

"A PICTURESQUE COLONY"
SYRIANS SETTLED IN THE FIRST WARD

What May Be Seen in a Walk Through Lower
Washington Street--A young But Growing
Community With Some Queer Coustoms.

Away down town in the First Ward, not far from the jumping-off place where Manhattan Island ends and the North and East Rivers meet, there has gathered one of the most interesting, curious and, to a student of human nature, instructive colonies of people that is to be found anywhere in the big metropolis, if not anywhere in the country. With their brown complexions, medium stature, lithe, wiry and muscular forms, keen, dark, restless eyes, the people composing this group plainly show their Eastern origin. The language they use among themselves is "as old as the hills", and is one which has contributed to the literature of the world no small part of its poesy and romance. To it the English of the present day is indebted for many words in common use, for it is the soft, flexible, graceful Arabian, the speech of the people who gave to the civilized world its system of notation. The members of the colony themselves are hardly true Arabians, as the majority of

Picture

"Native Wedding Costumes"

NATIVE WEDDING COSTUMES.

them came to this country from Syria, principally from the cities of Bierut and Damascus, and Syria is under the rule of Turkey and yields allegiance to the Sultan Abdul Hamid. But the Arab dominion left an indelible impress upon the country, which has outlasted all the changes of government, and in that section of New York City which is bounded by Rector, Greenwich, Morris and Washington streets, the salutation on entering a room is far more likely to be "Asalaam alalcoom", than "how do you do?" The houses, especially on the Washington street side of the block, are old, weather-beaten, dingy and sometimes dirty, the cellars are devoted to trade and packed full of everything which a pedler can carry in his pack or find a market for in his wanderings, and the first or ground floor is generally used as a display room and office, where goods are sorted out and bargains made--and these sojourners from the far East are sharp traders.

But as it is sometimes hard to judge of a man by the clothing he wears, so is it hard to fix a value on these houses by their outward appearance. Go inside one of these stores, where pins by the hundred gross rest against shoe blacking by the case, and scapularies and rosaries, beads and prayer books are almost hidden from view by boxes of cheap cologne and ornamental

shell work, and if you can find some one who will translate your English into Arabic and tell the proprietor what you want, with a wave of his hand this latter-day magician will alter the whole scene and for a brief time you will realize that "things are seldom what they seem."

① picture of ^{some} ~~the~~ ~~Arabian~~ ~~Nights~~ ~~Entertainments~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~magic~~ ~~word~~ ~~"Bagdad."~~ ~~Shade~~ ~~of~~ ~~Haroun-al~~ ~~Raschid!~~ ~~Has~~ ~~this~~ ~~swarthy~~ ~~trafficker~~ ~~got~~ ~~the~~ ~~enchanted~~ ~~carpet~~ ~~we~~ ~~read~~ ~~about~~ ~~so~~ ~~long~~ ~~ago~~ ~~stowed~~ ~~away~~ ~~in~~ ~~one~~ ~~of~~ ~~those~~ ~~boxes~~ ~~under~~ ~~the~~ ~~counter?~~ ~~Hardly,~~ ~~but~~ ~~he~~ ~~has~~ ~~some~~ ~~rugs~~ ~~there~~ ~~which~~ ~~are~~ ~~a~~ ~~de-~~ ~~light~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~eye~~ ~~and~~ ~~a~~ ~~benison~~ ~~to~~ ~~weary~~ ~~feet.~~ ~~Here~~ ~~is~~ ~~one~~ ~~which~~ ~~came~~ ~~from~~ ~~Mecca,~~ ~~and~~ ~~is~~ ~~more~~ ~~than~~ ~~a~~ ~~hundred~~ ~~years~~ ~~old.~~ ~~Of~~ ~~a~~ ~~soft,~~ ~~tawny~~ ~~brown~~ ~~color,~~ ~~with~~ ~~a~~ ~~pattern~~ ~~showing~~ ~~the~~ ~~straight~~ ~~ar-~~ ~~row~~ ~~markings~~ ~~and~~ ~~geometrical~~ ~~figures~~ ~~so~~ ~~dear~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~Eastern~~ ~~fancy,~~ ~~its~~ ~~rich,~~ ~~warm~~ ~~tints~~ ~~undimmed~~ ~~by~~ ~~age~~ ~~and~~ ~~use,~~ ~~it~~ ~~seems~~ ~~almost~~ ~~as~~ ~~if~~ ~~it~~ ~~were~~ ~~more~~ ~~fit~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~hung~~ ~~upon~~ ~~a~~ ~~wall~~ ~~than~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~trodden~~ ~~under~~ ~~foot.~~ ~~Amid~~ ~~the~~ ~~quaint~~ ~~specimens~~ ~~of~~ ~~Oriental~~ ~~carving,~~ ~~the~~ ~~marquetry~~ ~~work,~~ ~~the~~ ~~little~~ ~~tables~~ ~~in~~ ~~which~~ ~~the~~ ~~wood~~ ~~is~~ ~~lost~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~wealth~~ ~~of~~ ~~inlaid~~ ~~pearl~~ ~~with~~ ~~which~~ ~~it~~ ~~is~~ ~~adorned,~~ ~~the~~ ~~long,~~ ~~curved~~ ~~sword~~ ~~of~~ ~~Damascus~~ ~~steel,~~ ~~whose~~ ~~edge~~ ~~is~~

