

THE OLDEST UNIVERSITY IN THE WORLD.

Where the Koran Is the Chief Textbook—Before the Crusades El-Azhar Existed at Cairo—Many Students.

One seldom hears of what is probably the largest and oldest school in the world, El-Azhar, "the splendid," at Cairo, Egypt. While the dates of the founding of the universities of Oxford, Paris and Bologna, for which great antiquity is claimed, are lost in the mists of the Middle Ages, El-Azhar can read its title clear from the year 975 A. D. Constantinople is the official head of the Mahometan religion, but the summit of Mussulman learning may be secured only at El-Azhar. Thither flock from every land owning Mahomet as its religious guide those of all ages who would be proficient in the Koran and other branches of Oriental learning. More than ten thousand students, according to Frederic Courtland Penfield, formerly United States Diplomatic Agent and Consul General at Cairo, who has described the university in his book, "Present-Day Egypt," (published and copyrighted by The Century Company), sit at the feet of the instructors about the pillars.

The oddity of the university is manifested at the first glimpse of the building which houses it. The restorations have been too numerous to leave any indication of the original structure,

and each of the instructors has his particular pillar about which to gather his students. The lecture finished, the students respectfully kiss the hand of the instructor and hasten away to the pillar of another instructor to become absorbed in another subject.

While all this is going on other students are performing their purifying ablutions at fountains found here and there in the inclosure. Some are prostrate in prayer, with heads turned toward a niche in the largest assembly room, which indicates the true direction of Mecca. In the great quadrangle students, singly and in groups, are seated on their sheepskin rugs, toiling over their lessons. Some are stretched at full length, asleep. No one awakens them, masters and students alike carefully stepping around their recumbent forms. Cats without number stroll about the court, rubbing against the students or sniffing about their bowls of lentil soup. This is the cats' paradise, for dogs are "unclean," according to Koranic teaching, and are never permitted to enter. A few bread and water peddlers make their way between the groups of students, always careful not to disturb the sleeping ones. A few students are

fers him to the book and asks for the reading of the reference.

Education may be secured at El-Azhar without price and almost without money. The university is so richly endowed and owns so much valuable property that no scholar is obliged to pay anything, although many, from choice, contribute to the expenses. There is a spirit of democratic equality among the students. In robes of silk, the son of the pacha or bey squats beside the peasant lad, scantily clad in coarse cotton. Here and there among them sits one wearing a green turban, indicating that its wearer has made a pilgrimage to Mecca or that his family is believed to be descended from the Prophet. The students are very like the students of other universities in their love of a good story and a joke. An El-Azhar student is always under the supervision of the school authority, even when he is roaming about the streets. Should he be caught misbehaving, the police officials could only hold him until an official from the university arrived

to take him into custody. An incentive to enrolment in the university is the immunity from military duty which is accorded to a student there. One or two thousand of the students actually live within the walls of the queer university. As the spirit moves them they get out their simple fare of a bowl of lentil soup, a flat loaf of bread—perhaps one of the nine hundred distributed by the university to needy students—a handful of dates, or perhaps of garlic, and make a meal.

While the students have completed their school work for the day by noon, apparently they have few amusements to occupy their spare time. They rise with the sun to offer the first prayer of the day. There is no definite recess in the school year at El-Azhar, but the several religious feasts provide enough holidays to make the ordinary parent satisfied.

The curriculum includes the Arabic grammar, religious science, the Koran being the textbook; religious and secular jurisprudence, literature, philosophy, logic and upright living as defined by the Koranic teachings.

WILD EASTER SCENE AT JERUSALEM.

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tapers to be lighted, and they then passed on the light aloft to those in the galleries, so that above the great mass of tiny, flickering lights

through Jerusalem at this hour solitary individuals or groups of men and women could be seen carrying the precious light to the churches awaiting it, and also to their homes.

