

Dear Mr. Gephart

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The Millheim Journal

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A FLIGHT. It was at Constantinople. We found ourselves in a fleet of sixty vessels, of all nations. Ours was the only vessel flying the American flag. The time hangs heavily when ships are waiting for freights or winds to start them into active service. Pera had become dreadfully dull to us, and we had done up Constantinople and the surrounding country to our heart's content. With the exception of an occasional dinner at the consulate, there was no recreation to be had—no theaters or operas. A dozen of us tried to swing the Bosphorus from the point from which Byron was said to have started. He must have accomplished his feat in the summer, for we signally failed in the attempt, owing to the temperature of the water, and were glad enough to be taken on board our boats before we got half way. Our only resort was a hotel which was kept by the wife of the captain of the port, who was in exile for murder. She was a true type of Grecian beauty, a native of Athens, who such a person as the heart who swam so well would immortalize in verse. Between the hotel and the landing where we took our boats for the ship was a distance of about three-quarters of a mile. Most of the streets were guarded by gates, which were closed at night, when no one was allowed to pass—unless sailors, who with a few pistols, could bribe the guard to open for them at any time. We never ventured past the gate unless we were armed to the teeth, for the streets were full of robbers, who would have shot us on the spot. In one hand and pistol in the other, ready to defend ourselves against robbers, who did not hesitate to take life. The Turkish authorities took no notice of troubles arising among foreigners. The consuls were supposed to care for the interests of their own people. I saw a Greek stab and rob an Austrian captain within twenty feet of a Turkish guard, who did not interfere, and who showed less interest than he would have shown at a fight between two packs of dogs. The street which was our regular route to the ship had a gate and a guard house at either end. Blank walls about twenty feet high extended some 500 feet along both sides of the street. Behind these walls were the palaces of two of the grand pashas. We could only see the windows of the upper stories; the magnificence within was left to our imagination. As we were walking past one afternoon one of the windows was suddenly thrown open, and there appeared at it the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. We were fairly electrified by her beauty. She had defied a well known edict in showing us her face, as we knew. Instantly as she appeared we saw her throw something over the wall, and which she had picked up. We all rushed to pick it up. The prize was won by a Swedish captain, who immediately pocketed it. When we arrived at the landing the Swedish captain invited me on board his ship. We had been so intimate during our stay that the rest of our party could not take offense at this preference; but how anxious they were to know the contents of that note I find this having, from which they do not, nor would any divulge its contents which justly belonged to its captor. One on board, the note was opened, when an agitation seized the captain which made him appear to me like a lunatic. "Captain," he said, handing me the note, "you are married, and circumstances have proved how much you love your wife. I am unmarried, and have fallen desperately in love. Help me by your advice. What shall I do? My ship is ready to sail, and the wind is fair. I do not own the vessel or cargo and therefore have no right to detain her. Read, and tell me what to do." As my own marriage had been very romantic, this affair was doubly exciting to me. The note was written in a good English hand, as follows: "I know you are Christians, and will save me from this life of degradation. Entombed in this harbor, from which there is no way of escape, I appeal to you in mercy to save me. God, I know, will open your hearts, give wisdom, and guide you to-morrow night to a silken thread thrown from this window, near where you found my note. To the thread attach your answer. Death awaits discovery." The night was spent in devising means of rescue. The captain swore upon the Bible that he would marry her if she would consent that he should put into full ruyah with his feelings, and when the day broke our plan of action had been determined. I saw that he was unfitting to go to sea, his head being entirely turned, and to ease his conscience upon the point of his duty I pointed out that the interest of all parties would be served best if he should defer his departure until the dark moon, when the plan devised could be put into operation. This would necessitate a delay of five days. Among our friends we were to pretend that no importance attached to the missive which the lady had thrown out. As a reason for his delay in not sailing the Swedish captain was to say that he had discovered a leak in the ship's side after he had loaded her, which made it necessary to caulk her for repairs. It required much tact to get the captain to consent with whom he had been in daily company, and to make excuses to stay ashore late every night. We stayed ashore to become well acquainted with the guards, whom we thought we could induce, by appearing to be half drunk and by a liberal use of money, to open the gates for us at any time. The first night we half staggered up to the gate, handed the guards 100 piasters and then showed them our empty pockets, whereupon they allowed us to pass through the gate, pointing to their hearts to assure us that no one should pass that way to molest us. Each of us carried the usual paper lantern to illuminate the way, and we were well armed with pistols and cutlasses. During the day we had paced the distance from the gate to the spot where we might expect to find the thread, and we now had but to pace the same number of steps in the darkness. During the day also we had not failed to show ourselves frequently in the street to let the prisoner know we meant to communicate with her. We found the thread and attached our note of reply, first putting out our lights to avoid discovery. Softly pulling the thread, we felt a gentle strain in reply, and the note was pulled up, to reach, we prayed, the hands of her who so anxiously awaited it. On our return to the gate it was immediately opened when we had knocked and the guard had recognized our English voices.

