

Veiled Women of Damascus and Queer Marriage Customs



In Constantinople the women are doing away with the veil.

Ladies of the Harem



A young Mohammedan bride



Ladies of Damascus

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 DAMASCUS—Special Correspondence of The Bee.—Ho! Ye bright-eyed, fair-skinned girls of America! Drop for the moment your hobble skirts and peach-basket hats and take a look at your sisters of Damascus in faraway Syria! How would you like to exchange your life for theirs? How would you like to spend your days without showing your face to the light of the sun? How would you like to go about in a great bag of black silk which is tied in at the waist so that it covers your form from the head to the feet, except for a short thick veil of black which enables you to feel your way along the street? How would you like to be penned up in the back of your house, or to have your front windows so latticed that you could see out only through holes as big around as a lead pencil? Aye, more, how would you like to never talk to any man but one of your own family, and worse, never to have any other man or boy talk to or see you?

This is the condition of the girls of this fanatical city of Damascus. It is the fate of millions of other women in Turkey, and of the female Mohammedans throughout the whole world.

Among the Veiled Women.
 Within the last thirty years I have visited every Moslem country on earth, and have worn out my eyes trying to see through the veils which hide the fair sex. In Morocco their faces are covered with cotton, and they peep out through a crack as big as your finger, made by pulling the cloth slightly apart in front of the face. In Kairoon the girls cover their faces with black crepe so thick that you cannot tell whether they are negroes or whites; and in Tunis they are so shrouded that they have to lift up their cloaks a few feet in order to pick their way through the streets. In Zanzibar the girls wear bags which cover them to the feet, and their only view of the world is through peepholes as big as a 50-cent piece, which are hedged across with lace netting, so that a man cannot see in. In Egypt the headress comes down to the eyebrows, and a veil extends from there to the knees, with the exception of a crack for the eyes, the crack being kept open by a gold or brass spool which rests on the bridge of the nose. In Constantinople the fashionable Turks are doing away with the veil or using thin white gauze through which the face can be plainly seen. It is thus that the harem of the sultan is dressed, and thus the wives of all the rich men.

In Damascus.
 Here in Damascus the women stick to veils of flowered muslin or black crepe and they wrap themselves in great balloon like cloaks of black silk or tulle. These bulge out above and below where they are tied at the waist, making each maiden look like two huge lumps of sausages as they waddle along. I see hundreds of them every time I go through the city. They throng the bazaars, where they bob back and forth as they talk with the merchants. They may be seen picking their way through the side streets or sitting on the floors of the mosques reading the Koran and watching the men go through their prayers. Many of the veiled figures are those of small girls. They take the veil at 11 or 12, and the veils are kept on after marriage, until death.

And then the houses! All of the Mohammedans have homes so latticed that the women cannot be seen from the streets. In some cases the windows are built out over the sidewalks, hanging out like boxes of wooden work. This is so in the new apartment houses which are now going up, and also in the huts of the poor, although the latter seldom have windows except at the back. The ordinary lattice is made of cane-like rushes or sticks, and preparing them is a special trade followed by many. The rushes are brought in to Damascus already trimmed on the backs of donkeys, which as they go fill the streets with their loads.

Queer Divorce Laws.
 It behooves the Mohammedan woman to be strict in her conduct. The husband here has most of the rights, and he can divorce his wife, or wives, whenever he will. He sometimes does so without thinking, and that to his sorrow. I heard of such a case yesterday. According to the laws of Damascus, if a man wishes to get rid of his wife he has only to say, "I divorce you! I divorce you! I divorce you!" and the woman must leave. After she has gone, however, she cannot come back as a wife until after she has been married to some one else. To get around this, an angry husband, relenting and loving for the dear departed, arranges to marry her to a friend, a dervish,

or to some half-crazy man, who for a sum will go through the ceremony of a wedding and then immediately divorce the woman, who can then be married again to her old husband. In the case referred to the man had a quarrel with his wife and angrily muttered the words of divorce. Immediately she had gone he repented, and thereupon brought about her marriage with an alleged friend, upon the understanding that a divorce was to follow the ceremony. The friend, however, refused to utter the words of divorce, saying, "I like the woman and will keep her myself," and so it is at this writing.

