

The Hajj

C. STANLEY G. MYLREA, M.D.

“Proclaim to the peoples a pilgrimage. Let them come to thee on foot and on every fleet camel, arriving by every deep defile.”

“The pilgrimage to the temple is a service due to God from those who are able to journey thither.”—*The Koran*.

Upon every Moslem who would enter Paradise are laid four obligations, which he may not shirk. He must repeat, and the oftener the better, the Kelimah “There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet.” He must pray five times a day. He must give alms to the poor. He must fast between daybreak and sunset during the month of Ramadhan.

There is yet a fifth demand upon the zeal of the Moslem—it is not obligatory but is “a service due to God.” Hence every true and devout Moslem cherishes the hope of being able some day to tread the sacred soil of Mecca and worship in the holy precincts of the Beit Allah. He longs to set foot in the place to which, all his life, he has turned his face at the hour of prayer. And so from all the world they come, from China and from Morocco, from Afghanistan and from Russia, from India and the Balkans, and lastly but not least from all over Arabia. Although Mecca is in Arabia and familiarity is said to breed contempt, Arabs yield to none in their reverence for the Holy City and in their eagerness to perform the pilgrimage. It is safe to say that most Arabs have either been to Mecca or intend to go there some day. Before the war the popular route for the dwellers in the Persian Gulf was by water to Jidda in the Red Sea and from Jidda the short camel journey to Mecca was comparatively easy. This was the route followed by most if not all of the Europeans who have schemed their way into the city of Mohammed, at one time or another. Since the war broke out, however, steamers have been too busy to carry pilgrims and the overland routes have once more become alive with travellers, and in the words of the Koran, the Hajjis have been arriving on foot and on fleet camels—not always fleet.

Now the Hajj must be performed in “the month of the pilgrimage,” the last month of the year, and since the Mohammedan year is lunar, your travels may take you across the desert in midsummer! It was the 8th of August last year when the Kuwait party under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmed, the heir to the Kuwait throne, left for Mecca. I decided to get up early and watch the start from the open ground behind the town. The whole place was dotted with little groups of people making their final preparations and the air rang with the wailing of camels, protesting as is their wont against having anything put on their backs. I

accosted the first likely man I saw, "When is Sheikh Ahmed leaving?" "Tomorrow" was the unexpected reply. I tried a second party with the same question. "In half an hour" was the answer and on cross-examination he added "The Sheikh is even now setting out from the castle." I went up to yet a third gentleman and sought his opinion but he was utterly indifferent and merely stated phlegmatically, "By God, I haven't the least idea." It does not sound nearly so profane in Arabic as it does in English.

Somewhat disappointed at not seeing anything worth seeing, I rode across to another part of the maidan, where in the distance I had made out a large number of camels and found to my delight no less a person than Sheikh Ahmed himself sitting holding his court, as calm as a May morning and looking as though he had not the smallest intention of leaving for anywhere for an indefinite period. As I approached, two or three slaves ran up to hold my horse and at the same time the Sheikh, always the gentleman, rose to greet me. We sat down together and I once more started my enquiries, this time at the fountain head. I now learned that the Sheikh's party would start in the afternoon, only journeying a short distance the first day in order to get the caravan into working trim. From time to time, while we chatted, groups of camels were brought up for inspection and approval, and not far off, stuck in the ground, was the Sheikh's special pilgrim flag, a large crimson standard with "Kuweit" embroidered on it in white letters.

