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Arabia and the Arabs

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"Moreover, Newfoundland is not so much bound up with ice as most other countries are which produce this class of timber. Heavy ice packs, certainly, are driven in on the east and west coasts in the late spring; but the south coast is entirely free from drift ice. The temperature of Newfoundland never reaches the low degrees it does in Canada, and the thaw sets in earlier. Jutting out into the Atlantic to a much greater distance than most people realise, Newfoundland is much nearer the Mother Country for shipment of its produce than most of the countries from which are derived the increasing tonnage of lumber and pulp."

ARABIA AND THE ARABS.

By V. DINGELSTEDT, Corr. Member of the R.S.G.S.

(Continued from page 330.)

El-Hejaz.—With a population of three and a half millions, and an area of 96,500 square miles, this province is the Holy Land of the Mussulman world. It contains the famous cities of Mecca and Medina, the goal of pilgrimage of about one hundred thousand pious Moslems yearly who aspire to acquire the honourable title of *Hadji*. Infidels are not allowed to visit these sacred cities, but more than four centuries ago courageous men braved the dangers of the act and left accounts of what they had observed. The first European to visit Mecca was an Italian, Ludovico Bartema; the first Englishman, Joseph Pitts, in 1678. Since, some dozen other travellers in the last century have visited these guarded cities, and one of them, viz. the Dutch scholar, Snouck Hurgronje, resided in Mecca for a long time.¹

The principal object of adoration in Mecca is a stone, presumably a meteorite. The name Kaâba (Holy House), applied to the building containing the stone, reveals sufficiently its high importance. This stone worship, known to Arabs in ancient times, recalls the legend of the Svanetion Highlanders, which the writer had the occasion to quote in his paper twenty years ago.² According to this legend, before the creation of the world, God was confined in a high rock, which He burst at last.

Mecca is situated 65 miles inland from Jeddah or Jiddah, the harbour where Christians are tolerated, in a narrow, barren valley, surrounded by bare hills and sandy plains. It has about twenty-five chief quarters. Its streets are broad, pretty regular, but unpaved, and in consequence dusty in summer and muddy in the rainy season. The houses are high and painted. The mosque surrounding the Kaâba, called the Beit Allah, or House of God, is capable of containing 35,000 persons. No trees, nor verdure of any kind, are to be seen in the city. The townspeople, about 50,000, are generally able to converse in three or four Eastern languages. They are described by some as lively, polished,

¹ Mecca, *Mit Bilder-Atlas*, 2 vols., Hague, 1888.

² *S.G.M.*, vol. xi. p. 297.

and frivolous; by others as coarse and proud. According to Burton,¹ the Meccan is a covetous spendthrift. His wealth, lightly won, is lightly prized. They live, as in many other shrine-containing places in our Christian world, on the ignorance and superstitions of pilgrims. The Meccans look upon themselves as the cream of earth's sons, and they resent keenly the least slighting word concerning the Holy City and its denizens. Equally ignorant and conceited, they laugh at modern science and cultivate the superstitious practices of ancient times.

Medina is the second city of the whole of Arabia. "Within the sanctuary or bounds of the city it is affirmed all sins are forbidden." It is called *El Munowera*, the "illuminated," because on approaching the city devout Moslems pretend to see a luminous haze over its mosques. It is the chief stronghold of Hejaz. Its streets are deep and narrow, and only partly paved; it has flat-roofed and two-storied houses built of basaltic scoriæ, burned brick, and palmwood. The town contains the Great Mosque, *Mesjid-el-Nebi*, supposed to contain the prophet's body. To the Mosque are attached a great number of ecclesiastical officials, Ulemas, *Mudarisin*, *Imaums*, *Khatibs*, etc., eunuchs, sweepers, porters, guides, who live on the pilgrims' alms, backsheesh, and by extortion. The city was once famed for its scholars, and though in its decay now, it is yet busy and agreeable. Burton conceived no good opinion of the people—pride, pugnacity, a peculiar point of honour, and a vindictiveness of wonderful force and patience, are, according to him, the only characteristic traits of Arab character, which the citizens of *El-Medina* habitually display.

Other towns in this province are *Jiddah*, the harbour of Mecca. Viewed from the sea it has a rather imposing and pretty appearance, the houses being white, three or four stories high, surrounded by a wall. The illusion is, however, dispelled on the approach to land. The streets are narrow and dirty, and sanitary conditions deplorable, so that evil odours abound everywhere. The commercial importance of the harbour has declined greatly since the opening of the Suez Canal. The motley population is not above 20,000. The townspeople live by fleecing pilgrims. They are hotel-keepers, guides, money-changers, money-lenders, slave-dealers, drummers, all at the service of pious *hadjies*.

