

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.

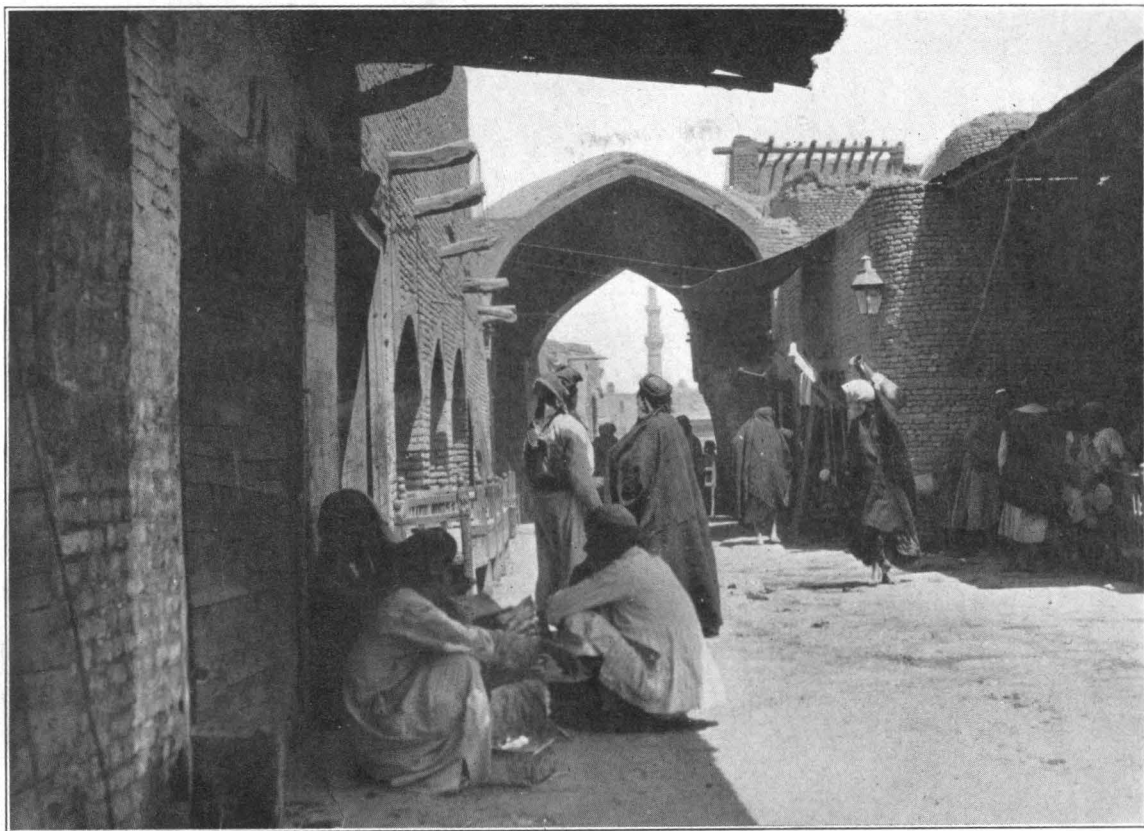
The author feels the glory, the tragedy, the drama of Baghdad, Babylon, Syracuse, Palyrma, still mighty and inspiring in their dusty ruins. He feels the ghost-like tread of the centuries that have passed over these once splendid cities.

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.

HUTCHINSON & CO
(Publishers) LTD.

**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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**BAGHDAD
& Points East**

Baghdad and Points East

Chapter One

BEYOND THE STARS

By Desert Trails to Yesterday

*By Baghdad's shrines of fretted gold
High-walled gardens, green and old.*

—TENNYSON, "Recollections of the
Arabian Nights."



AGAINST the sky a caravan plods sleepily along the fringe of the night. The "Ho! La! Ho! La!" of the chant to the camels becomes an eerie murmur in the echoing distance. A hundred camels—perhaps two hundred—bulking huge under their great loose burdens, are in this frieze on the horizon, weird things like candle shadows on a high white wall with great bodies and thin, nervous quivering reeds of legs.

The bunch grass and spiny gorse of the vast wasteland glisten like ice in the moonlight, and the wind, suggesting the chill of a dead world, sweeps down from the north. The dipper turns its slow somersault in a sky made frosty by millions of stars that dwellers in cloudy climes have never seen.

The shivering caravan moves onward, the camels with averted heads tacking against the wind, and the silhouette of them gives a fantastic bordering to the top of every dune and makes queer shadow pictures against the moonlit whiteness of the hollows. "Ho! La! Ho! La!" The chant is hypnotic and one presently looks upon the scene through

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half-closed eyes only partly convinced that this ghostly procession is real.

So came the silk trains out of China three thousand years ago. So journeyed the slave trains out of Circassia. So came the convoys of gold and frankincense. . . .

Three thousand years ago. . . . One cannot comprehend three thousand years. The djinns are abroad on this bleak fastness and they have broken the clock. The silks are still coming out of Cathay; the attars from Persia; the lovely ladies from Circassia; the gold and frankincense from the fabulous mines of the south. The Garden of Eden is still in bloom between the two rivers. The Mongols are not yet astir. Islam is still at the height of its magnificence. And Harun the Sleepless One still rules in Baghdad.

Baghdad! Is it a city or the echo of a name? The abode of dreams or itself a dream? Here in the magic of the desert one can see it in all its ancient perspective from the golden banners on its massive walls to the cool courts where walk the stately peris who figured most prominently in its history, a city of varied enchantments where Princes ride the air on flying carpets and armies are mobilized by friendly djinns in caskets no larger than a lady's hand. . . .

A hammer is echoing on iron. It is only Selim, the second mechanic, replacing a tire, but here in the night where phantom caravans are marching out of yesterday Selim is a wizard summoning the lords of the ether and the lower world whom Solomon ben Daoud exiled to this abode of emptiness these many years ago. Selim works rapidly, for the sons of Ishmael whom the Franks call Bedouins are abroad in this land. But under the circumstances it seems to be a needless precaution. The peril of the Badawi is such a little thing in the terrifying atmosphere of the desert itself. . . .

Ahmed the Teller of Tales is boiling tea over a tiny

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fire of dried weeds and he, too, is a part of the spell. The wavering light distorts his face until he might be an ifreet from the Isle of Marble concocting a devilish brew for the sorceress who enchained the princely husband of Gulinare.

"We go presently," says Ahmed cheerfully. "Ahead lies Tadmor which was Palmyra, and over there beyond the stars is Baghdad."

True enough of Baghdad. It was always beyond the stars, always journey's end for the gay romanticist since the days when Harun carved its minarets out of the turquoise that matched the sky. Beyond the stars now, probably, for the Baghdad that was will never live again. And yet out here in the vast silences it did not seem so far. In the shadow beyond the rim of Ahmed's little fire were the phantoms of all the lives that ever were spilled out onto the glimmering flats since Time first began over there on the banks of the Euphrates—shaven Sumerians and curly bearded men of Akkad and Nineveh, smiling daughters of Ishtar with plaited hair and scandalous eyes, Medes and Persians accoutered in brass, Elamites, Hittites and mat-wigged Scythians, great concourses of warriors who died only yesterday or was it a week ago last Wednesday on this their playground.

Many men have gone to Baghdad for various reasons—some like the boy of the folk tale "to obtain knowledge," some to bow their heads at the holy shrines, some to seek adventure, some to seek gold. In this weird caravan, halted here on the highroad to nowhere while Selim the second mechanic replaces a tire, are a Turkish banker, an English exporter, a Japanese journalist, a Syrian mystery and a troubadour conscious of the mixed blessings of cold feet and prickly heat who has come these thousands of miles for the love of a lady who died hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

The troubadour realizes that silence is the part of wis-

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dom in such a quest. Even here where there seems never to have been a calendar, and the magic of Chaldea is to be seen in every glimmer of starlight, one might well doubt the sympathetic understanding of such companions. Ahmed the Teller of Tales might know—and perhaps also the dark-eyed Englishman—but not the rest. The enchantment of the scene is translated to them only in terms of physical discomfort. . . . It will be well on toward morning before they can hope for the scant attractions of Palmyra. In the meantime their eyes burn with the day's dust, their faces have been scorched with an infernal heat, and now in the dead cold of the night they are freezing inch by inch.

True, Scheherezade is much more alive now than she was when viewed across the centuries from the terrace of a Cairo hotel. Even the most materialistic of this strange company must admit a sense of her presence. But at best she is only a little less dead than she was yesterday—dead enough, Allah wist, to satisfy the most enthusiastic necrologist.

So caravaners from beyond the desert and the several seas keep their counsel and go toward Baghdad as other men go.

"Where did you start on this evil journey?" inquired the Syrian.

"Cairo," compromises the admirer of the late Scheherezade. What is the use in admitting that he started the journey in the snow of a street in an American city years ago or that he turned his face toward Baghdad when as a little boy he first heard the startling and important news of the Barber and his several brothers? The East does not understand such sentiments. In its unvarying medievalism it is quite ready to believe without proof that all occidentals are crazy—what purpose then in evidence that would support this gratuitous diagnosis?

Cairo is as good a starting point as any for a journey. For all its French architecture and its English atmosphere

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it has the appearance of something that Aladdin might have founded. In the square by the Opera House brown-skinned men, naked to the waist, walk bare-footed in hot asphalt while a screaming Ifreet in tarboosh and misfit European clothes leans out from under a broad umbrella and translates for them in a disdainful voice the directions of an American from Bucyrus, Ohio, the strategist in charge of a steam roller. Under the palms of the terrace stews a devil's broth of peoples—swart-skinned Sudanese, Cordovan colored Egyptians, tanned Copts, variegated Armenians, Greeks, Syrians, Jews, representatives of all the races that inhabited Scheherezade's romanceful land—English officers bound for the upper Nile, Australian lieutenants of police—every variety of shade and stature and costume.

The street, afire in the white light of a midsummer noon, flowed with white robes and red tarbooshes. Dragomans clamored at the curb. Beggars, artistically representing the ultimate in squalor and suffering, leaned dejectedly against the wall. There came no end of tourists, bead sellers, snake charmers, fortune tellers and porters. . . . A clean-featured, kinky-headed King of Abyssinia with a comic opera retinue of tall captains in gray hats, silver chains, blue cloaks and soiled white pantaloons. . . . A street magician and long processions of black gowned ladies in diaphanous veils.

Yes, in all its color and restlessness, this was manifestly a starting point for one who would make the long journey to Baghdad. It seemed, indeed, that all these people must have come from there. If one could envision the city of the Caliphs in a wintry American twilight how much easier it was, sitting here on the broad terrace and sipping iced drinks, to dream of camels and hot deserts and distant minarets tossed into the palpitant sky like the vague trceries of a mirage.

. . . There are several ways to get to Baghdad. One may go down from Cairo to Port Said and travel through

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the canal to Bombay and thence back again to Basrah, seaport of Iraq on the western shore of the Persian gulf. Or if one is a true believer, and unafraid of a desperate march, he may pass over the bone-fringed edge of the "Empty Place" by way of Mecca and the deserts beyond. Or, again, he may go northward through Palestine and Syria, pausing perhaps at Jerusalem, Damascus, and Palmyra, and then eastward to the dusty Euphrates.

The Damascus route was the most popular up to the time when the Druses rose against the French. Two transportation companies scheduled automobile trains weekly from Beirut to Teheran and had reduced the running time from the Mediterranean to the Tigris to something less than three days.