As we parted the Sheikh said he hoped to see me as he called at the Consul's house in the afternoon to make his final good-byes before setting out in real earnest. In the afternoon I accordingly turned up at the Consulate in plenty of time to see the splendid caravan ride up to the house. The camels were a perfect blaze of color and I longed for a "kinemacolor" or whatever it is they call the particular kind of "movie" that takes in colors. The Sheikh and his special suite, having dismounted, entered the house and while coffee, cigarettes and cold drinks were being handed round we discussed the prospects of the travellers. It was midsummer and terribly hot; there were certain sections of the road which were waterless for days and strict rationing would be necessary. However, as far as possible, they would travel by night, and thank God they had a waxing moon. One of the pilgrims, a wealthy Kuwait merchant, was the subject of a good deal of merriment and the butt of many jests. He was absolutely an arm-chair man and rather than face the fatigue of camel riding for a month, or the best part of a month, he had a special palanquin built. This was swung on a camel and our sybarite would recline at his ease. I did not actually see the machine as our friend had sent it on ahead, not having the courage to leave the town in it.

After a while the fleet of desert ships weighed anchor and rocked off into the horizon and out of sight. There must have been about two hundred camels and some thirty of the pilgrims were women who were accommodated in special roofed-in, covered-up boxes, so that the fair occu-

pants were quite invisible. We heard of their progress from time to time from men of the road, and finally, wonder of wonders (to the Arab), came the wire that all had reached Mecca and were being royally entertained by King Hussein. Later on a second wire came to the effect that the Kuwait party had celebrated the great festival, the Id-el-Atha, which is held on the 10th day of the month of the Pilgrimage. The message reached here on what was regarded in Kuwait as the 9th day and a good deal of adverse criticism arose, for the real orthodox Moslem holds that a new month does not commence until the moon is actually seen in the sky. It was obvious, however, that the more civilized Meccans were following the infidel's calendar and had begun the month of the Hajj before they saw the moon.

On October 29th the Hajjis returned and were feted by all. We learned many amusing things. First, they had been held up by a party of raiders outside Mecca and a large sum of money besides their best clothes had been taken from them. This was very hard on the nerves of some and our friend of the palanquin was said to have beaten a very ignominious retreat, for bullets were whistling in every direction from the rocky sides of the deep defile through which they were passing and the locality was anything but healthy. Arrived in Mecca, the matter was reported to King Hussein who forthwith sent for the chiefs of the offending tribes and made them disgorge to the last handkerchief and dollar. On the quiet, however, Sheikh Ahmed sent the money back to the robbers, who probably still think him a first-class fellow. Our friend of the palanquin had had enough of cross country riding, his nerve was gone, and he went down to Jidda, took a steamer for Bombay and so returned to Kuwait by the safer and simpler pathway of the sea.

There was great excitement here when it was known that the Hajjis' caravan was nearing home. One day two special messengers arrived with word from Sheikh Ahmed that he would reach Jahreh, a small town some fifteen miles from Kuwait, at a given time and it was not long before the road to Jahreh was crowded with people going out to welcome the wanderers. In addition a large boat was got ready and loaded with a ten-course dinner for all. (I suppose the Sheikh of Kuwait paid for this.) This boat reached Jahreh safely and I understand there was a very merry time at the banquet. The day after the arrival at Jahreh there was a leisurely entry into Kuwait and thus came to an end one of the most noteworthy pilgrimages in the history of this city.

Moslem Funeral Customs

MRS. DIRK DYKSTRA

Bahrein, like all other places in the Gulf, has been visited by the epidemic, Spanish influenza, and the number of deaths daily, though very much less than in some other towns, has been considerable. At times such as these we learn a great deal about their customs connected with death and burial and their belief about the future. It is difficult to get a definite idea about it all; in fact, that is not possible, for most of their practices and statements are based on traditions of which there are no end, and there are many different sects, divisions and nationalities in Islam, each of which adds its own interpretations to these traditions and alters them to suit its own particular bent or persuasion. Locally our information comes from Shiah and Sunni sources and of these the Shiahs, in this as in all things, are much more superstitious and spectacular. This article does not claim to give all the information there is to be had on this subject, some of it may not agree with the practices in other Moslem fields, perhaps not even with those in the other stations in our field, and some of the statements may seem contradictory, but that is not uncommon in the teaching and traditions of Islam.

