THE ALGERIAN LADIES.

BY GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

This was perhaps, of all days, the most favorable for viewing these ambulatory packages of feminity, for it was a festival, and, moreover, an exceptional festival; and Sultanas are all but mortal, so, actuated by a pardonable curiosity, they sallied forth to peep at the Sultana's car, and the grand preparations made to greet him. Once veiled and packed and pinned together, the Mauresques enjoy entire liberty out of doors. No jealously-curtained *arabas* convoy them; no hideous eunuchs—ushers of a perpetual seminary for grown-up young ladies—hurry them along, forbidding them to look to the right or the left. Let me hasten to admit that in point of tidiness and cleanliness the Mauresquis offer a very favorable contrast to the dignified and dirty male child of the desert. *Haik*, vail, and unmentionables are alike spotless and snowy. At ordinary seasons veiled women are very rarely seen in the European quarter of Algiers. The indigenous females are unveiled, and are either Jewesses or negresses. Yesterday the *Haiks* and the *yasmaks* were exceedingly numerous in the great square. Sometimes the clothes-bag was portly, and suggested a stout mama beneath—a suggestion strengthened by a pursuivant tribe of children, all, down to little girl toddlekins of four or five (so at least to judge from their stature) as closely veiled as their elders. Altogether the "get up" of a Mauresque *en promenade* is livelier and smarter than that of a Turkish woman, whose veil is horribly ugly, who wears instead of the *haik*, a pillow case of black silk, and whose trousers hang in ugly folds over her loose and slovenly boots of untanned leather. There is a spick and span, just-home-from-the-wash look about these Moorish ladies very refreshing to view; but their *ensemble* is, nevertheless, as I have hinted, funny. If you are in the Penseroso mood, you may picture to yourself that all the feminine tombs in the great cemetry of Mustapha have disgorged their tenants, and, that they, or their pallid ghosts rather, are wandering about in the sunshine, vainly seeking for the janissaries of the good old time, and wondering how the Dey could think of allowing so many Christians to be at large without shackles on their shins and burdens on their backs. Or, still in ghostly frame of mind, you may liken them to the phantom nuns who serenade Robert le Diable. Very much like these sainted apparitions did the white Mautesques look this evening, gliding through the dim arcades of the Rue Bab-Azzoun. Or, if the Allegro suit you better, you may fancy yourself gazing on the corps de ballet in *Giselle*, and that the airy creatures are but *Willis*, with their ballet-skirts tucked tightly around them. Or, to one of ruder vision, they may appear like those five-and-twenty or thirty boarders at the ladies' school where Mr. Pickwick went to prevent their elopement in their best gowns. Take them, however, as you will, and for granted the grotesqueness of their trim, and you shall not divest them of an indefinable but omnipresent perfume of the East—of the dreamy, vaporous, sensuous land of mystery and sorcery and jealousy and intrigue. I abandon for good the bifurcated clothes-bag, the double pillow case similes. At night, albeit the glare of gas contends with the moon's rays, each pair of baggy pantaloons becomes a novel in two volumes.

