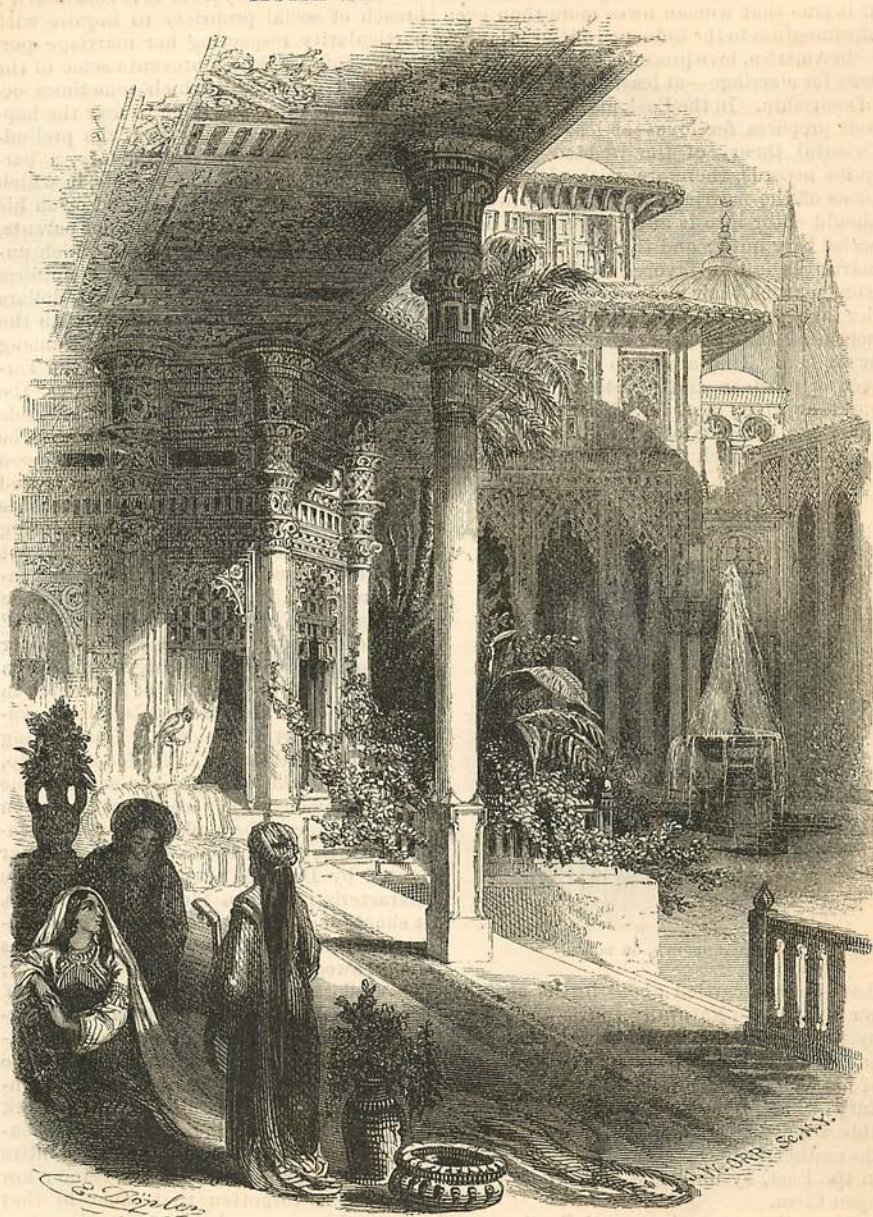


HOME LIFE IN THE EAST.*



INNER COURT OF A HOUSE IN DAMASCUS.

WE propose in this article, commencing with the wedding and ending with

* The illustrations and, in the main, the facts embodied in this article are taken from Dr. HENRY J. VAN LEXNER'S *Bible Lands: their modern Customs and Manners illustrative of Scripture* (Harper and Brothers). The necessary limitations of space are such that we present here only one aspect of Eastern life, which in this volume is admirably illustrated in all its aspects by one whose long residence in the East gives him personal familiarity with the subject.

the burial, to trace the history and describe the condition of an Eastern household. The reader who follows carefully the course of our narrative will find in the ancient customs which are still maintained unchanged in the Orient some few features worthy of our imitation; he will find more that indicate how true it is that all the world is kin; and he will find also some that illustrate the truth that Christianity has greatly changed

social life, and that if women are the most devoted adherents of the Christian Church, it is true that woman owes more than even she imagines to the influence of Christianity.

