

1890

Travel Articles from the Ladies Home Journal

Mary Jane Holmes

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Travel Articles by Mary Jane Holmes from the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal*

These articles appeared in the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal* between the years 1890 to 1894. Mrs. Holmes and her husband traveled extensively in many parts of the world, and her home, "Brown Cottage," in Brockport NY, was described by contemporaries as being filled with souvenirs of their travels.

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SUNSET ON THE BOSPHORUS.

BY MARY J. HOLMES.

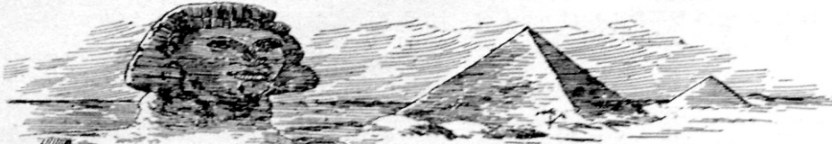


UP the Nile, where the stars which look down upon the empty tombs of the Pharaohs shine with so great a brilliancy that one can almost read by their light, I have seen sunsets so gorgeous that even the yellow sands of the great desert seemed all aglow with the colors of crimson and gold shooting up from the western sky to the zenith like the auroras near the North Cape. But never have I seen a sunset like the one on the Bosphorus, which comes back to me now more vividly than anything else which I saw in the strange oriental city of Constantinople, half Asiatic and half European. We were standing on the deck of the *Behera*, which was to take us to Athens. The city was still shrouded in the gloom of a wintry sky, for it was February, and the wind blew sharp and chill from the Black Sea to the Marmora, through the Bosphorus on which we were sailing. But it was our last look at a place we might never see again, and we staid outside in the cold, watching as far as we could see it, the muddy Golden Horn and the long bridge which crosses it. Then, with a thought of the coming night and the tossing sea which we were entering, glancing at the clouds above us, where rifts of light began to show themselves, followed by patches of blue and salmon, which increased in size and intensity until at last there was spread out around us the grandest panorama of sunset coloring it has ever been our fortune to witness.

In front, to the west, the sun was going down—dying, as the old Egyptians used to think, and, in dying, unveiling its face for a farewell look at the world it was leaving. But it was behind us, on the city that the glory lay—the gorgeous, golden light, falling on the grand palaces of the Sultan and on the gilded dome of St. Sophia, which, from its height of 180 feet, looked like a great ball of fire, and shed its brilliancy upon the windows below until they, too, blazed in the reflection, as if all the many lamps and candles inside the huge building had been lighted for a gala night. Beyond St. Sophia the minarets of the mosque of Sultan Achmed and of Suleiman, the Magnificent, cut the sky, bathed in the crimson-sunshine which shone through the tall cypress trees and upon the old Seraglio, and tinged the water below its walls with a hue like blood.

And now the heavens were all aglow, and as the rainbow colors deepened and the windows of Scutari came into view, the whole city looked as if watch-fires had been kindled on all its hills in honor of some great victory, and that behind each pane of glass in palace and humbler dwelling a candle had been placed. Even the stolid sailors working at the ropes paused a moment in their work to look at that magnificent picture, which soon began to fade, for the sun had gone down and with its going the domes and minarets lost their bright coloring—the candles went out behind the window panes, and the tall cypress trees looked black against the old Seraglio over which darkness was gathering so fast; Stamboul, Galata, and Scutari were lost in the twilight; the fires went out upon the hills; the night wind blew cold across the deck; the blue Bosphorus was behind us; we were on the sea of Marmora, and that glorious sunset was gone forever.

DOMESTIC LIFE IN EGYPT



BY MARY J. HOLMES



PHASES of domestic life in Egypt vary according to the grade to which the parties belong, for where there is an advance in education, with frequent opportunity for intercourse with the English and Americans, there is less of that restraint and espionage which, in our free land, would be unbearable, and which, beginning and chafing the Egyptian women like a harness worn too long.

The Khedive's household is a happy one, for the Khedive himself is a sensible, kind-hearted man, very popular with his people and very fond of his wife. She was the grand daughter of an ex-Sultan of Turkey, and, it is whispered, holds the matrimonial reins rather tightly, and keeps so sharp an eye upon her husband that he has never taken a second wife, although the law provides that he or any other man may have four lawful wives and as many unlawful ones as he pleases.