The shops are full of *cartes de visite* of Arab and Jewish ladies, not only veiled, but with uncovered countenances—not only smothered in the haik, but arrayed in all the picturesque splendor of Oriental costume. Whence have these photographers obtained their models? Have they been permitted to enter the penetralia of the Moresco houses? Has the camera become one of the lights of the harem? I trow not. The models, I apprehend, have been selected from the *Rikat*, or naughty tribe—numerous enough here, as everywhere else. In these photographs you may see, at least, the lay figure dressed in the gorgeous attire of the Mauresque at home. The baggy trowsers, drawn tight around the ankles, are replaced by the *serroual*, or wide drawers of silk or china crape, and reaching only midleg. The inmost garment is of finest gauze; the feet are in slippers of velvet embroidered with gold; the hair, plaited in long tresses, is knotted behind the head, and descends almost to the ground; the head-dress is a dainty little skull-cap or *chachia* of velvet thick with gold and seed pearls, and attached by golden chords beneath the chin. The upper garment is the *rilla*, or jacket of brocaded silk, beneath which are one or more vests of gay colors, ornamented with innumerable sugar-loaf buttons. Round the waist is swathed the *fouta*, or many-folded sash of striped silk. Add rings and ear-rings, often of diamonds and emeralds very clumsily cut; necklaces with side rows of fine pearls strung on common string; bracelets for the arms, called *m'sais*, and the bangles for the ankles, termed *m'kais*, and the Mauresque in her *carte de visite* or indoor costume is complete. Stay; she sometimes wears a kind of chemisette or breast-plate called a *dejabadoli*, curiously filagreed with gold. A knowing Frenchman of long Algerine experience tells me that you may see the Maureaques in all this bravery of dress, and in actual reality of visage, if you will only stay at your window for an hour in the evening before sunset, armed with a powerful opera-glass. Then, sweeping the horizon of houses you may espy the beauteous she-Moors, gorgeous as the Queen of Sheba, come forth on the flat roofs of these old tenements in the upper town which have escaped the ruthless progress of French improvements. Simple she-Moors! Like the ostrich which is said to hide its head in the sand—but doesn't do anything of the sort—and fancies itself invisible to the hunter, the confiding Mauresques imagine that nobody can see them when, glowing in silk, and velvet, and gold, and fine linen, they take their evening walk upon the house-top. Another informant tells me that scarcely an evening passes without his seeing the unveiled Moorish women crawling over the tiles very much after the fashion of cats from roof to roof, from house to house, and often from street to street; for in the old quarters of the town the thoroughfares are, as a rule, considerably narrower than Middle Temple-lane or old Cranbourn-alley, or one of those queer back streets at Venice, and each story projects so much above the other that at the summit they touch. Shining over the tiles is the orthodox way of paying evening visits. The tiles are the stairs, the flat roofs the drawing-rooms. It is precisely the same at Mexico, where the *azoteas* are the great sunset rendezvous. Sky-parlor is where the Mauresque woman most enjoys herself. Thither she comes to gossip with her neighbors, to sing, to eat sweet-meats, to hang out her linen, to beat her carpets and her children. Life in a Moorish town would be dreary indeed without the house-top. The house-top! For how many thousands of years have these unchangeable races been walking on the house-top! And the sheet that was let down before the eyes of the visionary; what was that but the old canvas curtain they rig here every night on their roof, to temper the sea breeze, and afford shade from the latest fierceness of the sun's rays. This Moorish woman's dress which I have figured bit by bit from a bundle of photographs might have been copied almost verbatim from Lady Mary Wortley Montague's description of the dress of a Turkish lady in the Seraglio a hundred and fifty years ago, and for centuries, perhaps, ere that, no fashions in the harem had changed. Staunch old Conservatism walks Algiers as proudly as of yore, and, for all the improvements of the innovating Franks, they cannot improve it out of the land they occupy, but have not conquered.

The position of the Mahometan women in Algeria is theoretically much preferable to that of her sex in Tunis or Morocco. The strictly equitable nature of the French rule forbids her being treated with harshness or sold into slavery; but practically she is not much better off than in other Oriental countries. She is the victim of a stupid and brutalizing social code, founded on and bound up in a religion as stupid and brutalizing. She is either contemned or maltreated; a toy to the rich, a beast of burden to the poor. When a child is born to a Moorish woman, she cries, if it be a boy, "it is a blessing;" if it be a girl, "it is a curse." Directly she comes into the world she is baptized in the name of Fatima, which is that of the mother of the Prophet. A week afterwards another name is given to her. The choice of appellatives lies between Aicha, Bedra, Djohar, Halima, Hasuria, Khredoudg, Khreira, Meriem, Mimi, Mouni, Rosa, Safia, Yamina, Zina, and Zohra. Some of these names seem to have a characteristic sound. Wouldn't you like to fall in love with a young lady named Mouni? and can't you fancy being blessed with a mother-in-law by the name of Khredoudga?