In America, love precedes and prepares the way for marriage—at least this is our theory of courtship. In the East, marriage precedes and prepares for love—at least this is the Oriental theory of the wedded state. It quite accords, therefore, with the Eastern ideas of the marriage relation that women should enter into it at an age which to us seems very unfit; and this practice of early marriages is also favored by the fact that women reach their maturity at a much earlier age than with us. They are at the height of their bloom and beauty at fifteen or sixteen. They are often married at thirteen or fourteen, and sometimes as early as eight or nine; and Dr. Van-Lennep mentions one instance of a wedding which he attended in which the bride was so young



BRIDAL CROWN, OR DODOS.

that she was carried about in the arms of her relatives. Naturally courtship is done by proxy, and the young men are cheated out of what the American regards as one of his most sacred, inalienable rights. The duty of looking up for the young man a suitable wife, which even in our own society the mother, aunts, or sisters often assume, is in the East, by universal consent, devolved upon them.

Womanly nature is essentially the same the world over, and we may safely assume that they are nothing loath to perform the duty which social custom intrusts to them. For this purpose they sally forth in a body on their tour of inspection, call at any house which affords reasonable hope of containing a suitable inmate, are invariably greeted with the utmost courtesy, and ushered at once into the reception-room; the young lady is summoned, and presently enters, bearing sweetmeats and water; she is ar-

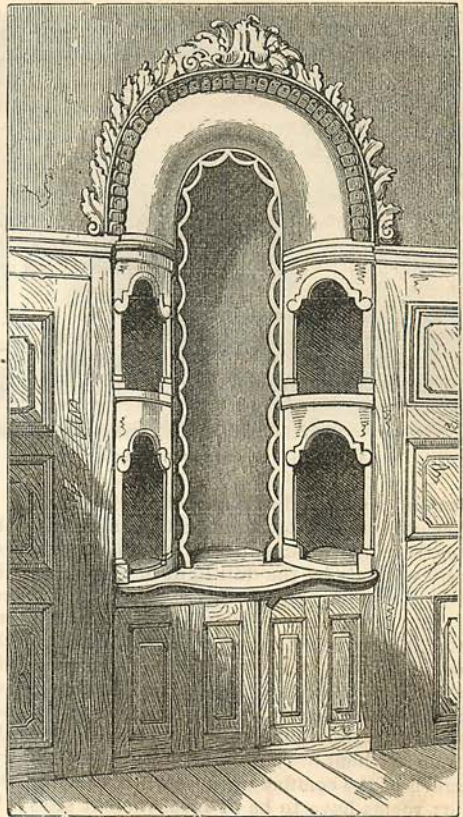
rayed in all the finery and jewels which belong to her dowry; nor is it considered a breach of social propriety to inquire with particularity respecting her marriage portion. This frankness prevents some of the awkward discoveries which sometimes occur with us after marriage to mar the happiness of the honey-moon. If the preliminary negotiations are satisfactory, a bargain is made between the parents, in which the amount paid by the husband or on his behalf, either to the bride or to her parents, is definitely agreed upon. This, which under the Mosaic law was fixed at a uniform rate—at fifty shekels, or twenty-five dollars—varies among the modern Jews with the condition of the bride's family, while among some of the Circassian tribes and the Tartars, as among the African savages, the daughter, when she reaches a marriageable age, is sold to the highest bidder. The parties are considered as affianced as soon as the marriage contract has been agreed to, but the nuptial ceremony is sometimes deferred for a considerable period, during which time the bride and groom are not permitted to see each other; their sole intercourse with each other is through the intervention of a "friend of the bridegroom." The wedding dress is even more a matter of importance with the Eastern bride than with us. The preparation of her toilet, in the presence of female friends, often occupies a large part of two days. The wedding veil, the bridal crown, the dodos or cap, are some of the emblems donned for the bridal ceremony. The costumes are often rich and gorgeous beyond expression. Fashion, as interpreted by an Oriental milliner quoted by Dr. Van-Lennep, prescribes the characteristics of an ideal wedding dress. It should measure six yards from the shoulders to the end of the train; the long sleeves should sweep the floor; the material is silk; it is elaborately embroidered by a party of professional embroiderers under the direction of a chief. The sum paid for superintending the needle-work on a single robe referred to by Dr. Van-Lennep was five hundred dollars, while the charge for the work done by the subordinates was two thousand five hundred dollars, and the entire cost of the dress was ten thousand; nor must it be forgotten that labor in that country is very much less expensive than in this.

