

WOMAN'S LOVE OF THE EXOTIC

BY LAWRENCE BURT

ABOUT two months ago the whole country was shocked by the discovery of a crime which had been perpetrated in New York. The murdered body of a young girl was found in a trunk, in a room occupied by a Chinese waiter. The girl was a granddaughter of a general who had won distinction in the Civil War. She was a girl of refinement and good education. Both she and her mother had for a long time acted as mission workers among the denizens of Chinatown.

The mystery of her death has not yet been wholly solved; yet two facts became immediately known. The first was the fact of her love for the Mongolian in whose rooms she had been murdered; and the other was the fact that she had transferred her affections to another Chinaman; so that the current theory of her murder made it a crime due to jealousy.

Taken by itself, and as a single incident, one would hardly attach a great deal of significance to this shocking affair. Dreadful though it was, it might possibly have been set down as a sporadic tragedy, entirely abnormal in its nature, and therefore without any special meaning. But the course of the investigation to which it led brought out further disclosures which were much more startling, and possibly much more significant.

When the police, in their efforts to track the murderer, ransacked the dwellings of other Chinamen, they discovered quantities of love-letters written to these men by white girls who were not at all of the class that springs from the gutter and has natural association with the loose-living Orientals of Mott Street and Pell Street and that neighborhood. The writers of these missives, like the murdered girl, had homes very different from the dens of Chinatown. They evidently

were young women of some education and of decent training. Yet they had thrust themselves into the haunts of these low creatures, and the letters found by the police showed that they had become infatuated with them.

This was a very shocking revelation, and it gives one food for serious thought. How could young girls, whose upbringing had been so different, descend so easily to such a level?

A DANGEROUS ASSOCIATION

Now, in the first place, the particular explanation that has been given is not unreasonable; yet it does not wholly satisfy the mind, because it deals with only one particular phase of a very curious subject. Most of these girls, in the beginning, were probably religious in their cast of thought; and they went down to Chinatown, at first, with the sincerest and most innocent motives. They hoped that they would convert to Christianity the laundrymen and shopkeepers and opium-smokers who make up the mass of our Chinese population. Their interest in their protégés was a missionary interest.

At first, no doubt, they must have experienced some little feeling of repulsion at having to do with creatures whose sleek skins seem like those of lower animals or reptiles, with their high cheekbones, their slits of eyes, and all their sly and stealthy ways. But this natural repugnance was in time quite overcome by a species of religious zeal. Each "worker" took some Mongolian under her charge; for these Chinese insist upon having separate teachers.

In time, familiarity brought about a new feeling, and made the interest a personal interest, quite as much as a religious one. The very fact that white men despise Chinese, and often ill-treat

them, stirred what may be called a maternal instinct in the women who made themselves responsible for the welfare of their charges. Just as a mother loves most tenderly her most misshapen and ill-favored child, so these girls felt their hearts moved by the thought that their "converts" had all the world against them. Then, again, the personality of the Orientals, with their insidious ways and fawning manners, made the appeal still stronger. Add to this the fact that religious emotion is very closely related to one that is physical, and we find a combination which explains why so many of these young women went astray, and why in their converts they ultimately found lovers.

It has been said, notably by two New York clergymen—the Rev. Dr. Samuel H. Virgin and the Rev. R. S. MacArthur—that these results do not occur except when white women go down into Chinatown. It is claimed that the women who teach the Chinese in Sunday-schools connected with churches never drift into sentimental relations with them. This would be interesting, if it were quite true; but the facts show that, even in the up-town churches, a great deal more may pass between teacher and pupil than these two clergymen are aware of. There have been marriages between white women and the yellow men; and where there are marriages of which everybody knows, you may be sure that there are also relations which stop short of marriage, yet which rouse feelings of disgust in those who believe that there exist certain barriers of race erected by nature against anything that approaches social amalgamation.

