

did not see them perform, for he was told by a fellow traveller that 'the exhibition was indecorous to a degree, and that he was glad when it was over' (*A Winter on the Nile*, 1888, pp. 255-6). The Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava was invited to a performance and found it 'very peculiar'. She sat through a few dances and then left, 'knowing that we should see nothing new' (*My Russian and Turkish Journals*, 1916, p. 284).

Mme Jean Pommerol spent some time in the Sahara, where she found the women to be very childish. After relating how they spent time dancing in front of each other, she went on to explain the reason for this. It was only a rehearsal for the real thing – the time when they would perform for men. It was apparently inconceivable to her that women might just have enjoyed dancing for its own sake. Countess Malmignati, however, set out searching for romance and was entranced by everything about the desert life. The dances she witnessed by torchlight outside the 'Sultan's' tent were like a stage spectacle, a wonderful setting for the romance she sought.

In a word, the ways of the women of the Sahara are full of contradictions; contradictions of feeling, of sentiment, but everything is more or less childish with them, even their dancing, of which they are insatiably fond. I have already spoken of the dancing of the women of Wargla, but the love of this amusement is general in the Sahara, and women dance before each other in a manner not a bit more modest than that of the fassedett, though it is decidedly less graceful. Between their cups of tea they give themselves up to posing in all manner of attitudes, twisting their bodies about in a manner often anything but pleasing, holding themselves rigid, whilst the spectators stare at them, and assuming indifferent, passionate, polite, or disdainful expressions, according to the mood of their audience. They seem to like to practise what will please the opposite sex when no representatives of that sex are present. Although they are not aware of it themselves, there is, in fact, something voluptuous about them, an unconscious struggling after an erotic ideal in their dancing, the ornaments they wear, and the perfumes they use.

To please! To please! That is their one desire, and they have so very few opportunities of pleasing the opposite sex. For all that, in this country where those who wish to be attractive have not yet hit upon the idea of low-necked bodices, they accumulate fine clothes,