Such divorces are always on the part of the husband. As for the women, they have more difficulty in getting rid of the marriage tie, although they can do so, provided the husband does not perform his duty to them or give them an equal amount of attention with the other wives of the family. According to Mohammed every man had the right to four wives, but the Koran provides that he must spend an equal time with each of them, and in some places he is required to give each a separate establishment.

Marriage in the Holy Land.
 During my travels in the Holy Land I have picked up some interesting stories of marriage and divorce. Every sect has its own customs. The Jews can divorce easily, and after that they can marry again. The orthodox Greeks can only marry three times, and some of the Christians are not allowed a divorce without cause.

In all of the Jewish weddings the girl brings a dowry, the amount of the dot being mentioned in the contract of marriage. This contract is always signed in the presence of the rabbi, and the wedding ceremony takes place under a tent in the court of the synagogue. Before marriage the bride is shaved from her head to her feet, and after that her head is always kept covered. At the ceremony and after it they have music, with drums, cymbals and harps, and many of the old-fashioned customs of Bible times are preserved. The Jews marry young, and a girl is an old maid at 20.

The Peasant Mohammedans.
 The Mohammedans of the villages usually take wives when they are entering their teens, and marriages at 12 years are not uncommon. The man is usually older, and it is customary for matured men to marry young girls and to add them to their harems as the first wives grow older. In such cases the groom pays money to the father of the bride. This is the reverse of the Jewish marriages, where the money goes to the groom. The price for a Mohammedan wife ranges according to the financial condition of the contracting parties. The contracts are made by the elder people of the family. If there is a father he decides upon the marriage. If the

father is dead the oldest brother may act, or in some cases the mother.

The customs as to the right of the family to dictate the marriage are rigid. The other day a peasant living near Jerusalem had a sister who ran away with her lover and married him. This was after the family had objected to any union of the two. The peasant took a revolver and went after the bridal couple. He met his brother-in-law in Jerusalem and shot him dead on the street. When arrested he justified the crime and he is now imprisoned awaiting trial. I am told he will get off with a slight punishment, as he has acted within his rights according to the Koran.

Brides of the Cities.
 Among the city Mohammedans the bridegroom makes a present of a dowry sufficient to enable his bride to purchase her trousseau and household furniture. He may give her six or eight hundred dollars, and the greater part of this will go to her nearest male relative, being paid before the wedding takes place. On the other hand, he and that relative may buy the outfit together, making items of the various things and their cost. Often the whole dowry is not paid, 25 or 30 per cent being left until after the wedding. This is not demanded, except in case of divorce, and it is considered a premium that will insure good treatment on the part of the husband.

The bride seldom sees the groom before the wedding, and the groom never meets her before that time. The investigations of both families are carried on by the fathers and mothers, independent of the real parties to the marriage.

How They Marry in Syria.
 I asked a Mohammedan friend of mine last night to tell me how marriages were arranged here. Said he:

"When a boy is old enough to have a wife, let us say at 17, his parents begin to look about for a suitable girl. The mother goes to the karensa of her acquaintance, and asks as to the daughters. She also visits the girl's school, and when she has found a maiden whom she thinks may suit, she invites the mother of the girl to meet her at the bath. This is one of the chief places of gossip and pleasure, and it is not uncommon for ladies to meet there. To the bath the girl comes with her mother, and she there has her first interview with her prospective mother-in-law. The two talk and gossip together, and very likely go into the harem and plumes, clad in the light attire of two Turkish towels, the fashionable garb for the occasion. After the bath is over they have something to eat.