One route turned abruptly eastward from Damascus, plunging shut-eyed over the rim of the wilderness through the flaming day and the freezing night with no stops save for tire changes until a sentry should lift his bayonet at the bridge of boats over there "beyond the stars" where lay Baghdad. The running time between these twin capitals of dead Caliphates was twenty-four hours—and the schedule was rigidly maintained. . . . It was something of a sight on a Wednesday morning in Baghdad when one felt like walking out beyond the town to the edge of the canal, to see the dust balls rolling up out of the Western horizon and presently to make out that this new manifestation of the djinni was the advance screen of onrushing motor cars. Only the rapidity with which they took form from unidentified specks to gleaming, quivering, leaping machines gave hint of the terrific speed at which they were being driven. At first they seemed to be swelling in size but standing still. Then in a moment they were much larger and in perceptible motion, hurling back the eastern sun from their windshields in a dizzy blinding glare. And almost before one was aware of it, the sentry was standing at salute and a caravan was

Beyond the Stars

clattering over the loose-planked bridge, its dirt-caked drivers and passengers staring from black-ringed eyes at waving palms and a running river which they hoped might not turn out to be another mirage. . . .

The other route pursued a more leisurely—if more uncertain—course. Its terminus was Beirut and it curled over the Lebanon into Damascus to strike northward toward an older caravan trail—the mysterious highway of marble and sand by which, so legend has it, man first walked out of the suburbs of Eden to look upon the far west—which then was the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. It picked up this trail at Palmyra where Zenobia the queen learned in defiance of the acquisitive might of Rome, and it led through an avenue of tombs and a forest of crumpled columns into the vast, hot emptiness of the East. This route eventually came to the Euphrates and thence careered across the broken canals of Asshur to the Tigris.

Traffic was interrupted in this quarter by the sudden ambitions of the Druses. But it will be resumed one day. There is already talk of reorganization and greater capital and other things that give sprightly zest to the annual reports of railways and such. It is planned to establish on the face of the desert a number of fortified khans where there will be supplies of cool water and palatable food and sleeping accommodations for wayfarers who may wish to stop the night. Not so long ago an American automobile manufacturer was asked to figure on the construction of a touring car with standard wheel base which would provide Pullman berths for four persons and a driving compartment for two chauffeurs.

The "trackless" desert bears the imprint of every tire tread known to the roadways of the world, and the long furrow, plowed in a straight line across Syria to guide the Cairo-Baghdad air mail, is now only one rut in a thousand. To-day devout Mohammedans on the pilgrim-

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age to Mecca think nothing of starting out onto the desert with a Ford, twenty gallons of gasoline, a drum of water, ten passengers and an unbounded trust in Allah. To-day that great and inquisitive tourist agency which has brought the blessing of travelers' checks to the far corners of the world, is advertising that one may now go to Baghdad without canceling his life insurance policies. To-morrow the California buses, the motor tallyhos and other symptoms of sight-seeing in its most virulent form will make an endless line of traffic from the gates of Damascus to the tomb of Zobeideh. There will be bead sellers at the crossing of the Euphrates, and vendors of Nebuchadnezzar's autographed bricks in Babylon. . . . To-morrow. . . . When that day comes, my children, there need be no further debate concerning whether or not Scheherezade is actually dead. . . .

“Ho hum,” murmurs Ahmed the Teller of Tales as he stirs his fire and turns his thin little back toward the unseen mountains whence comes the wind. “There is never any to-morrow.”

A bit uncanny, this observation, not in its originality perhaps, but in its timeliness. It is mind reading that in any other environment might seem truly amazing.

“You refer to the invasion of yearning ladies with souls and prepaid tickets and six-rupee cameras?” the troubadour inquires.

“I do not know what you mean,” declares the puzzled Ahmed. “I have not seen these ladies with the souls. . . . I mean that we have been told we may be in Baghdad to-morrow night, although I am certain that the tea will not have come to a boil by then. To-morrow, Sahib! To-morrow! You will laugh at the jest of a To-morrow when you have seen Baghdad. There is no to-morrow there or here. Beyond the stars it is always yesterday.”

Chapter Two

ALONG THE SEA TO BERYTUS

Vanished Poms of Phœnicia

Trust not the World or Time—they are liar mates!

Ya hu!

Wealth borrows wings and woman goes her way;

Ya hu!

Into the Old House with the Ebon Gates.

Ya hu!

Who enters is but a guest and must not stay.

Ya hu!

Love not the sun, for that shall die;

Ya hu!

Love not the roses, for they must decay.

Ya hu!

—HUDAYI II OF ANATOLIA.



NE feels something of the atmosphere of the Arabian Nights as one journeys northward from Haiffa along the cliff road that skirts the sea. The highway follows the curving of golden beach about the Bay of Acre to the ruins of the citadel where Richard, the great two-fisted pilgrim, halted for the moment before leading his pious mace men into the Holy Land. Northward one takes a course through the dreary sand flats that cover the crumbling buttresses of Tyre and under the awnings of Sidon where Phœnicia the Forgotten stalked in her might.

The skies are cloudless—a luminous cobalt. The cliff walls are brown and green and white, and the road a

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quivering, wavering streak of light through a mist of dust and heat waves.

Sometimes the sands, glittering and golden, stretch off to the left and blend with the ocean. Sometimes the gaunt volcanic rocks, bright with the coloring of mosses and algæ, step boldly out into the blue water. The sea itself has a color here that one probably will discover nowhere else along its shore line, save perhaps in the sheltered clefts of the coast near Nice or about the inlets of Greece. It rolls out of the horizon, blue without a hint of green, until it approaches the shallows offshore. There the emerald blends with it, shading quickly to lavender with a red iridescence as it sweeps over the sea plants on the rocks. The splashing tints come to a sudden climacteric in the white spume of the surf feathering out over the bright yellow of the sands.

The road climbs high on the face of a precipice as it nears the borderline between Palestine and Syria. Between rocky approaches that effectively prevent any detour it curls reluctantly through the iron gate of a long white pagoda where British soldiers in tropical uniforms scrutinize passports and issue cholera warnings.

It is silent here. The low voices of the soldiers are lost in the empty spaces of the pagoda. The whisper of the surf comes upward as a sound to be felt rather than heard. Some bees are droning sleepily in the sunlight. But all of these sounds blend in a mere murmuring—the ghostly overtone of a vast quiet. Here died the great Phœnicia and nature seems still to be mourning for her.

A few miles to the north one comes to the French customs station, a stone house by the side of the road. At this point the cliffs have receded and the highway is close to the sea level once more but at a considerable distance from the shore.

The customs officer detaches himself from his luncheon, washes his hands and hastily envelops himself in his blue

Along the Sea to Berytus

uniform coat to give proper dignity to the ceremony of affixing a rubber stamp to the documents of identity that the travelers spread before him. This ceremonial completed, one may stop for a bite to eat in a grove across the road where a haphazard inn provides dates and grapes, weird meat cakes cooked in olive oil, leathery omelets, thin sheets of bread and lukewarm drinks that vary in character from beer to soda water.

Tables are set out under the trees in plain view of the little kitchen which for the obvious reasons of heat and convenience has been moved out of the inn to a shelter at the edge of the grove.

The baking of the bread is one of the most interesting sights of this neighborhood. A woman picks up a glutinous mass of dough from a mixing board and kneads it about two sticks which she then begins to move up and down in opposite directions. With great skill she whips the dough out into a thin sheet about two feet square. Then she detaches the sheet, opens it up along the side and drops it onto the hot surface of an iron stove. It is cooked almost instantly and is passed out to the waiting patrons to serve as chinaware, napery and silver.

Bread is used as an outside wrapper for nearly all foods from meat cakes to omelets. It has something of the taste of a pancake, but is somewhat tougher although very palatable.

The dividing line between the desert and the town is clearly defined in Syria. One needs little geography to envision the wide stretches of wasteland that lie beyond the blue hills to the east. But here along this road into the North there is plenty of the contrast of rich verdure. One passes through great olive groves—between mud walls that carry rippling irrigation sluices on their tops—through forests of mulberry trees where the silk industry is taking on a new impetus.

And so presently one comes to Beirut.

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Like the other harbor towns that are crumbling to a handful of dust along the Mediterranean back there toward Haiffa, Beirut was once a Phœnician stronghold.

To-day, despite its weird street cars and heavy automobile traffic, it seems to show its ancestry. To the north the mountains of Lebanon stretch out into the sea, a note of green and gray on a field of blue. Behind the town the mountains rise abruptly to hazy distances carrying along with them a white road along which are villas of blue and pink and creamy yellow. The curving waterfront is lined with sea craft with colored sails and save for a funnel or two sticking up over a stone warehouse must look much as it did when the great merchantmen of antiquity set out from here to distribute the silks that the caravans had brought or to quest for tin among the misty islands of the legendary North.

There is an air of age to everything in the city. Buildings, streets, parks, walls, wharves—all combine to give the impression that some ifreet having carried Beirut to the edge of the mountains suddenly let go of it and allowed it to go tumbling down the slopes toward the sea. The ancient disdain for square corners is observable everywhere. And ancient buildings crowd the narrow alleys just as they do in all other cities of the East. Smart French soldiery changing guard at the public buildings or hazing the sweating team of a seventy-five up the long hill toward military headquarters seems wholly out of place—a modernistic dab of color on the subdued background of a time-mellowed painting. The soldiers, the modern flags, the liners that drop their rusty anchors in the harbor—all are details entirely out of the picture.

The queen city of Phœnicia, huddling its teeming population in the ruinous buildings that it has founded on ruins, was here before the French soldiers or the tricolor or the steamships . . . and probably will be here when all of these innovations have gone.

Along the Sea to Berytus

The population of Beirut has changed much since the war and is still changing. The French occupation has stimulated some businesses and repressed others. It has attracted new nationalities and mixed the native Arabic with a polyglot of tongues.

If one may judge from the status of the Yashmak, this city must be largely Christian. The veil is seen much less frequently here than in other towns along the eastern Mediterranean coast. And one gets to see more of Cis-Asian beauty here than elsewhere in the Moslem countries.

It cannot be said that the Oriental beauty is entirely prepossessing. She is partial to fleshly upholstery and the lumbering carriage that goes with excess weight. But for all that the Syrian woman has her own charm. She has eyes that take one's attention from her lesser enchantments and there is a languid, mysterious air about her. Nowadays if she comes of the aristocracy, she goes trimly corseted and steps daintily in French-heeled shoes and silk stockings. If she is a wise lady she clings rather closely to the sober black that is so typical of Oriental style. If she is an artist she scorns the Paris styles in hats and with a few deft touches and a splash of white adapts the Moslem headdress to her modern needs.

So clad her dark beauty is in its proper frame. She does not set herself on a plane of comparison with her slimmer, more vivacious French sisters. She is *sui generis*.

Quite a colony of Russians has come to Beirut in recent years. Most of these people had fled to Constantinople during the Bolshevik uprising and were without passports when the allies turned back the Bosphorus to Turkey. They feared the Turks. They could not return to Russia. They could not turn toward Europe for lack of proper identification. At which juncture France opened the door to them and they came to the most important city on the old Phoenician coast.

There is something dramatic, something pathetic in

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their journeying—something so typical of the country to which they have come. In this region it seems that whole peoples were always in a state of migration. . . . The Jews going into captivity or coming out of it . . . Palmyran populations routed by Roman . . . Samaritan revolutionists traveling toward slavery in distant Iran. . . . In little, Russia is carrying out an aged tradition.

The sons of a proud people—some of them representatives of a high-chinned aristocracy—are driving camions and taxicabs for these aliens whose language they probably never will be able to speak. Their daughters, some of them charming and cultured, serve as barmaids or scatter their smiles among strangers in the waterfront cabarets.

Chapter Three

THE SINGING BOWSTRING

*The Adventure of Yusuf the Pious Assassin and His
Overdeveloped Ambition*

*Approaching me, he threw his noose—
But downward bending I escaped . . .*

—FIRDUSI.



NUMEROUS mystical societies flourished in the purple hills of Syria with quaint objectives that varied in sublimity from the placation of Satan by spitting against walls to the service of Allah by strangling an occasional dissenter with a gut bowstring.

