

THE Near East, with its wonder cities of ancient glory, holds for us enchantment, mystery and reverence. It is here that history reaches back and is lost finally in legend. Here is the cradle of religions, the seat of ancient civilisations, from which the western world obtained much of its inspiration, its culture, its literature, art, science.

The author feels the glory, the tragedy, the drama of Baghdad, Babylon, Syracuse, Palyrma, still mighty and inspiring in their dusty ruins. He feels the ghost-like tread of the centuries that have passed over these once splendid cities.

He visits the people, the descendants of these ancient races, who with a background of centuries of history, tradition and customs, are struggling with the conflicts and the influences of the western world.

His descriptions have the vivid colour of the artist. Many of the stories he tells are miniature Arabian Nights, for the lands of the East still cast the spell of the mysterious, the romantic, the exotic.

**BAGHDAD
& Points East**



NOONTIME IN THE BAZAAR, BAGHDAD
Thus they sat at the gates of Babylon the Mighty

BAGHDAD & Points East

By

Robert J. Casey



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*. . . To the memory of one who started
upon a longer journey beyond the stars while
another Ahmed went up to Baghdad to obtain
knowledge. . . .*

An Apology to Scheherazade

IT bespeaks the temerity of an immodest age that one should attempt to elaborate upon the record of fantasy and romance that you contrived so cunningly in a thousand and one nights. Is there more to be said of Baghdad the Glorious than you have said? Is there any mystery of its shadowy gardens that was not solved hundreds of years ago in the harem of Shahryar? Have the hearts of men so changed that they may feel emotions which you failed to describe? Is there anything still to be said of the Glittering East that you have not already said?

Well, my Queen, consider the case: In her grave by the switch-yard sleeps Zobeideh of blessed memory. The gardens where rose the stately palace of Harun al Raschid are silver with the dust of passing taxicabs. Aeroplanes, the Rukhs of a new day, sweep the sky over Hinaidi. "The lion and the lizard keep the courts" where Jamshyd did the various and sundry things accredited to him. But they are not undisturbed for necromancers with picks and shovels and infinite patience are digging up the bones of the late Jamshyd and piecing out his history from scraps of pottery that he left in his kitchen.

The camels seek their spiny gorse far over the horizon in the waste land for their old grazing grounds along the caravan routes are preëmpted by petrol chariots that link Baghdad with Damascus by a day's journeying, and the desert is becoming crowded with tradesmen and adventurers.

Aye, my Queen, things are a bit different in Baghdad. A handsome king who would be another Harun, sits once more on the throne of the caliphs, but in the shadows beside the dais stand men in green-brown uniforms—blue-eyed men of a tribe that had no standing in Arabia when Zobeideh was a girl. . . .

An Apology to Scheherezade

Angles they call these men, and they are not like the other conquerors who flowed into Iraq with sword and torch in the days whose record may be read in the ash piles along the Tigris. They are children—fussy children—eternally worried over the removal of rubbish, the “improvement” of roads and bridges that for hundreds of years served our ancestors continuously and well, the disciplining of the police force and what not. They are sticking their pale noses into the harems with demands for a highly theoretical something that they call the emancipation of women. . . . As if women needed any emancipation.

Magic lights in bottles on every street crossing have taken the romance from the one-time shadowy recesses of the ancient city, and the brightly colored sherbets of the bazaars are made chill and unpalatable by an outlandish invention which they call ice.

So, my Queen, the time, has come to give further attention to the affairs of the Glorious Baghdad, to add a few more tales to the thousand and one. And though one undertakes the task of narration well aware that his deficiencies are many, and conscious of the model that he can never equal, yet it is obvious that some one should undertake it, and you, sweet lady, have been dead a long time.

So the author can only hope to temper the rashness of his venture with an admission of unworthiness, to crave in advance the pardon so seldom given a man who would ask the last word from a talkative lady

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