The marriage festivities last often for a week, and in many sections of the East the old practices are still maintained. The bridegroom, with a procession, starts with music and torches, by night, for the house of the bride, where, after a show of resistance, and sometimes quite a struggle, she is taken possession of, and borne away to her future home. This resistance by the coy maiden to the approaches of her husband

is curiously illustrative of the marriage customs of many countries, and in various forms—from that of African society, in which the bridegroom chases the fleeing bride, captures, and carries her away bodily, to that of the Nestorians, where the bride remains in a corner of the church until the time comes for the joining of hands, when she is dragged half across the building by main strength toward her intended husband, who is allowed to seize her hand only after a vehement struggle, during which the officiating clergyman stands passively by.

Far more important, however, than any difference in the form of the marriage ceremony between East and West is the fundamental difference in the nature of the marriage contract. Even the State of Indiana has not succeeded in incorporating in its legislation a facility of divorce equal to that of the Orient, where, both among the Jews and the Muslims, the husband is both judge and jury, having a right to divorce his wife at any time, with no other limitation than the requirement that he shall give her a written statement both of the fact and of the cause of the divorce. A liberty so large as this seems to render unnecessary what is, however, a common practice among certain Muslims—marriage for a limited period. In entering upon this strange relation, the parties agree to live together for a fixed period, which varies from a few days to ninety-nine years, and the contract is regularly drawn up by the judge and duly signed by witnesses. This practice is confined to the transient residents of large cities, and the women who enter upon such relations are deemed of good repute.

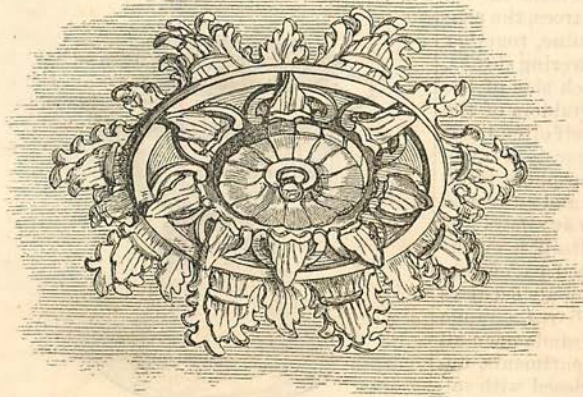
From the bird to the nest, from the bride to the home, the transition is easy. The tent is the germ from which, by a process of Darwinian development, the Oriental house has grown. In the cheapest and poorest



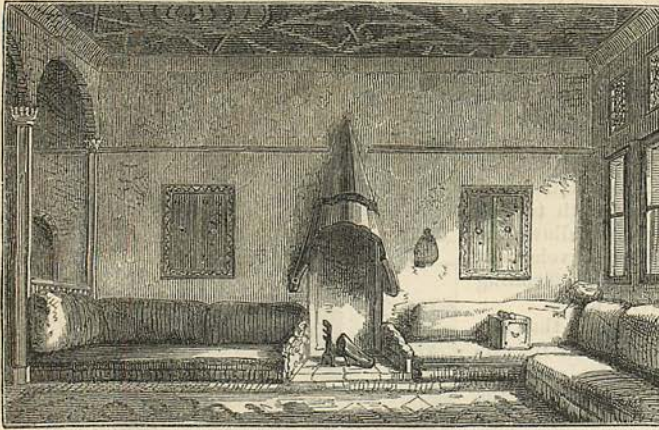
GYPSUM ALCOVE.

houses this idea of a tent is carried out in the details. There is a single apartment within, oblong in form. The roof is a simple and rude form of dome, which looks like a conical chimney, and is intended for the escape of the smoke from the fire-place, which stands in the middle of the room. The building material is mud, or sun-dried bricks, or branches of trees daubed with

mud both within and without. Sometimes the roof is flat, the site chosen being the sloping side of a hill, so that one end of the roof is level with the ground. A railing separates the apartment occupied by the people from that appropriated to the cattle. Light is admitted through an opening in the roof, which serves also for a chimney; but this is sometimes wanting, and the smoke has to find its way out as best it can. In such cases a narrow opening made in the wall serves for a window, but



CEILING ORNAMENT IN GYPSUM.