This latter service was conducted exclusively by the pleasant and interesting Assassins whose name is derived from the Arabic designation of their principal habit—hashashin, eaters of hashish. Although in its attempt to do good in a naughty world, this association was largely religious, it was not totally so. Talent of all sorts may be put to base uses, even talent for murder. And so it was with the eaters of hashish.

Originally they were a sect of the Ismaili faction of Islam and their development seems to have been a logical offshoot from their convenient system of ethics. The Ismaili believed that in the line of Ismail, a descendant of Ali, was vested the chief authority in the Moslem religion. There were extreme fatalists, so thoroughly predestined to suitable rewards in the hereafter that they

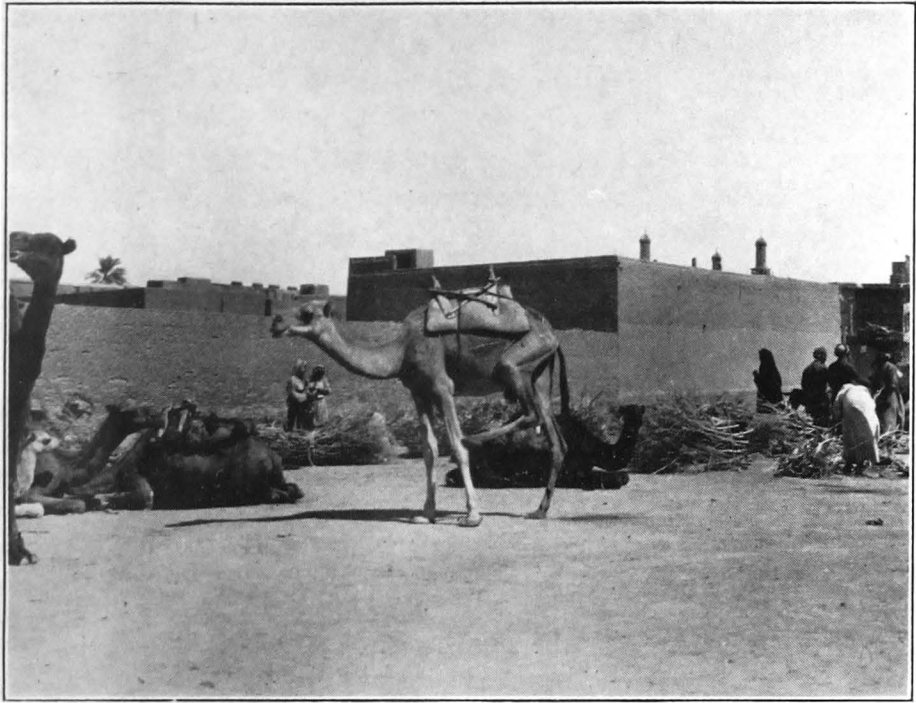
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saw no use in accounting for actions of any sort in this life. In their early days they were looked upon as a sort of inner circle of Shia Islam whose holy cities are in Mesopotamia. They did not feel the call to their glorious mission until 1090 A.D. when Hassan ben Sabbah, a gifted Persian living in Cairo, obtained admittance to the order and was made an initiate.

It is said—though one may discount the rumor as one of the sort always directed toward the purists in any sect—that ben Sabbah attempted to put the Ismaili to political uses in Egypt and was driven out by the unregenerate and suspicious police. He returned to Persia where he organized a new branch of the lodge with many allurements to the lay citizenry. As a sort of added touch, to the already beautiful ritual of the order, he introduced hashish eating and the concomitant good work of bowstringing his enemies.

Just how well Hassan ben Sabbah conducted the organization of the order is not known but history tends to show that it did not reach its finest flower until after his removal and the appearance of the Sheikh-al-Jebal, "The Old Man of the Mountain," whose name was a thing of fear to the Crusaders and likewise to many useless but opinionated Mohammedans.

It was under the Sheikh-al-Jebal that the Hashashin acquired their importance politically. The Sheikh had all the machinery of a modern municipal government with its committees, subcommittees, precinct captains and ward heelers. Three deputies answerable to him alone ruled over the provinces of Jebal, Kohistan and Syria. Under the deputies were the Initiates and the Students to whom were imparted only so much of the useful and glorious mysteries as might be deemed expedient by the men higher up. The Initiates and Students exercised power over the proletariat of the order, "The Devoted Ones" whose job was to eat the hashish and tauten the



A CARAVAN AT KADAMAIN



A HALT ON THE ROAD

The Singing Bowstring

bowstring. It was explained to them that the pleasurable sensations of hashish were only a foretaste of the joys of heaven that were assured them, should they carry out loyally and efficiently the work of terrorism whereby their superiors hoped to effect their program of reform.

A Devoted One knew that were he caught in the act of removing an enemy nothing would happen to him except possibly hanging or drawing and quartering or death tied to the tail of a wild horse. Then heaven would be his.

Such simple faith, despite its obvious beauty and spiritual advantages, was not accepted with wild acclaim by Arabia. Islam stood in terror of it for one hundred and fifty years while the children of Kaffir Europe shivered at the very name of the Old Man of the Mountain for centuries after he had gone to claim his eternal recompense for a work religiously undertaken and painstakingly executed.

The Deputy Grand Master of Syria emancipated himself from his superior Assassin during the reign of Mohamet II and has been credited with the removal of Conrad de Montferrat and two or three negligible caliphs. They still tell the legend about Acre and Beirut that Richard Cœur de Lion himself was marked for sacrifice to the cause of better and brighter murder and that he escaped through the intercession of his wife who pleaded for him with the Old Man of the Mountain.

When the Mongol dynasty took over the rule of Persia in 1255, the order had become one of the greatest influences for the acquisition of wealth in the Near East. But the Mongols set themselves against it as they did against any enterprise with which they were only slightly acquainted. They broke up several of the central houses of the society and ended its political significance with no regard for its long history and splendid achievements. Since that time the philosophical rulers of Persia and Syria have looked upon it as something coeval with the priestly lines of Babylon and Nineveh. Nowadays when a man is found

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with a bowstring wrapped about his neck it is supposed that something unusual has happened to him. . . . He may have been festooning himself with a riata just by way of personal decoration and he may have inadvertently tied the string too tight. . . . A man vain enough to adorn himself with a gut line might be expected to commit some such fatal error. Or he might have been set upon by brigands temporarily out of ammunition. It would be silly to give credence to the rumors that the dens of the ancient order are still populated by mystics who believe that the old ways are the best ways.

There is little in the landscape here to remind one of the dread Assassin and his religious ardor. It is doubtful if even the ghosts of this mystic order would bother to stir out of their unmarked graves, were it not for the Crusaders who have achieved a greater and more fragrant immortality. But as it is, they walk ensemble along every road in the region, the swaggering Gaul and Briton in their rusty mail, the suave knights of the bowstring politely concealing their disappointment at the unsportsmanlike and unethical conduct of invaders with protecting steel collars about their highly desirable necks.

It was Ahmed the Teller of Tales who discovered the phantoms in the sunlight. He had that gift of second sight, which is so essential to an understanding and sympathy with these strange lands. And not only that he had the talent, only slightly less important, of evoking the specters of the empty places merely by repeating the tales that he had heard about Arab campfires during his impressionable years, perhaps half a decade ago. Ahmed came originally from one of the oasis towns outside of Damascus. His education at the American college in Beirut had given him a remarkable command over the English tongue, but had succeeded in fitting him with Occidental processes of thought no better than it had

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succeeded in fitting him with European clothes. Ahmed was a porter, or pilot, or factotum-extraordinary with the caravan—he himself did not seem to know his functions or care. The soul of him belonged to the Badawi of his ancestry who in a moment of weakness had apostatized from the cult of the desert and sought happiness between the mud walls of townhouses. Ahmed liked the automobiles because they were quicker than the camels of the Damascene caravans and took one more quickly to the strange regions “beyond the stars.”

“In Acre,” he said, “they will show you the place where Yusuf the Able Assassin was laid to rest by his admiring and grateful brothers. . . . And should you doubt that, the scholars of Tyre and Sidon and Beirut will show you his grave right in their own cities. . . .” There was no trace of humor in the eye of Ahmed. The matter of a man’s being buried in two or three graves at the same time was not sufficiently original, in a land of relics, to excite comment. The car from Haiffa had stopped for water at a village just south of Beirut and Ahmed, with an occasional glance toward the mountains where one might reasonably expect to see peris and other lovely but diaphanous creatures dancing in the sunlight, gave much of his attention to stirring the dust on a Roman milestone with his foot.

“They say that some of the members of this noble brotherhood still range the hills,” he observed. “But it is hard to find the truth in such rumors. And there are few men alive nowadays who would have the courage and the zeal for the service of Allah shown by Yusuf the Able Assassin. . . .” And thereupon he told the story of Yusuf which certainly is worthy of repetition. . . .

It was during the glorious reign of Saladin II, when the disturbing Crusaders were making trouble for the sons of Islam that Yusuf came into the service of the Sheikh-al-Jebal and voiced his great ambition.

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“What do you desire of our holy order?” inquired the Old Man of the Mountain, not from any great desire for information but as a part of the ritual of initiation.

It was Yusuf’s part to reply: “The peace of Allah and the service of His Prophet.” But he added a word that brought the mysterious council to its feet: “And furthermore I pray that I may be spared in this great work until I have dispatched thirty-three of these unspeakable barbarians from over the sea. May my right arm be strong, my eye quick and the bowstrings better than those they make in Dimishk-esh-Sham.”

And the kindly old Sheikh, with tears in his eyes, raised up the youth and placed him on a divan beside him.

“You are impetuous,” he said. “And with the fire of youth you set for yourself a splendid objective. That in itself is something to be praised, for it reflects the spirit of our noble and benevolent society. But as your spiritual father I must caution you that murder is not looked upon by everyone as the beautiful rite that it is to us. There are those among these kafirs who would disembowel you for the very good deed that you do in removing one of their number. It is very seldom that a good throtter—even though he is buoyed up with the faith that actuates yourself—is ever able to bag more than three Crusaders before they catch him. So far our superiority has lain in the fact that when a good workman was taken from us we always had two loyal boys to step into his place. And if I do say it myself our training school is the best thing of its kind in all Asia.”

“You do not discourage me, oh, my father,” replied Yusuf with a smile. “I know the perils of the calling I have chosen.”

“Of course you do, my son, of course you do,” said the Sheikh-al-Jebal.

“I attempt no discouragement. On the contrary no one would rejoice with you more sincerely than I should you

The Singing Bowstring

succeed in shutting the wine-like air of our native land out of the sinful windpipe of the thirty-third victim. But as an old man I advise caution. Out of the experience of my years I must point out that the going is hard and that if it becomes necessary for you to be drawn and quartered, in our holy interests, you will have to be drawn and quartered. For such is our ancient and beautiful custom."

And Yusuf nodded. So deep were his emotions that he could not trust himself to speech.

It was lovely up there in the palace of the Old Man of the Mountain. A fountain sang in the gilded court and peacocks strutted about, before hangings of purple. The superior assassin sat upon a high throne studded with rubies a few feet above the divan where he had located Yusuf in his place of honor. And before the throne to the horseshoe arches of the portal stood the guard of chosen ones, stalwart men over whose shining mail had been draped robes of crimson satin. And every one of them had in his face the unmistakable stamp of the elect. Each looked every inch a murderer.

It is not known how long Yusuf remained on the mountain studying the technique of his profession and comparing notes with the veterans. But it was certain that he was there one day when news was brought that one Raoul de Beaufort had stepped out of a trap near Acre and ambushed half a thousand of innocent ambushers.

A great hush fell upon the audience chamber when the dusty messenger had gasped out these unbelievable tidings. Even the Old Man of the Mountain found it difficult to find words as he realized the ghastly truth.

"Well," he said at length with great harshness. "We shall have to rid the world of this Raoul de Beaufort. Here is opportunity for some one to reach the seventh heaven with a trifling effort and the small personal sacrifice of his life. Would that there had been such a chance for

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me when I was a younger and more active man. I should take the assignment myself as it is . . . but I have an engagement in Damascus."