Taking advantage of this privilege, old Ismail, father of the present Khedive, had in his different palaces, three hundred at a time; but so wretched was his life, with so many women to please and stand between, that he offered fifty pounds and a gold watch to any man who would take one of them off his hands. But as no one was found courageous enough to do it, he emigrated with the entire three hundred to Stamboul, where, I was told, they are all living under one roof and eating at one table.

As a rule, the Egyptians are kind to their wives, and the women of Egypt are less under restraint than those of other Mohammedan countries. They go out quite often, though always veiled, for Moslem law requires that a woman's face shall not be seen by any man who is not a near relative; and when a stranger enters a house he calls out to let them know that a man is coming, and give the women time either to veil or retire, which last they generally do, like a flock of frightened birds. In the street, the disfiguring veil is always worn, except by women of the lower class and by the very young girls, who are as free and untrammelled as the girls of our own country.

Those of the higher and middle classes are frequently attended by a eunuch, who is looked upon and treated with nearly as much familiarity as if he were the nurse of the family; while the girls of the peasantry—the Fellaheen—literally run themselves, and with their ragged gowns, and brown, bare feet, look as happy, when seeking for *beskash*, as do the daughters of the Khedive when driving with their English governess, with the royal runners in front, and the soldiers and band at the palace gate waiting to salute them on their return. But, once married, perfect freedom of action ceases, for the husband keeps a vigilant watch over the charms which belong to him, and any impropriety or boldness on the part of his wife is visited with prompt and severe discipline.

Marriage, with the Egyptian girl, is not a matter of choice, for everything is arranged for her, and at a very early age. To be single at eighteen or nineteen is a disgrace, and it is not unusual for girls to become wives at the age of twelve or thirteen, and even younger.

Of the excitement of love-making the Egyptian girl is ignorant, for when the right time comes, a husband is provided for her and she has nothing to do but to take him for better or worse, and, with no affection on either side, it is quite as often for worse as for better—for how can a girl love a man whom she knows only by hearsay, or how can a man love a woman of whom he has only heard from his sisters or his mother, or some person hired to look up and report the good qualities of the marriageable girls, as one would report the good qualities of any other marketable animal?

It is said that American women are naturally match-makers, and in this respect our Egyptian sisters do not differ greatly from us; and where there are several daughters in a family, the mother herself sometimes makes advances to the young men, telling them of the treasures hidden in the harem of her household and soliciting negotiations. If the impression is favorable, whether received from her or from some one else, the bargaining commences with the father as to the amount of dowry expected for the bride, and the amount to be given with her.

The dots on both sides being amicably settled, the father and son-in-law grasp hands, touching thumb to thumb, while both repeat the Mohammedan creed, and the father says something as follows: "You take my daughter to be your wife and promise to give her—(so much), while I, on my part, promise her—(so much), whatever the sum may be; and this is the marriage-contract, with which the bride-elect has nothing to do, although she becomes, for the time being, a person of nearly as much consequence as are the brides-elect in our own country, with this difference, however, there is no watching for the coming lover, no passionate words or acts of endearment in the out-of-the-way places which engaged people have a

knack of finding, and no planning for the cloudless future. All this is unknown to the Egyptian girl, who can only sit quietly at home, admiring her pretty dresses, if she has any, and speculating as to how she will like her husband, or—what is quite as necessary to her happiness—how she will get on with her mother-in-law, with whom she is to live; for the young man usually takes his wife to his father's house, where, in some cases, she becomes a mere drudge, with little or no sunshine in her life; while in others she takes her place at once as the petted daughter of the harem.

The act of going to the bath, which precedes the wedding, is an important one, and attended with as much ceremony and show as the condition of the family will warrant. One often sees, in the streets of Cairo, a procession, headed by a band of musicians, followed by the married friends and relatives, with numerous young girls surrounding the bride, who looks like a walking bundle of shawls so closely is she wrapped in them to conceal her from view. A second band of musicians, with horns and drums, brings up the rear, and the procession moves very slowly to the sound of the doleful music, interspersed occasionally with bursts of laughter from the girls, who evidently enjoy it all immensely.

