



## The Use of Amulets Among Moslems.

One of the real hindrances to the spread of the Gospel and to simple faith in Jesus Christ among Moslems is the burden of groveling superstition which rests upon so many hearts. The widespread illiteracy of the Moslem world, including from eighty to ninety per cent. of the whole population, is a constant stimulus to all forms of childish credulity. One of the most common forms of superstition is the use of amulets, called in Arabic *Hama' Il*, *Ta' Widh*, *Hijah* or *Azeemah*.

The use of amulets is almost universal in the Moslem world from Sierra Leone to Java, and men of intelligence and education in Turkey and Egypt are still often the slaves to this custom, which, doubtless, like so many other things in Islam, was borrowed from Judaism. Yet



[By courtesy of Fleming H. Revell Co.]

A MOTHER AND HER DAUGHTER FROM TUNIS, WEARING SIX AMULETS  
TO PROTECT HER CHILD AND HERSELF.

the words talisman and amulet are both derived from the Arabic language.

All sorts of things are used as amulets in Arabia, and their use is justified by the saying of Mohammed himself (Mishkat, 21:1): "There is no wrong in using charms and spells so long as you do not associate anything with God." The most common things used as amulets are a small Koran suspended in a silver case; words from the Koran written on paper and carried in a leather receptacle; the names of Allah or their numerical value; the names of Mohammed and his companions; precious stones with or without inscriptions; beads; old coins; clay images; the teeth of wild animals; holy earth from Mecca or Kerbela in the shape of tiny bricks, or in small bags. When the Kaaba covering at Mecca is taken down each year and renewed the old cloth is cut up into small pieces and sold for charms.

The women in Mecca use an amulet of special power called "Mishkash," which is supposed to exercise its virtue for the increase of the family. The "Mishkash" is really a copy of an old Venetian coin, representing the Duke of Venice kneeling before St. Mark on the one side, and on the other side is the image of Christ surrounded by stars. Of course the women themselves are in total ignorance of the inscription on the coin and of its Christian character.

Amulets and charms are worn not only by the Arabs themselves and to protect their children from the evil eye, but are put over the doors of their dwellings and even on camels, donkeys, horses, fishing boats; in fact, anywhere, to ward off danger or death.

According to the principles of Islam only verses from the Koran should be used, but the door of superstition once being set ajar by Mohammed himself, as we know from the story of his life, it is now wide open. The chapters from the Koran which are most often selected for use as amulets and put in the little cases shown in the picture are Surahs i, vi, xviii, xxxvi, xlv, lv, lxxvii, and lxxviii. There are five verses in the Koran called the verses of protection, "*Ayat-el-Hifdh*," which are most powerful to defend from evil. They read as follows: "The preservation of heaven and earth is no burden unto Him"; "God is the best protector"; "They guard him by the command of God"; "We guard him from every stoned devil"; "A protection from every rebellious devil." These verses are written with great care and with a special kind of ink by those who deal in amulets, and are then sold for a good price to Moslem women and children. The ink used for writing amulets is saffron water, rose water, orange water, the juice of onions, water from the sacred well of Zem Zem, and sometimes even human blood. It is very important that the one who writes the amulet be a holy man in the Moslem sense of that word. We are told in

Arabic books on the subject, and these books are printed by the thousands, *e. g.*, "The diet of the one who prepares charms depends on the kind of names of God which he intends to write or recite. If they are the terrible attributes of Allah, then he must refrain from the use of meat, fish, eggs, honey, and musk. If they are His amiable attributes, he must abstain from butter, curds, vinegar, salt, and ambergris."

There is a whole science of amulets, exorcism, and Moslem witchcraft. One of the learned men of Bahrein some years ago gave me



[By courtesy of Fleming H. Revell Co.]

EVERYDAY OBJECTS IN MOSLEM HOME-LIFE.

Two water-jars; a water-pipe; prayer-beads; ornamental cups and boxes for jewelry. The circle of various shaped amulets is shown on the upper right hand corner of the picture.

the standard work on the subject, which has run to many editions. It is by Abu-Abbas Al-Couni. There are many traces of Christian influence in the later development of Mohammedanism, and the use of the cross as a symbol to ward off evil is one of them.