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A GAME OF BACKGAMMON

Let it be in the afternoon, when the sun, striking slantwise through the window-panes, fills the whole interior with a flood of soft, yellow light. You turn to look at something which has attracted your attention, and a low, soft voice whose words you do not understand causes you to turn back again. In place of the pile of dusty boxes you see and are turned away from, your eyes are dazzled by a great square of yellow satin, covered with delicate tracery of silver wire, fine as a spider's web, and glinting in the sunlight as if of burnished steel. One corner is turned over and the other side shows only a shade darker, but the same tangled web of silver network and glittering color is there. Out from a drawer, with a sweeping throw, is tossed a great fleecy cloud which finally resolves itself into an Arabian burnous of soft white sild with blue stripes, and settles down over the golden square as if trying to hide it from too curious eyes. Silks and satins, lacework, embroideries, follow each other in rapid succession, until the eyes are revelling in a bewildering maze of gorgeous, fantastic and beautiful colors, and your fingers begin to itch and your purse-strings to loosen, while the alert, keen-eyed dealer assures you that all these wonderful combinations of parti-colored threads are the work of hands as brown as his own, and far more slender and pliable. In that far-off land where lived the fertile brain that gave to the world the "Arabian Nights Entertainments."

Pick up a filmy goasamer web of silken lace with a line from the Koran running around its border, and in your ear is whispered the magic word, "Bagdad." Shade of Haroun-al Raschid! Has this swarthy trafficker got the enchanted carpet we read about so long ago stowed away in one of those boxes under the counter? Hardly, but he has some rugs there which are a delight to the eye and a benison to weary feet. Here is one which came from Mecca, and is more than a hundred years old. Of a soft, tawny brown color, with a pattern showing the straight arrow markings and geometrical figures so dear to the Eastern fancy, its rich, warm tints undimmed by age and use, it seems almost as if it were more fit to be hung upon a wall than to be trodden under foot. Amid the quaint specimens of Oriental carving, the marquetry work, the little tables in which the wood is lost in the wealth of inlaid pearl with which it is adorned, the long, curved sword of Damascus steel, whose edge is

as keen as a razar, and which has that marvellous temper which has made its name famous wherever swords are known, all are here. An in the midst of all this riot of the beautiful and odd stands the dealer, the natural gravity of his features relaxed into a smile of satisfaction at the wonder and delight expressed by his American visitor. But the vision ends, and with many parting "salaams" one goes back to the dust and dirt, the noise and bustle of the street.