COUNCIL-CHAMBER AT TOCAT.

it admits cold and rain as well as light, and has often to be closed by a rude sort of shutter, leaving the inmates in utter darkness, relieved only by the dull light of a smoking tallow candle.

The city house is, however, quite a different affair, and in one respect it must be conceded that the Oriental is wiser than are we. "The chief aim of the Occidental is to obtain beauty on the outside, and his success is to be judged from a general view from without. To this is to be sacrificed much of the comfort of those who live within; rooms have to be of inconvenient sizes and shapes, passages awry, and windows in the wrong places. The Oriental, on the other hand, cares little for the outward appearance; his houses are usually mere agglomerations of rooms. Nothing is to be seen without but a dead-wall, with, at most, a high latticed window." The regulation pattern of such a house is a series of rooms built around and opening upon a court in the centre. Into this court admittance is given by a lofty gateway, whose double doors stand open all day long, revealing within the refreshing shade of a variety of trees, the acacia, the citron, and the jasmine, together with other odoriferous and flowering shrubs. On the carved benches at each side of the gate lounge the gayly clad retainers of the master of the house. He himself often takes his seat here, and receives his guests or transacts business where the atmosphere is refreshed by the cooling breeze and enlivened by the cheerful twitter of the swallows flitting in and out. The court itself is generally provided with a tessellated pavement; a well, tank, or fountain commonly occupies the centre of the court; a pillared veranda runs around it; upon this veranda open all the windows of the lower apartments, unfurnished with glasses, and closed with solid single shutters of walnut wood. Directly opposite the great entrance, with the

court intervening, is the *liwan*, an apartment open in front, and used as a reception-room for guests and as an office for the transaction of business. The houses of the wealthy are highly ornamented with pavements and wainscoting of marble, with carvings in marble, alabaster, and wood, and with ceilings and walls plastered with gypsum, wrought out in elaborate and often beautiful designs.

The furniture of the poorer houses is of the poorest description. Three stones reared against the outer wall of the peasant's single-roomed hut constitute the housewife's cooking stove; a saucepan or two, a few wooden spoons, and some basins or bowls of the coarsest earthenware are the table utensils; the furniture consists of a coarse carpet, or sometimes a black goat's-hair cloth, only a yard in width, spread along two or three sides of the room next the wall; a cushion filled with straw serves the purpose of chair or lounge; the bedding spread on the floor at night is piled up in one corner by day.

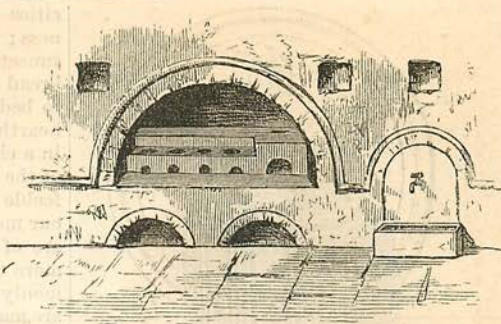
The apartments of the wealthy are, however, often elaborately furnished. The accompanying illustration, representing the council-chamber of the Governor of Tocat, in Asia Minor, will give the reader a fair idea of an Oriental interior. The room is ordinarily of an oblong shape. A platform raised six or eight inches above the rest of the floor occupies a larger part of the room, extending from side to side, and being of equal length and width. The highly orna-



BRAZIER.

mented ceiling is divided in the same manner; frequently near the edge of the platform on either side rises a pillar, from which springs a graceful arch. A seat or divan is built around the three sides of the room on the raised platform. This divan consists of a frame about a foot high and three feet in width, upon which are laid mattresses stuffed with wool, hay, or straw. Over the mattresses is spread a covering of chintz, broadcloth, or even some richer fabric, usually of a bright scarlet or crimson color, often trimmed with a long silk fringe interwoven with gold threads. Large soft cushions are placed against the wall; a rich carpet generally covers the raised portion of the floor. Chairs are not wholly unknown, but they are rarely seen outside *cafés* and other public resorts. The fire-place, when there is one, is on one side of the room, where the place of the divan is occupied by a hearth flanked on either side by marble or other stone, which answers the purpose of a fender. Sometimes a single andiron is used; sometimes the wood is set upright against the back of the chimney. Such a fire-place, however, is seen chiefly in the mountainous districts, where wood is procurable; the more common fuel is charcoal, grass, and dried manure.