The question, then, forces itself upon the mind whether women have not somewhere lurking in them a strong love of the exotic, a willingness to overstep race lines, and whether they do not even feel a peculiar and inexplicable pleasure in doing so. Leaving aside, for the moment, the subject of sex, let us take up this question in some other spheres.

THE PASSION FOR ADORNMENT

There was a time when men and women alike adorned their persons in practically the same way—with vestments of gorgeous coloring and laces

and jewels and gold and silver—and when the men, no less than the women, derived delight from a sort of bedizement which among males in the Western world would now be styled barbaric. The centuries have witnessed a steady simplification in the tastes of men, substituting plainness for the gorgeousness of other times.

This marks man's upward progress in the scale of civilization. The African potentate may still wear a nose-ring. The Hindu raja may cover himself with pearls and precious stones; but not even the mightiest monarch of the West, save on the rarest state occasions, is conspicuous in his attire. A king will go about in knickerbockers and a derby hat like the most commonplace representatives of the people whom he governs. With women, however, there has practically been no change. The extent of their personal adornment is measured only by their means; and when they cannot afford jewels and gold-work that are genuine, they will often deck themselves out with cheap imitations in brass and colored glass.

When they have wealth, they circle their necks with pearls and emeralds; their hair is all aglow with diamonds and rubies. Their fingers are clogged with showy rings. For them the silk-loom weaves their delicate fabrics, and for them the lace-makers destroy their eyesight. The farthest seas are dredged to supply this feminine craving for show and color and magnificence. Not a few women in high station have appeared in ballrooms with live lizards writhing in their hair, at the end of a slender golden chain. Other women, like Judith Gautier and Sarah Bernhardt, with many who are less well known, exhibit what seems an unnatural fondness for tiny snakes. It would be a waste of time to enumerate all the forms which this curious fancy assumes, this passion for strange gems, for masses of jade and graduated corals—for everything, in fact, which West and East together can supply.

Here, in itself, is a striking distinction between man and woman—a distinction on which we do not often dwell just because we are so accustomed to it; but the fact remains that centuries of training, "the emancipation of the sex," the

entrance of women into the same fields of activity as those which at one time belonged to men alone—all these have not wrought in woman the slightest transformation when it comes to the passion for the exotic.

MARRIAGES WITH FOREIGNERS

This passion for the exotic shades off from the slightest whim or preference to a sort of mad degeneracy, if one may use so strong a term. Let us take, for instance, so simple a thing as the comparative attitude of men and women toward foreigners—meaning by this term white foreigners and persons who are in every way entirely unobjectionable.

A man, almost instinctively, distrusts a foreigner; or, at any rate, he has a feeling that he must know the foreigner and mentally appraise him before regarding him as a person to be cultivated. On the other hand, with women, the very fact of a person's being foreign seems to be a passport to their favor. When one thinks of it, why is it that so many American heiresses marry foreign men, while so few American men marry foreign women?

Of course, a partial answer may be given when you say that the women often marry for a title. And this is true; yet it does not cover more than a quarter of the cases. On the other hand, there are thousands of foreign women of high birth and social rank who would be glad to marry American millionaires in return for a handsome settlement. Yet they almost never do so, and the reason is that they do not get the chance.

No matter how rich an American may be, he generally prefers to wed among his own people. He does not wish to buy a titled wife or connections with nobility. In whatever other respect he may be open to censure, in this he deserves the highest praise. He marries where he loves; and almost always he loves one who is familiar with his own traditions and with the ideals of his country.

Going more deeply into this question of marriage and sex-relationship, let us look at a few more facts which have to do with those who are of entirely different races. In England, for example, there have been numerous marriages be-

tween white girls and Hindus, or even negroes. Prince Victor Duleep Singh married the daughter of an English earl; while there are many full-blooded negroes—educated and trained, of course, in England—who have found wives there. The women who have married such exotic specimens are not at all ostracized by their white sisters.