There is more talking and the girl is asked up mentally and physically. Upon the return home the mother of the groom tells her husband the result of her investigations, and if he is pleased negotiations

are begun with the parents of the bride. If agreeable the dowry is fixed and the betrothal is made. Neither the marriage nor the betrothal can be consummated without the consent of the girl. This consent is gotten in connection with the man, or Mohammedan priest, who appears at the door of the harem of the bride's mother. The girl is behind the door and she is asked if she will consent to the match. She has to answer "I will" three separate times, after which the amount of the dowry may be paid over, in the presence of witnesses.

Queer Wedding Ceremonies.
 In all oriental countries the wedding ceremonies are very important. The marriage is always an occasion of protracted festivities, and not to be invited is a grave offense. One of the proverbs here is, "He who does not invite me to his marriage will not have me at his funeral." Among the Mohammedans the wedding ceremonies often last a week, during which there is feasting on the part of both families. The dowry is given before the wedding, and at the time of the ceremony large amounts of money are thrown to the beggars. The wedding feasts usually begin Monday. Tuesday the bride is taken to the bath and

there is a feast there, the bridegroom paying the expenses of the bathing and eating.

Wednesday the bridegroom's lady friends go to the house of the bride, where they have a concert and dinner. At this time the finger nails and toe nails of the bride are stained red with henna and they begin to deck her out for the wedding. Thursday the bride is taken to the groom's house in a great procession and there the two eat candy, exchanging mouthfuls or bites, the idea being that nothing but sweetness is hereafter to pass from the lips of one to the other. The bridegroom has not seen the bride until this time. He here says a prayer in the presence of the bride, kneeling on her bridal veil as he does so.

Mohammedans of Palestine.
 Among the Mohammedans of Palestine, so says my guide Shammam, the wedding usually takes place at the mosque, and the bridegroom meets his bride when she is on the way thither, although she is so veiled that he cannot see her. She is dressed all in white and is carried under a canopy on the shoulders of four men. At the mosque the wedding sermon is given, and at the end of this the bride goes to the house of her husband. As she steps over the threshold she bends down and passes under two crossed swords upheld by his friends; this means that if she is not true to her husband he will kill her. She is taken first to the women's apartment or harem, over the door of which has been placed a piece of leavened dough with a green leaf lying upon it; she presses the palm of her hand on the leaf and into the dough, thus signifying that the home into which she has come is a flourish. In some cases the bride breaks a piece of leavened bread and gives to the young people to eat.

After she has entered her own apartment in the groom's house there is a feast, the guests sitting on the floor and eating course after course of meats and vegetables, interspersed with candies and syrups. In some cases the groom has to make the bride speak before the dinner will be served, and it is a virtue with her to keep silent just as long as she can.

Woman's Rights in Syria.
 It is the general idea among Christians that Mohammedan wives have no rights which their husbands are bound to respect. I am told this is not so, and that the women here not infrequently rule their husbands. The cost of living has increased greatly within recent years and it is only a rich Mohammedan who can own several wives. Public sentiment as to the rights of women has risen and the man who abuses his wives is not considered respectable. No man dares address a strange woman on the streets of any Turkish city, and in the best regulated houses the husband does not enter the woman's apartments when he knows he is not wanted, although he has the legal right to go there at any time.

The Mohammedan wife has the entire right and control of her own property, and if she brings the money into the family she does not hesitate to say so. She has about as much power in the courts as our women have; she can sue and be sued, and can even enter a suit against her husband in regard to her own property; she can make a will and leave her property as she pleases and she can force him to pay the dowry agreed upon. When she marries he has to buy the wedding gown, and if he divorces her she gets back her trousseau.

Slave Marriages.
 It is said that women are still bought and sold in the Turkish possessions. Not long ago there was a regular trade in the black girls who were brought across the Sahara from Central Africa and shipped through Tripoli into Syria and other parts of Turkey. Before the English took hold of Egypt this trade was carried on through the Nile valley and it was winked at by the officials. It is said to be still in vogue in Morocco, and slaves are brought in from parts of the Caucasus to Constantinople.