In the East, however, the stove is more common than the open fire-place, though the Oriental stove is quite unlike ours. It is a brazier, or stand of brass or copper, about two feet high, in the top of which is a pan to contain the fire of charcoal. A layer of



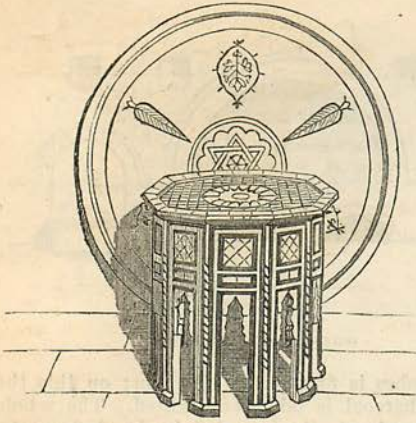
ORIENTAL KITCHEN RANGE.

ashes is first put in the pan; on this the charcoal is laid and lighted. The whole brazier is then carried by hand from the court-yard, where the fire is started, to the room where it is needed. The stove of the poorer classes is simply an earthenware pan. Even the modern range is not, however, unknown in the East, though of a very simple and rude construction. It is built of stone or brick, about three feet high, supplied with a fire bed not wholly unlike our grates, and with holes above for the pots and sauce-pans. The cooking utensils are almost as various as with us. Cast iron is unknown; the common materials are copper and brass. The Orientals believe that tongs, like forks, were made after fingers, and it is wonderful to see how a human being can handle a live coal without harm. Still, iron tongs are to be seen as an article of necessity in the blacksmith's shop, and as an article of luxury in the dwelling of the wealthy.

The oven of the private house is variously constructed. The most common form is that still to be seen, in a slightly modified form, in our American logging camp. It consists of a hole in the ground about three feet deep, a little wider at the bottom than at the top, and plastered within with clay. The tent dwellers use a portable oven of earthenware, covered at the top, and with an opening at the side. In either case the fire is first kindled in the oven, and then, when the oven is sufficiently heated, the dough is introduced. This is the



A PUBLIC OVEN.



COMMON TABLE AND TRAY.

method also pursued in the public ovens, which have existed in all the larger towns since the days of Hosea. These, in structure and in the method of operating, resemble our New England brick ovens. A brisk fire is kindled on the floor of the oven; when the chamber has become sufficiently heated, the embers are raked out, and the loaves of bread are put in their place inside by means of a long-handled shovel; then the door is closed, and the loaves are left to bake.

If the cooking apparatus of the East is simple compared with ours, the food is ordinarily no less so. The elaborate dishes of an American or European dinner party are, for the most part, unknown in the family life of these people, who retain something of the simplicity of the early child-life of the world. Stews, thickened by long simmering over the fire; soups and potages, flavored with aromatic herbs, and thickened with sour curds or flour; rice, mingled with chopped meat, and seasoned with pepper, salt, and onions; bread, cakes, and pasty—constitute, with fruits and garden vegetables, raw or cooked, the chief articles of diet. The killing of a lamb or kid, now as in Bible times, is reserved for special festival occasions. The dinner table is a very slight affair, about two feet high and eighteen inches wide, often beautifully carved and inlaid. It sits in the middle of the floor or against the angle of the divan, the master of the house sitting on the divan, his companions sitting round upon the mat or carpet, and the wife waiting as a servant upon her lord. The hours for meals are those of a fashionable or busy American in the great

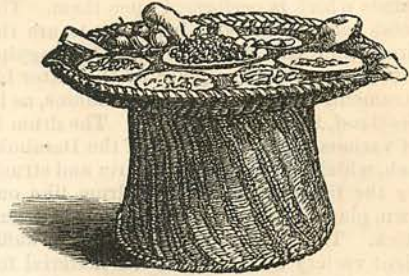
cities—breakfast early, before going to business; dinner late, on the return home at sunset. The noonday meal is a lunch of bread and fruits. Dinner over, the poor go to bed by the light of a blazing fire on the hearth, or the light of a pitch-pine torch set in a chink in the wall. In the houses even of the better classes, tallow candles afford a feeble and flickering light in contrast with our modern chandeliers. The candlesticks are of brass, silver, or gold, never having more than a single stem. Those most commonly in use are not over a foot high, and are made to set on the table; but larger ones are in frequent use, and are set, as needed, on the floor. Olive-oil lamps are also in common use in the olive districts. If, however, the light is dim, it must be remembered that there are neither printed books nor daily newspapers to be read by the evening lamps.