Reverse the sexes, and the case will be entirely different. No white man, if he be above the very lowest level, would ever dream of marrying a Hindu woman or a negress; or, if he did, he would immediately lose caste and be dropped by his associates.

QUESTIONS OF COLOR

There is a great deal of interesting literature in English which bears upon this subject. More than one of Kipling's stories tells us of the scorn which white men feel for their fellows who, even in the remotest regions, have forgotten the traditions of the ruling race and have yoked themselves with black or brown or yellow women. There is also that interesting book by Mr. F. C. Phillips, entitled, "A Question of Color," which has a direct relation to this point, as do some of the very powerful tales collected by Mr. A. J. Dawson in his fascinating volume, "The African Nights." It may be objected that these are only works of fiction; but good fiction always builds on fact; and thus it is that these stories mirror conditions that exist and are quite real.

Mr. Dawson, to be sure, tells us that a woman who is married to a negro comes to feel a horror of him; and he describes this horror in very striking language:

You can see it if the husband comes into the room suddenly and walks up to her chair. It is a long, indrawing shudder, beginning at the ankles and running upward until it unfolds the hands and they quiver in the lap. Then the shoulders take it from the wrists with a little convulsive twist, and crush it down finally into the fluttering bosom. Not pretty. It is too unpleasant to write or think about—much.

Those who are interested in this subject would do well to read a book written by the late Paul Laurence Dunbar, himself a negro. The volume is now out

of print, and can be obtained only with difficulty. Its author called it "The Sport of the Gods," and in it he gives us a very curious glimpse into certain phases of negro life in the great cities of our own country. It is indeed a unique book, since no other has been written with such intimate knowledge of the subject, nor does any other treat of a world whereof almost all white men are ignorant.

Mr. Dunbar shows us how prosperous negroes live in Northern cities; how they have made for themselves settlements and communities of their own; how they have their own clubs and theaters and places of amusement. What strikes one most in this strange narrative is the fact, which it sets forth quite simply, that the prosperous negro—whether he be merchant, actor, musician, or what-not—mates often with a white woman who is not an out-cast, but who in some cases possesses beauty, refinement, and personal charm, and who unfeignedly loves her dusky partner.

DESDEMONA AND OTHELLO

This recalls some passages in Shakespeare's "Othello" which are perhaps too strongly phrased to be quoted here. It must be remembered that Shakespeare

regarded *Othello* not as a Moor, as we understand the word, but as a negro with "thick lips" and "sooty bosom." It was of him that *Desdemona* declared to the duke:

That I love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world; my heart's subdued
Even to the very quality of my lord.

In these words, written some three centuries ago, the greatest of English poets gave utterance to what we may tentatively regard as truth, though the explanation of it may require much complex psychological discussion. But the truth in question is that almost all women have, lurking in their natures, a love of the exotic which is foreign to most men. It is part of their sensitiveness to color-effects, to novelty, to strangeness, to the unknown, and to all those subtle sensations which are evoked by lights and shades and perfumes and dainty differences.

Perhaps one may call this feminine characteristic a perversion of the sense of beauty which finds an exquisite sensation in what is different and alluring by reason of the difference.