If the Moorish girl's parents are poor they will regard her only as an incubus. Her mother was probably married at ten or twelve years of age; she ages early; and each accession of maternal cares is only a warning to her that she is no longer fair to look upon. As for the father, it is as much as he knows that he has a daughter till some one buys her of him in marriage. The poor girl grows up to be beaten, over-worked, and dispised; a Cinderella without a fairy godmother, but with sisters as miserable as herself. The rich girl is neglected by her mother, and is relegated to a corner of the harem and the care of an old negress. When she is old enough to be sold, she is married. She is profoundly ignorant, of course, very fond of sweet-stuff, very fond of the bath, very fond of flowers, very fond of smoking the cigarettes.

This statement of life is no doubt very pitiable. The government can do very little to ameliorate it. They have guaranteed to the native the possession of the civil law—which is the Koran—and the social code and the civil law are one. They might as well decree that the Mahometan women should go unvailed, or that the Arabs should leave off their burnouses, as interfere with the domestic arrangements of the Moorish gynecæum. A benevolent French lady residing in Algires has of late years endeavored to do that which the admirable Miss Whately attempted in Cairo, though on a purely secular basis. She has established a school where nearly a hundred little Mussulman girls, from four to ten years of age, receive a very good education; and I am told that the progress made by some of these young Paynims, in geography, arithmetic, and history—besides the more feminine accomplishments of needle-work and flower-painting—would have done no discredit to a ladies' college in Europe. But the civilization given to these poor little creatures is, perforce, superficial. The lower classes are glad enough to send their children to this school for the teaching is gratuitous, and the parents are even encouraged by bribes to send them; but the half-educated girl goes back to all the dreariness and all the drudgery of Oriental life. She is married and becomes a mother when she should still be learning her lessons; and she very soon forgets the few she has learnt. The wives of the very rich Morescos are said never to leave the house, save to visit the holy *koubbas* to pray that they may have men children and to propitiate the Marabouts with gifts. It is an animal kind of existence altogether, but can be no more altered or amended than the Koran.

JACOB SELWYN'S WIFE'S EPITAPH.

"Her name was Sarah—simply Sarah," said Jacob, as if the fact were a testimony to the modest nature of the departed. "She was of late years—68," he continued, referring at the same time to an old pocket-book; "but according to my reckoning we lost three years or so from not keeping a check upon her birthdays. But put her down at 68; she must have known her own age better than any one else." Mr. Wycherly wrote, "aged 68." "Would you say *aged?*" asked Selwyn, "I don't think she would have liked that. Say in her 68th year, if you please." Mr. Wycherly wrote as requested. "She was an excellent cook, Wycherly, and made ham better, I think, than any woman in the country," said Selwyn, with a pardonable feeling of pride. "I don't think we can put that in her epitaph," remarked Wycherly. "No, perhaps not; but it's a pity; it ought to go down, as it might have stimulated other young women to have as much said of them," said Selwyn, adding, after a pause, "she was good at figures, and taught me to cipher when I was first married; but that can't go down either, I suppose? She was a very tidy woman, and made others tidy; broke in a lot of good servants, who never had a kind word to say of her, I dare say; that can't go down, I suppose?" "It would be difficult to express it," answered Wycherly. "Pickling and preserving, she was a great hand at both," said Selwyn, with an enquiring look; but receiving no encouraging response from his amanuensis he took another sheet. "Always early with her chickens and turkeys, and pretty nigh found herself in clothes. What do you say to that? That ought to go down." Mr. Wycherly replied, "Well, I think all the good qualities you have enumerated, Selwyn, must be comprised in "She was an excellent wife." "Ah! that she was," said the bereaved husband; "and it's hard she can't have it put stronger than that. She was affectionate, Wycherly." "Yes, I'm sure of that." "Sometimes rather too affectionate, and showed a little unnecessary anxiety about me. I used to vex her sometimes on purpose to try her temper." "And how did you find it?" said Wycherly, slyly. "Well, it varied—sometimes smooth enough; at others warm, perhaps very warm; but, as her good qualities can't be set out at length, I won't have her little infirmities advertised in the churchyard."

——While a person in Newport, N. H., was reading the account of the murder of the President, and escape of the assassin on the "stage," one of the listeners jumped up much excited, and eagerly inquired, "Why in the world didn't they stop the stage? why didn't they shoot the driver?"