Our letter to the lady contained the following: "The fifth night, counting from to-morrow, we will rescue you by a rope ladder. At 1 o'clock we will attach a strong line to the end of your cord. Pull this until the ladder reaches you. The line will weigh sufficiently strong to bear your weight. Place the line over a hook or post, but do not make it fast. We will hold the end, so far not. The line will be withdrawn after your descent, so that no one will discover the manner of your escape. There will be no moon. Before daybreak you will be on a vessel under way for England. If you can devise any other means or have any suggestions to make you can communicate as before; we will pass night and day with some token from you. We are two who have sworn to save you. One of us will ascend to assist in your descent if you desire it. May God, to whom you have prayed, nerve you to your task." The next night we received the following answer: "I will provide the ladder, which you will pull toward you by the cord. I have a trusted eunuch who will assist me, as his life belongs to me. Think well of the danger. I have no right to place you in jeopardy. In case of discovery, you will prove your guilt; you would be seized and disposed of, none would know how except the headsman. Your crime and mine are punishable by death. My life is nothing, nor would I be missed, but you have loved ones at home. Should you change your mind on the night appointed, God have mercy upon me! I will not live to see the light of another day. I have often meditated this act. I have always prayed, would deliver me, and that I would be allowed to thank him in his sanctuary. If you do not find the cord, you may know that I have been betrayed. If all is safe, the cord will be weighted with a silken purse containing jewels to reward you and to assist me in my escape. Should you not find this token, it will be because I have been discovered. Then be on your guard against assassination. I shall not look for you until the hour named." My friend, Capt. H., had fallen most despondently in love. I say despondently, because he neither slept, ate or drank, nor would he give me any rest. It was reassuring to me to see a fellow so far gone; I had thought myself the only one who could be so "cracked." He was always at my heels, and had become my shadow. I learned his whole history. The cause of his going to sea was the removal of a flaxen haired, blue eyed schoolmate, who had been his beloved little friend from his earliest memory. Her parents had moved to Moscow, and thence, as he was informed, to Odessa, from which port he had last sailed, with a cargo of grain for Falmouth for orders. At Odessa he had made the most searching inquiries, and learned that a family of the same name had gone to Alexandria about six years previous. He had been, until our present adventure remarkably quiet and diffident. He had told me that his diffidence arose from the fact that he was almost a woman hater, and that he never expected to be happy until he found his early love, whom he last saw when she was 11 and he 12 years of age. His interest in the fair captive was doubtless aroused by the fact that she strongly resembled his early love. The evening light arrived. I gave a supper at the hotel to allay any suspicion. Sapper was ordered for twenty, and was served at 11 o'clock, which meant an all night sleep. Wine flowed freely, and had its effect upon our friends. At 12 o'clock, by a preconcerted arrangement, a note was handed to me by a servant. I pretended that it had been sent by my second officer, and that it announced that my chief officer had killed one of the crew. Apologizing for my sudden departure, I promised to return as soon as possible and finish the night. My friend, Capt. H., insisted upon going with me. I protested, but he was obstinate, and finally as the company insisted that it was not safe to go alone, we two left in company. We arrived at the gate in our usual apparently drunken condition, fed the guard liberally, and passed through. A few minutes later we returned and had our cigars and lanterns lighted, pretending that the latter had been put out accidentally. They were ready in assisting us that we gave them another handful of piasters, and made them understand not to allow anyone to follow us. They earnestly promised and we started again, our hearts almost bursting with rapid pulsation. We found the cord; a purse was at the end of it. So far all was safe. Turning to the farther gate as quickly as possible, we repeated our former strategy. The ladies, and the guards promised us that while we were in the street nobody should pass them. Thus we had the field to ourselves, with guards on either hand to protect us from interference. We returned to the spot where the purse lay. It was readily discovered by reason of its brilliancy, being worked in gold and silver threads. A stout cord was attached to it. We pulled gently upon the cord and drew down a ladder made of silk. The night was dark, not a star visible. He sprang up the ladder and disappeared. We were so taken by surprise that we could not have defended ourselves if occasion had required it. Treacher or not we did not know but we stood at our post. Presently we felt by the strain on the rope that some one was again descending. This time it was the lady herself. She sprang lightly to the ground, and a moment later came the man who had before descended. He was the faithful sailor. He fell on his knees and begged to be taken with us. But this was impossible. He was to be relieved by another guard at 4 o'clock, and his absence would have caused the discovery of the escape. She advised him to return, close the window, and let the rope. She would not be missed until noon, when it would be impossible to know during whose watch she made her escape. It might be supposed she had committed suicide, as she had frequently threatened to do, and might have done so by throwing herself into the Bosphorus through a trap in the floor of a boat house near by.