Circumstances have made the Oriental people peculiarly social and hospitable. The very want of books and newspapers aids to make them so. The traveler bringing news from a far-off land, or even the gossip of a not remote town or village, is always welcomed to the social circle gathered about the camp fire, or sitting on the floor about the open fire-place, or, in the



CANDLESTICKS.

wealthier mansion, on the cushioned divan and in the tapestried apartment, lighted from one or more tall candlesticks, and promoting conversation by the inspiration of pipes and coffee. There are no hotels. The inn or caravansary is but a lodging-place for caravans whose company is too large to be accommodated in private families. The proffer of perfume or the use of incense is in special instances, and as an honor to special guests, the first offering of hospitality. The perfume usually employed is the *lignum aloes*, a small bit of which is dropped upon burning coals in a little chafing-dish or censer of silver or gold filigree, sometimes adorned with precious stones. The fumes escape through the perforated cover. Sometimes the perfume is rose-water sprinkled upon the hands or the face of the guest from an ornamental bottle; sometimes it is an odorous substance thrown upon the burning coals of the brazier, or put in the pipes



COMMON WICKER TABLE WITH COLLATION.

suits him, washes his hands as before meat, and is then served with coffee or a pipe. There is but little wine-drinking during the meal, but plenty after it.

Music and dancing are the essential concomitants of social festivity. The Oriental music is of a rude description, radically different from ours. Dr. Van-Lennep gives an interesting analysis of the difference, too long for us to transfer to these pages. We must content ourselves with saying that harmony is unknown, and even impossible; that our stringed instruments need to be strung differently, and our wind instruments made over, before they are capable of performing the curiously disjointed Oriental melodies; that the only musical accompaniment to a melody in the Orient consists of a single note, struck in different octaves for the sake of variety; and that the Oriental melodies republished in this country are, for these reasons, but poor imitations of the



COFFEE POT AND CUPS.

of the social circle. Simple refreshments, coffee or sherbet, almost invariably follow.

The meal itself is rarely a social occasion. It is generally dispatched expeditiously and in silence. If there are a number of guests, a proportionate number of small tables, such as have already been described, are set for their use in different parts of the room. When the master wishes to show special attention to his guests, he waits upon them, deprecates the meagre fare, and bids them partake freely. On great festive occasions as many as a hundred dishes sometimes appear upon the table, following one another in quick succession, beginning with soup, and alternating a sweet dish with some form of cooked meats—now a fruit jelly, then a roast fowl, finishing at last by a huge plate of "pillau," or boiled rice. The chief dish, a roasted sheep or fatted calf, is served whole, and torn in pieces with the hands, each guest doing his own carving. The dishes are passed from table to table, through the various social gradations, ending in the kitchen, where the servants, retainers, and scullions wait impatiently for their share. At the close of the meal each one rises as it

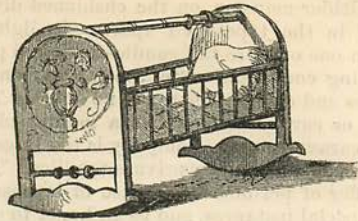
originals, which can not, indeed, be expressed in our ordinary system of musical notation.

The musical instruments of the East are as rude in conception and structure as the



SILVER CENSER.

music which is performed upon them. The most common martial instruments are the drum and the hautboy, but the bagpipe sometimes takes the place of the latter instrument, and sometimes serves alone, as in Scotland, Italy, and Bulgaria. The drum is of various forms, from that of the Darabukkeh, which is held under the arm and struck by the fingers, to that of a drum like our own, played with a peculiarly shaped drumstick. The house instruments are of sufficient variety to constitute the material for quite an orchestra. The flute, the guitar, the violin, the tambourine, the castanet, all resemble in their general nature our own instruments. The modern organ has not even a distant relative in the East, but the Kanoon or Santâr is the ancestor of our piano. This instrument—for the two names indicate only slight varieties in the same instrument—consists of a box two inches in depth and of an irregular form, its greatest size being thirty-nine inches by sixteen. Across this are strung the strings of wire, underneath which is a perforated sounding-board. The performer holds it upon his knees or carries it suspended from his neck, and plays it by striking the chords with the forefinger of each hand, to which is fastened a plectrum of horn, or with wooden hammers. Music is a well-recognized profession. Bands of performers go about on especial festive days, as the singing children on Christmas in Germany and England; they are heard in the *cafés*; they are hired by the wealthy to grace their festivals. Usually a young lad serves as the solo singer, the rest joining in the chorus, and using their instruments as an accompaniment.



