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The Persians.

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PERSIA.

THE Mohammedans of Persia, as is well known, belong to the Sheah sect. A small portion of them, especially of the Koords and Eolants or wandering tribes, are Sunnees. The Sheahs are usually considered to have more liberality than their orthodox brethren. Being looked upon as dissenters themselves, and having to maintain the right to differ from the majority, they are naturally inclined to greater liberality towards those who differ from them. As in politics, so in religion—great freedom of discussion is allowed. They dispute for hours on religious themes, without displaying fanaticism or arrogance. One need not have the slightest hesitancy about expressing an opinion; it is when he puts his opinion into action that he meets with opposition and persecution.

The morals of the people have been frequently described in the portraits of the conditions of the other Oriental nations. Polygamy and its attendant evils are presented in their social life. Theft is so universal that you had best take it for granted at all times that every one will steal; deceit and falsehood so natural that it is hard for them to tell the truth when it is for their advantage. Bribery and venality are accepted factors in all transactions, bargaining habits in trade, abominable repudiation of debt, if successfully accomplished, considered clever; a high loyalty to self, which disdains to be lacking in the majority—in short, the noblest work of God is a rarity. Diogenes would light his lantern in vain in this region. True conjugal affection is exceptional, concubinage frequent. The profane use of the divine name by men and women alike strikes the ear in every kind of intercourse. Gambling



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prevails among the upper classes. Drunkenness is making distressing progress. Though the penalty for the latter is a public beating through the bazaars, yet if justice were meted out with even hand, none would deserve it more frequently than the Golla B ya, or Governor of our ward. Liquor duns, instead of being stamped out, as the Koran would indicate, are made a source of revenue to the officials. We attended a native wedding, and when the time came for the bride's father to preside on the occasion, we were informed that he was sick, but the evidence of our eyes showed him and one of the chief guests dead drunk in the side room. Those who preach up the high morality of Islam should come and see its practical workings. One thing, however, is universally conceded in favour of the Persians—they are not blood-thirsty nor quarrelsome. Their gentleness, affability and courteous manner, though insincere, cannot be gain-sayed. It is a great source of satisfaction. If to their other qualities were added a fiery and haughty temper and a repulsive bearing, our intercourse with them would be far different. As it is, it can always be pleasant in form and outwardly agreeable.

In education the Persians are greatly deficient. I had been led by the accounts of some travellers to expect to find schools universal, and primary education the heritage of all the men. It is true there are many schools which give a humdrum training in the three R's, but so far is it from being universal and up to any proper standard that in the cities not one man in four can read and write, and the average is not more than two or three to a village, while a reading woman is yet a rarity. The term Meerza still holds its place as a distinctive and honorary title of one who can read and write. The schools are usually in the mosques,