She did not speak nor evince any terror, but trusted us entirely. As we heard footsteps rapidly approaching, and feared pursuit or a meeting with street marauders, we lost no time in reaching the gate. The guard I called I immediately. The word "American" had a charm for them, especially as it was followed by a handful of piasters thrown at them when the gate was opened. I presume they imagined we did it in our drunken fun, but it was really to draw their attention from our companion. After we had passed through I locked the gate and threw away the key. The guards were too busy picking up the money to heed a thunders at the gate after we had gone. We did not reach our boats too soon, for we could hear muttering voices and tramping feet close behind us. With muffled oars we pulled for my friend's brig. We had proceeded not more than fifty yards from the shore when we heard our pursuers jumping into boats at the landing. Who they were we could not tell, but they had not the customary lights with them to indicate that they were honest citizens. The extreme darkness favored our flight among the many vessels anchored in the harbor, most of which had their anchor lights up. My friend's vessel had two lights in the main rigging as a private signal. These were put out as soon as we reached the deck. Entering the cabin we again saw the face of the lady. As I have before said she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. I could not help feeling that my friend was not the handsome fellow that deserved to be united to such loveliness, yet the gods must Venus and Vulcan. The Swedish captain was speechless with admiration. I acted as his ambassador, and informed her how desperately in love he was, and that he was determined to save her or lose his life in the attempt. She was now free to act for herself, but I was sure that if she married him she would have a loving husband. As I had been concerned in her rescue from captivity I felt it my right as well as my duty to urge her to accept him. She did not utter a word, but she did not leave the cabin until my friend's crew would assist him. The vessel must be outside of the harbor, I said, before daylight, and before sunrise be well into the Sea of Marmora. And so we parted.

It was three o'clock when I reached my ship. Sleep was out of the question. The events of the previous day were like a dream out of which I had just awakened. The consequence might have been serious to me. But I was always ready for adventures, and had been in many a predicament equally hazardous. I lived, as all young sailors live, on romance and daring. The excitement of this occasion was an exhilaration to me as champagne is to the wine bibber. In the morning I was visited by several of the captains who had been my guests of the night before. They had felt some fear for our safety when they learned that a conflict had taken place between the guard in the street we passed through and a band of Greek robbers. Two of the robbers had been killed. These must have been some of the robbers who had attacked them, had returned and attacked the guard. They were overpowered by a company of soldiers from the fort, who were making their rounds to relieve the guard. Of course I knew nothing of what had become of the Swedish captain. I assured them that he went safely on board and was to have sailed at sunrise, and that, as the wind was fresh and fair I supposed he was off. I feigned an attack of rheumatism as an excuse for not going ashore that day. The following day our command, hearing I was sick, came on board. From him I learned one of the wives of a pasha of the army had made her escape by the aid, it was supposed, of the Greek robbers, some of whom had been captured, and would be executed unless they told where their companions and the captive were to be found. It was supposed that she was held for a ransom. A rapid search was made on board all the Greek vessels, of which there were many lying at the harbor, but, of course, the missing lady was not found. I will here give the sequel. Nine years later, while in command of the clipper ship Dreadnaught, arriving in New York one day I made fast at my usual berth at the foot of Rector street, when Capt. Hope, a Sandy Hook pilot, who was harbormaster at the time, boarded my vessel and told me that a Swedish brig was lying at pier 8, and that her captain was very anxious to meet me before he sailed. The Constantinople episode had nearly passed from my mind in the exciting years that had intervened. As soon as our gang plank was hoisted aboard a lady and gentleman came on board. I was standing on the quarter deck with some custom house officers and passengers. The lady, whom I immediately recognized, came forward and embraced me with much warmth, and the gentleman followed suit. The pleasure attending this happy meeting was shared by all who witnessed it. It is needless to say that the pair were the Swedish captain and the lady whom I assisted to escape from Constantinople. That truth is stranger than fiction is here exemplified. After leaving Constantinople their joy was unexpressed upon discovering that they had been lovers in their childhood. She was the daughter of a Swedish girl for whom my friend had pined so long. When they parted as children her family went to Moscow, where they remained several years, and where she had the advantage of an excellent education and became a proficient linguist. Her great beauty attracted universal attention. She was courted by many, but won by none. Her father received the appointment of consul at Odessa, but gave up this place and migrated to Alexandria, where he became a grain exporter. This frequently necessitated journeys into the interior of Egypt, and his beautiful daughter was his constant companion. During one of these excursions their caravan was assaulted by Arabs. The men were slaughtered and robbed and the women were disposed of among the chiefs. She fell to the lot of one who sold her into the harem, where she was rescued by us. When the air arrived at Falmouth, after the rescue, they were married, and sailed for Antwerp, where some of her jewels were disposed of to purchase an brig which he commanded when they paid their visit to me on board the Dreadnaught. They sailed together around the world, but this was their first voyage to New York. Col. Graham, now clerk of the court of common pleas, was custom house officer in charge of my ship at that time, and he lives to bear witness that he heard this remarkable tale told in my cabin by the Swedish captain at that time. My friend the captain has a 3d his vessel and retired from a Lieut.-Capt. S. Samuel, of the Dauntless.

