

Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXIV., No. 39.

MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER 29, 1899.

39 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

The Pilgrim to Kerbela.

(By the Rev. W. A. Rice, in 'The Church Missionary Gleaner.')

What are those distant shouts? Is there a free fight going on? Do they want to murder somebody? Or has some supposed injury to the faith stirred up the true believers to muster together and make a raid on Julfa? Or what is it?

Certainly if it were in England instead of Persia that you heard those excited cries, you would think something terrible was the matter, and imagine that bloodshed was not far off.

But when you come to know the people a little better, you find that the cause of a great deal of turmoil and hubbub need not be a very big matter after all, and that generally it is only a question of a few copper shahis, 'black money,' as they call it. Only the people have a very excitable and demonstrative way of expressing their angry or indignant feelings, for in their lack of

less movements, and arouses their curiosity by manners and customs directly opposed to their own religious and ceremonial ideas. In spite of his reputed intelligence, he is often surprisingly negligent in acquiring an accurate knowledge of their language and acquaintance with their thoughts and habits. While his enterprise and apparent wealth command their respect, they are puzzled to understand why God should have bestowed so much wealth and power on the unbelieving Christian. For in addition to all his other peculiarities, the Farangi possesses the further disability, which being an inherited misfortune he cannot be held entirely responsible for, of being an unclean dog of an unbeliever, worthily and properly doomed in the next world to those everlasting torments, of which the most particular, vivid, and realistic descriptions are given in the Qur'an and traditions of the teaching of Mohammed. In a word the Farangi presents a rather perplexing picture to the Persian mind.

But all this by the way. When you ap-

and difficult journey? Has he not braved weariness and fatigue, and long and exhausting marches, and exposure to heat and cold, and dangers of sickness and perils of robbers? Has he not won for himself honor and sanctity in the eyes of the children of his people? Has he not, in short, been to Kerbela, and visited the shrine of the blessed Imam Husain?

Yes; he has really trodden the holy sanctuary and gazed with his own eyes on the very tombs of the glorious martyr Husain, son of Ali, and of Ali Akbar, son of Husain.

He will never forget the proud rapture of the day when, the long journey past and its fatigues forgotten, he prepared to enter the holy shrine. How carefully he bathed himself before he mingled with the reverent and expectant throng that assembled outside the mosque, while the leader offered up a prayer for permission to enter the consecrated precincts! With what deep awe and emotion they passed within the sanctuary and made their way beneath the dome! Then the same leader repeated another long prayer consisting of salutations to the saints, and after a few more prayers the formal ceremony was over.

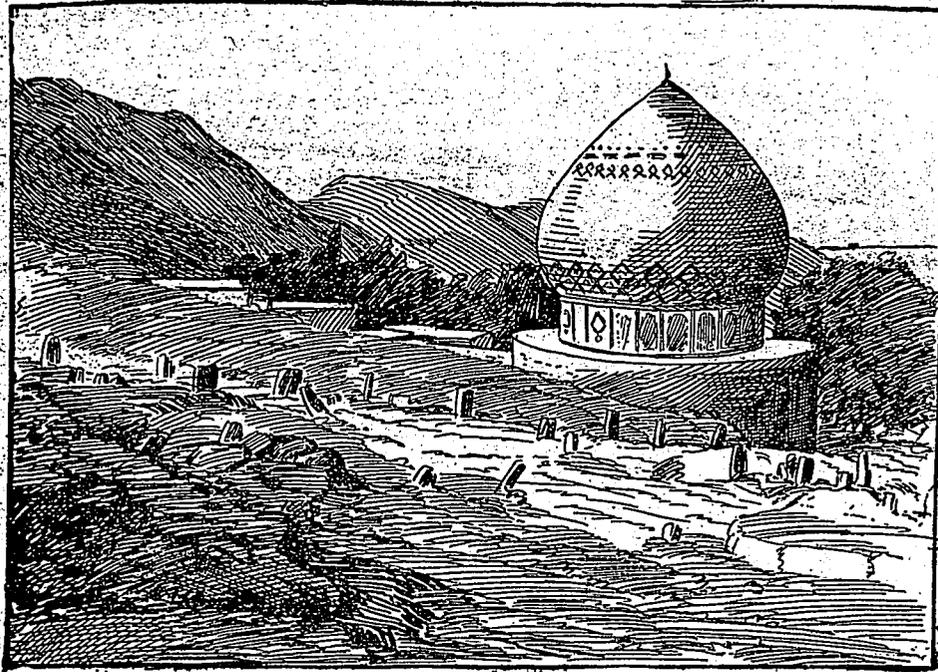
He would never forget, too, how some of the worshippers—but they were chiefly women—actually took the dust from the grating round the tomb and rubbed it on their eyes, and touched the holy threshold with their foreheads and kissed it in the intensity of their religious fervour, while some of them wept aloud, and others in silent prayer presented their special requests, mostly for wealth or children, to the grace and favor of the saints.