Within the church arose a universal shout of glad thanksgiving from the shrill voices of hundreds of pilgrims, accompanied by the cries and shrieks of fanaticism and dispute which were appalling in a house of prayer. Throughout the Holy City cheerful bells pealed forth to proclaim to all the inhabitants the good news of the advent of the miracle.

The "Bishop of the Fire" now emerged from the tomb, holding bundled tapers three feet long, with which to light the candles in the Greek Chapel within this Cathedral. In his great anxiety to reach the church safely and swiftly, and in the midst of the tumult of the multitude who clamored eagerly around him, anxious to light their tapers from his, the aged man fell, and his long white beard took fire. This caused a great commotion. After the blaze had been extinguished by the use of the long flowing sleeves of a devoted pilgrim, the bishop was lifted on to the shoulders of some priests to raise him above the crowd and carried into his own sanctuary, for the revered old man was too unnerved to proceed further alone.

Presently many of the pilgrims began extinguishing their own lights with their handkerchiefs, which they would henceforth treasure for life. The women, devoutly crossing themselves, pressed the tapers to their bare breasts in their religious enthusiasm, thus extinguishing their candles. Heedless of their scorched flesh, they hastened to obtain new light from the tapers of kindly neighbors. Some of the men put the lighted tapers to their faces and beards, with the supposition that they would not burn like earthly fire, to find, however, much to their surprise, that their superstitious imagination was leading them too far in the hallowings of this fire.

In former days, at this climax, a dove was let loose from the cupola, to further mystify the pilgrims by the miraculous appearance of the emblem of the Holy Ghost.

Before leaving the church, many pilgrims lingered yet a while, to besmear with the melting wax of these torches pieces of linen, which were destined to be their final shrouds, and would now have power, through the merits of the sacred fire, to preserve their souls from the flames of hell.

Now the Greek pilgrims flock to the Jordan to bathe in its sacred waters. After this they feel assured of having won eternal salvation.

Another service of great interest held in Easter time week in Jerusalem by the Greek Church is that of the "washing of the feet." This ceremony is celebrated on Maundy Thursday. The Greek Patriarch and other dignitaries of the Russian Church, attired in their most gorgeous robes, make a grand display of imitating the Lord's example of humility. This service is held in the large open court before the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where visitors and pilgrims gather. With great pomp and ostentation the Greek Patriarch washes the feet of twelve priests, especially chosen for this purpose.

IN SANDY HOOK.

Barney met a brother Celt on the street one morning last week, and with a feeling of great excitement, said:

"They do tell me, Pat, that a whale have got inside Sandy Hook."

"How is that?" asked the other sleepily.

"I don't know, but he's there."

"Thin Sandy must have the devil of a big stomach."—(Short Stories.)

THE GENTLEMAN FARMER.

A. J. Cassatt, the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, has a stock farm on the outskirts of Philadelphia, and at a recent dinner of the Philadelphia Clover Club a friend of the eminent railroader said: "Mr. Cassatt has a fine stock farm, and he runs it on a business-like basis. Sometimes he makes money out of it of it.

"Last year he bought a pig for \$27, fed it forty bushels of corn at \$1 a bushel, and then sold it for \$31.50.

"I made \$4.50 out of that pig," he said to



OLDEST UNIVERSITY IN THE WORLD, EL-AZHAR, OF CAIRO, EGYPT.

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but there is no doubt of its relation to Mahometanism, for lofty minarets of Oriental type rise here and there. Little can be seen of the exterior, however, for it is closely surrounded by buildings. Within is a court, the sky its only roof. On each side are alcoves covered by roofs supported on pillars. The porticos about the enormous open court are each divided into various compartments for the separate use of the students of the different nations. The Algerian students have one, the Moroccans another, the Nubians a third, the Turks another and the Indians still another, and so on. The different sections of Egypt each have a separate compartment; those who come from the resting place of the bones of Mahomet—Mecca—are also provided with a section, and blind pupils, strangely more fanatical and turbulent than the average Mussulman, also find special accommodation for themselves.