Yembo is another port serving Mecca; while *Taif*, south-east of Mecca, is a pleasant garden-city and a health resort. *Rabagh* and *Kunfunda* are two ports on the Red Sea.

Between Hejaz and Yemen is the mountain region of *Asir*, whose brave highlanders have ever resisted the rule of the Turks; and have always succeeded in maintaining practically independent the region between *Taif* and *Roda*, some miles north of *Sana*.

Hadramaut.—This province, called also the Land of *Uz*, is the least known part of Arabia, save *Nefud*, yet as lying next to *Aden* it has a particular importance for England. It stretches between the great desert and the sea eastward to *Oman*, the land rising from the coast in a series of terraces to *Jebel Hamra*. Some tracts of it are under British protectorate. It was described by *Abdullah Mansûr*,² who, to avoid the

¹ *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medina*. London, 1857.

² *S.G.M.*, vol. xxviii. p. 154.

dangers of travel, adopted the disguise of a down-country Arab chief. It is a dangerous country to travel through, and to accomplish the task many rare qualifications are needed. Hadramaut was also partly explored by Von Vrede, Joseph Halévy (1870), Theodore Bent and his wife, and the Dutch Van den Berg. All these explorers have left records.¹

The chief town is Shibam, while in addition there are the cities of Makalla, Haura, and Shehr. Shibam, the residence of the most powerful Sultan of Hadramaut, is built on rising ground in the centre of the narrowest part of the valley. It offers, according to Mr. Bent, a curious appearance: above its mud-brick walls, with bastions and watch-towers, appear the tall whitewashed houses, which make it look like a large round cake with sugar on it. The city has been celebrated from ancient times. Makalla is the chief commercial port of the region. The most influential inhabitants of the town are Parsees from Bombay, and Hindustani is spoken nearly as much as Arabic. The reigning sultan belongs to the Al Kaiti family. The town is filthy and malodorous. Haura is a village surrounded by palm-groves, and dominated by a castle seven stories high, belonging to the Al Kaiti. Shehr is a coast town. Mr. Bent says that it is a detestable place by the sea, set in a wilderness of sand. The Arabs of Hadramaut have much connection with India and Java—large colonies of Hadramis emigrated to Java more than a century ago. The facts of this near connection of Hadramis with the inhabitants of the Dutch archipelago, and their frequent intermarriages, were first brought to light by Van den Berg.²

Oman is a mountainous country, partly very fertile, and about as large as England and Wales together. It has a good harbour at Muscat, and manufactures cotton, silk, and arms. Some of its mountain peaks attain an altitude of 10,000 feet.

This state is a kind of island, for it is separated from the rest of the world on one side by the sea, and on the other by the desert. According to General Haig³ its people are even more primitive, simple, and unchanged in their habits than the Arabs generally. It is the largest, and in some respects the most interesting, province of Arabia. Turkish rule never extended thus far, and the country finds itself under independent rulers, called Imams or Seyyids. The population, about 1,500,000 strong, is divided into two rival races called by some Hinani and Ghaffiri, and by others Kahtani and Aduani, which are in continuous feud, and inhabit separate quarters in some of the towns. These two stocks are subdivided into two hundred different tribes, and these again into "houses." Each family group has its own sheikh—the eldest male in the family.

The towns are numerous: Muscat, the sole port of access to Oman, Mattra, Sib, Dahirah, Burka, Sur, Sohar, Khorfakan, Nakhil, and others, with from 5000 to 10,000 inhabitants. There are but few nomadic tribes. Muscat and Mattra, only two miles apart, are the chief towns

¹ Van Vrede, *Reise in Hadramaut*; Bent, *South Arabia*, 1899.

² *Le Hadramaut et les colonies arabes dans l'Archipel Indien*. Batavia, 1886.

³ "A Journey through Yemen," *G.J.*, vol. ix No. 8.

on the coast. The heat of these cities is extreme ; it is not unusual for a black bulb thermometer to register 189° F. in the sun at Muscat, and 107° at night.