There was silence among the stalwarts of the guard of honor for they knew their etiquette. It would be considered selfish for any one of them to step forward and seek to wrest from another this glorious opportunity for fame and salvation. That both would come close together there was no doubt, for the killing of Raoul would have to be done where Raoul could be found. . . . And that was inside the walls of Acre. The prospects for escape from a walled city after the performance of this simple act of faith were not so good. The Sheikh-al-Jebal gave long consideration to the matter.

"There is one among you," he said at length, "who has shown greater zeal than all the rest. He has done nothing but talk continuously since he came here of the damage he would do to the cause of Europe when he got a chance. And we have loved to listen to his endless haranguing. It would do the heart of any zealot incalculable good to hear him.

"And now has come this glorious chance wherein the bowstring will sing only once and the musician who twangs it will be speedily tossed to the dogs about the walls of Acre. Who has done more to merit this great honor than Yusuf? . . ."

And even the purple hangings swayed with the shouts of the multitude: "Yusuf! Yusuf! His be the honor. The Sheikh has chosen wisely."

Yusuf rushed forward with tears of gratitude in his eyes to thank his benefactor.

True there was little chance in his carrying out his splendid ambition with circumstances as they were. The killing of Raoul would be more or less public and thereafter the matter of escape would have something to do with the miraculous. But, after all, Yusuf knew that he

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could afford to sacrifice the remaining thirty-two scalps. . . . Or at least his companions felt that he must know it.

"There is just one thing I would remind you of," said the Sheikh as Yusuf started off on the long road southward through Syria. "You must forget the splendid urges that brought you here. You must kill only one man—and that man is Raoul de Beaufort. Those are your orders. And we shall miss your sprightly conversation dreadfully after you are gone. It was so heartening to hear you discoursing upon the wholesale method of slaughter as opposed to the individual and chiding your companions on their meager ambitions. You will kill only one man and you will not come back. But be consoled with the thought that we have selected a very able—if somewhat silent—gentleman to take your place."

History knows, or ought to know, how Yusuf the Able Assassin rode down through the dust, past Berytus and Sidon and Tyre to Acre where the red-sailed ships of the Crusaders made a crimson blot on the fair blue of the sea.

Yusuf, well trained in the ways of the order of the mountain, slipped over the wall and went about his work.

Late that night he broke through the window into the bedroom of Raoul de Beaufort and slipped the line about his throat. But he did not strangle him—not then. Raoul had one of the most noticeable necks that ever had been seen in northern Palestine. The bowstring, shrunken a bit in the drying process, was not long enough to make a noose. Yusuf went out the way he had come.

The story is told how Raoul de Beaufort was found dead in his bed on the following morning and how an unknown in Beaufort's armor had made his way through the eastern gate along toward dawn. But it is only legend that tells how, after a weary fortnight, there came a knock at the gate of the castle where the Old Man of the Mountain kept his ledgers of life and death. A startled guard opened the gates and Yusuf the Able Assassin stag-

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gered up the tiled areaway to the audience chamber of the Sheikh. He was received with stern solemnity.

"So you are back," observed the Sheikh with an eagerness that some might have mistaken for annoyance.

"Yes, my father, I am back," replied Yusuf. "Raoul the Unspeakable is dead."

"I didn't think there was a chance of your getting out," commented the Sheikh. "In all my experience I never saw a case where the chances were better for your immediate removal. And I am to suppose that you obeyed orders implicitly."

"In the spirit, my father," explained Yusuf. "In some nonessential details they may have been violated. But in the spirit I certainly did a good job."

"You killed only one man as you were ordered."

"No, my father, that is the point in which the nonessential violation occurred. I killed fifteen archers. I had to kill the fifteen before I found a bowstring suitable for my work. . . ."

"My son," cried the aged one, "you are a man in a thousand. Never in all my born days have I seen such initiative and skill. Come forward and I will put the chaste salutation of honor on your brow. . . ." And he did. . . . "And now I have another surprise for you. I should be a poor leader of our people if I failed to see that the obvious wishes of Allah were carried out. According to all the schedules you should, by now, be tasting the delights of heaven. I cannot restore to you the fortnight of bliss that you have missed by remaining alive. But I can correct the error brought about by the poor intelligence of these invaders. . . . Guards, take this hero out and garrote him at once. . . ." And so it was done. If Ahmed's story sounds like an echo of the war tale about the soldier who had to kill six of the enemy to find a pair of shoes that would fit him, what of that? Every story has to start somewhere.

Chapter Four

DAMASCUS

A City Old As Time

*To this Khan—and from this Khan—
How many a pilgrim came—and went too!*

*Many a van and caravan
Crowded came and shrouded went, too!*

—KEMAL OOMI.



DAMASCUS is said to be the oldest city on the face of the earth and looks its age. It was here among its fountains when primitive workmen were baking the first bricks for Kish. It was ancient when Babylon and Nineveh were conducting the first great land boom in history. It held its proud identity through bloody cycles of war, laughed at the might of Assyria, Egypt and the lesser nations, shrugged its lean shoulders at Rome and went on through the ages toward immortality. Day before yesterday a perian conqueror sacked it. Yesterday the sword-girt reformers of Islam pounded on its eastern gate. An hour ago the seventy-fives were smashing down its ancient domes and minarets with melanite. But it is still here considering with tongue in cheek the vast optimism of those who would destroy it.

The oldest written records of mankind, setting down in permanent form the traditions that preceding ages had passed along from the days when language was just getting fashionable, speak of Damascus as they speak of the earth

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and sky and sea—something so well established, so permanent, that the world seemed always to have known of it. Some of the earliest books of the Hebrew scriptures refer to it casually as they might mention any other hoary institution. And something of its status in the political economy of the period has been deciphered from cuneiform inscriptions on the tiles of civilizations dead these thousands of years.

Damascus remains to-day the city of the Arabian Nights. When one speaks of "The Changeless East" he sometimes is conscious of mental reservations allowing for electric lights, tram lines, ice and taxicabs. Occidental civilization has reached out a steadying hand into the deserts of Western Asia and even Moslem reaction cannot shut it out. It is here as in Beirut. Automobiles parked along the Barada, French uniforms in the streets, street cars easily recognizable as such despite their peculiarities—all evidence that the West is moving eastward. And yet—though this is an obvious paradox—there are no violent contrasts.

East and West mingle with violent reaction at Port Said, for instance. There the flaming Orient flows through streets that resemble the scarcely tracked alleys of an Oklahoma oil town. There one is instantly aware of the striking modernity of the canal and its terminal buildings, its constant traffic of tall ships and the blinding searchlights with which vessels guide themselves out onto this cleft in the sand and so across the desert. The costume is that of the East. The people are a polyglot, but an Eastern polyglot, and yet one comes away with the idea that this is all as ancient and convincing as a musical comedy.

Beirut is ancient in its buildings and site and traditions but painstakingly and unsmilingly thorough in its effort to be a modern seaport.

But Damascus takes her modern adornments less seriously. They hang to her like votive offerings about a

Damascus

statue in a shrine—attachments rather than additions and they affect her appearance, prospects and mode of thought as little as if Occidental meddlers had left them on the other side of the world.

The beauty of Damascus is that of a marble goddess, languid, immutable and unaware of age. So long as the desert leads mysteriously away into the purple East, lean men and tired camels will be passing constantly through the gate at the end of the Street Called Straight. So long as the desert is unchangeable, unchangeable also will be the conditions that caused men forgotten ages ago to build a city here. And unlike more modern cities, that are born of modern necessities and flourish and bloom and eventually wither, Damascus has no need to adorn herself with newer and sillier fashions, revise her coiffure and daub her face with wrinkle eradicators.

The distance between Beirut and Damascus is fifty miles on the map. In measurement of time one might count the separation, with some thousand leaves of the calendar for each mile. A step or two from the tram lines and one is back again in the marts of Nineveh or lazing beneath the garden walls of Babylon. In dim ateliers iron-mongers are pounding out steel blades with the processes that made damaskeened swords famous throughout the civilized but somewhat bloodstained world. The art of damaskeening, said to have consisted of hammering together iron ingots of varying carbon content, has been lost but the anvils on which the steel is pounded and the hammers with which the work is done might well be the ones used centuries ago by armorers fashioning ordnance for the reception of the Crusaders. Here is a boy chipping a great block of ivory with a broad-bladed adze. Here is an artisan threading silver wire into patterns in a hammered brass lamp. Here are weavers at looms such as those at which were fashioned the ceremonial robes of Sargon, King of Kings.

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Here are noisy street merchants hawking a variety of wares, from sweetened gum to Baghdad mercery. Here the gray-bearded patriarchs, who might have been here when Mohamet halted reverently on the desert's edge, still sit complacent in the perfume bazaar compounding attars for mysterious ladies. Here Time has cried for the right of sanctuary and has been granted it. There are no clocks—what need of them where chronology is reckoned in centuries.

It has been said by some one attempting to analyze the manifest difference between the East and the West, that the sea must account for one and the desert for the other. The pace of the East trading across hundreds of miles of burning, silent emptiness is that of the camel. That of the West is in step with the quick, facile journeys that have always lain between important human habitations in lands where the ground is fertile and the water plentiful. The East has never fathomed the secrets of the desert. Out there beyond the salt marshes, where the cool rivers of the Anti-Lebanon spread out and lose themselves, strange things have been happening since life began to stir itself in the world. Great caravans have gone out toward the capitals of Iran and have disappeared forever. Legends have arisen to account for their tragedies and a bewildered mind has populated the wastes with Ifreets and Peris and other weird beings created by Allah to live in a region so obviously unsuited to Man.

And as geography has given Damascus its permanent location so it has given to the populace a fatalism and a mysticism of which Occidental thought cannot form a remote notion.

The unseen spirits that walked with the sleepless Harun, when he wandered at midnight through the crooked lanes of Baghdad, are just as numerous in Damascus and just as much of an influence upon the life of the people as they were in his day. The wonders of the

Damascus

Arabian Nights might have been enacted here only last night. The occult is in everything and no less real because it cannot be measured.

If a camel driver should come staggering through the Bab-el-Sherki this afternoon and announce that he had discovered in the desert a city of brass with gates of chased silver and domes and minarets of massy gold, some of the graybeards might scoff at him, but ninety per cent of the scoffers would believe him. If he should embellish his tale with an account of how peris, more beautiful than the sun, inhabited the place and lured the sons of Islam to certain destruction amid unspeakable enchantments, the scoffing would pause long enough to permit every one of his auditors to breathe a short prayer to Allah.—No matter how preposterous the narrative there is in the native an inbred conviction that the wonderful is true and as for prayer—well, it costs nothing to be on the safe side.

Not even the convincing materialism of the seventy-fives could eliminate the magic from this city of magic. No harshness of alien government will ever convince these people that some day a thaumaturgy, similar to that which created the city, will not be invoked to strike the invaders dead in their beds and restore the world—and by the world is meant particularly Damascus—to the lovely simplicity it enjoyed when Asshur was wandering about Mesopotamia, looking for a place in which his tribe might take root.

No small part of this mysticism is due to the location and appearance of the city itself. Viewed from the motor road that winds down out of the Anti-Lebanon Damascus may disappoint the traveler from Beirut. In the glare of the noonday sun, it seems a dusty paradise, akin to the desert mirage. Its gardens are mostly in walled courts and the groves that line the road seem to be drooping in the heat. But seen from the spur of the Anti-Lebanon,

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which one crosses in coming out of the wilderness from Palmyra to the north and east, it is a thing of misty white and gold and blue set among shadowy tapestries of purple and green. From that vantage it appears to be what it is—something that the genii might have built at the invocation of The Owner of the Lamp in a peculiarly happy mood. It is the Oriental city of unchecked fantasy.