When it is apparent that a sick person is about to die, if it is at all possible he is made to give the testimony, or "shehadeh," as it is called, which is, "There is no God but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God." Those Moslems who are at all seriously minded are very careful and faithful in the observance of this practice, and they do not hesitate to strike or pull the dying one so as to arouse the departing spirit sufficiently to repeat this creed. If anyone dies unattended the central thought of regret is that no one took the "witness" from the dead. Another thing that is done to the dying is to pour water into the mouth, which is the dying one's sustenance on his journey to the other world. Sometimes large quantities are administered so that choking results. Then before life is extinct they begin to straighten out the limbs and to stretch them, tying the two big toes together. Moslem etiquette demands that when people meet each other and stop to speak, the feet should be placed side by side with the toes in a straight line. And so at death Moslems prepare the corpse in such a way that when the departed meets his Lord his feet will be in the correct position. When death has finally come, the women at once begin to wail and to cry out in high shrill voices.

The Moslems believe that a corpse must be brought to the grave as quickly as possible in order to speed the spirit on its way to the other world, and so all preparations for a funeral are made at once and quickly. This belief that a spirit must be speeded on its way makes it a meritorious and praiseworthy act to hurry things and with all the funerals we see the bearers are always going very fast, sometimes running. A sad result of

this excessive haste is that funerals are sometimes interrupted by the supposedly dead person coming to life again and without doubt, because of this custom, many are buried alive. But especially do Moslems hurry a funeral if it is near sunset, for they do not like to bury after that time. In times of an epidemic, necessity forces them to depart from this custom, the main reason perhaps being to keep secret the number of deaths, but ordinarily they dislike evening or night burials. One reason given is that the cemetery must not be allowed to say, "It is my dinner," or it will demand a corpse every night. They do not explain, however, why the cemetery does not demand a breakfast on the same principle! Another reason they give for not burying after sunset is that, unless the corpse is watched, something called "zaubainee" will come and eat it, or that the "jinns" will come and take it away. Sometimes, if a person dies late in the evening, the corpse is carried to the cemetery and left there all night so as to be as near as possible to its final destination and someone is appointed to watch it.



FUNERAL OF A PLAGUE VICTIM

During an epidemic all corpses must be washed at the general washing place adjoining the mosque, if possible. At other times he who dies in his own house, which is his personal property, can be lawfully washed there before carried away to the grave, but if the deceased dies in a house not his own he must be washed at the general washing place. This washing of the body is a matter of great importance because the body must be thoroughly purified and made presentable for the interviews that await it. The corpse is washed and scrubbed with scrupulous care, soap and other cleansing agents being freely used. Especial attention is paid to the ears, eyes, nose, teeth and nails. There are men and women who are publicly recognized as washers of the dead and for this work they receive payment according to the financial condition of the deceased. After the washing comes the shrouding and perfuming of the body. To the words of our Saviour, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on,"

for the Moslem's benefit we might add, "Nor yet for your burial where-withal ye shall be shrouded." With some Moslems part of a bride's trousseau is a piece of cloth for her shroud and this she carefully guards lest future circumstances might leave her unprovided for. Most of the women here wear or own a special nose jewel and with many this is dedicated to defray the cost of a shroud. Some women, even though altogether destitute, can still be seen wearing this jewel and it is the last piece that they will part with in life so that they may have the benefit of it in death. The reason for all this care about the shroud can be appreciated only when we realize that the Moslems believe that the shroud is their covering in the next world. Therefore it is neither wise nor kind to provide for anyone when he dies, unless there is absolutely nothing to be realized from any of his possessions, however little that may be, because the credit for the shroud will go to him who has provided it while it will leave the one who has been provided for without any covering before his Lord. And because this winding sheet will be their covering in the next world it must be without spot or blemish, for whatever defilement is in it here will appear there. We had an illustration of this last year when in a shooting affair a man was killed. The accident happened near sunset and as usual they set about to bury the dead man at once, but he bled so long and so continuously that it was several hours before he could be properly washed, shrouded and buried.