These wholesale dealers, who will do a retail trade if opportunity offers, are of great help to their poorer countrymen, often advancing to them not only goods but money with which to trade, and though there are large sums outstanding at times, and often goods of much value on hand, the Syrian Colony has yet to furnish a case of bankruptcy, and the credit of the tradesmen is first-class. But the others, the rank and file, what of them? They are, male rule, poor: and the question naturally arises, why would they leave their native land, and how did they get the means to come to this country? The same reasons which have impelled thousands of people of other nationalities to make for themselves homes, incomes and fortunes in the Western El Dorado, started the Syrian immigrant on his journey, to make which he, in some cases, mortgaged his little farm to a Turkish money-lender, but far more often borrowed the money from some accommodating friend. The remit of this handicap of debt is seen in the feverish industry with which the new-comer seeks to master the English language, to get into trade and begin making money. Debt once cleared off, native indolence shows itself in many ways, and exertions are relaxed. This is seen in the restaurants along the Washington-street side of the block. In any one of them at any time may be seen groups of men watching games of backgammon, which is the favorite amusement of the people. These restaurants, where coffee of the consistency of mud, but delightful to the taste, is served in tiny cups, and the long, flexible stemmed narghileh, or "hubble-bubbles," all ready for smoking, are in constant demand, partake more of the character of a common meeting place than a regulation dining-room. In reality they are the common room of the boarding-house, for as at least sixty per cent of the men either have no families or have left them behind in Syria, the boarding-house is necessary, and eating is done on the "go as you please" plan. It is not uncommon to see some eating, some talking over trade and business prospects, others playing backgammon, and yet more watching the game, all in the same room, while the soft flowing language of the talkers, the bubble of the water in the narghilehs, the rattle of the dice and the click of the pieces as they are moved around, the gleam of a red fez with its long, black tassel hanging down behind, and the dark, watchful eyes of the waiter, who is idly leaning against a table and playing with a string of brilliantly colored beads, make a combination of sound and sight which seems strangely out of place in busy New-York.

Of home life, as Americans understand it, there is little in the colony. The population is constantly shifting, and the families who are here find their homes utilized as headquarters by those who are not yet settled. They are extremely helpful to one another, and the proverbial hospitality of the Arab suffers no loss at the hands of his Syrian representative. Of course there are many who are permanent dwellers here, and nearly all who come look forward to citizenship as the one great prize. This is obtained as speedily as possible, and then comes the settlement in the city, and the helping of others. Contrary to general opinion, the followers of Mohammed among them are few in number, the majority professing the Roman Catholic faith, while the Presbyterian, Maronite, Protestant Episcopal, Greek and Orthodox Catholic creeds all have adherents among the members of the colony. Many of the Catholic members worship in St. Peter's Church, at Barclay and Church streets, the Maronites have a place of their own in Washington street, and the others go wherever their fancy leads them.

As a class, these Syrians are not only seekers after trade, but are diligent in the pursuit of knowledge. Some of them, notably the pioneers of the emigration to this country, have achieved renown in learning, and small though the colony is in numbers, it supports a newspaper of its own, of

which three pages are printed in Arabic and one in English. This paper, "Kawkab America," or "The Star of America," is edited by Dr. A.J. and Nageeb J. Arbeely, brothers, and sons of

كوكب أمريكا
جريدة علمية تجارية أدبية

ARABIC TITLE "KAWKAB AMERICA."

Dr. Joseph A. Arbeely, who was the first native Syrian to come to New York. He was President of the Patriarchal Syrian College of the Greek Church, and his standing as an educator and scholar was such that when the Rev. Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck first translated the Bible into Arabic, Professor Arbeely was called upon to assist in and verify the translation. Dr. A.J. Arbeely, the present editor, was graduated from the Presbyterian College, at Bierut, and took a post graduate course at the at the Imperial College, at Constantinople. He is an expert on the subject of cholera, having acted as a physician during three epidemics in his native land. Nageeb J. Arbeely, his assistant, was educated at Bierut, and was graduated from the university at Marysville, Tennessee. He has served the Government as United States Consul at Jerusalem, and is at present connected with the Bureau of Immigration in this city. Nasseem, the youngest of the brothers, holds the gold medal for oratory of the class of '82 from the University of Tennessee, and is now studying law in New York.