ORIENTAL CRADLE.

Music is, however, by no means confined to professional musicians. Every where and at all places you may hear the quaint weird melodies of the Orient. Mothers soothe their infants with plaintive lullabies; children accompany their games with song and chorus; the muezzin chants the call to prayers from the top of the minaret; the church beadle keeps time to the music of his exhortation to matins with the resounding blows of his heavy stick upon the pavement; the street vendors extol their wares with rude chant and song; the priest recites his prayers and the congregation their responses in a musical monotone; the wedding, the circumcision, the baptism, the burial, are all accompanied by instrumental music and song. Not lightly and carelessly caroling, as the Italians, but with sober and sometimes tearful earnestness, as befits the plaintive music, the Oriental takes up what is to him the solemn psalm of life.

The respect which the strong pay to the weak, which, therefore, men pay to women, is the real measure of civilization; and it must be conceded that, so measured, the civilization of the East is painfully lacking.

The "equality of the sexes" is utterly unknown. If the husband happens to walk the streets with his wife or daughter, he precedes her by several paces; they never walk side by side. If in conversation he alludes to either in polite society, he prefixes the reference with the phrase, "I beg your pardon," as politeness requires him to do before mention of a donkey or a hog. If, absent, he writes to his



ORIENTAL BAGPIPE.

family, his letter is addressed to his son, not to his wife, even though his son may be a babe in the mother's lap. In many places the wife speaks to her husband only with hesitation; the bride does not speak above a whisper till the honey-moon is past, and, in token of this compulsory reticence, even wears a handkerchief around her mouth till her mother-in-law bids her dispense with it. She is, indeed, a true housekeeper, but not a true wife; she prepares the meals, waits upon the table, washes the hands and even the feet of her lord, and performs all the menial services of the household for him; but his social and intellectual life she never shares. Her industry contributes to his wealth, but no part of it is hers. She cultivates the farm in his absence; even in his presence she weeds or picks the cotton, prunes the vines, gathers the grapes or olives, wields the sickle, and helps to gather in the harvest. She takes her babe to the field, leaves it in its cradle, nurses it, brings it home with her when the day's work is done. She gathers the brush-wood and the manure for the fire, and fills at the fountain or the well the jar of water, bringing it at even home upon her head. Within-doors she is equally busy. She works in embroidery, spins the wool, cotton, flax, or goat's hair, plies the loom, and makes up the homespun fabrics into garments for her children. In brief, all the poetical eulogy of the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs is realized in the prosaic domestic experience of the Oriental housewife. But



ORIENTAL DISTAFF.

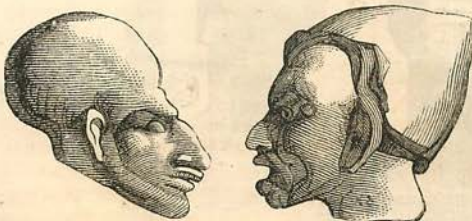
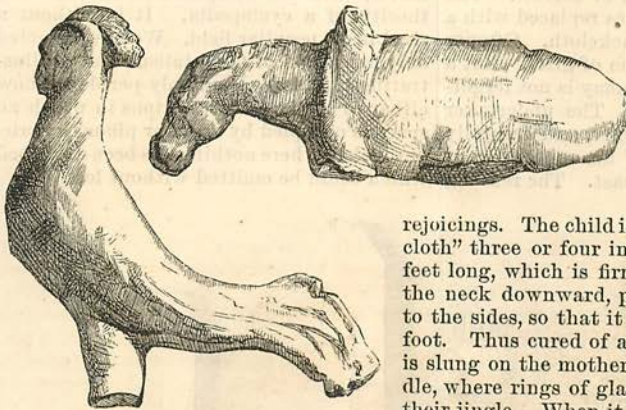
in all her industry she is ever a loveless and a hopeless drudge.