Muscat has two old forts, which stand out on each side of the town, and it is cut off from the plain behind by a strong wall, which stretches from hill to hill. The wall is pierced by two guarded gates, closed a couple of hours after sunset. Beyond the walls are houses and mat huts inhabited mainly by Baluchis and Negroes. The population of Muscat, a port of transit, is most heterogeneous—Arabs, Baluchis, Banians, Negroes, Persians jostle one another. The trade is mostly with India ; the chief exports are dates, fruit, shark fins, fish, and salt ; the imports rice, sugar, coffee, silk, petroleum, piece-goods, and arms.¹

About 25 miles from Muscat, at Sib, begins the fertile Batina coast of the Gulf of Oman ; it extends for 150 miles up to the mountainous cape of Musendum in the neighbourhood of Khor-Kalba, and has an average width of about 12 miles. It is studded with many towns and villages—chiefly built of mat huts, among date-groves and gardens—Sib, Burka, Suaik, Sohar, Shinas, Dibba.

South-east of Muscat, towards Ras-el-Had, there are on the coast some small villages, and the large double town Sur, situated on a back-water, with two forts. It has about 8000 inhabitants, belonging to the two clans of the Bui Bu Ali and the Bui Janaba, often in feud one with another. The people are bold sailors, enterprising merchants, but also slave-dealers.

The coast beyond Ras-el-Had is inhabited by two large Arab tribes, the Mahrah and the Gharah ; the first, descended from the ancient Himyarites, occupy a coastline of nearly 140 miles from Saihut to Ras Morbat ; their chief town is Damkut. They are smaller than most Arabs, not at all fair, very poor, and utterly ignorant ; they have a soft and sweet language, and a peculiar mode of salutation, consisting in putting their noses side by side and breathing softly.

The Gharah inhabit the mountainous coast between the islands Moseirah and the Kuria-Muria ; they are troglodytes, largely nomadic, and shift from cave to cave. Their wardrobe consists of a single piece of coarse blue cotton wrapped around the loins. The women wear a loose frock of the same texture and colour, reaching a little below the knees in front, and trailing on the ground behind. Children go naked. Both men and women tattoo their cheeks. They are armed with swords, spears, daggers, and matchlocks. Their diet consists of honey, milk, flesh, and fruits. The main products of this région are *frankincense* and the celebrated wild honey collected from rocks. The trade in incense, so largely used by all nations of antiquity, was formerly highly important.

In the heart of Jebel Akhdar is hidden the fort of Nakbl ; it has renowned thermal springs. It contains about 6000 inhabitants, among whom are 1500 Arabs, mixed with Persians, Negroes, Zattut, and Bayâsir. The last, an industrious and peaceable people, are regarded as aliens by the Arabs and despised by them.

¹ Zwemer, *Arabia*, p. 82.

The windows in Nakhil are never glazed; they are closed at night with wooden shutters. Circular holes at the top of the room serve for ventilation. The teak beams and rafters are often carved or painted.

In the same mountains are also situated the towns of Sheraizi and Zikki. The last contains 8000 inhabitants, composed of the two hostile tribes, Yemen and Nizâr. Sheraizi is perched at the head of a ravine like an eagle's nest. In northern Oman, along the Persian Gulf, extends the Pirate coast explored by the Rev. Mr. Zwemer in 1900-1.¹ From the abundance of fish this coast was once called Ichthyophagi. Along it are situated the towns—Deboi, the well-built and growing metropolis of northern Oman, with some 15,000 inhabitants; Abu Thabi with 10,000 Arabs, Negroes, and some Banians; Ras-el-Kheima, with a number of well-built houses and a businesslike aspect; Sharka, a famous Wahabi centre, now in decline.

El Haza.—The province of El Haza makes a triangle on the Persian Gulf beyond Bahrein, between Bui Hajar on the north, the peninsula of El Katar, and the desert on the west. Bahrein is the most eastern part of Arabia. El Haza is a low country, as its name signifies. It is rich in underground watercourses.

The main cities of El Haza are El Hofhuf, the capital, and El Katig. The first is surrounded by gardens and a mud wall; inside it are also some gardens, in which grow in abundance the date-palm, the nabak, the papaw, the fig, and the pomegranate. Indigo and cotton, rice and sugar-cane, as well as different vegetables, are also cultivated. El Haza is celebrated for the manufacture of *abbas*, a kind of cloak with rich embroidery, and brass coffee-pots of curious shape and pretty form. Once rich and prosperous, the Hassa's capital under Turkish rule is now in decline. El Haza constitutes a part of the Basra vilayet.

