

NEGLECTED ARABIA.

October - December, 1910.

Behind the Veil.

In May of this year a young wife, daughter of a wealthy merchant of Menameh, asked to be taught English. Because of the secluded lives these women lead, the study of English seems rather useless, except for the fact that it affords abundant opportunity to read. However, the request was granted, with the hope that it might lead to better acquaintance and to direct opportunities to bring the Gospel message. For here, as everywhere, it is individual work for individuals that is most effective, and therefore most essential, but at the same time it is the most difficult to obtain. In almost every home there are several women, and always a number of slaves who have the privilege of being wherever their mistresses are. So meeting one alone, and opportunities for private conversations are as rare as they are desirable.

The girl herself is very anxious to learn, and what seems even more wonderful, her father also seems anxious that his daughter shall be well-educated. Although married, she lives with her father, and so his authority over her is absolute. She seems to be a favorite child, and has therefore received the best possible local education. She reads Arabic fluently, and shows an aptitude for acquiring the English. When I gave her the first lesson I suggested that we go to a room where we should not be disturbed by the talk of the women in the court-yard. It was quite impossible to do any teaching in the yard, much to the surprise of the mother, who could not understand why the Arabic way of teaching, amidst noise and shouting, was not good enough. However, the daughter's wishes were backed by her father, and so the new arrangement held. These lesson-hours always close with a half hour or more of conversation on topics of vital importance. Usually I read a passage from Scripture, and she asks questions about it, and this leads to further discussions.

One day the subject of our conversation was prayer. To the Moslems it means repetition of passages from the Koran, and it is hard for them to grasp any other view of prayer. She asked me if I prayed, and then whether I ever prayed to their prophet. And upon my answering in the negative, she asked me why I did not. Then I again told her about the Saviour and how He intercedes for us, to which she replied, "The Jews have Moses, the Christians have Jesus, and the Moslems have Mohammed." I asked her whether we could all be

right, and she answered, "Impossible." We then spoke of our friendship here on earth and I said I hoped that we might continue our friendship in heaven. To this she replied that she was afraid I would never see heaven, for the Koran says that only those who believe in Mohammed will have that bliss. I then asked her if she felt sure of her own salvation, and she admitted that she did not, but hoped she might earn it by repeating sufficient prayers. I assured her that to all who believe in Jesus Christ eternal salvation is a reality even now in this life, and that it is not a reward of merit; the obtaining of it depends not on ourselves but on Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice. I asked



VEILED WOMEN.

her then if she did not wish to possess such salvation and peace now, and, while she honestly thought that I was wrong, and I believed that she was wrong, I asked her to pray this prayer with me every day, each of us adding the other's name, "O Lord, lead me to Thy salvation and truth for Thy name's sake." She hesitated at first, but after some thinking promised that she would.

At this time she also asked me to spend the day with her the following Wednesday, and it was with pleasure that I accepted. It was a splendid opportunity to study conditions in an Arab home. During the day I met several other women and girls who had also brought their sewing with them. They were very much interested in my sewing and my workbag and folding needle case. Of course all kinds of questions were asked about our manner of living, house-keeping, customs, and so forth. The singing of hymns pleased them especially. About noon my young friend excused herself for a while, for her father had come

in for his breakfast, and she had to keep him company, although that day, in honor of her guest, her father had excused her from breakfasting with him, asking her only to serve him so she could breakfast with me. It is a very pleasant thought that the father loves his daughter so well, although it seems the more strange to our western ideas that he should deny this privilege to his wife.

During the day they said their prayers, and they asked me whether I wished to say my prayers. If so, they would make whatever preparations I wished. As clearly as possible I explained what prayer meant to me, and that the blessing I had asked upon my breakfast was prayer. Then they asked me to offer prayer there before them, which I did, and at its close my little hostess assured me that she had not forgotten to pray the prayer I had suggested.

The day was further spent in chatting and sewing. Just as I was getting ready to leave, great trouble overtook them. During the afternoon I thought I had noticed the mother making unusual preparations, and I asked whether she were going out visiting. They said that she was not, as her husband forbade her ever to leave the house. But just then the servants came rushing into the room in great consternation, and all seemed so terrified that I asked what the trouble was. Then the story came out. The father was in the habit of going to some bathing place every afternoon and staying until sunset, and so the mother planned to take advantage of such an absence by making a stolen visit. But, as often happens in such times, he returned very early, and wanted to see his wife. They invented excuses for her delay, saying she was with some women, and would come in in a few moments. But as the time went on they became more and more at a loss to find excuses to appease his anger at her nonappearance. I asked them what he would do if he found out about her leaving the house, and they said, "He will choke her and whip us, for he is disgraced." Some time ago the daughter had asked permission of her father to visit me in my home, but had been refused, and then she had proposed to deceive her father as her mother had done now. This I had not allowed, showing her its sinfulness and its necessary consequences. Now the daughter of her own accord thanked me and said that she would never come in such a way, for it meant dreadful results. I could not stay any longer and had to leave them in their plight since I could not help them. But what a lesson of the results of the teaching of Islam. It is not these poor women who are mostly to be blamed for deception. They need our love and sympathy and need to learn to do right in spite of existing faults. Far more it is the system of false teaching and false relation in life that must stir up in us righteous indignation and cause us to arise in our might against these forces of evil. Our prayers should be for the breaking down