



A YOUNG ARAB GIRL—STILL UNVEILED

## Arabian Children at Home

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**I**N all the world there is nothing so universally appealing as a little child. Whatever may be our estimate of the adults of any race, concerning the babies there can be but one opinion—they are made to love. There is something that is irresistible in the wide-mouthed, guileless smile of a baby, whether he be white, red, brown, yellow or black.

Life in an Arab town is sometimes very sordid. There is so much to make one shudder, so much to wring one's heart. Then there is also the monotony. Sand, sand, sand! Oh, for one grassy slope, for just one shady nook carpeted with ferns! But there is always the sky, the glorious, glowing sunset, like a highway to the gate of heaven, and in some places there is the ever-changing sea, and always, there are the babies!

Brave warriors are the Arabs, galloping full speed into the face of danger, laughing at machine guns and bombs dropped from hostile aeroplanes, suffering silently the pangs of death because death is "from Allah." Now see the warrior's little son. They have mounted him upon a steed. Full, flowing garments wears the little man, just like his father. Has he also the piercing eye, the long lean face? No, that will come. Today, he has a laughing eye and dimpled face.

Little Arab sister, with sweet, olive-tinted face, and great, wondering brown eyes! O you beauty! They have loaded you with jewels to show their love. They have petted you and spoiled you. They will lavish on you wealth and luxury. Then, when the lovely bud of maidenhood is ready to unfold, they will tear the blossom open and stand by to see it fade. O you darling! If you could only have a chance!

Little Hassa came one day to see our little daughter. It was a holiday in the Koran school, and the school girls had donned their silks and jewels. There was to be a party for them, with dancing in the court-yard of their school. There, Hassa would unbraid her black hair and join her schoolmates in their swaying dances, shaking flowing tresses, clinking jewels, snapping fingers, and moving to the rhythm of hand-clapping and the singing of the spectators. Little Hassa is the daughter of a wealthy family. On the crown of her head she wore a huge, gold ornament, studded with pearls and turquoises. Her dress of silk brocade was elaborately embroidered in gold. Around her neck were necklaces of large gold coins. Heavy jewelled bracelets adorned her wrists. Earrings of pearls and turquoises swung from her ears. One pierced nostril was ornamented with a jewelled hoop of gold. She was very proud of her finery, and in high spirits.

Our little daughter, clad in pink rompers, and playing in the sand, was happy too.

“Naima,” (our daughter’s Arabic name), asked Hassa, “Where are your jewels? You have none?”

Naima shook her head. “Oh!” cried Hassa, “you poor thing!”

When I heard Hassa say this there came to me a vision of the probable futures of those two children. I saw our little girl, in free America, rolling hoops and jumping rope, while Hassa was secluded and guarded within the confines of her home, lest she be seen by men. Then I saw our little one, a few years later, a sweet girl graduate; then Hassa, fourteen years of age, would be spending sleepless nights to still the crying of her first-born child. I saw our daughter walking arm in arm, with comrades on a college campus; when Hassa, a disappointed, sad-eyed woman, divorced, remarried, would be supplanted by a partner-wife. I saw a young American woman, brave-eyed, equipped for life. The occasion was a student conference. She was singing, and her face was lighted with a holy joy. Yes, I heard the words, “We are on the Lord’s side, Saviour, we are Thine.” Then I saw Hassa, eyes dimmed with weeping, repeating her sacred creed, “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is Allah’s Apostle.” Her jewels? Oh, yes, they were safe in the box by her side.

The children of Arabia have such splendid material in them. There is nothing degenerate about their race. I find the Arab

women extremely lovable. Not only that, I am conscious of the feeling that these women are, in everything except opportunity, our equals. Fortunate are we, indeed, if they, proud aristocrats, do not consider us their inferiors. They have ability, and no one can tell what they might achieve if they were given half a chance.

As for the men, they have excelled in many ways. The beauty of Arab poetry and the remarkable breadth of their theological



ARAB BOY PLAYING WITH A CAPTURED BIRD

thought, are well known. Arabic grammar is intricate, logical, and highly developed. The mind that produced these is not to be despised. Yet the average Arab schoolboy is considered well educated if he knows the "three R's" in his native tongue, but nothing of history, geography, or science. The majority of boys cannot even read, and, with them, illiteracy is no disgrace.

An even smaller proportion of the girls are sent to school. A few are taught to read the Koran, and chant it by heart. The girl who is taught arithmetic or writing is very rare indeed. Yet some girls are so eager to learn these things that they succeed in mastering the rudiments at least.

The Arab is no mean workman. Sea-faring crafts, made by Arab builders, are often admired in the ports to which they go.

The pearl fisheries of Arabia, though primitive in the methods they employ, are the most important factor in the pearl markets of the world. The date-gardens of Mesopotamia are the chief supply of the world's date market.

Arab courage and virility are a factor not lightly regarded by their enemies in warfare with civilized nations.

In hospitality, the Arab leads the world.

All these fine capabilities are inherited by Arab children. To be sure, there are other characteristics of the Arab which are not desirable. What about their cruelty, their sensuality?

Yes, we admit, there is much cruelty among the Arabs. It is spring-time, just now, and the scattered, walled-in trees of our town are full of birds. If you look closely, you see that they are also full of bird-traps, for the catching of these pretty songsters for play-

things is a regular business throughout the months of spring. As you pass along the streets, you notice that almost all the children are holding birds in their hands, their wings clipped and one wing or foot secured to the end of a string by which the child drags his captive. The roads are strewn with dead birds and parts of birds, which have ceased to serve as playthings, and have been supplanted by new victims in various stages of suffering.

One remonstrates in vain. "Little boy, why do you torture that bird? Don't you know you hurt it? Don't you know that God made that bird, and it is dear to Him? God is looking at you while you torment it. If you let it go it cannot fly, won't you put it out of its misery?"

The only answer is a laugh, and one passes on sick at heart.

We tried once to make a mother understand. We said to her, "Why do you give your child a bird to play with? You women complain that your husbands break your hearts. Do you know that it is partly your own fault? Do you realize that you are training your son to be heartless? You are teaching him to look on a bird suffering, and not care. When he is grown up he will look on women's suffering in the same way—and not care.

"Why, that's so," said the woman vaguely, and then she laughed, as much as to say, "how extraordinary of you to think that all out!"

As to sensuality, that is, without doubt, the worm at the heart of the Arab. In Christian lands, sensuality is opposed by religion, and exists, not encouraged by it, but in defiance of it. On the contrary, in Moslem lands, sensuality is fostered by the religion of Mohammed. There is no use looking to the religion of Arabia for a remedy for this evil. Any hope of purification must come from a higher source.

Arab boys are not really expected to keep themselves pure in either thought or deed. To Arab men there is much license within the bounds of their religion. An Arab girl, however, *must* keep herself pure as to deed. If she fails in this, the penalty is death, and that, at the hands of her own family. Hence the purdah system. So long as a girl is kept within the four walls of her own house, she is supposed to be safe. But alas, even this precaution sometimes fails. While the necessity of keeping pure in deed is so urgent, all the influences of a girl's life tend to make her impure in thought. The physical side of life is always foremost and uppermost. The seamy and ugly aspects of life are freely discussed before little boys and girls. There are no secrets from even the youngest. As soon as a child can understand what he hears and sees he understands everything. One of the hardest things for the missionary to bear is this Eastern lack of reserve. And yet this is the atmosphere in which the Arab child lives and grows. With so little of schooling, so little