Bats are not Birds. There are few animals about which so many superstitions have been believed from very early times, as the bat, and even now the creatures are by many regarded with dread. When one of them flies into a room at night, all hands give chase, and the useful little insect hunter is too often killed. Our bats are quite harmless, and the stories of blood-sucking, told of those in South America, are only partly true. Our bats, of which we have about half a dozen, are all small, being but a few inches in length, but there are those in the East Indies, the wings of which have a spread of four feet. These monsters are fruit eaters, and do not attack animals at all. The early naturalists classed the bats with the birds, but their ability to fly is the only thing they have in common with birds. They only differ from other mammals in their having long fingers, over which a long thin skin is stretched, reaching to the hind feet and tail; this forms the wing, and usually ends in a hook by which the animals can suspend themselves. The hinder feet are supplied with stout claws, by which they also hang when at rest. The eyes of the bat are so small and hidden by hair, that it was at one time supposed that they had no eyes, and "as blind as a bat" is a proverb still in use. However it may be as to their sight, their senses of smell and hearing are very acute. Some species of bats, like the Long-eared Bat of Europe, have enormous ears, and some species have curious leafy appendages to their nose, which are thought to aid the sense of smell. Bats are nocturnal in their habits, flying at night with great rapidity, and whirling about with the ease of a bird, in their chase after night flying insects, of which they consume great numbers. In the day time, they secrete themselves in old buildings, in caves, in hollow trees, and such places. In Texas there are a number of churches which, when that State belonged to Mexico, were built by the missionaries among the Indians. These are now deserted, and more or less in ruins. We visited one of these buildings that had been taken possession of by the bats, which hung to the timbers of the open-work roof, and wherever they could get a foot-hold, in myriads. Upon being disturbed, they would set up a tremendous chattering, and, although it was daytime, would fly about our heads in swarms. Some idea of their great number may be formed from the fact that their droppings covered the floor to a depth of three or four feet.—American Agriculturist for October.

Window Gardening. "How do you manage to have so many beautiful plants?" is a question often asked of successful window gardeners, and we feel inclined to answer as did the doctor in the case of the old lady who had been taking too much medicine, that all that is needed is, "Light, and water, and air." But there are so many things involved in these three that it is well, perhaps, to be a little more explicit. A window facing the south is the best with a glass door or curtain to shut off draughts and exclude dust. Sprinkling the leaves with a fine brush, if a syringe is not practicable, will help to keep the breathing pores open and healthy, which every plant requires. Injudicious watering often destroys plants. No rule can be given, but the first thing is to see they are kept moist but not saturated and that the water used is about the temperature of the room. For the green fly, and all other common insects, there is nothing so effectual as a mixture of kerosene and soap, to which is added a little kerosene that has been first mixed in milk, as it will not combine with water. All soft-wooded plants should be placed nearest the light; harder ones in the rear. In potting see that there is good drainage of broken pots or any rough material that will not clog and sour the soil. Too much heat is often given, and many plants, as roses, azaleas, camellias, alcyon citriodora, the various lycaods, hyacinths and other bulbs of that sort will thrive in a room without a fire there is no frost. The best soil is one-third leaf-mould, two-thirds good turfy soil, well rotted, and a little sand added to the mixture. Fine manure is beneficial to geraniums and to bulbs, but most plants thrive best in manure water. Saxifraga ubra and the Lysimachia nummularia are safe basket plants, while the ivies stand cold treatment; if given shade and water. It is agreed that gas from a furnace is more injurious to plants than illuminating gas, but by proper attention to moisture and the screening of the window and excessive heat, it is possible to be successful in window gardening. Keep a thermometer in the room, never more than 75° by day and 45° at night. This will be the best guide.