One knows why the gaunt, hollow-eyed men of the caravans are silent as they pass through the east gate. Theirs is an emotion which cannot be expressed in words. They are desert men who have come at last to cool rivers—adventurers whom the hand of Allah has guided safely to a marvelously cheerful destiny. Out there man was nothing and danger was at his hand and the thirst in his mouth. Here the mastery of man over the world in which he lives, is once more manifest. Here humankind walks fearlessly through lazy streets, toward flowering yards where houris with restless eyes trail jeweled fingers in the waters of murmuring fountains.

It is water that has made Damascus lovely—water even before the snow-capped mountains that rise to the west. The Barada for ages has spread out to push the wheat sprouts toward the barren rim of the wilderness. The Barada has given this desert port its gardens of apricot and olive and lime and orange trees. Fountains with crystal jets have given the dwelling places a character unlike that to be discovered in the squalid houses of other Eastern cities. Cleanliness is not so difficult where there is water, and the dirt of Damascus is mostly in the streets. Its people do not live in it. . . .

Some Eastern philosopher has said that the progress of cities differs from that of rivers only in the nature of the materials in the state of flux. In rivers drops of water go down to the sea and never again come back but the river itself is a permanent thing that is not altered except by a convulsion of nature. In towns men are born and

Damascus

grow up and wed and die and their works like them crumble eventually to dust. In three generations populations have passed on. In a few hundreds of years at the most, the physical aspect of a city is entirely metamorphosed. But like the river the intangible something which one calls a city is also changeless. . . .

This is as true in Damascus as elsewhere—truer, perhaps, for even cities have a way of dying and disappearing. The age of the town is more evident than in other communities because here the past has a way of repeating itself in the present. Styles are not revised—either in dress or in architecture—and standing buildings are replaced very slowly.

In the Great Mosque—most important of the buildings of Damascus—one's attention is called to three distinct schools of construction that bespeak the principal epochs in its existence. Its foundations and the pillars with which it is girt are Greek or Roman and it has been identified as the rebuilt temple of Rimmon. It was here, according to Biblical scholars that Naaman reared his altar—the altar that Ahaz reproduced in Jerusalem. Under Constantine, who carried the domination of the empire of the East far into Asia, the temple became a Christian church. In 379 A.D. Theodosius dedicated it to John the Baptist, whose head was said to have been placed in its inner shrine.

The shrine is venerated to this day by Moslem and Christian alike. Upon it is a wreath, the gift of that ubiquitous son of the Prophet Wilhelm II who placed it there with one hand while with the other he directed the unfolding of the mosque's richest carpet before the prayer niche in the direction of Mecca.

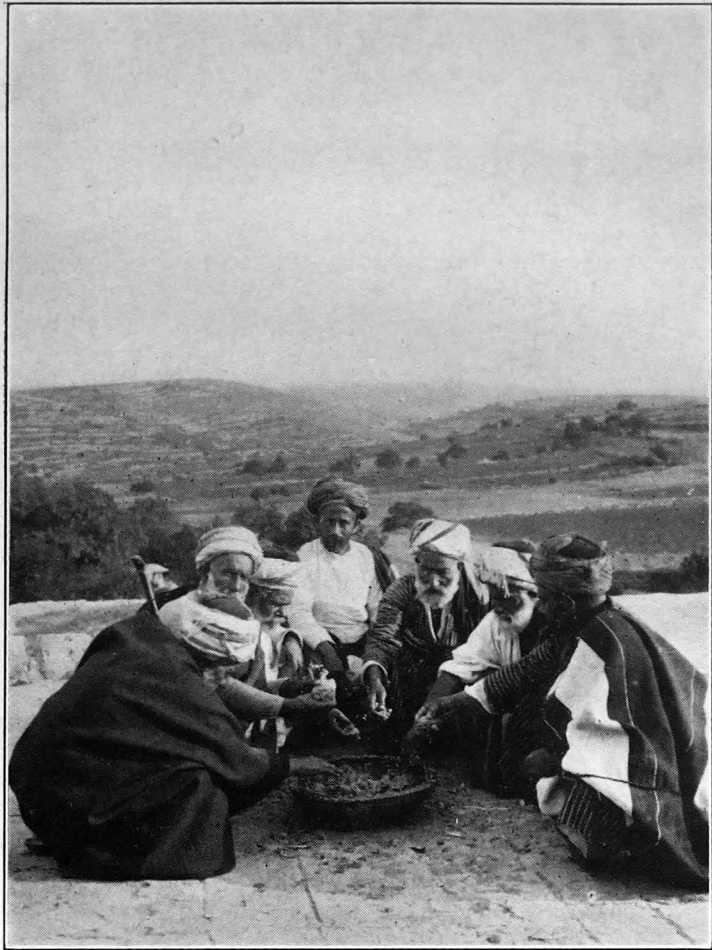
When nearly three hundred years after Theodosius the city was betrayed into the hands of the Moslems, the ancient church became what it is to-day—a mosque and a monument to the Western caliphate.

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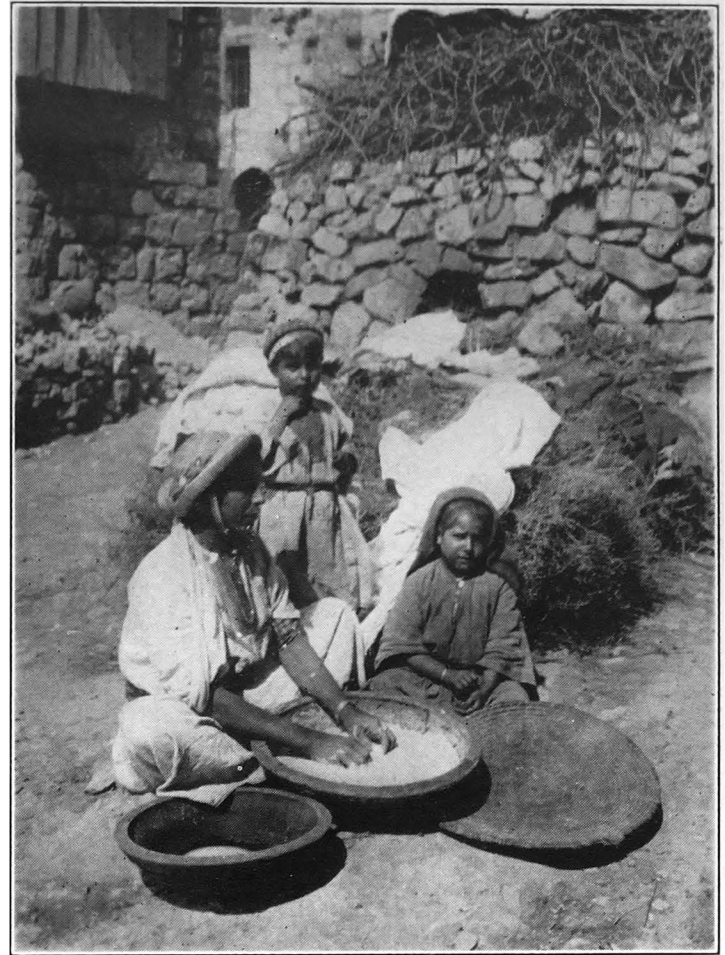
The Caliph Walid in 705 A.D. imported skillful Greek architects and a thousand stonecutters, wood carvers and goldsmiths from Constantinople to transform the ancient building into a dazzling show place, as lavish in its magnificence as any of the palaces for which Baghdad came to be noted throughout the world. The timbers of the ceiling were inlaid with gold, the walls were covered with slabs of matched marble and transparent onyx. Pillars snatched from the dead grandeur of Palmyra and Baalbek were brought to Damascus in long, tedious journeys from the north and east and mounted in the great outer colonnade. The prayer niches were veined with gold, and jeweled lamps whose filigree frames were of solid gold were clustered about the ceiling.

Much of this shining display is gone. The pillars of the outer colonnade in places have tumbled down. The marble covering of the inner walls is cracked. The golden lamps are gone from the gilt-flaked rafters. But there is still about the building a somber grandeur due partly to age and partly to the chaste simplicity of line and the boldness of plan with which the inspired workmen of two thousand years ago conceived it. Beggar women crouch at its gates—"Backsheesh for the love of Allah" is the whining cry that stirs the long silent echoes of priestly chants. Philosophical Arabs cluster under its pillars as much for its cool shade as for its influence in the cause of spiritual uplift. It is a typical building of the East falling away to a splendid memory, stone by stone. But its day is not yet done. It is still what it was when Walid revised it, one of the greatest places of worship in all Islam.

The Christian tradition has not quite deserted the Grand Mosque. It peeps out in old inscriptions from which the covering plaster has fallen away. It is quite recognizable at the shrine of John. It is still more evident in some of the nomenclature of parts of the building, as for instance the Madinet Isa—the minaret of Jesus—so



ARABS AT NOONDAY MEAL



MAKING BREAD IN SYRIA

Damascus

called because of a belief, which good Mohammedans find no difficulty in reconciling with their own faith, that on the Day of Judgment Jesus Christ will stand in that tower for His awful reckoning with the angel of death on His left hand and the recording angel with the book of gold on His right.

Virtually every Arab who stops at the fountain in the outer court to perform his ceremonial ablutions before entering the mosque is convinced of the inevitability of this awesome finish to the affairs of Damascus, but he never allows the matter to weigh too heavily on his conscience.

It is probable that nowhere else in the world would one find so convenient a process of thought. It makes it possible for the true philosopher to be tolerant and intolerant at once. He may bow reverently at the Madinet 'Isa and pause respectfully at the marble sarcophagus of St. John. Whereupon he may wander out into the street and tempt French machine gun bullets by yowling for the death of the nearest Christian. That is the way of the East. It is measurable by no Occidental standards.

From the great octagonal tower of El-Gharbiyeh one may look down across the courtyard of the mosque and over the city. He may see the Barada leaping out of the mountains in a white band and spreading itself fanwise through the city in a myriad of scintillant streams like the silver wire filigree that the artisans are pounding into lacy patterns in the brassware of the bazaars only a few yards away. He may look out toward the desert where the rivers merge into the sea of the salt marshes and presently come to nothing. He may watch the camels plodding out of the east gate toward the dancing horizon and he may pause hesitant with an ear alert for the battle cry of Greek or Roman or Palmyran or Mohammedan, for here is no whisper of the West, no memory of the ages that have been trod by mankind since Abraham came out of Ur. . . .

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One leaves the mosque to enter the bazaar of the joiners and journeys toward the Bab-esh-Sherki—the East Gate. This is by far the most fascinating part of the magical city. It was to this gate that the perils of the desert came, time after time, seeking the treasure and the destruction of Damascus.

Out there beyond the crumbling remnants of the City walls the Moslem army camped year in, year out, in one of the greatest sieges in history while warriors died and their sons arose to take their places. It was through this gate that Islam marched westward toward the sea and the Christian countries beyond the sea, to spread the new dispensation with ready torch and bloody baptism. It was looking at this gate that Mohamet stood when he looked to heaven and breathed his now famous prayer against a temptation to forswear the joys of the heaven that he had so cleverly contrived to fit his own specifications in favor of this earthly Eden that thirsty men from the desert had planted in the rocks and marshes so many ages before him.

“It is not meet that man should enter Paradise more than once,” he is said to have decided. “So I shall not pass this gate. . . .”

A lane leading to the left from the east side of the mosque passes between two Moslem schools toward the Bab el Amara on the north side. A short distance farther is the tomb of Saladin. There is a beautiful cenotaph on this site, a fitting monument to a warrior of such manifest and varied talent. It is still interesting to the voyager from the West, although not the least notable of its features, a wreath of bronze laurels placed there by the Kaiser in 1898, is now missing. This valuable souvenir is said to have been presented to Colonel Lawrence by Feisul, now king of Iraq, when the modern Crusaders broke the Turkish army hereabouts in 1918.

