation, and more especially of its women, should be deeply and intelligently appreciated by all who have the opportunity and the privilege of reading it. An added interest is that its gifted authoress, in her "After Words," at the conclusion of the volume, tells us that she is at this moment in a French hospital, with English nurses, helping to repair the ills that Christian nations have done to each other."

Miss Ellison is a passionate lover of the race which is the subject of her book. She is at pains to disabuse the Western mind of its conception of harem life. We are assured by her that polygamy is of rare occurrence, and that it cost a great deal of trouble to discover a man who had even two wives. She says:—

"To the Western ear, to be staying in a Turkish harem sounds alarming and not a little—yes, let us confess it—improper." In the Imperial harem, "Fatima" (the friend with whom she is staying) "explains to me that the women are solemnly asked four times a year whether they would like to marry and leave the harem. . . . Their existence, however, seems a heart-rending waste of human life; and as I sat watching them loitering along the exquisitely carpeted corridors, gossiping, smoking, alternately carrying coffee and water to the guests, I longed to break down the lattice which

there is always between them and the sun . . . and open the doors, that they, too, might go out. And yet not one of the women seemed in the least to feel her slavery." The harem, then, we understand, is simply that portion of the house which is reserved for its women, slaves or otherwise. Even members of the Imperial family content themselves with one wife. Said a witty Pasha: "When four wives meant to their possessors four tillers of land there was some sense

in polygamy, but not when they buy their dresses at Paquin's." A story is told of a pious Moslem, always first in the mosque. "How is it you are always so early?" asked his friend. "I have two wives," answered the pious friend, "and get away as soon as I can." These stories help to convince us of the inconvenience of plurality of wives. The indolent life of the Turkish woman has its compensations, apparently, in the absence of anything like nerves, or fussy anxiety in the household. "How long was I expected to stay?" The surprised answer was, "As long as ever you



MISS GRACE ELLISON AND MISS "CHOCOLATE."

like; you need never go away." There are guests here who came as I did for a few days, and have never gone away at all.

In a Turkish country house on the shores of the Upper Bosphorus, where Miss Ellison stays, this *dolce far niente* seems accentuated, and the lassitude and repose seem almost to convey themselves to us as we read, and soothe our tired nerves, and make us long to escape, as do these Turkish ladies, from "the lot of fine tears and good worry that is wasted in the West. Our beds do get rolled up and put away before it is time to take them

*By Grace Ellison. London: Methuen & Co.

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