The ceremony of conducting the bride to her new home is much the same, except that she goes in a carriage, which is covered with shawls, so that no glimpse of her can possibly be obtained by the most curious looker-on.

In the evening comes the reception, to which many guests are bidden, and where the ladies have a chance to show their handsome frocks, though only to each other, as they are assembled by themselves in an upper room, through the latticed windows of which they can cautiously look down into the court below, where the men sit, stiff and silent, drinking coffee, smoking and listening to the atrocious music which the hired band keeps up. After the reception the man is taken to his wife, whose unveiled face he sees for the first time. If he likes it, the girl's chance for happiness is good; if he does not like it, life must become a burden hard to bear, while in no case can it be very exciting or hilarious, secluded as she is from the world, with, if she belongs to the better class, little or nothing to do except to lounge in her stocking feet upon the divans ranged around the room, go to the bath, gossip and smoke cigarettes, and sometimes amuse herself with needlework or embroidery.

Cosmetics and perfumes are freely used, and an Egyptian lady is as particular about her dress as a fashionable New York belle. At the wedding reception which I attended, the gilded of the women were much like our own; but when they appear on the street they are covered from head to foot with huge, loose gowns of black silk, and as they always ride the donkey astride like a man, the wind gets under the gowns, which stand out like little balloons, so that, with their faces visible above their veils, and their little red Turkish slippers just visible at the stirrup, they present a most peculiar appearance. They are always attended by a servant, whose business it is to keep the donkey going and the way clear for them. If a man meets them, it is etiquette to turn his head away, lest his eyes should rest upon and covet his neighbor's property.

The houses of the upper classes are usually built around a court, in which there is a fountain and sometimes potted shrubs and flowers. The harem, or private apartments of the wife and children, is in the upper story.

The Egyptians are early risers, taking at once a cup of coffee and a pipe. At 11 or 12 they breakfast, and dine some hours later. But the chief meal of the day is supper, to which guests are frequently invited. The hands are washed and grace said before and after each meal, and they often eat with their fingers. The spiritual welfare of the women is attended to by a person hired for that purpose, and one native told us that he paid three pounds a month for a priest to read and pray with his wife every day. All this, of course, pertains to the better class of women, who lead a very different life from the poor Fellaheen, or peasantry, who are, literally, hewers of wood and drawers of water, and whose tired eyes look so sadly and drearily at you over the dirty veil fastened across their noses, as, with one hand they hold a little child upon their back and with the other carry a basket larger and heavier than the child. How they live only Heaven and the missionaries know, for few tourists ever care to visit their homes, which are sometimes rude mud houses and sometimes caves, or tombs, from which the mummies have been stolen. These last are up the river where I looked into one, a rock tomb in the desolate valley of Bab-el-Molook. An iron kettle on a pile of stones was the only article of furniture I saw in the place where husband and wife and children, camels, donkeys and dogs, all herd together at night and hover near during the day.

God pity the poor Fellaheen women and hasten the time when she and all who are now held in bondage by the superstitions of the Moslem religion, may know what domestic happiness means, where woman is a queen and man her loving subject.

Ladies
Home
Journal,
May 1890,
p4.

SUNRISE ON THE NILE.

BY MARY J. HOLMES.



IT was an ancient belief of the Egyptians that the sun died in his western bed and was recreated for the work of the next day, thus keeping himself in a state of perpetual youth; and to those who on the Nile have watched his rising from the regions of

darkness, the idea is not a bad one.

Around you is the river, cool and dewy in the early morning, with a deep coloring of green upon its quiet bosom. To your right and your left strips of a fertile valley, and beyond it the great Lybian and Arabian deserts stretch away into vast seas of sand in the east, and in the west widen out into a broad plain, dotted with some of the grandest ruins the world has ever seen; while farther away a line of hills marks the entrance to the desolate valley of the Tombs, where so many of the Pharaohs were buried. It is a quiet, peaceful scene, with no coloring in it as yet; but a change is coming over it, and you watch the gray of the hills and the green of the river as they take on, first a golden, and then a crimson glow from the eastern sky where the sun is just beginning to show himself, rising, as it were, from the sands of the desert, and flooding the whole heavens with his brightness.