The gates of the city are the pivots of most of its tradi-

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tions. At the Bab Kisan is a square tower where disinterested Mohammedan guides will point out the window whence St. Paul was lowered in a basket to escape the anger of the Jews. Near the Bab es Saghir—the little gate—is a rose-colored tomb which tradition ascribes to Fatima, the granddaughter of the prophet, and archæology ascribes to somebody else. Not far from the Bab el Hadid, the Iron Gate, in the neighborhood of the saddlers' bazaar, is a great plane tree which the reverent guide asserts, with a positive air, was planted at the hour of Mohammed's birth.

North of the East Gate is a house which legend holds to have been the home of Naaman which in recent years was used as a leper hospital. In the same neighborhood is the House of Ananias. The level of the city streets has risen to such an extent, during the centuries that have followed the Barada out into the timeless desert since the beginnings of Christianity, that the main floor of the house of Ananias is now a basement. It is used as a Christian church.

The entire region about Damascus is closely bound to the past by folklore and shrine. It would be more remarkable were it not. Guizot, in his history of France, has paused to remark that the most fantastic of legends have their roots somewhere in fact. One who has made a study of such tales is sure to lean toward the same belief and it is obvious that if colorful tales are traceable to history, then, in the reverse of the picture, history must be trailed by magical traditions.

A pleasant journey out of Damascus is made to El-Gharbiyeh where there are many tombs marked with names that were famous throughout Islam and numerous interesting ruins. The traveler is quite likely to see neither for it is from this point that one sees Damascus at its best with its age-old dusts swept away from it and its youth girding it about with green garlands just as it appeared when Aladdin's Djinn of Uz, son of Uram, placed it there.

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The Jebal Kasiun rises near by, revered by Moslems because of the tradition that Abraham stood upon it when the unity of God was revealed to him, and the legend that Abel's body was hidden among its rocks by Cain before he started on his terrible journey out toward the far ends of the earth.

Three miles north of Damascus is the village of Jobar where Elijah is said to have lived when he was fed by the ravens. Jewish pilgrimages still come to the spot that has been designated as his tomb.

And so it is with all the region. There is not a hilltop but has its holy place—not a village that does not seek to excuse its squalor with vivid tales of departed grandeur. The population moves in mists of its own fancy that acquire no little realism from the unbelievable loveliness of this city, which in the ensemble takes no note of its marred components.

Chapter Five

THE JEBEL DRUSE

The Adventure of the Violated Guest Right and a Magnificent Suicide

*Should he advance, his cause is just
And blood will mingle with the dust.*

—FIRDUSI (The Shah Nameh).



THE wreckage of buildings that were old when Vercingetorix surrendered to Cæsar at Alesia adds to the dust of forgotten civilizations in the Street Called Straight. The arches of the bazaars have fallen in wide gaps and the spattered marks of high explosive shell are to be seen in the colonnade of the Great Mosque. The sun drops down beyond the Anti-Lebanon, and the Barada picks out the star points of a clear sky as it did when a sign in the clear heavens led the Magi across the desert to the city of Bethlehem not so far away. . . . And out beyond the eastern gate machine guns rattle through the night and Damascus stirs in a restless sleep.

The battery commander, in charge of the guns on the heights to the west, shrugs his shoulders.

"The Druse," he says, "they are always at it. . . . They toss barbed wire over the cheveaux de frise at the gate and ring the alarm bells. . . . And so they draw fire and wake everybody up. They are a very silly people."

Which, to his way of thinking, explains everything.

It is safe to say that Damascus will be here when some

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day the Druses are exterminated and their history becomes as misty and dubious as that of the Old Man of the Mountain. That day may be æons in the future. It may be day after to-morrow. In the meantime they are something more than a mere thorn in the sides of the French government. They are a definite expression of the Orient—the old Orient that was here before the Haj took it away to Mecca in railroad trains and the Barada was cinched, martingaled and cruppered to furnish power for the funny little tramways that parade the twisting alleys of the old city like some new and unbeautiful species of insect.

Dispatches from the scene of the recent disturbances dispose of the Druse tribesmen by naming them and referring them to fanatics. Some correspondents in the early days of the rioting went so far as to declare that their uprising against the French was further evidence of "the growing unrest in Islam." Which explanation was on a par with the plaint of the French artilleryman that the silly tribesmen concern themselves with disturbing the sleep of an otherwise peaceful community.

It would appear that one might find some profit in a casual look at these people, who have cost the world so much in cable tolls since France took over the mandate for Syria.

In the first place they are not Moslems. Their quarrel has nothing at all to do with the "growing unrest in Islam." They care no more about the Mohammedan than they do about the Christian—and that is very little. Ethnologists generally concede that they were not even of the same stock as the Arab. They are not Semites, although they speak the language of the Arabian peninsula as perfectly as do the tribes among whom Arabic is an ancestral tongue. They show marked indications of descent from the so-called Aryan race. And their religion is a mystical *mélange* in which the muleteer of Mecca has a subordinate place. Their sacred book is the Koran but their interpretation is their own.

The Jebel Druse

Very little is known about them. Hence they are well accounted for in a hundred varying and fanciful legends.

One theory makes them descendants of an army of occupation left in the Lebanon by the Crusaders. That story does not seem to be very well substantiated, either in local tradition or their own folklore. Another, deriving their name from Turs—shield—identifies them with the shield bearers who served with notable effect against the Western invaders during the Crusades. This tradition coupled with the fact that their private life is as little known as the ritual of a secret society has led some investigators to link them with the Assassins—a correlation that is borne out neither by their racial appearance nor their attitude toward the faith of Mohamet. It has been said that their ancestors were brought to the Lebanon in a colonization scheme by Esrahaddon about 700 B.C. and it is toward this explanation that commentators, who have studied them closely, are now inclined.

They are a monogamous people in the midst of polygamy. . . . They have always been an independent people in the midst of oppression.

Two settlements of the tribe are to be found in Syria. One, headquarters of the so-called Western Druses near Beirut, the other less well known country of the Eastern branch in the Hauran south of Damascus. The holy city of the Westerns is at Deir-el-Kamar—"convent of the moon." The seat of government of the Orientals has moved frequently since the World War but it has always been in the rocky hills near Suedia.

The Druses in the Lebanon have been independent enough to carry on an occasional uprising but the moral direction of the tribe is vested in the East where in little the tragedy of the Riff is being repeated almost daily. Something of the attitude of these people may be understood if one bothers to read a little of their modern history. They were the cause of the riotous times of 1860, when

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thousands of corpses lay piled in the streets of Damascus. And they were suppressed at the time by a garrison of 20,000 French troops imported for that special task.

From contemporaneous accounts it would seem that the rebellion was not so much religious as political in significance. The attitude of the Druse toward the Turk, who then exercised sovereign control of the Arabian peninsula, was never one of open admiration. In the eyes of the Hauran at that period a Christian was to be preferred to a Moslem who received his orders from Constantinople. But when the time came the Christians were massacred with the whole-souled abandon that might have marked a genuine fanatical outburst. . . . So in the end it all came to the same thing.

The Druses were pressed back eastward and southward from the city to the mountain that now bears their name—the Jebel Druse. . . . And there they forced the wilderness to give them a living and built for themselves a natural stronghold that in 1925 proved its effectiveness against trained troops with a thoroughly modern equipment.

When the Druses took possession of their mountain it rose forbidding and barren out of the plain with no indication that it would ever give sustenance to a human being. The tribesmen with the infinite pains that one may find where time is no particular object carried up fertile earth in baskets from the valley below and laid out garden terraces on the slopes. These terraces they planted with mulberry and lime and pomegranate and apricot and the other trees that are seen about Damascus. Eventually they founded a silk industry and so for half a century derived a livelihood.

The little war with the French had its beginning in 1921—according to the story told by the Sultan Pasha el Atrash, the present ruler of the tribe. There came to Bekkah, feudal stronghold of the Atrash, one Adham

The Jebel Druse

Khayim, whose political activities had irked the government at Damascus. The Sultan, who had some work on hand, saw the visitor installed in his house and went on about his business. When he returned he discovered that his guest had been arrested by the acting governor of the district, the Commandant Tranca.

Whatever divergences of opinion may separate the Druse from the Moslem they agree on one point, the sacredness of one's house particularly as it pertains to the law of hospitality. The Sultan attempted to explain his position to the governor. When his modest request for the return of his guest was refused he attacked a motor train and killed a French officer and four soldiers. Immediately thereafter the Druse chieftain moved down into Transjordan to remain until he had been granted an amnesty.

Captain Carbillet was appointed governor of the region and proceeded to impress his charges with the importance of the Syrian government. Memory of the attack on the motor train and the belief that a show of the force behind the French occupation might tend to enforce peace may have been responsible for his policy. Results might have been the same had he attempted to placate the Sultan and admit that it might have been a breach of etiquette to arrest the guest of the house of Atrash during the absence of the host. But whatever might have come of amity the desire of the governor for ceremonial recognition, whenever he chanced to visit a Druse village, resulted in the sending of a delegation to Damascus.

General Serrail, the high commissioner of Syria, declined to see the delegation because the governor was absent on leave. The Druse chiefs went home and prepared to see that the governor would remain permanently absent.

Word of the maneuver reached Damascus and five relatives of the Sultan were invited to meet the French officials in a new parley. When the chiefs came before the repre-

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representatives of the high commission they were arrested and distributed about the desert. Sultan Atrash struck quickly. He swept down on the French garrison at Kafr and virtually annihilated it. Soon afterward he laid siege to Suedia, seat of the French governor, and called out all of his man power—some ten thousand—to arms.

General Michaud was rushed to relieve Suedia. He was ambushed and suffered about two thousand casualties. And so what had started out to be a punitive operation on the part of the French became a war of extermination.

For all that the Jebel Druse was doomed the moment it took down its rusty flintlocks from their hooks in its dismal houses, this revolt some day may be written as not the least stirring epic of a region that is full of them. A nation of 65,000 souls took the field unhesitatingly against a first-class power accepting in advance the prospect of defeat.

With its obsolete muskets it attacked and brought down aeroplanes. With its rusty blades it hacked to pieces columns of trained French colonials. With its bare hands it rushed against tanks, upset them and destroyed them.

When the harassed invader, temporarily at a disadvantage for want of fresh troops, offered to declare peace and install a governor suitable to the Druses, the chieftains rebelled at the suggestion that they pay an indemnity of five thousand Syrian pounds—about \$12,500. They elected to sacrifice themselves for a principle. And in that spirit they carried the war to Damascus.

Sporadically they are still fighting—sniping from outside the walls or drawing French fire by the device of shaking the barricades and ringing the alarms at the gates.

From an Occidental point of view they are quite "the silly people" that the French lieutenant of artillery described them to be and yet a magnificent people even to their foes.

"What good will come of it at last?"

The Jebel Druse

The Little Wilhelmines of the Jebel Druse probably are asking the question now as Little Wilhelmines have always asked it after wars in defense of that very abstract thing called Liberty, or to overthrow a highly general proposition called tyranny, or to defend a local custom such as the exercise of the guest right. And they probably are no nearer the answer than the millions of suffering and questioning women whose sisters they are.

Chapter Six

A CARAVAN GOES EAST

The Town of Lovely Ladies

*When the misbelieving Guebre saw
Thy black locks and dazling brow,
Wonder smote him to the soul, and awe.
"Bilirim! (Credo!)" He cried, "I now
See that God should be adored
For the darkness as the light;
Allah Akbar! God, the Lord
Made not only day but night."*

—LAMII.



IT was late afternoon before the motor caravan got started from Damascus on its way to Palmyra. The customs officials, in the shed behind the ornate railway station that has stood idle since it was built, had all the leisurely complacence, about their work, that one might expect on so warm a day. The weary adventurers sat in the breathless heat looking at the dream city now smothered by the djinns of dust and flame and listened, complaining, to the importunities of a sherbet seller who shouted unconvincingly of the tastiness of his wares, the while he clanked his brass bowls like castanets.