MUSICAL GOSSIP.

An English paper is responsible for the most of the following. It asks—

"Is there anything in this world more dreary than a musical evening? It is said that there are persons so ignorant of the first elements of Christian charity as to pervert a four or five o'clock tea, into an occasion for what is technically called music. We are not quite prepared to assert that such an abuse of the blessings of civilized life is a proof of the innate wickedness of man; but the fact forces on us the reflection either that we are unable to talk like rational beings for an hour or two, or that the pertinacious vanity of singing ladies and gentlemen is simply irrepressible. It may be, indeed, that the singing and the playing are introduced in order to induce the silent to speak, as it is their wont during musical performances in the evening. Or it is possible that our love for harmony is such that we cannot live without having it at all times and in all circumstances.

"As to the professed musical evening, we all know what that is. It may briefly be described as a contrivance for inflicting the greatest possible amount of suffering on the largest possible number of people, with the smallest possible advantage to all persons concerned. Strictly speaking, it is simply an organized hypocrisy. Doubtless there are persons who profess to find pleasure therein. There are women who really rejoice to fill their rooms with a miscellaneous crowd of acquaintances, including among them a sufficient number who are supposed, or suppose themselves to be, what is called 'musical.' There is no particular reason why all these people should be asked to meet one another, except the vague hypothesis that they either like to perform or like to listen; so that, whatever their age, sex, rank, experience, or tastes, they must certainly be gratified by a share in the refined intellectual recreation prepared for them. As the most straitlaced cannot object, so it is assumed that the most gay and the most fastidious cannot object but be charmed. The details of the proceedings vary, of course, according to the social position and tact of the host or hostess; but there is a certain generic likeness pervading them all, which entitles them to be taken as typically exhibiting the peculiarities of modern civilization in one of the lowest forms."

There!—we call that pretty strong. To the enormity of having been written by an Englishman, it adds the extrinsic brutality of being "critical."

Now, we have no wish to be brutal, or, what amounts to the same thing (in some people's minds), "critical," but we will ask any candid person or persons if they have not at some time been tremendously bored by a "musical party?" Nobody listens, except the few who may be under the hostess' or performers' eye, and they only out of politeness. When the young lady pianist begins to play it is the grand signal for every one to talk, and the louder she plays the louder the company talk. Sometimes, however, the performer suddenly changes from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*, and leaves those who should be listeners talking very *forte*. You who do this, just imagine the feelings of the performer under such circumstances. And you who sing, reflect that when it comes your turn to "amuse" the assembled guests, you are criticised, made fun of, your dress and carriage supercilliously discussed, and perhaps scandol talked about you—and you will end with the pleasing reflection that you have bored everybody, and that you receive hypocritical compliments from a few that feel called upon to give them.

The salons of many people now offer the attraction of really good singing and pianoforte playing. There is a wonderful advance in this direction the last few years. Not many years ago the "Battle of Prague" was the *chef d' œuvre* of young pianists, and an English ballad their best song. Now the gems of the opera and the difficulties of Chopin and Gottschalk are common.

——On April 25th, Mgr. de Hohenlohe, Archbishop of Edessa, and Grand Almoner of his Holiness, conferred on Liszt, the pianist, the clerical tonsure in the private chapel of the Vatican, in presence of the Most Reverend Father de Perrari, Commissary-General of the Holy Office. The Abbe Liszt immediately assumed the ecclesiastical habit, and in the afternoon of the same day was admitted to the presence of the Pope at a private audience, and was received with marks of the most paternal affection.

——Brignoli made his *debut* in London, at the Royal Italian Opera on May 11, in "Martha." The Morning *Post* says: "Signor Brignoli achieved legitimate success. If not a singer of the very first rank, he will still prove a valuable acquisition to the Royal Italian Opera. He has a sympathetic voice of good compass, and sings with taste and feeling." The N. Y. *Herald* tries to make out that Brignoli achieved a first-class success, but being called "a second-class singer," is not being in the first rank exactly.

——Ole Bull, the violinist, and Leo Lion (terrific names) the pianist, lately created a *furor* at Dresden.