The Irak Arabi is the north-eastern, and richest, province of Arabia, covering the great alluvial plains of the Tigris and Euphrates. It is the ancient Mesopotamia, called by the Arabs El-Jesireh, the seat of vast ruins of once great empires. From the neglect of irrigation, misrule, wars and oppression, the once very rich country has been partly laid waste, but in the last 75 years, thanks to British enterprise, it has already been considerably developed. Mesopotamia, with the exception of Jebel Sinom, forms a flat, almost level, stretch of meadow without any rise or fall, save the artificial ancient mounds. On both sides of the wide river, on the whole length of the country from Fao and Mohommerah to the Montefik Arabs above Kurna, there are endless plantations of date-palms. This tree attains here its greatest perfection of beauty and utility. According to the statement of an English merchant at Basra, the entire annual date-harvest of the river country might conservatively be put at 150,000 tons. The palm-tree has a thousand different uses.

The principal towns of this province are the following: Baghdad, by far the most important town, founded about 765 A.D., was the capital of the Moslem world for five centuries. It is in decay now, and preserves only some ruins of its former glory. Thanks to its situation on the

¹ G.J., vol. xix. No. 1.

Tigris, it may well aspire to become once more glorious, but certainly not in Turkish hands. There are many pilgrims' shrines. The city has a very motley population of pilgrims and merchants and mendicants, estimated at from 120,000 to 180,000, of whom nearly one-third are Jews.

The trade of Baghdad is valued at over one and a half million pounds. Baghdad has more than 68 mosques, 6 churches, and 22 synagogues. There is a large European community. The population of the whole Baghdad vilayet is placed at 850,000, of which 93 per cent. are Moslems, mostly Sunnite, 6 per cent. Jews, and 1 per cent. Christians. There is a railway from Baghdad to Samara, some 70 miles to the north up the Tigris.

Basra, on the Shatt-el-Arab, is another important town, the seat of a Wali. It is the centre of an important trade in dates, and the port for all the region round about. The average annual exports from Basra to London and New York for the five years 1907-12 reached about 20,000 tons. The population in Basra vilayet has been estimated at about one million, of whom 94 per cent. are Moslems, mostly Shiah.

Kerbela, near Hillah, is a sacred city for Shiah, for it contains the tomb of Hosein, the grandson of the prophet. Numerous pilgrims believe that once there one has nought to fear for the next world.

Farther down the river are Kufa and Nejef, both on the border of swamps.

Kuweit, or Grane, on the Persian Gulf, has the finest harbour in all eastern Arabia, and a population of about 120,000. It is the probable terminus of the proposed railroads to the Persian Gulf, and is partly in the hands of Britain. It is surrounded by deserts on which the Bedouin tribes often encamp, bringing with them horses, cattle, and sheep to barter for dates, clothing, and firearms. The large village of Ctesiphon, on the left bank of the Tigris, opposite to the ruins of Seleucia, has now become famous as the theatre of a recent battle with the Turks. It was once the winter residence of the Parthian kings. Along the rivers are settled poor Muntefik Arabs who cultivate the soil.

Interior.—The six provinces we have passed in review are on the outskirts of Arabia, and the vast interior of the great peninsula, the greater part of which remains unexplored, remains for consideration. Four regions can be distinguished here: Jebel Shammar, with El-Hamad on the north, Nejran on the west, Roba-el-Khali on the south, and Nejd, or El-Nejd proper, in the very middle of the peninsula. The first is a region of *Nefud*, or sandy deserts, inhabited by Bedouins having no rulers save their sheikh. There are some oases, among them *Teima*, remarkable for the size and cleanliness of the houses, the abundant water supply, and the beauty of its women.

Roba-el-Khali, which signifies "empty abode," includes all the hinterland of the Mahrah and Gharah tribes, the Dahna desert and El Akkaf. It is almost unknown. It is doubtful if it is all desert, for there are some place-names, such as Jebel Athal, Tamarisk Mountains, Belad-ez-Zohur (Flower-country), El-Joz (the nut-trees), which have little in common with desert.

Nejran, north of Yemen, with Danasir-Wady, is a well-watered region with an area of about 30,000 square miles; it is reputed to be even more fertile than the best part of Yemen. There are extensive date-plantations, and its people are all agricultural Arabs. It was visited by Halévy in 1870, who found many ruins. It was here that the Roman army under Aelius Gallus came to grief.