The little director of the expedition, an Alabama youth with a Dixie accent and shreds of an American army uniform, drooped in a patch of shadow on the loading platform adjoining the shed and recalled how hot it had

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been one day in Birmingham. He spoke in a low voice, as if he felt he was asleep and feared to awaken.

"I wonder what my mother would say if she could see me out on the desert," he pondered. "It gets awful hot out there. I think some day I'll quit."

Obviously there was no hurry about quitting. It was something one could do to-morrow . . . Malesh. . . . Nothing matters in the Orient and one who listened to the boy from Birmingham knew that he would not quit, until some day he should drop dead out there beyond the eastern horizon. He had eaten the lotus.

The employees of the railroad terminal were asleep along the gleaming tracks. A porter was snoring under the loading platform. The boy from Birmingham yawned.

"The old boy who runs this place is probably home taking his nap," he said. "We should have got around here before noon. It's a good six hours to Palmyra if we don't have any bad luck. But I suppose we shouldn't howl about it. This ain't such a bad place to rest. . . . You can get to feel almost cool if you look at the snow up there in the mountains."

Few of the voyagers shared his philosophical attitude. There was little relief in a glance at snow-capped mountains that swayed dizzily behind a curtain of heat waves nor in the thought of an acclimated official sleeping away the afternoon while a dozen blistering travelers awaited the ceremonial wielding of his rubber stamp. Camels were moving in the road before the railroad station raising smoky veils of dust that marked their passage toward the Bab el Shirkey long after walls had hidden them from view. They would wait, probably, at some khan near the gate and toward sundown start out upon the month's jaunt that would take them to Nineveh or Baghdad or the cool hills of Persia. Save for the tinkling of camel bells and an occasional shouted direction the passage of the caravan was silent. For all of reality that invested

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it, the train might have been what indeed all the scene seemed to be—something in the red queen's dream.

The customs officer came at last—a little irked to find so much business awaiting his attention while the effects of sleep were still upon him. He questioned gruffly the good intentions of anyone who might be journeying toward Baghdad, issued cautions against the transport of opium, hasheesh, arak or cocaine, and inquired of the baggage master if he had anything of a dutiable nature to declare. It was after three o'clock and well over 100 in the shade when at last the Scot who drove the baggage car put his foot on the starter pedal and led the way out of the railroad yards toward the plaza beside the Barada.

Before the Victoria Hotel, where he paused for orders that might have come by telegraph from Beirut, a French officer girt in silky white robes adjusted a silver sword and bade the voyagers a smiling farewell. He was commandant of the camel corps, the finest troops in the army of occupation, whose duty was the policing of the far reaches of the caravan routes. Bred probably in Paris and trained in North Africa, he looked more like the picture book chieftain than the Arab sheikhs themselves and was quite the handsomest soldier in Damascus.

"Look out for the Badawi," he said as a Syrian chauffeur drew an Enfield rifle from a rack on the running board and shoved a clip into it. "You can't be up to them. But have no fear. If they attack you we shall get them eventually. . . . We always do."

It was a consoling message at which all the travelers brightened perceptibly. Even the heat could not depress the surge of good spirits at the thought that over one's bones carefully cleaned by the buzzards in the wasteland this fine commander and his men would one day exact a vengeance.

A street hawker took advantage of the lull to offer some cactus fruit, poisonous in appearance and dripping with

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the gray water in which it had been dipped for peeling. It had the insipid, spoiled banana taste of the American papaw which it resembled in mushiness and color as well. As the travelers who were experiencing a foretaste of the thirst that they must presently feel, rebelled at the sickly sweetness of the fruit, the hawker explained its value as a desert ration, suggesting that the director of the commissariat might do no better than to add a quantity—perhaps the whole tubful—to his otherwise deficient supplies. The picture seller, who lolled in a booth to the right of the hotel steps, walked out to join in the argument while at his heels strutted a tame starling that looked at the whole proceedings with a baleful and critical eye.

Some shopkeepers were already putting up their shutters when at length the cars moved off from the curb. Business is no more of a care than other things in the community. It is said that some tradesmen fix in advance the day's scale for which they will work. Once that amount is tucked into the folds of sash or turban the merchant closes his booth and goes home to doze luxuriously by his fountain and pray for a more speedy accumulation of his set stake on the morrow.

The way led through the street of the ironworkers, pounding as they have been pounding for hundreds of years on lumps of metal that their apprentices have heated in charcoal braziers fanned with hand bellows. It turned along a street where other artisans were fashioning flexible tubes of red leather for the eternal water pipes of the coffee shops. It followed an irrigation sluice that leaked freely and cooled the highway with impromptu waterfalls. Always the course led upward toward a spur of the Anti-Lebanon, that glowed blue, purple and white and shivered in the sun.

The cars wound through the narrow alleys of Kubbet el Asafir and then climbed upward over a hard road to the rim of chaos.

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The green groves of Damascus were being left behind now. Once in a while, a cluster of citron or dusty palm peered over a mud wall, but, as the caravan moved downward toward Kuteifeh and Chan il Arus only the irrigation wells and the piles of grain differentiated the landscape from the desert that lay where the mountains rolled down to the plain.

For miles the scene was one of primitive cultivation and still more primitive harvests. The wells were found in groups of from six to twelve surrounded by earthen platforms about which blindfolded camels marched ceaselessly turning the wheels that dipped up the water for the sluices. On either side of the road that now had become a mere rutted trail over hard ground the harvesters, men and women, were preparing their crops for market. Here a stalwart wielded a flail. There, a horseman milled about through the piles of wheat and barley, threshing the grain under the hoofs of his mount. Again one came upon a company winnowing the harvest that had been threshed. And this, too, was the simplest of matters.

A hot breeze was blowing from the foothills. The winnowers tossed up the grain with wooden shovels to meet the wind. The grain traveled only a short distance and fell to the ground. The chaff, being lighter, was carried farther and so by a process that resembled placer gold mining in its operation and wastefulness, the crop was made ready for the mill.

One did not have to see the mills to know that they, too, would be in keeping with the rest of the apparatus.

In some parts of the region, flour is still made by women grinding the grain with a small pestle in a stone mortar deepened by the labor of hundreds of generations of housewives. In more progressive communities are millstones turned by camel or on rare occasions by water power.

A weird atmosphere lingers over the land. These folks, toiling in the sunlight, seem less like themselves than like



A THRESHING FLOOR IN SYRIA



SHEPHERDS AND SHEEP

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ghosts of their own ancestors. There is no taint of the Occident here, in the foothills, no hint of modernism. For centuries the world has been standing still by these wells as it may stand for centuries on end, and the dazed traveler looks on the scene and rubs his eyes uncomprehendingly, unbelievably. . . .

The desert comes closer as one goes northward. Patches of arable ground are more widely separated, the little villages more carefully walled and presumably the family armaments are closer to hand.

A settlement near Jabrud, white and sepulchral as are all of these villages from the distance, brings a sudden surprise as the hurrying cars sound their sirens in its winding street. Situated as it is on the edge of the irrigation district, an outflung sentinel of an old civilization, it promises nothing. If one expects to see in it any change from the squalor of the earlier communities he hopes only for the worst. Poverty and lack of water seem to run hand in hand here, as they do in a more modern world. And yet. . . .

The car slows down to make a square curve before a mosque and one is conscious of the presence of a beautiful child—a girl twelve years old, possibly younger, for maturity is seen in tender years in these parts. It is only in her eyes that she resembles the Arab women of Damascus or the laughing Christian housewives of the Lebanon. Her complexion is lighter, the cut of her features more like that of a child of the more western Levant. And before one has an opportunity to study the problem that she presents, he is conscious of inquisitive women, of varying ages but no less beauty, gazing at the caravan from the shelter of doorways and angles in the walls that press the street. All are unveiled. All seem frankly unconscious of a charm that to Occidental eyes at least is without a parallel in all of Syria.

They have none of the quiet, retiring attitude that is so

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characteristic of the Moslem woman. Instead they are alert and frankly—not to say boldly—interested in the journeying motors. They exchange banter with the Damascene porters and smile as old friends at the chauffeurs. Altogether they are quite the most amazing feature of a region that seems to have come unexpurgated from an untranslated volume of the "Thousand Nights and a Night."

The caravan sweeps out between the round-topped graves of the little cemetery, northeast of the town, and continues on its way. The women wave their hands in farewell and presently are lost to sight. But the puzzle of them follows on and on and is not dispelled as succeeding villages present the standard array of Yashmak, latticed windows and careful husbands.

Who will read the answer to this?

Inquiry in Baghdad and Damascus failed to bring a solution. The Damascene, content with the Oriental standards of female beauty, is unable to identify the town of lovely ladies by means of a Westerner's description. The absence of the veil is no particular clue, because, Allah save the backslider, villagers on the edge of the desert get careless in such important observances.

It was not until a long time afterward in Cairo that a possible explanation was offered by a man who had traveled extensively on the desert as personal aide to Emir Feisal of Iraq.

"I know the place," he said. "In the old days, when Turkey ruled in Syria, the harems of Constantinople were extensive and exacting. The slave markets of Damascus were noted throughout the Eastern world.

"To supply an ever increasing demand some Turk, with more intelligence than is generally credited to his race, founded a colony of Georgians in the hills northeast of Damascus. And there were brought some of the most beautiful women of the Levant.

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“Not all of them were slave women. Eventually perhaps very few of them were, for the Turks always had trouble keeping the desert towns in order and independence developed very rapidly where the police were not watchful enough to detect it. The descendants of these beautiful Georgians are still to be found in the region where they were planted and are famous throughout the Lebanon.”

It was impossible to trace the authenticity of the story. Ethnologists have enough to puzzle over in the environs of Damascus to write any treatises on an isolated village that is distinguished only in the beauty of its female population. Perhaps the inhabitants of this town—like the war-like population of the Jebel Druse, had an origin back in the days when Semiramis ruled at Nineveh. Perhaps, as one observer suggested, they may be the last of the Palmyrans. . . . A mere visitor may not hazard a guess. . . .

From the Village of the Lovely Ladies, the trail, widened by the marching camels, the creaking carts, the brass chariots and the war paraphernalia of thousands of years, proceeds northward, keeping always between the Jebel es Sherki—the eastern slope of the Anti-Lebanon—and the Jebel el Wustani. Some sixty miles from Damascus it turns almost due east. By this time sage and cactus and camel gorse have made their appearance in the landscape. Dry washes strewn with black pebbles are seen occasionally, and flocks of sheep replace the irrigators and threshers as evidence of husbandry.

At Karyatein the caravan halts. The drivers sound a chorus of sirens and presently from the last house at the eastern end of the village a woman appears. She is large, broad-shouldered and not bad looking in a dark, rough way. Her clothing is of a thin blue material like calico and she wears no veil.

She chatters pleasantly to the porters and smiles, revealing two rows of large but white and even teeth. She

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disappears into her house and returns after an interval bearing two five-gallon drums, filled with water, a considerable weight for even a strong man to carry.

Resuming her jesting conversation where she left off she lifts one of the drums breast high and pours the water into the steaming radiator. The process is repeated until all the cars are filled. One of the Syrian porters hands her a bit of silver the size of a sixpence which she considers and gravely hands back.

"She always does that," the porter explains to the wondering travelers. "This is a Syrian coin. Out here the old Turkish money is still in use and she does not think the new coinage is worth anything. So—as you have seen—she doesn't accept it. . . . And after all why should she take pay for a work that obviously gives her so much pleasure? . . ."

Chapter Seven

THE ROAD TO PALMYRA

The Adventure of the Ubiquitous Village

*A moment's halt—a momentary taste
Of being from the well amid the waste—
And Lo!—the phantom Caravan has reached
The nothing it set out from—Oh, make haste!*

—OMAR KHAYYÁM.