To the west the sunbeams fall on the ruins of the Rameseum, lighting up the Osiride columns which support the entrance to its great court, then falling upon the huge pillars of the corridors beyond, they bring into greater distinctness the hieroglyphics and bas-reliefs which adorn that wonderful relic of a glorious past. Even the broken statue of Rameses the Great, which once stood or sat sixty feet high, a monster king of stone, seems to take on life and motion as the sunbeams creep in and out and over and around it, until in fancy you see it as it was thousands of years ago, seated in its chair, with its huge hands upon its knees and its deep set eyes keeping watch over the great city swarming with human life. And from the broken statue and the Osiride columns of the Rameseum the sun moves on until it strikes the palace of Rameses III., where the haughty monarch once walked in his pride through his marble halls, looking out, it may be, on just such a sunrise as this, which is now covering river and ruin and sands alike with a mantle of purple and gold, and converting into pillars of fire the two Colossi, who, with their faces to the east, have sat watching and waiting no one knows how long and no one knows for what. And as the full beams of the sun fall upon the face of the Vocal Memnon, of which in your childhood you read with a feeling of awe, you involuntarily find yourself listening for the cry of joy with which it was said to have greeted the early morning. But the Memnon is silent now, mourning perhaps for the desolation which has fallen upon that once populous plain, and neither dawn, nor noon, nor night can wring a sound from its fast sealed lips.

And so you leave it in its loneliness and grandeur and turn your face towards Karnak and Luxor, which are still in the shadow, but which soon begin to brighten in the sunlight that shines through the great Hall of Karnak, and, glancing off from the gilded top of Queen Hatasu's obelisk, strikes on the ruins of Luxor just as you step from the boat upon the shore with a picture in your mind of what few have ever seen—a Sunrise on the Nile.

Ladies Home Journal, June 1890,
p4.

A MOONLIGHT VIEW OF NAPLES.

BY MARY J. HOLMES.



O stand on the walls of the Castle of St. Elmo in Naples, and watch the moon as it rises in the direction where the smoke of Vesuvius curls up dark against the eastern sky, is a scene of remembrance.

This view of Naples, and the surrounding country from St. Elmo, is lovely, whether seen in daylight, with its thousands and thousands of houses stretching away to the east and the west, and up the vine-clad hills and terraces to the north, or whether seen by starlight, when the lights from the town shine out upon the sea and show the hundreds of boats moving hither and thither like shadowy phantoms in the semi-darkness. But as moonlight, like the snows of winter, softens and covers up whatever is unsightly or defective, so I think that the city—which is sometimes poetically called the “white rose of the sea”—is most beautiful when the moon is shining over it and hiding the defects upon its petals, for although it may be a rose, it is certainly, in some respects, a very soiled one, and lacks the perfume of the flower to which it is likened. But up at St. Elmo you forget the perfume and the soil and the narrow, dirty streets, and the broad quays, where crowds of people are jostling each other and filling the air with their discordant cries and shouts of laughter, and think only of the glorious panorama spread out before you.

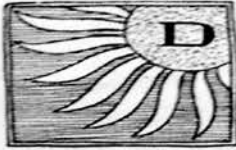
To your right and the west, seen across the tops of the flat-roofed houses, are the hills of Posilippo, crowned with vineyards and gardens and orange trees and the beautiful villas of the nobility; while a little farther on is the wide-mouthed grotto, or tunnel, and near it to the left, on a vine-clad eminence, the so-called tent of Virgil. In front of you, looking south, lies a part of the great city, and at the foot of the hills stands the gloomy old Fortress of Castel del Ovo, whose walls are constantly washed by the waves which, however quiet they may be elsewhere, always beat angrily against the huge obstruction. Farther on, and still looking south across the beautiful bay, is Capri, distinctly defined against the sky, for the blue mist which veils it during the day is gone, and it stands out clear and strong in the full moon of the warm spring night; while beyond and miles away is Sorrento, the loveliest spot the sun ever shone upon, with its bold cliffs overlooking the sea, its gardens of roses and azaleas and its balmy winds, which always have in them a warm breath of summer, even when the skies are gray and the waves of the Mediterranean beat angrily upon the shore. To the left of it, as you look from St. Elmo, you can almost define the dark curve of the hills, with the broad highway which sweeps round the wooded point and along the bay to Castel-a-Mare. Here, trees and hills all blend into one gray background, but you know that the road leads on to where the roofless houses of Pompeii stand desolate and empty in the moonlight, which gives to them a weird-like beauty and peoples them with the ghosts of those who once went in and out between the crumbling walls, and lived and loved and enjoyed, just as we enjoy and love and live, and then, with their city, were suddenly swept from the face of the earth.