Widely as life differs in its outward garb,

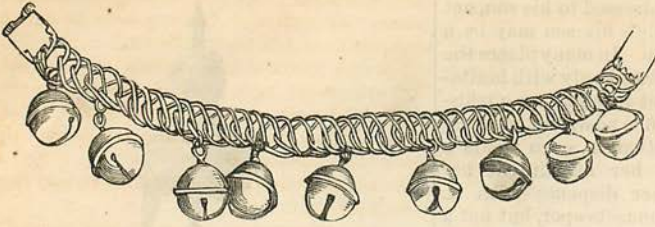
its inward experiences are not without resemblances. If we enter the inner precincts of the household, we find at once a curious similarity and a curious contrast with our own. The birth of a son is celebrated with great

rejoicings. The child is clothed in a "swaddling-cloth" three or four inches wide and about ten feet long, which is firmly wound round it from the neck downward, pinioning the arms firmly to the sides, so that it can neither stir hand nor foot. Thus cured of all infantile restlessness, it is slung on the mother's back, or left in the cradle, where rings of glass or metal amuse it with their jingle. When it begins to walk, an anklet

is fastened about its ankles, whose tiny bells announce to the mother whither the child is straying. Dolls' heads of terra cotta, that might be hardened specimens of the modern monstrosities in gutta-percha; miniature horses, cattle, dogs, fish, birds, and wild beasts; dolls with movable legs and arms, like an American jumping-jack; curious grotesques of all imaginable and unimaginable shapes and forms; whistles, flageolets, candy representations of the



CHILDREN'S TERRA COTTA TOYS.



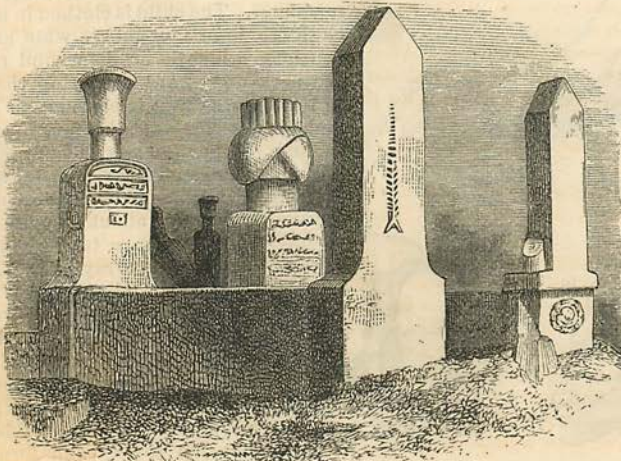
BELLS FASTENED TO A CHILD'S ANKLE.

animal creation, any or all of which might, in slightly modified form, be found in an American toy store—are among the toys of childhood, whose inalienable right to amusement is recognized almost the whole world over. It is true that the religion of Islam, like that of the ancient Hebrews, forbids the making of graven images; but a liberal construction is put upon this statute, and it does not practically shut out the children of the Orient from mimic children of their own.

From the cradle to the grave is but a step, from the toys of childhood to the tears of old age. We began this glance at Eastern life with the wedding; we may fitly end it with the funeral. The mourning customs of the East have not materially changed since the days when Joseph went up to bury his father in the land of Canaan. Professional mourning women announce the death by a shriek, shrill and piercing; they weep, they beat their breasts, they tear their hair. The entire household join with them in noisy and obtrusive demonstrations of sorrow. The outer garment is sometimes replaced with a coarse robe or shawl of sackcloth. Oftener it is rent in the distraction of grief. But a reasonable regard to economy is not forgotten on these occasions. The undertaker first goes to every mourner, and carefully rips the central seam of his robe three or four inches down the breast. The rending

of the garment is thereafter only the ripping of a seam; a needle and a little thread easily repair the damage. The sacred tears of affection are treasured up in a bottle. For this purpose the master of ceremonies presents each weeping friend with a piece of cotton-wool with which to dry his eyes. This cotton is preserved, and the tears wrung from it into the tear bottles, as a future and efficacious remedy in the last hours of life. Thus a carefully pre-arranged extravagance of grief prepares for and accompanies the last rites of respect. When the time of burial arrives, which in that warm climate is never long delayed, the body is dressed in its best attire, and laid, not in a coffin, but upon an open bier, perhaps adorned with flowers, and so borne, by the Turks in silence, by the Christians with softly chanted hymns, to its last resting-place. Yet even here economy is not forgotten: every valuable article of clothing is taken from the remains, which are then buried, without a coffin, and in a shallow grave.

In this article we have only turned over a few pages of Dr. Van-Lenep's really remarkable volume—a volume which possesses the fascination of a book of personal travel, with the compactness and the authority of a cyclopedia. It is without a rival in its peculiar field. We have selected only one phase of Orientalism, and in illustrating that, have been only perplexed how either to condense descriptions in which no space is occupied by florid or pious rhetoric, or to select where nothing has been described which could be omitted without loss.



ORIENTAL GRAVES.