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Child Life in Syria.

(By Mrs. James S. Dennis, in 'Sunday-School Times'.)

The usual way of carrying children is astride the shoulder; the little one, holding on to the mother's head. Sometimes they are slung across the back. Mother-love is strong in the heart of the Syrian and Arab woman, though often passionately and ignorantly expressed. Noisy threatenings, and even beatings, will be followed by extreme and unwise indulgence. One of the things which most impressed me in my early life in Syria, was the loud and perfectly unrestrained crying of the children. A mother does

ther or sister, and brings thorns or sticks to keep the pot with the family dinner boiling. She pats out the bread for the oven, and is, in short, even in her pastimes, a little woman almost as soon as she emerges from babyhood. One delight she has, and that is to play aroos, or bride. The whole performance of the wedding is enacted by her and her companions with great delight. Dolls are a western importation, and yet I have been informed by an elderly native woman that she has always seen the homemade rag-baby, which also is used in impersonating the imaginary aroos.

Both girls and boys, however, have some games. Their playthings or implements are very simple. They are ingenious in turning stones, reeds, bones, acorns, etc., to good account. There are many more games played by the boys than the girls, and these, as a rule, are less active than those common in our own clime. Something similar to marbles, is played with small stones. Another of their games is called ka'b ('ankle joint'), and in it the ankle-bones of sheep are used. One is laid down, and each player in turn tosses up one. If, when it falls to the ground, the upper side corresponds to that of the one first placed, the player gains it, and another is put down in its stead, and so on. The one gaining the greatest number of joints wins the game. The word 'ka'b' in its plural form is the name for dice, and gambling with dice is common. There are some half-dozen ways of playing with these joints. There is a game played by rolling acorns down an inclined and smooth surface, with the endeavor to strike one previously placed. The successful player wins the acorns. Young men skirmish with lances on horseback, and the boys have various games involving the throwing of reeds in imitation of the throwing of the lance.

The food used by both old and young is largely bread and olives, or onions, though meat, rice, vegetables and wheat in various combinations, are also to be found. In the gathering of the olives many children are employed, and olive oil is much prized. The children of Syria, like those in other parts

coating of sugar candy. Dried and candied figs, apricots, and dates, are also common.

In reference to education, the primitive Syrian girl, receives none except that given by life itself. Very rarely indeed was a girl taught to read. Her brother was sometimes sent to a school where he was instructed in reading and writing, and the simplest rudiments of arithmetic. If he was a Moslem, he learned also passages from the Koran. The wealthier and more aristocratic families sometimes gained higher educational advantages for their sons. The schools founded under the auspices of missions have stimulated an extensive native educational system, extending to many parts of Syria, so that even among the Moslems there are now a number of schools for girls.

The ordinary dress of the country children is of coarse cotton, dyed an indigo blue.



MOSLEM SCHOOL.

not hesitate to deceive her child, if she can purchase by this some temporary relief. Disregard for truth is deeply ingrained in the Eastern nature. In nothing is renovation more needful, since the disastrous and pitiful results of such an atmosphere of untruthfulness breathed by a child from his earliest years can hardly be exaggerated.

With all this practical and ignorant injury to their little ones, parental affection is often tenderly expressed. Children are spoken of as the ones 'preserved of God,' 'Kaif hal il-mahroos?' ('How is the preserved one?') is a common way of inquiring concerning a child. They are often addressed as 'Ya ainee' ('Oh, my eye!'), 'Ya kalbee' ('Oh, my heart!'), 'Ya, habeebee,' ('Oh, my beloved!'), and 'Takburnee' ('May you live to bury me!'). Along with untruthfulness, a child learns from its cradle a very irreverent use of the name of God.

The play period of a child's life in the East is very brief, for the burdens of existence come early. Almost as soon as a little girl can toddle, she carries a tiny jar on her shoulder to bring water from the fountain; and before her strength is equal to the task, she lugs around on her back a younger bro-



BETWEEN WOMEN AND CHILDREN, WITH CHILDREN GRINDING CORN.

of the world, love sweets, and there are some very nice ones. The most ordinary kind is what is called hummus, and is of the nature of roasted peas, covered with a thick

That of a little girl is a skirt and a simple waist, or short jacket. A boy's garb consists of full trousers, and a sort of loose wrapper called a gumbaz, which is folded about him, and fastened in at the waist with a bright girdle twisted around. Sometimes there is a short jacket of cloth, which, for gala occasions, is embroidered with gold thread. The girl wears a bright-colored handkerchief tied over her head, and the boy a red cap, or tarboosh. In the cold weather a small shawl is sometimes worn over the fez. The girl, also, in some places, wears a tarboosh, and, as soon as she reaches early maidenhood, she drapes over her head and shoulders a thin cotton veil. If she is a Moslem, her face is also covered when in the presence of men not of her own family. If a Druze, one eye and her mouth are hidden. There is no general social intermingling of the young after the age of childhood is passed.

Children all the world over love freedom and play, but those of Syria have always seemed less merry than those I have known elsewhere, and carry, perhaps unconsciously, the inheritance of a burdened and oppressed ancestry. In nothing are the fruits of an enlightened Christianity more discernible than in the blessing it brings to the lives of the young. This, I think, was foreseen by the old prophet, Zechariah, whose thoughts