Between you and Pompeii, the great mountain, which wrought the ruin, is seen, occasionally sending up spits of smoke and flame as proofs that the volcanic fires are still smouldering inside, although the mighty forces which rouse them into activity may be quiet for a time. Vesuvius, on such a night as this, has a beauty of its own, for its scarred and blackened sides are covered with so soft a light that every jagged point of scoriae and melted rock glisten like the branches of white coral which grow far down in the sea. And as the moon rises higher and higher and brings into greater distinctness the mountain, the hills, the city and the bay, you wonder if moonlight in Eden were fairer than this, and linger on the castle walls until your friend, more matter of fact than yourself, brings you down from the heights by asking if you have forgotten how late it is and that the cabman waiting for you charges by the hour!

Ladies Home Journal, July 1890, p2.

WHERE SUNSHINE BATHES IN GOLD

BY MARY J. HOLMES



“DID you ever see the spot where the sun bathes himself in gold? I was asked by one who gathered all the sunbeams which fell across her path, and found some joy in everything.”

“No; and if there is such a place I do not believe it is very near here,” I answered, looking dejectedly out upon the gray sky and the bank of fog settling down upon the lake and hiding from view the mountains of Savoy which lay beyond it.

“Yes, it is,” she replied. “It is in a deep, narrow canyon, we should call it in Colorado, and it lies among the terraced hills where the grapes are growing so thickly. A waterfall comes tumbling down from the height above, and I found it accidentally that day I was out so late. You must see it near sunset; I’ll take you there when the storm is over. It is finer after a rain.”

We were at a hotel in Switzerland, on the shores of lake Geneva, where Byron was rainbound when he wrote his famous poem, “The Prisoner of Chillon,” without having seen the prison, it is said, which accounts for the impossible things he made Bonnivard see, as he paced his weary, round and measured the length of his chain day after day, until even the spider became an acceptable companion. And here we were bound by the great financial crash which swept over the country when the firm of Jay Cooke & Co. went down and left so many tourists stranded in Europe until help could come from home. We were in Interlaken when the blow fell, and leaving Lauterbrunnen, and the Grindelwald, and the Yungfrau, we went back to where we had left our luggage; and as the great hotel was beyond the means of people with only a few francs in their purse, we stopped at the smaller house, where, if not luxuriously placed, we were comfortable at least. And there we waited while the days went by and a rainstorm came on which lasted nearly a week, and reminded us of Byron, whose room, with the sign over the door telling that he once occupied it, we visited often as our sole diversion.

How it did rain, and how the wind blew and screamed at us through the windows and under the doors, while we huddled round the fire and piled on the wood, until it seemed that, unless the weather abated, there would hardly be enough left in Switzerland to make so much as a lead pencil! And what should we have done without that Colorado girl, who laughed and sang as merrily at the last, as at the first of our dreary stay in Ouchy. Accustomed to the wild canyons of her western home, she had fearlessly explored every nook in the vicinity of the hotel, and found, as she said, a wonderful spot where the sun took a golden bath before going to bed.

And at the close of a beautiful day, after the rain was over, she took me there—by what path I cannot tell, except that it was up hill and down, and more down than up, until we stood at the bottom of a narrow ravine, between two of the steep terraced hills which skirt the shores of Lake Geneva. Through this ravine a waterfall had found its way, and, fed by the recent rains, was leaping impetuously from rock to rock, pausing for a moment on each, while it threw up wreaths of spray, and then, as it reached the last shelf, plunged into a shallow basin below. Here it was churned into froth, like the water which drops from the wheel of a mill, and then went on its way through a tangled undergrowth towards the lake, distant a mile or more. Behind us the ground sloped back to the west, where the sun was near his setting; and as he sank lower and lower, there came suddenly upon the waterfall a deep coloring of crimson and gold, with the reflection of many suns whirling and dancing for an instant upon the upper shelf of rock, then darting down to the next and the next, until the entire fall was like a kaleidoscope with all the suns which had ever risen or set, performing a wild fantasia, and throwing out all the hues of the rainbow.

