

A School of Hopelessness

MRS. JOHN VAN ESS

A few days ago my head Arabic teacher and I went to pay an official call at the Busrah Government School for Girls. This has recently been reopened, with a Turkish instructress from Constantinople added to its staff, and, as it is the only government school for girls in the province, and accordingly our only rival for the Moslem pupils (the Jewish and Catholic schools are only for the children of their own congregations), we were very anxious to see it. True, there are thousands of little girls in Busrah and there is room for many more than two schools, or three or four; but the demand for education is slight, and a Moslem school might interfere seriously with our growth at this juncture.



THE DOORKEEPER, "MOTHER OF JASSEM"
WITH TWO OF HER CHARGES

Three of our most faithful pupils of last year have been taken away from us and sent there, so that they may study the Koran and avoid the Bible—and who knows how many more are going to follow? So with almost painful interest and anticipation my young Mardin teacher, "Mual-limat" Khatoon and I threaded our way one afternoon through the crowded dirty back streets, under the pilotage of our old doorkeeper, "Mother of Jassem," a character in herself, who loves nothing better than to escort and be somebody in the highways and byways of Busrah on such calls and errands. We had considerable trouble in finding the place and tried several wrong doors before we met a little girl coming out of a hole in the wall in one of the narrowest, darkest alleys I have ever seen, even in Busrah, and were told by her that this was the school. We pushed the little door open and with great difficulty ascended a crooked, crazy staircase whose steps were so worn and crumbling and steep that I wonder the little girls do not break their necks on them, and finally emerged on an uneven mud roof enclosed with toppling board fences. Over at the left, somewhat after the manner of a deckhouse perched on a deck, was a little room to which we picked our steps. It was built of mud bricks, unplastered either within or without, the floor was deep with dust and dirt, the small windows so thickly coated with cobwebs that it was impossible to see out, and the only furniture was a row of high benches around three sides. In one corner sat a hard-

featured common-looking woman, the Arabic teacher; before her on the disreputable benches twelve little girls—and this was the school! This was the sole provision of the sublime Turkish government for the higher education of women in Busrah province, said to be the richest province in the whole of Turkey.

The Arabic teacher welcomed us very cordially, deplored the fact that the Turkish teacher, the lady from Stamboul, was out for the afternoon, and after the customary exchange of polite remarks we said that we should like to hear the children recite their lessons. Our three ex-pupils were peeping at us from over the tops of their books, and subsided into giggles when they heard our request. The teacher seemed very loath to have her charges "show off," no doubt because they were so little able to do so to advantage, as we soon saw, and the only really interesting thing we heard was the reading of the Koran. The children swayed their bodies to and fro and read in the high-pitched, chanting voice considered proper for the rendering of the sacred words, not one of which they probably understood. My teacher, Muallimat Khatoon, whispered to me in English, "Oh, how *can* these girls be willing to come here after they have been in a nice school like ours?" And I replied: "Poor little things, I don't know." We inquired about the curriculum and found that, besides Koran, the girls study Mohammeden tradition, arithmetic of a sort, and a number of subjects in Turkish—which is of course more or less Greek to them. They also are taught some needle work, of a rather crude native sort. Order there is none, and apparently results are none. When we took our leave the teacher apologized for the



BUSRAH GIRLS' SCHOOL (at the right)
BOYS' SCHOOL (at the left)

dirt, disorder, and the stupidity of the girls, and assured us that it was a thankless task to try to teach Busrah children.

We hurried back as fast as we could to the open streets and the well-built houses along the main creek, and into our own big front door, with the great sign over it, "School of Hope for Girls." The afternoon sun was streaming into the courtyard as we went in and hastened up our nice clean stairs, and in every room there was the sight and sound of busy happy occupation. In my own large tidy white-curtained classroom the little third-class girls were sitting at their comfortable American school desks, studying lessons for the next day, and copying exercises from the blackboard. Over by the piano the big girls were gathered in a laughing group reading over their parts for a little sketch which is to be the "piece de resistance" at our next entertainment for the mothers. In the next room a class was busily sewing, and in the back classroom the tiniest tots were occupied, while waiting for their big sisters to go home, with "Busy Work Tiles," and bead stringing. Every one, large and small, looked busy and happy, and the

whole atmosphere was as different from that of the forlorn place we had just left as the West is from the East.

These girls, instead of intoning the Koran, are studying the Life of Christ. Instead of reading Mohammedan tradition, they are learning the wonderful structure of the human body, and the care that must be taken of it. They are rediscovering the world in geography class; and they are preparing themselves to be better housewives and mothers in the work that they are learning with hands as well as heads. Of the forty girls now enrolled, they are almost without exception contented in their work and show a natural aptitude for it.

Some wise people tell us that Mohammedanism is best for the Mohammedans, that Christian civilization can never be assimilated by the Orientals, and that they are better off as they are. If such could visit the Turkish Government School for Girls of Busrah, and see where the wives and mothers of the future are being trained, and then could come and compare with it our "School of Hope," I wonder if they would continue to think as they do? I wonder?

Pen Pictures of Women's Medical Work. Busrah

MRS. A. K. BENNETT.

"Welcome, welcome, Khatun, here we are," I hear myself accosted thus as I am about to ascend the veranda steps at the Hospital, and turn to greet two River Arab women, mother and daughter evidently, the latter with a flat tarred basket on her head. They are both robust and hardy, with sun-browned faces, clad in brown home-spun abbas, patched here and there, barefooted, the younger woman with thick plain silver anklets. "Here we are, we have brought her to you" saying which they by united manoeuver, deposit the basket on the veranda. There is a curled-up bundle on one side, and on the other a dish of cooked rice. I ask what they have there. "Why it's the baby, we have brought her to you"—and the older woman pours out a tale of how her daughter has had numerous children, apparently healthy enough, but who have died successively for no known reason. So they have come that I may see this one and perhaps give the mother medicine so that the child may grow up and not die. A fat sleeping infant, large for three months, is disclosed on unwrapping the nondescript bundle; she is apparently cheerful and happy, lacking nothing. Advice is given and cheerfully received, and my last glimpse of the group shows the basket again poised on the mother's head, the baby crying lustily at being consigned to oblivion once more.

II. I am seated at my desk on a clinic morning, an Arab woman comes in when her name is called; she is the wife of a tiller of the soil on one of the large estates down the river belonging to a prominent Busrah man. Her veil lifted, I see a sweet patient face, somewhat anxious, and showing traces of illness. She is polite in her manner, and uses good language in telling her trouble. On examination I find that she is suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis in the early stages, but