According to the law of the Koran marriages with slaves are legal. The wives of the sultan are largely slaves who are brought in from Georgia and Circassia, a plump, bright-eyed, red-headed, white-skinned girl being worth as much as half a dozen white horses. I am told that Circassian girls are sold to be sold out of the hardships which they are sure to find in their own country; they are bought young and are trained up for wives; such as can play on the zither and other musical instruments bring more than the ignorant, and the blonde is worth more than the brunette. In the past \$5,000 was not a high price for a Circassian girl, and any good-looking Georgian maiden of 12 would bring \$200 and upward. According to law the children of such slaves are legitimate.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Irrigating the Waste Land of North Dakota

NEBRASKA and Iowa land owners along the Missouri river will be interested in some projects now being worked out on the upper reaches of the treacherous stream by the United States government in the line of irrigation. From recent reports it appears that, among the many wonders accomplished by government engineers in the redemption of arid lands under the reclamation act, there is nothing more unique than the group of pumping projects in North Dakota by which means the hitherto uncontrollable Missouri is harnessed and made to irrigate thousands of acres of land that have needed only the touch of water to make them fertile.

Since the earliest days of western history the "Big Muddy" has been looked upon as the most uncontrollable of streams, says a writer in the New York Tribune. The keel boatmen who poled many adventures up the streams in the days of the fur hunters had countless thrilling experiences with the erratic stream. Many a successful trapper, floating his furs back to the St. Louis market, struck a snag in the boiler, muddy river or was thrown against a sandbar by a clutching eddy and was heard of no more.

In later years the ranchers who have settled along the Missouri have had their troubles with this giant among streams. Sudden floods have come, wreaking untold damage. Then, too, the channel of the stream has constantly shifted. Owing to its winding course and the sandy nature of the soil through which it travels the Missouri is constantly changing its bed.

It cuts swiftly through a neck of land and perhaps abandons its old channel for one miles away.

To harness such a stream as this has been considered impossible, but government engineers have proved the contrary. They have tamed the ferocious "Big Muddy," and the stream which hitherto had no master is now irrigating several thousand acres of land in North Dakota. Pumping barges in the stream send a steady flow of water to huge settling basins, and from those basins many irrigating canals are filled when water is needed on the farms that are springing up on the bench lands. The variance of the river makes no difference in the work, for the barges rise and fall with the stream. Even if the river saw fit to change its channel it would not escape these monsters that have brought it to subjection.

The government has several pumping projects in western North Dakota which raise water from the Missouri to irrigate bench lands which cannot be reached by gravity systems. The Williston and Buford-Trenton projects are the ones which have the unique features mentioned. The lands included in these projects are ideal for farming, but it has been impossible to get water to them on account of their height above the channel of the river. The general elevation of the land is about 2,000 feet above sea level. The soil of the bottom lands is a heavy clay, but the desirable bench lands are a rich, sandy loam, requiring about two acre-feet of water per annum. The principle crops grown in this locality are wheat, flax and oats, with alfalfa and sugar beets growing in

favor. Recognizing possibilities of this neglected area of the land, if it could be brought under water, the government engineers working under the reclamation act devoted much time to a scientific study of the difficulties to be overcome. Finally the large pumping plan was decided upon. The power problem was quickly solved. There are thousands of acres of lignite coal underlying the lands surrounding Williston. A power plant was built at Williston, and from the coal at the very doors of the plant power is quickly and cheaply generated. The electricity is conveyed to the pumping barges, which are anchored in the river. The water of the "Big Muddy" is pumped through the huge pipes to settling basins above. So muddy is the water that it is allowed to settle before it is pumped into the system of irrigation canals radiating from the settling basins. If the water were discharged into the canal directly from the river the silt would necessitate constant work in repair and cleaning.

One of the remarkable features of this project is that the coal used for generating electricity is mined and delivered by gravity to the furnaces at the power station. The initial cost of the Williston project includes about 5,000 acres of the bench and valley lands surrounding Williston, but the system will be enlarged to cover about 15,000 acres. There is a state experiment farm near Williston, which is of assistance in demonstrating the methods of irrigation to settlers. Land has been reserved for a government townsite about eight miles north of Williston.