

CHAPTER X.

WOMAN—THE HAREEM.

Thus in the ever-closed hareem,
As in the open Western home,
Sheds womanhood her starry gleam
Over our being's busy foam.
Through latitudes of varying faith,
Thus trace we still her mission sure,
To lighten life, to sweeten death,
And all for others to endure.

R. M. MILNES

ON entering a strange country, its women are the first objects of interest to the moralist as well as to the epicurean; to the former, because the education of a people, and the framework of its society, depend mainly upon maternal and domestic character; to the latter, because almost every grace and charm of daily life is owing to her influence, or interwoven with her being—"On a dit, qu'il y a de la femme dans tous ce qu'on aime."

Among the lower classes of all nations, especially in the country, the life and habits of women approximate more or less to that of men in an inverse proportion to their civilisation. As they share with the ruder sex their labors, hardships, and daily occupation, among savage tribes almost the only distinction between the sexes is physical. It is of the Moslem woman of the middle and upper classes that I am now about to speak, and I do so with a diffidence proportioned to such mysterious matters.

Difficult a study as woman presents in all countries, that difficulty deepens almost into an impossibility in a land where even to look upon her is a matter of danger or of death. The seclusion of the hareem is preserved in the very streets by means of an impenetrable veil; the well-bred Egyptian averts his eyes