Nejd culminates in the crescent-shaped Jebel Toweyk, and is intersected by numerous well-irrigated and fertile valleys. North of Nejd, separated from it by a narrow arm of northern desert, is the smaller plateau of Jebel Shammar, crossed by the ranges of Aja and Selma. The Nejd proper is a vast table-land in central Arabia, with an average elevation of about 3000 feet above the sea, with a gradual ascent southward to the highlands of Yemen and Oman. It is the heart of Arabia, and includes the regions of El-Kasim, El-Woshem, El-Aared, and Yemama. It is a healthy country, enjoying a crisp, dry, and invigorating air. The table-land contains ledges and peaks as high as 5500 feet. The highlands are mostly clothed with pastures, and the plateau is intersected by valleys. Subterranean waters are abundant at a depth of about 15 feet. Nejd is ruled by an Amir, who is believed to be very rich, hospitable, and self-willed. His residence is Hail, amidst a barren country, with a population of about 10,000 within its walls. The Amir's castle is a formidable stronghold. According to Doughty¹ the town is clean, well-built, and pleasant to live in, save for the fear of the tyrant-ruler.

Another important town in Nejd is Er-Riadh, lying about 280 miles south-east of Hail. Since Palgrave no European traveller has ever visited this ancient Wahabi metropolis. To the region of north-western Nefud belong also the towns of Jauf, Orman, and Kaf, visited by the Rev. A. Forder.² Jauf possesses a magnificent old castle called Mazed, opened only once a year. It has sulphur springs and large date-groves. It is celebrated for the manufacture of saddle-bags and *abbas*. It is also famous for music, as its people are adepts at playing the rebaba.

Kaf has strong brine springs; large caravans, composed sometimes of 1600 camels, come here for the salt.

Sandy Deserts.—About a third part of Arabia, chiefly on the south, is desert (*Nefud*). The general physical features of this "desert" are those of a plain, clothed with stunted aromatic shrubs of many varieties, some forming excellent pasture for camels and sheep, some worthless. Some Nefuds abound in grasses after the early rains, others are barren all the year; they are covered with long stretches of drifting sand, carried about by the wind and tossed in billows on the weather-side of the rocks and bushes.³ The Nefud is covered with the ghada bush and a tall grass called Knusi (*Aristida Forskahlei*), excellent for camels.⁴ According to Carruthers there are many inhabited places between

¹ *Arabia Deserta* (Cambridge, 1888).

² *G.J.*, vol. xx. p. 619.

³ Zwemer, *Arabia*, p. 24.

⁴ "A Journey in North-West Arabia," *G.J.*, vol. xxxv. p. 225.

Ma'an, Jauf, and Teima in north-west Nefud; it is not a hostile desert, for there are good grazing places, and several large wadys and wells sufficient to support a large nomadic population.

The west coast of the Red Sea, between 18° and 22° N., seems to be one of the most desolate regions in the world.¹ Mostly stony, the deserts are in places steppe-like. Sometimes they have a red colour, so that in the light of the setting sun they look as though sprinkled with blood. Those deserts have undulations whose crests rise to about 100-160 feet, and even as high as 330 feet. Clumps of bushes, thorny and dry, with stems about 6-12 inches thick, occur. The products of such deserts seem sufficient for the needs of Bedouins.

The British are already the masters of the land thus briefly described, which is certainly called upon to play in the future at least the same, if not a yet greater, part than it has already occupied in the remote history of humanity. It is highly desirable that attention should be directed to it by all civilised nations, and quite especially by enterprising and practical British explorers and merchants. Britain has already accomplished great things in Arabia. She has surveyed the entire 4000 miles of Arabian coast, has established her power on the Arabian littoral; it remains to her now to go farther, to extend her protectorate over Yemen and Oman, and penetrate into the unknown interior of the vast peninsula.

MEN OF THE OLD STONE AGE: THEIR ENVIRONMENT, LIFE, AND ART.²

(With Illustrations.)

THE learned and exhaustive work on this interesting subject, which has been recently published, is from the pen of Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, D.Sc., LL.D., Ph.D., Research Professor of Zoology, Columbia University. It opens with a discussion of the rise of anthropology and of the geological history of man, and shows how the latter was influenced by geographic and climatic changes. The author gives (after Obermaier) a very informative map of Europe during the period of maximum Continental elevation, in which the coastlines are widely extended, connecting Africa and Europe—including Great Britain and Ireland—in a single vast peninsula, and affording free migration routes for animal and human races north and south, as well as east and west. The ocean boundaries are more remote, and the interior seas are greatly reduced in area. With regard to these remarkable geographic changes, Professor Osborn says: "The migrations of mammals and races of men into Western Europe from the Eurasian Continent on the east and from Africa on the south, were favoured or interrupted by the periods of

¹ Crossland, *Desert and Water Gardens of the Red Sea*. 1913.

² London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1916. Price 21s. We are indebted to the publishers for permission to reproduce from the book the accompanying illustrations.—Ed. S.G.M.