Accompanying the shrouding is the perfuming the body, the amount varying according to different sects and wealth. Spicy herbs, incense and powders are some of the most common in use. The winding sheet is slit so as to lend itself to proper and secure winding and then the top and the bottom are tied much as we tie a sack of wheat. The Shiah's untie the winding sheet after the corpse has been placed in position in the grave so that the dead body can move about to pray. The rosary is put under the head and a cake of mud from holy Kerbela is placed near at hand. If the forehead rests on this holy mud during the prostrations in prayer the prayers will be much more efficacious. Two date branches are placed alongside the corpse, one at each side of the body, to serve as crutches to the dead for getting up to pray. The Shiah's also put some sand in the mouth of the corpse, which is its confession to its Lord that it was made of dust and must return to dust. In connection with their belief as to their covering in the next world there is a tradition that man's covering before the fall was of the material of which our finger nails are made, but when he fell this was gradually taken away from him and only the nails were left to remind him of what he once was before the fall and they are a promise to him of what his covering will again be in the next world. This very probably explains why the waste nails are so carefully disposed of. On Friday, the Moslem Sunday, nails are trimmed, great care being taken not to lose any of them, and these are then wrapped up in a piece of cloth and buried, and as they do so the Shiah's say, "Take your due, O devil, and the compassionate one will testify against you."

Then on the resurrection day God will require all these nail-trimmings, and woe to him who has not carefully preserved them.

There are no undertakers in Arabia. Near the washing place there are always several biers which any can use. These and the flat stones necessary to build up the grave are supplied by voluntary contribution by those who have the means to do so and who want to lay up merit. The bier resembles a ladder and as a rule the corpse of a man is placed on this bier without any covering besides a mat or wrap around the shroud. A woman's bier differs from a man's in that a fitted railing about a foot high, with corner posts, is placed around the bier and when the corpse is placed on it the whole is covered with a large cloth. It is great merit to help carry a bier even though but for a few paces, but there are always noticeably more bearers at the funeral of a rich and influential man than at that of a poor man. The Sunnis have no prayers or ceremony at their funerals. After placing the body in position in the grave, they put in place, at the head and feet, the two stones called the "shehadeh," witness. The Shiah, after the body has been washed, carry it to the mosque, where they have prayers outside, standing west of the building, because that is towards Mecca. In Bahrein the men usually stand in three rows, though it is said that there may also be five or seven rows, but the number must be uneven. The corpse is placed on the ground before them while the men all face west and say prayers for the dead. The numbers of these vary, as also later at the grave, according to the station and financial condition of the deceased. Prayers are the same for men and women and are said for all who are ten years and older. Women do not follow a corpse to the grave at any time except for two or three who, in the case of a dead woman, must place the corpse in the grave and undo the winding sheet. When carrying the bier the Shiah, as much as possible, try to keep the head towards the north.

As has been said, the corpse must be carried quickly. The bearers are constantly exchanging places, those who relieve beginning at the front and all are thus gradually worked towards the back, and these again in turn run forwards and begin anew there. All chant together as they walk hurriedly, "La illahu illa allah wa Mohammed er-rasoul allah," "There is no God but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God." When the grave is reached the bier is placed on the ground and the bearers sit down waiting for the body to be properly placed. Previously to this the grave has been dug, the length of the body being measured with a stick. The upper part of the grave is about four by six feet, and three feet deep. In the center a trench is dug which is about a foot and a half or two feet wide and deep. In this the body is placed on its side, facing Mecca, and the winding sheet is unfastened so that the dead man can sit up to pray and to be interviewed. If there happens to be a grave of older date where the new one is being dug, any bones remaining are carelessly put aside and when the new corpse has been placed in position the bones of the former corpse are thrown into the trench with the fresh corpse.