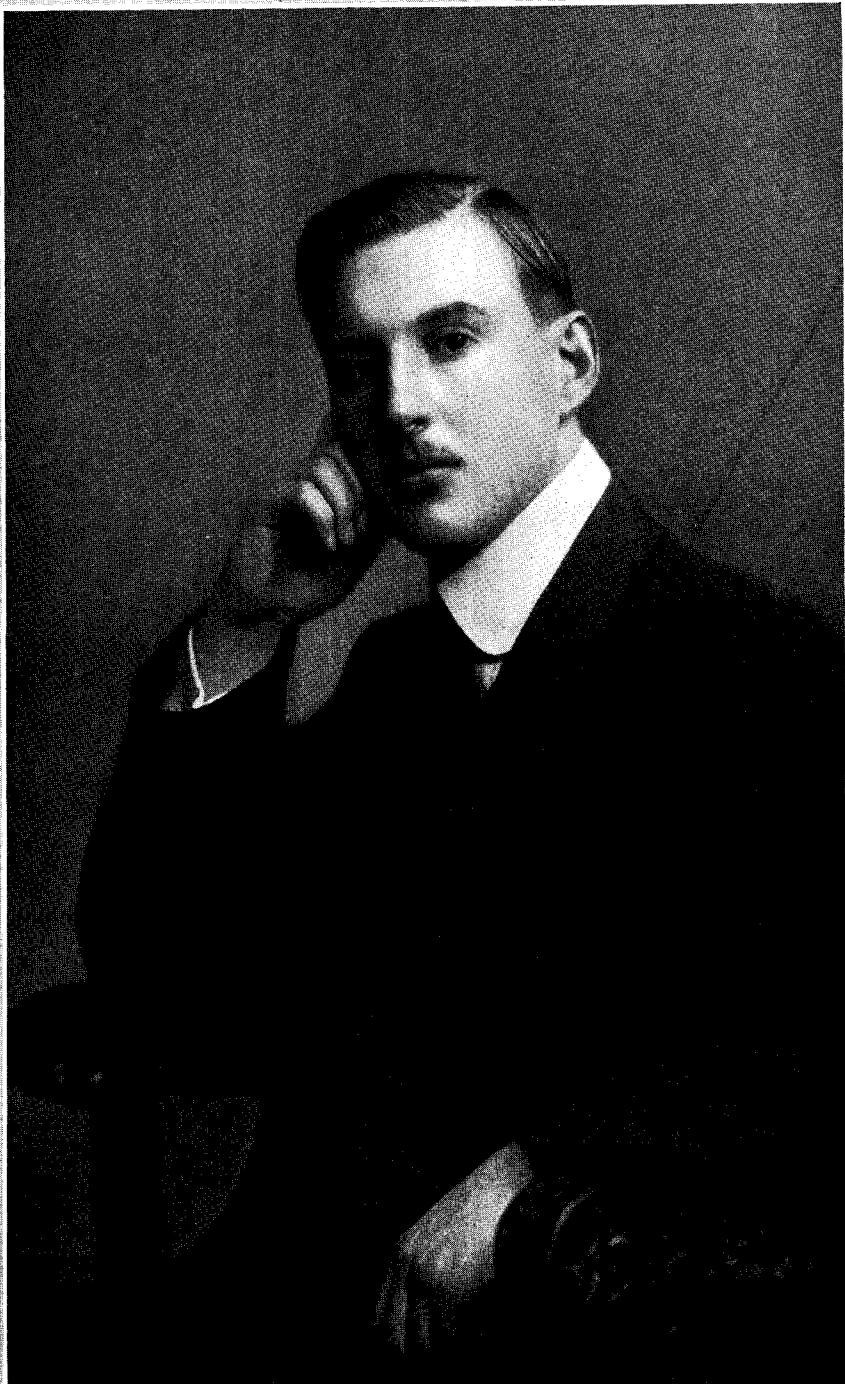
THE TIDES

THROUGH rush and reed
The long, strong tides recede,
Jostle and surge,
And toss and urge,
And foam and merge,
Where lily roots shine bright like bronzen brede.

"Haste! haste!"
That is their cry;
Back to the mother waste
They fleet, they fly,
Again to be embraced—
Again to be a part
Of that great heart!

As set the tides, so we,
After the stress and roar
Along life's shore,
Shall one day set toward the eternal sea!

Clinton Scollard



THE DUKE OF LEINSTER

MAURICE FITZGERALD, SIXTH DUKE OF LEINSTER, WAS TWENTY-TWO YEARS OLD IN MARCH LAST. HE IS THE ONLY YOUNG UNMARRIED DUKE IN THE BRITISH PEERAGE

From a photograph by Lafayette, Dublin