I do not know why it was, and cannot explain it, but I watched it breathlessly until, with the setting of the real sun, the last reflected one fell into the pool and did not appear again.

“He has had his bath and gone to China. He will not be back till to-morrow, and we had better go home,” the girl from Colorado said; and with a feeling that I had been repaid for the long and tiresome walk, I made my way back to the hotel and dreamed that night, as I have often dreamed since, of that wild ravine in Switzerland and the golden sun-bath of which I can never think again without a throb of pain; for associated with it now is a little grave under the shadow of Pike’s Peak, where last autumn they buried the young girl from Colorado, whose sun has set thus early here, but risen again in the glorious dawn of a day which knows no ending.

Ladies Home Journal, July
1891, p6.

NIGHT AMONG THE BAVARIAN ALPS

BY MARY J. HOLMES



THE Passion Play we had come so far to see was wearing to a close. Behind the mountains, which inclose the little village of Ober-ammergau, the sun was going down and leaving behind it a radiance which gilded the hill-tops with a wonderful brightness, and transformed the cross on Kofel into a blaze of fire. For eight hours nerve and brain had been on the rack while we watched the great drama, from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the closing scene when the cry, "It is finished," made us glad with a great gladness that all was over, and henceforth there was nothing but joyful anticipations of the Easter morning, when the truth of the Resurrection would be verified. It had been a day of excitement and fatigue, and it was a luxury to rest upon the bench in front of the house where we were stopping, and listen to the sweet-faced old woman, our hostess, who was knitting by the door and trying to talk to us. The streets were full of people, thousands of them who had come to see the play and were now going home. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, Americans and English, Germans and French, jostling against each other, and anxious to get away; the titled lady in silk and satin, whose destination was Munich or Innsbruck, and the lowly peasant woman in her cotton gown and wooden shoes, who thought nothing of a walk of sixteen miles which must be accomplished before she reached her home far up among the Tyrolese hills. On Mt. Kofel, where the huge cross was standing, the sun was still shining with a brightness which the old woman pointed out, with the words, "See the glory showing."

And truly, it was a glory which that sunset threw over all the fir-clad sides of the mountains; and when the red disk disappeared behind a tall gray peak, and the purple shadows began to creep across the river and the valley and up to the heights where a few white, misty clouds were floating, it was easy to understand why to the superstitious fancy of the woman there was in every cloud an angel's face come to view the scene of the great tragedy, and to keep watch over the tomb which, to her, was more really in Ober-ammergau than in Jerusalem. How the colors deepened and changed as the daylight faded, until, at last, there were only a few bars of crimson and gold marking the spot where the sun went down. Then suddenly, on the opposite side of the valley, where the jagged peaks were piled high above each other, there came a luminous light like that which heralds a fire, except that it was soft and silvery, and the rocks and trees and hills grew white and ghostly as the moon rose higher and higher in the heavens and brought into greater distinctness the little town with its humble, low-roofed houses, nearly each one of which held an actor, who was either sleeping quietly after the day's excitement or praying for grace and strength for the morrow, when the work must begin again.

"'Tis like where He has gone," the old woman cried, dropping her knitting, and folding her hands reverently as the moonlight fell upon her upturned face, while I wondered if the city which needs no sun by day nor moon by night could be fairer than this scene on which I was gazing.

The little town, the towering peaks, the piled-up rocks, the grassy hillside, where cows were feeding and from which came the tinkle of a bell, the whole valley flooded with light which shone like pearly gleams upon the river running swiftly by and singing, as it ran, what sounded like an echo of the sad refrain of the song I had heard that afternoon just before the curtain rose upon the last act of the Passion Play. It was a picture to be hung upon the walls of one's memory and never to be forgotten; and it comes to me over and over again, making me glad for that moonlight night, and glad that I have seen the Passion Play, which, while it would be sacrilege anywhere else, seemed almost a sacrament in that far-off town among the Bavarian Alps.

Ladies Home Journal, September
1891, p4