

MOHAMMEDAN WORSHIP.*

BY RICHARD DAVEY.

Mahomet, rightly dreading idolatry, so prevalent in Mecca in his day, wisely ordained that the interiors of the mosques or places of prayer should be destitute of all representations of human or animal life. The early mosques were plainly whitewashed, and were not even ornamented by verses from the Koran. In the course of time, certain pious califs expended vast sums on the construction of mosques, and many of them became monuments of architectural magnificence into which the richest materials were introduced. But their interiors, however splendidly adorned with marble columns, stained-glass windows and glorious carpets, are as nude as an English town hall when cleared of its proper complement of chairs and tables. The only furniture of a mosque is the mihrab, a sort of niche indicating the direction in which Mecca lies, the minber or pulpit, and in some of the Imperial mosques a maafil-i-humayum or private pew for the Sultan, and a little gallery called a maafil for the chanters. Two gigantic wax candles in gold, in silver, or brass candlesticks, stand on either side of the mihrab, and are only lighted during Ramazan. Most of the mosques are embellished with elaborate inscriptions in Arabian or Turkish characters quoting verses from the Koran. In some of the mosques, notably those at Brussa, there is a large fountain under the central dome. This does not serve, however, for ablutions, but simply as an ornament. It is a popular error to say that people are obliged, as a sign of respect, to take off their shoes before entering a mosque. This is done simply because the floors of the mosques are covered either with mats or carpets which must be kept scrupulously clean, because the faithful touch them with their foreheads constantly during their devotions. If you wear overshoes, you need only remove them, and boldly enter the mosque in your boots. Another popular error connected with the mosques is the idea that Christians must not be admitted into them. This is absolutely opposed to the teaching of the Koran, which declares that any man or woman may enter a mosque, be their religion what it may. Indeed, in the earlier period of the history of Islam it was considered an excellent method of converting unbelievers to invite them to attend the services. Since Turkey and the East generally have become the happy hunting-ground of tourists, the Imams have conceived the idea that, by charging the Giaour for permission to enter the mosques, they may turn an honest penny to their own advantage. There are, however, mosques held to be so sacred, on account of the relics they contain, that the mere presence of a Giaour would pollute them. Otherwise the exclusion of infidels from the mosque is contrary to the teaching of the Prophet.

The ceremonies of the "howling dervishes" are thus described :

"The first person to begin the office is the sheik, who wears a vivid crimson robe and squats down in front of the mihrab, on either side of which burn two small braziers, occasionally fed with incense. Then the musicians assemble and sit in a circle ; at the other end of the room, against the wall, a number of members of the congregation and dervishes

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