Among the Shiah Moslems, whom we meet everywhere in East Arabia, the most common amulet is called *Nadi-Ali*. It consists generally of a lead or silver plate with little bells at the bottom, inscribed with these words:

Cry aloud to Ali; he is the possessor of wonders.  
 From him you will find help from trouble.  
 He takes away very quickly all grief and anxiety  
 By the mission of Mohammed and his own sanctity.

There are innumerable cases where such amulets are used for the cure of disease. The native doctors firmly believe that when every other remedy fails the book of Allah, if properly administered, internally or externally, will drive away pain and cure the patient.

We must not think that this belief in the power of talismans and amulets is a thing of the past. From one end of the Moslem world to the other, there is still unquestioning faith in the power of such religious magic. Prof. MacDonald in his recent book, *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam*, says:

“Scattered among the educated classes, it is true, you will meet a good deal of absolute Voltairean unbelief, but even these individuals are liable to set back at any time. The shell that separates the Oriental from the unseen is still very thin, and the charms or amulet of the magician may easily break it. The world of the *Arabian Nights* is still his world, and these stories for him are not tales from wonderland, but are, rather, to be compared to our stories of the wonders and possibilities of science, such as M. Jules Verne used to write and which we now owe to Mr. H. G. Wells.”

The fact is that ordinary things often seem very extraordinary to people brought up in ignorance, as are the Arabs, and so many of the Moslems. To the average Moslem the game which children play of telling a person to take a number and perform divers operations with it, with the result of telling one his age, would seem to involve direct contact with the spirit world. The numerical value of numbers in the Arabic language is used to form all sorts of magic squares, and this sort of hocus-pocus passes for religious learning among the masses.

The traveling dervishes grow rich in trading upon the superstition of the common people, and it is strange that people who are so credulous to believe everything connected in any way with their own prophet and book should be unwilling to accept the testimony of the Gospel and believe in the great miracle of the Incarnation.

Fear of death and of a judgment after death makes them all their lifetime subject to bondage. We must pray that the veil of ignorance may be removed and that speedily the Name which is above every name may so rule in the hearts of men, women and children that all other names shall lose their power.

The hospitals and the book-shops of our Arabian Mission will doubtless in time drive out the use of amulets in East Arabia, and the march of civilization, with its modern scientific miracles and spirit of

investigation, is also a means to that end. Nevertheless, I have known of cases where printed Arabic gospels were bought to be used as amulets and where patients tried to rub off ink from the printed paper used to wrap powders in at the hospital in order to drink the solution as a remedy!

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### Abdul Messieh — In Memoriam.

On September fifteenth we laid to rest in our little Christian cemetery the remains of a man who was born a Moslem, but who lived and died a Christian. His name was Abdul Messieh, i. e., Servant of Christ, which name was given him at his own request, and was in itself a testimony to his faith in Christ. But more valuable than this outward confession were the fruits of the Spirit that so abundantly showed themselves in his life and character. He was a man without an enemy, as he showed love toward all and malice toward none. A faithful servant, a loyal friend, a trusted companion, he adorned his confession by a beautiful and manly character. During the year and a half in which I came in touch with him I have never heard him speak a word or do a deed that would not adorn a Christian character at home. And this means the more in his case as his opportunities for spiritual growth were less. Born among an Arab tribe up in the river country, in an environment thoroughly heathen and wicked, he started life at a great disadvantage. He early developed a desire for trade and travel, often making good money in trade, but spending it as often in travel, and also losing much in gambling. But with it all he had a spiritual side to his character, which kept him from losing his life altogether, and which, in the providence of God, brought him into contact with the missionaries and their message. The manner and the result of his contact with the missionaries may be gathered from the following letter by Mr. Moerdyk:

“Abdul Messieh came to us first in Muscat in 1903. He was then in town on business for the Sheikh of Kuwait in purchasing and delivering guns and ammunition. He came to my house and to that of the colporteurs with the purpose of asking about the Truth. He told me that he had been a Sunni, Shea, Wahabi, and Babi in turn in his search for Truth and rest, which he could not find. He had visited all of the principal shrines and had also been to Accha, the shrine of the Babis, to get peace. He had read many controversial books of the Christians, and some in the Bible, and felt that the Christians had the truth to give him. During his stay he came regularly to prayers and services, and in the evening came to read and talk about the Truth. After his