

CHILD LIFE AMONG THE MOHAMMEDANS OF PERSIA.



N Persia there is always rejoicing and feasting at the birth of a son, however poor the parents may be. In wealthy families the father gives a tea drink to his servants, often distributing presents among them. In some homes girls too are welcome, but the parents would be ashamed to show any pleasure at the birth of a daughter.

When it is known that a child is born, the neighbors call to "bless his foot," usually accompanying their congratulations with a gift. The schoolboys of the district come to the house in a body and sing a blessing from their teacher, the *mullah* (priest). They are generally rewarded by a sum of money, which they carry back to their teacher, who, in return, gives them a half holiday. Frequently one band of boys meets another coming to the same house, and the result is a fight. Which ever school finally succeeds in carrying off the money gains the half holiday.

A new-born baby is not allowed to nurse until the *azan*, or call to prayer, has been heard three times and the roof of its mouth has been touched with sacred earth. Then baby has begun life as a good Mohammedan.

Naming the baby is an important ceremony. The *mullah* comes to the house and intones the Mohammedan creed, then blows into the child's right ear and pronounces its name three times. He repeats this performance, blowing into the left ear. Afterward tea and sweets are served to the neighbors who have assembled.

A Persian mother takes many precautions to protect her baby from the evil eye. When it is but a few days old it is held over a smudge made by burning a species of bean, and a little of the charred bean is rubbed on its face. Charms are put about its neck, wrists, and ankles, and blue

beads are sewed on its cap. When baby sleeps he is strapped to his cradle, and is protected from light, noise, and air by a close-fitting covering which is held off from his face by a bar across the cradle top.

When a child is old enough to run about its costume is like that of a grown person, except that a girl does not begin to wear the *chuddar*, or veil, till she is nine years old. After that she must cover her face in the presence of any man, excepting the members of her own family. She is obliged to fast and pray, while her brother need not begin until he is sixteen. She helps her mother in the housework, brings the daily supply of water on her back in large earthen jars, and arranges in order the shoes which callers shuffle off at the door. She waits on her father and brothers, and, when they have company, serves, but cannot eat or sit down in their presence. When she goes out to play she must take the baby, if there is one in the family. The baby is tied firmly on to her back, then she runs, plays jack-stones, or bounds ball, not minding the weight on her back any more than the baby minds the shaking up.

Girls make their own dolls, of sticks padded at one end, for which they delight to make clothes. After a girl is nine, however, she must leave her dolls and begin to sew on her wedding outfit. Besides making her own wardrobe and household furnishings, she must, at her marriage, give a sample of her needlework to every member of her husband's family as well as to other friends. As a girl may be married at twelve, nine is none too soon to begin the wedding preparations.

Girls never go to school. Occasionally a tutor is employed to teach a favorite daughter to read, but it is against the law that a woman should learn to write. Among the rich the girls are not obliged to do housework, but are kept more strictly than their poorer sisters. They never leave the harem except when, closely veiled and attended by an escort,