LIFE IN MODERN PERSIA.

QUEER SCENES AND CUSTOMS IN THE LAND GOVERNED BY THE SHAH.

An Interesting Talk with Mr. S. G. W. Benjamin, Late U. S. Minister at Teheran—Odd Marriage Laws—The Danger of Looking at the Shah's Wives—Fine Gardens.

Mr. S. G. W. Benjamin, United States Minister to Persia, who was recently recalled to Washington, arrived last week in this city, and remained here several days. He is a short man, with reddish hair and moustache, and strongly marked Puritan features. There is, however, nothing else Puritanical about him. He is an artist and writer, and a pleasant conversationalist. In speaking about Persia, he said:

"I arrived there on June 1, 1883. The accounts of my reception and the presents bestowed upon me have been greatly exaggerated. It has always been the custom for the King to send a horse to each new Minister on the latter's arrival, and the Minister naturally makes a present in return to the man bringing the horse. It would be an insult not to give a return present, and the value of that present depends on the rank of the person to whom it is given. I received the horse, as well as the hospitality shown me, in the name of the United States Government, not for myself; the Department at Washington so understood it, and readily met the moderate gratuities which were spent on the occasion—gratuities common in more or less degree in other countries than Persia. The horse is now at the legation and belongs to the United States Government. It is of fine Arabian blood and has won several races. Every other legation there spent more money in this way than I did. I didn't have it to spend, because as our Government has only a mere bagatelle of four hundred millions salted down in the Treasury, we cannot allow the expenditures made by the old monarchies of Europe, but must give them the precedence. I was, however, obliged to make some presents at my own expense.

"The European colony at Teheran, the capital of Persia, comprises, including the legations, about 300 persons, and they live in the new city. The majority inhabit the ordinary Persian house. This is one story high, of unburned brick, and built around one or more courtyards. The great thing sought in Persia is seclusion and privacy. In walking through a street one sees nothing but these walls of houses, some fifteen or twenty feet high, with flat roofs, and with no windows whatever. They are covered with plaster to keep the brick from being worn away by the rain, and kept in repair just as centuries. The monotony of the walls is relieved by mouldings and cornices. The entrance is a small door richly decorated with Saracenic work. The Persians have always been ever decorative architects. Persian architects built the Alhambra in Granada, and or ginated the Moguf architecture of India. And after going through a narrow winding passage, you suddenly step into a courtyard more or less magnificent, according to the wealth of the owner. Courtyards of two and three acres in extent are not uncommon, and some cover five acres. They are filled with parterres of flowers and trees of the most luxuriant foliage. Here and there are great tanks, some of them fifty yards long with jets of water playing in them. Every household in Teheran has its courtyard and tank of water, no matter how poor he is. Frequently there are three or four courtyards, and there is one called the andaroon, into which no man ever enters except the master and his eunuchs. It is reserved for his wives and concubines. A wealthy Persian can have fifty or sixty wives, if he chooses. These women drive out in carriages and visit one another, and are watched with the greatest care. The wives of poorer men go about on foot, but all alike are covered with a dark blue mantle, which falls to the feet, concealing the form. Over the face is a white veil, with apertures for the eyes.

"The rooms have large windows set in richly decorated sashes and opening on the courtyard, and frequently these windows are studded with colored glass, giving a cathedral effect to the high-ceiling rooms. All the rooms have dirt floors, but they are hardly noticed, for they are covered with enormous Persian rugs. In one part of the room there is a mattress covered with rugs, and on this the Persian sits during the day and sleeps at night. Some of the rooms have tanks in their centre, giving them an air of luxury. I often wonder why water is not used more in this way in other countries. It does not exceed the boiling point in the climate in Persia is very dry. There is a separate room for the bath, and its appointments are often luxurious. Christians are obliged to have separate baths from the Mohammedans."

"What are the daily habits of Persians?"

"Every one from the king down rises at 6 o'clock in the morning. They then partake of a cup of tea and some bread. Tea is a very important article of diet in Persia, and the tea urn is nearly always busy. No milk is used, but they sweeten the tea almost to the consistency of syrup. Then over, the merchant goes to his shop in the bazaar. This bazaar consists of a long street or series of streets, with side streets, which are opened here and there to admit light and air. The merchant sits in a booth in front of his store and awaits custom. He charges a much higher price than he expects to get, after the usual Oriental style. At noon he makes a substantial breakfast in the bazaar, and has an afternoon siesta from 12 to 2 P. M. He takes a nap. About 4 o'clock he goes home and takes a ride, returns to dinner, and then at about 7 o'clock enters his andaroon. When one enters, he sees a succession of rooms, some fifteen or twenty feet high, with flat roofs, and with no windows whatever. They are covered with plaster to keep the brick from being worn away by the rain, and kept in repair just as centuries. The monotony of the walls is relieved by mouldings and cornices. The entrance is a small door richly decorated with Saracenic work. The Persians have always been ever decorative architects. Persian architects built the Alhambra in Granada, and or ginated the Mogul