

Women of Damascus--Queer Marriage Vows. How Mohammedan Wives Are Chosen. Brides and Bridegrooms of the Levant



A YOUNG MOHAMMEDAN BRIDE FROM MOUNT LEBANON.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Damascus. Ho! Ye bright-eyed fair-skinned girls of America. Drop for the moment your hobbles and peachbasket 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 latticed that you could see out only through holes as big around as a lead pencil? Ay, more, how would you like to never talk to any man but one of your own family, and worse, never to have any other men or boy to talk to or see you?

This is the condition of the girls of this fatal 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 past 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 Kailash 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 neck, 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, the women stick to veils of flowered muslin or black crepe, and they wear the great balloon-like cloaks of black silk or called. These bulge out above and below where they are tied at the waist, making each maiden look like two large lumps of sausages as they waddle along. I see hundreds of them every time I go through 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 eleven or twelve, and the veils are kept on after marriage until death.

And then the houses! All of the Mohammedan houses are 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 network. This is so in the new apartment houses which are now going up, and also in the parts of the town, although the latter seldom have windows except at the back. The ordinary lattice is made of cane, the rushes or sticks, and supporting them is a wooden frame fastened by many. The streets are caught in it, Damascus is a city of women, and the streets with their loads.

Other things I saw. 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 at any time, wherever he will. He sometimes does so without thinking, and that is 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!" and the woman must leave. After she has done this, 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, repenting and longing for the dear departed, arranges to marry her to a friend, a dervish, or to some half crazy man, who for a sum



LADIES OF THE HAREM.

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 to repent, and thereupon brought about her marriage with an alleged free, upon the understanding that a divorce was to follow the ceremony. The man, 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, and 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 marriages the girl brings a dowry, the amount of the dowry 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 entering the tent the bride is shaved from her head to her feet, and after that he 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 days are preserved. The Jews marry young, and a girl is an old maid at twenty.

The Penitent Mohammedans. The Mohammedans of the villages usually take wives when they are entering their teens and marriages at twelve years are not uncommon. The man is usually a young man, and the 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 re-

verse 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 eldest 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 kind. The peasant took a revolver and went after the 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, and 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 in which she has come will flourish. In some cases the bride breaks a piece of leavened bread and gives it to the young people to eat.

Women'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 are not inferior to 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 do so 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 re-

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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 hotroom and plunge, 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.

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 are held in the house of the bride, and the bridegroom is taken to the house of the 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, and 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 in which she has come will flourish. In some cases the bride breaks a piece of leavened bread and gives it to the young people to eat.

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gard 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 traffic 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 a half-dozen white horses. I am told that Circassian girls are glad

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 twelve would bring \$200 and upwards. According to law, the children of such slaves are legitimate. (Copyright, 1911, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

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