Every day during his stay in Kerbela the pilgrim paid a visit to the chief shrine, and visited besides some of the other holy places in the city, such as the shrine of Abbas, the younger brother of Husain, as well as the towns of Najif and Kufah in the neighborhood.

Now it is all over. He is at home again, with all his sins cleansed away, and himself made holy and pure, like an angel of light, and a 'brother of God.' So, at all events, he thinks himself, nor are his fellow-villagers disposed to question it.

It is therefore no wonder if his friends go forth to welcome his return, and embrace and kiss him, and make feasts in his honor, and come to visit him and pay their congratulations; and his female relatives give him presents of new clothes made with their own hands, as it is their custom to do whenever any one of theirs returns in safety after a long absence.

No doubt he will have brought gifts for them in return, different-colored rosaries, each containing ninety-nine beads, with which to recite the names of the attributes of the Deity, or take the omen which reveals God's will in circumstances of doubt or uncertainty; small prayer-tablets also of different designs, and of a natural pale-brown color, and like the rosaries, made of the sacred sweet-scented earth of Kerbela, pressed into different moulds, oblong, round, semi-circular, or lozenge-shaped. The possessor keeps it carefully in a little bag, and at the time of prayer places it on the ground a few feet in front of him, and touches it with his forehead in his prostrations. Not



MOHAMMEDAN SHRINE.

self-restraint and their care for the interests of 'number one' they are like wayward children.

Perhaps that Mohammedan there, sitting quietly by the road-side, has read the question in your looks, or notices the rather frightened face of the little English girl having a ride on your horse (for we were all returning from an hour or two spent by the riverside that afternoon), and obligingly reassures you by telling you that it is only So-and-so has returned from Kerbela! And if you reply, 'Alhamdulillah!' ('Praise be to God!'), and further politely ask whether he has returned quite safe and sound, you will perhaps be rewarded with a smile and look of astonishment at the thought of a Farangi (European) showing so much intelligent and sympathetic interest.

For, as a rule, the Persians understand us perhaps even less than we comprehend them. In their eyes the Farangi has very free-and-easy and undignified ways; he wears a short, unseemly, not to say indecent style coat; he fidgets them with his active, rest-

proach a little nearer to the scene of the cries which first attracted your attention, you can begin to distinguish such exclamations as 'God accept your pilgrimage!' 'May your service be accepted!' 'Praise God for your safe return!' 'Our eyes are once more enlightened by the sight of your lovely face,' and, addressed to the relatives of the hero of the hour, 'Your eyes are enlightened' (i.e., on account of his return). All this is mingled, perhaps, with the recitation of prayers to Mohammed and his descendants, repeated by some one appointed for the purpose either in the party which has just arrived, or from the throng which has issued forth to welcome the pilgrim home.

Then we see people coming forward to greet and embrace a little insignificant-looking man, bronzed and tanned with long travel and exposure, who appears quite self-possessed, and not in the least disconcerted by all the commotion.

Why indeed should he be? Is he not a bit of a hero—for a few days at all events? Has he not successfully accomplished a long