

Motherhood in Persia.

There is a vast difference in the meaning of the word motherhood to a Persian woman and the meaning of that same word to women of the western world. It means to a Persian a struggle, a desparate struggle for life with one little one after another until toward the close of life they look back with something almost like indifference at these past struggles and tell you quite calmly of their fourteen or sixteen babies only two or three of whom have lived to grow up. To me one of the most discouraging things is that these poor tired mothers, worn out from excess child bearing seem to have lost all of the true spirit of motherhood and refuse to take any advice whatsoever regarding the care of their children.

The extremely high infant mortality in Persia is not at all surprising when one sees the way even the best and wealthiest families are so bound by superstition that the mothers have no peace from the time the baby is born. At the time of birth the women of the family all gather around the mother and tie or pin charms all over her. They write prayers and having poured water over these make the mother drink the water. About two teaspoonful of ashes is then given. If they can afford it they bring into the room a big black sheep which is sacrificed after the mother has touched it. After the little one is born it is wrapped tightly in old rags with its little legs pulled out straight and its arms bound down to its sides. This sort of wrapping makes a convenient bundle to carry around. Therags are opened but once a day and the baby is washed. It is not unheard of for this bath to take place beside a stream of water that runs through every village. The poor little babies are let down into this cold mountain stream (for practically all the water supply in Persia comes from the melting snow on the mountains) and their screaming is quite unheeded.

The mothers don't seem to understand why they lose so many of their children. It is the will of Allah and they accept it as such not realizing that they have any responsibility at all. One mother who was bending over a little one whose eyes were all diseased was asked why she didn't put a net over the child to keep the swarms of flies away from him. Her reason given was that she couldn't afford to buy a net. When the missionary replied "You would rather have a blind son than pay twenty cents for a net?", she merely laughed as though the remark had been intended for a joke.

However they are not all indifferent to the welfare of their children. One family with whom I am acquainted had a son who was crosseeyed from birth. To cure him they fastened on each eye a half of a walnut shell in the centers of which they had bored little holes. In order to see anything the child was forced to draw his eyes straight and focus through the little holes in the walnut shells. Gradually the muscles of the eye straightened and the boy, who is now grown up, is not afflicted with cross eyes.

Not long ago a mother sent word to me that she had little new twin boys. She asked me to tell her how she should feed and care for them.. The poor soul had lost every baby she had ever had and she was desperately determined to keep these twins. If more of these mothers would accept the help we are so eager to give, a great deal of suffering would be ended but they have such a strange attitude toward us!unclean Christians!