Although only a drive of a few minutes from the hotel district, comparatively few foreigners take the trouble to visit the strange educational institution. Many are unaware of its interest. It is reached by the street of shops, the Mouski, and the narrow lane known as the "Street of Booksellers." Picking one's way between the conglomeration of humanity, camels, donkeys and Arab workmen, sitting cross legged on the floor of their boxlike little shops, binding the curious looking volumes, one reaches the entrance known as the "Barbers' Gate." Passing a number of students who are having their heads shaved so closely that they look like a French wigmaker's shiny artificial poll, one gains the interior of the building. Students and masters who are entering are removing their shoes at the threshold. Here and there at the foot of the pillars are seated the "professors" on rugs of sheepskin, discoursing to groups of students squatting in a half circle about them. The pupils are listening intently. Discussions of different themes are going on. Not a student turns to look at the visitor, so interested is he in the discussion. The covered portions of the building are supported by 300 marble pillars,

washing some of their garments, drying them in the sun, or mending them. All in all, it is a unique domestic scene that is spread out in the big court.

The masters to the number of more than 225 direct the education of the numerous students. Their title is sheik, the head master—one selected from the faculty because of his superior knowledge and great holiness—being styled Sheik El-Azhar. In the eyes of the faithful he ranks only a little below the Khedive himself. Few American scholars would be tempted to become members of the faculty, for there is no direct compensation from the university. They do, however, receive liberal allowances of the staff of life, especially those of a certain degree, who draw several hundred loaves of bread weekly. This is a traditional custom. There is a suspicion that many of these loaves find their way to shops outside the walls of El-Azhar, and are sold. There are, however, opportunities for emolument outside the school. At odd hours the masters usually teach at private houses, copy books, attend to the duties of a petty office of a religious character to which a small stipend is attached, or read the Koran at weddings and funerals. A radical thinker among the members of the faculty would soon find himself out of his element, for, while four orthodox sects of Mahometans are represented among the instructors, independence of thought is never found among them. A teacher advancing new theological views would create more of a sensation in the Mahometan world than ever did an advocate of higher criticism. Progressiveness is discouraged as a dangerous tendency, and masters and pupils learn only what may be found in books centuries old. Every branch of study is pervaded with religion.

Surprising as it may seem, some of the teachers are unable to read. They know the Koran by heart, and as the study of this is the chief occupation of the juvenile pupils, they supervise the instruction of the youngsters in this branch. The excuse of "weak eyes" suffices if one of the "professors" of a higher grade re-

in the basilica shone a dome of sparkling brilliancy ablaze with myriads of tapers, which cast a magnificent reflection of gold and red on the animated faces in the balconies. Looking down from above, the spectacle was one of dazzling beauty. The lighted torches were being waved to and fro by the ever swaying multitude, casting a reflection of myriads of tiny lights on the glittering decorations around the church. A splendid background of saints and angels encircled the throng. The scene was one of triumph combined with conflict still, for now entered an element of the ever ready spirit of antagonism and jealousy existing between the different sects of the Oriental Church. Those who were exultant in the proud possession of the precious light looked with disdain on those who were not so fortunate, while the latter, envious of the bearers of lighted torches, did their best to extinguish the lights they held. Thus there began a strange conflict, almost like child's play, if the solemnity of the occasion and the fierce looks of the combatants had not belied the possibility of there being an element of amusement in this wild and jealous chase. The people continually lighted and relighted their tapers while extinguishing all those of inimical neighbors, yet all the while struggling to hold their own lighted tapers aloft and out of the reach of those who were endeavoring to put them out.

The Armenian youths who had lighted their tapers direct from the light as it streamed out of the opening were ready at once to start on their errand of meritorious work—to carry this sacred light to their own churches in and around Jerusalem. Holding silver lamps which were fashioned to shield the sacred fire, they passed out through the avenue reserved for them. Other fortunate bearers of the light hastily pressed through the excited throng by the energetic use of their arms and limbs, to reach the convent chapels in the villages around Jerusalem before their tapers should be burned out. They ran for miles barefoot, carrying aloft their lighted torches. All