The editorial rooms of "Dawkab America," at Number 45 Pearl street, are unique. Divans are ranged on all sides, a squawking parrot has his cage in one window, and another is taken up by canaries; Oriental rugs are on the floor, and the walls are covered with curios from Syria, and other Bible lands. A branch from one of the cedars of Lebanon drops lovingly over the edge of a brazen shield embossed with sentences from the Koran, and the mouthpiece of a narghileh is poked out from behind one of the ancient goatskin bags or bottles, as they are called, in which wine was carried in the days when the injunction went forth, "Thou shalt not put new wine in old bottles."

But if the editorial rooms are a delight to the artistic eye, the composing room, which is on the same floor, is a place which the average American printer would do well to keep out of. The cases which hold the Arabic type are so arranged that the workman stands with two sections before and one behind him and not content with having nearly 1,300 different characters and combinations to remember, he sets his type from right to left, reversing the method of English composition. The printed page, which much resembles closely written shorthand, is read in the same direction. This department is in charge of Joseph E. Hage, the only expert Syrian compositor in the United States. The paper itself has a large circulation, and is the only publication on this side of the world which is admitted to the palace of Yeidis and translated for the Turkish Sultan. A special copy is printed for him on parchment paper and then gilded. Arabi Pacha, in his exile at Cey'on, the Shah of Persia, the Ameer of Afghanistan, and many others of the high and mighty are numbered among its subscribers, and the list reaches out wherever a Syrian merchant or traveller may have settled, and he, perhaps the only member of a group who can read the printed page, will read it aloud for the benefit of those less favored educationally, and then send it on to some friend further away.

While the Syrian of the peasant class who comes to this country is generally totally ignorant of the English language and American business methods, he is quick to learn, and ready to grasp every opportunity of doing so. To aid in this work

there has been formed the Syrian Society of New York, with Dr. William M. McLaury as president. Dr. Edward P. Thwing vice-

*Picture of Barber cutting
someones hair*

BARBER AT WORK

president, Mr. H.E. Leverich, of Brooklyn, treasurer, and Dr. Ameen F. Haddad, a native of Syria, and a graduate of Bierut College and the New York University Medical School, secretary. This society in May last opened an evening school for the benefit of those employed during the day, and now has a class of thirt members. A day school was opened later, which is presided over by Miss Helen M. Fisher, who gained her experience in the American Female Seminary at Bierut, and whose services are given to the society without charge. She has now a class of fifty, over half of whom are constant attendants. The society has rooms at No. 95 Washington street and its work in promoting the welfare of the Syrian community, and by means of an Industrial home and school, in preparing them for the duties of American citizenship is supported entirely by voluntary contributions.

Those who can afford it bring with them to this country and retain for use on state occasions, their gorgeous native costumes, and while the regular American dress is seldom departed from in everyday life, a feast or wedding will bring out costumes which are gay with silver and gold, and covered with embroidery. All through the colony, glimpses of a life foreign to America may be seen, and the veil of mystery which has ever hung over the peoples and countries of the Orient has one little corner lifted in this section of the town. Here in its perfection is that mixture of the Occident and the Orient which is at once perplexing and interesting. These men are members of an alien race, who do their bookkeeping *wrong* end to, who make ice cream on the sidewalk in full view of a prospective customer, who wear baggy trousers and smoke pipes with six feet of stem and a quart of water in the bowl, who make their boast that no man shaves his upper lip and help out the barber by holding the basin when under going a shampoo, and pick out from the stock the razor they wish to be shaved with, who read and write backward when they read and write at all, and when they get tired of playing backgammon take a string of parti-colored beads, and with faces as grave and immobile as if carved out of mahogany, proceed, in some peculiar fashion of their own, to extract as much enjoyment from them as an American girl will from her first doll.

With reference to this colony, these points should be remembered that the colony is growing in numbers and anxious to learn American ways and manners, and to become citizens as soon as the law will permit; that they are, as a rule, quiet, orderly, sober and industrious people, who are beginning to see the benefits to be derived from united effort, and who

are destined to become in the near future, under the leadership

*Picture of an ice cream
seller*

AN ICECREAM SELLER

of men who are thoroughly acquainted with their capabilities and needs, a factor in the body politic which will make itself felt for good.