It would be difficult to analyze the impressions that the adventuring traveler carries eastward from Karyatein. Of all the squalid villages encountered on the road from Damascus it is by far the most squalid. Filth encompasses it and poverty staggers blindly through its sun-crazed street. And yet it has an importance quite beyond that of the palm and citron decked towns of the meadowland. The traveler may know nothing of the local geography. He may have only the vaguest idea of the landscape through which he has been whirled in an eye-puzzling kaleidoscope. But he realizes instinctively that beyond Karyatein lies the desert. . . . And the fear of the desert is born in him as it has always been born in humankind, since the morning star of the world broke through the clouds over there by the Persian gulf.

The desert! The Arab has been traveling it for thousands of years. He has been living in its windrows and marching along its grim steppes since first he learned to make houses of hair and force the evil-tempered camel to

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work for him. And yet the fear of the land of emptiness is as much of his heritage as it is that of the European who never in a lifetime is called to be more than a few hours out of sight of human habitation.

The Arab who has felt its deep loneliness, who has followed the trail from Damascus to Nineveh, between mounds of bleaching bones, hates the wasteland with an unreasoning hatred both for what he knows it is and for what he thinks it may be. He hates the devils with which he has peopled it and he hates his cousins, the sons of Ishmael, who roam its secret hollows with their bellies empty and their hands against the world.

He has known the thirst. He has fought to the death for the muddy waters that are dragged up in stinking skins out of slimy desert wells. He has seen the terrible magic of the mirage and has followed it to unspeakable tortures. He knows from experience authenticating instinct, that the wide plain is dedicated to death . . . and for all his fatalism, he does not wish to die.

A dry wash circles one end of the walls of Karyatein—an appropriate mockery. Pebbles strew the bottom of the little depression and one feels that water has been here only a short time before and that one day it will be here again. The Arab knows better.

In the rains of the winter, perhaps, it may be a momentary torrent. But just as it rises nowhere it will end nowhere. The water will subside as quickly as it arose and the fetid breath of the spring sun will be the more terrible for the smoke of moisture that it lures from the drying mud.

The cars strike out boldly across the little arroyo with the sun behind them and long unplumbed shadows in front of them. . . . Lakes are forming on the horizon. Hills are stepping up to the right and left contributing psychologically to the traveler's feeling that he is being walled-in—immersed in an atmosphere of unbreathable gases.

The Road to Palmyra

The Occidental idea of the desert, gleaned, perhaps, from photos of the great pyramids, half-buried in wandering dunes, pictures the wasteland as a vast, undulating plain of loose sands.

The Libyan and the Sahara deserts and the stretches of duneland north of the Suez Canal bear out this belief. They are like their pictures. But this wilderness carries in it the hint of the charnel house. One cannot rid oneself of the feeling that it is a part of the world that once lived and now is dead.

The earth crust is dry and hard and gray-green with scattering verdure. Detached sand dunes appear occasionally but they are few. For the most part one seems to be descending vast shelves of an uplift that presently will let one down to the level of the prairie land that one knows must lie toward the east.

Dr. Kelman, in the account of his journey to Palmyra, describes it with a shiver:

“The desert has mountain ranges in it, barren as the very ribs of death and colored in every dead and stony shade of color. These mountain ranges hold up at a level of 1,800 or 1,900 feet above the sea, vast flats of wedge-shaped or oval table-land, held aloft to the sun and waterless; and little gorges and ravines hacked and split out of livid rock. By the route through Kuteifeh and Der Atijeh to Karyatein one climbs by such ravines to the successive plains and then journeys along each of them to its edge whence the next vast amphitheater discloses itself in a steppe, two or three hundred feet below the last. For a time you travel along the length of the ovals, but above Karyatein you cross the edge to descend at right angles upon the blunt end of a wedge-shaped spike of desert. . . . The edges over which one plain drops suddenly to another at lower level present the most startling and dramatic effects.

“When the journey has begun to seem long and the rein

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slacks and the brain grows sleepy, you reach a tumble of broken sandstone, or perhaps a slab of rock, and suddenly a new world spreads itself out for fifty miles below and before your feet and you are once more startled into a fresh realization of the illimitable breadth of the desert.

“Even within the same plain you seem to be slowly wheeling forward from one vast circle to another, the center and the circumference insensibly changing as you go. You have not apparently touched the rim but remain always at the center. Yet the circle is constantly changing—always indeed faint and almost spectral in its coloring, yet never for long the same—now green and silver, then gray and rusty, yet again blood-colored with splashes of delicate purple and gold. It is as if the bordering hills were in constant recession, slowly retreating before the forward wheeling sweep of these strange circles.”

And this description is as accurate as it is vivid. It errs only in its restraint.

The pictures, the gray-green plain, the encompassing hills linger eternally and unchangeably. If one fades, there is another precisely like it to take its place. One feels the whirl of the motors and watches the hand on the speedometer dial creeping up to an unbelievable mark of kilometers and yet, though one may have difficulty in breathing the dust that is hurled into his face by hot blasts at seventy miles an hour, he feels no sensation of speed. His mind numbs and he sinks back half-conscious to feel as if the pounding wheels were turning endlessly in a great rocky treadmill.

Beyond Palmyra there are changes in the barren landscape. There the plains are wider and flatter. Chips of flint and agate replace the camel gorse for long stretches, and at times one rides over wide strata of volcanic rock, perfectly smooth and flat. But it seems only that the substitution of new copies of the never varying pictures is merely delayed to longer intervals. The process is eternally the same. . . .

The Road to Palmyra

The sun dropped suddenly with only a moment of twilight. The forward progress of the cars seemed to have ceased entirely. The imagination pictured the hills moving closer until the route seemed to lie between narrow cañon walls. And the fear crept up and raced at one's side.

Overhead the stars came out in sudden brilliant bursts. The moon arose to cast a false light over the plain. The Dipper began its acrobatics in the northern sky.

One who has seen the desert stars realizes how the camel drivers were able to bring the silks from China across these wastes when they were really trackless. Navigation eastward is no great feat, if one keeps the Dipper on his left. . . . But even so—even though the stars lie closer to the earth here than anywhere else in the world—disaster lies still closer.

Some thirty or forty miles from Karyatein we came face to face with it. The cars had become separated. The chauffeurs, familiar with the trail, were thinking more of hot tea and cold water at Palmyra than of the tricks of vision that have been luring brave men to death, far from the desert wells, since before the recording of time began. A tire, blistered by heat that rubber was never intended to withstand and torn by the knifelike edges of bare escarpments, suddenly exploded. The driver cursed, swung about in a wide arc and stopped to fix it.

The delay seemed interminable. Tools had to be dragged from a box under the lashings of the provision crate. A refractory rim had to be removed and a cold wind, the more fearsome because of the unbearable heat that it followed, swept down from the north to numb the hands of the mechanic.

By the time this part of the caravan got under way again the voyagers were only semiconscious. The cold white spotlights of the other cars had been lost in some arroyo or beyond some slope and the panic of loneliness was not far away. It was only the close proximity

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of the silent men between whom he was pressed that gave one any sense of assurance. The roar of the starting motor brought a positive sense of relief—after which one sank back and tried to sleep, miserable with the cold and the water that slopped out of the tank in the tonneau and covered the floor. At this juncture some one might have taken the trouble to look at the North Star or the Chair of Cassiopeia—but no one did.

For somewhat less time than was required for the building of the great pyramid, the passengers nodded in a wretched sleep. They were roused to complete and fearsome wakefulness by the chauffeur's cry in French.

"This is strange," he declared aloud. "I have been over this route a hundred times. And never have I seen a village at this place."

The voyagers leaned forward to see a white wall leaping into the glare of the headlights. A cemetery with its round-topped graves—a mosque with a white dome bulked out of the night and one recalled with a shock the stories of cities that the djinn had built. It was not difficult to believe such tales under circumstances like this. . . .

"It was never here before," the driver repeated over and over. . . . And he shut off the power until the speed of the car was little better than a crawl.

Under the white wall he came to a stop and sounded his horn with no great enthusiasm. In the moonlight one could see that he had picked up his rifle from the floor and was fumbling with the bolt.

There were sounds in the night. Some one was stirring at the end of the alleyway before which we had stopped. Bare feet echoed on the close-packed earth. And then suddenly the whole party laughed outright. A form detached itself from the shadow—the buxom lady who had refused the Syrian sixpence was eyeing us sleepily from the white glare of the headlights as she attempted a belated adjustment of her blue wrapper.

The Road to Palmyra

We had come back to Karyatein.

It was a nightmare, that ride to Palmyra—ninety miles that seemed like a continuous fall into a bottomless pit. The Kasr el Her—mysterious square tower of a forgotten conqueror—loomed up for a moment and was lost. The wind was bone-chilling, the route rough enough to prevent sleep even had one's cramped quarters permitted it. And the driver was proceeding more carefully now—and more slowly. It was two o'clock in the morning when a broken pillar lifted itself like a broad spear just ahead. A row of columns suddenly hung a weird grating over the face of the moon. The car swerved to the left, amid sculptured ruins that suggested the nave of a vast cathedral, and the screaming brakes called a halt in the courtyard of a dismal khan.

The passengers alighted stiffly to find a bearded patriarch brewing tea in a huge brass urn and ladling it out in cups that seemed darkly suspicious even in the merciful dimness of the lanterns.

It is highly probable that the terror of the desert does not encroach frequently upon the empty walks of this broken capital. Here in the midst of death a djinn could find no field for his varied talents and a ghoul would be hard put to stir a meager living in the dust that earlier ghouls have left. But now, with the memory of Karyatein behind and the neglected Dipper still swinging silently overhead, one seemed to have come to the very throne of death.

In the blackening sky, beyond the back wall of the khan, the façade of the long abandoned Temple of the Sun blotted out the stars and hid from sight all vestiges of the miserable village that squats here amid the crumbling remains of a splendor that stirred the lust of Rome. The night was still—so still that one's ears rang with silence. The sheikh at the teapot spoke in whispers and was answered in whispers by the awed voyagers. Not even

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the bawling of motor sirens had stirred the villagers from their dead sleep and one sensed the close presence of the stalwart souls who once had inhabited this place.

The shadows that flowed grotesquely on the courtyard walls when the wind stirred the flame in the lanterns, seemed to mingle with the shades of the sculptors who had erected that temple to the great lord of the desert, the caravaners who had come here as joyously as the returning pilgrims of the Haj who sight the waters of Damascus, the Roman legionaries who had plundered the city, the bronze-cased warriors who had defied an empire for the love of a queen.

Just beyond the dancing halo of the lights one might imagine the ghost of Zenobia weeping more at the havoc time had wrought than she ever unbent to do, when the troops of Aurelian were wresting a kingdom from her able hands. If ever the dead of Syria arise to wail among the scenes they knew in life it should be here where persistent grandeur attesting to the magnificence of days that are gone accentuates the death that has come to desolate the land.

Here is the eternal anomaly of the desert—by day one looks upon a scene of wreckage—the wreckage of splendid buildings—the wreckage of the high hopes in which they were pieced together. By day one sees evidence that an empire has paused here for its fleeting glories and passed on over the bone-strewed highway of all empires. By night the years slip away. Shadows put new roofs over the broken colonnades, and pave the rutted streets with dull basalt. The dead stir in the tombs that give the horizon its jagged outline and they troop down here to this crossroads in the wilderness to speak of love in scentless gardens, to haggle with ghostly caravans from the no less ghostly East, to sit about patches of swamp fire by the bitter wells and exchange stories of the days that are gone. . . .

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“Me I followed the queen to the lake of Homs and I died in battle as a man should. If somebody hadn’t got a lance through my jacket I’d have stayed alive long enough to show these Romans something. . . . This Aurelian, who was he? You never hear anybody talk about him nowadays. He’d be forgotten entirely except for Zenobia. He undid her—but she made him, that’s what she did. It’s ghosts like us that make people remember the old empire. Rome? Where is it now? Rome the eternal—what bosh. . . .”

It is only physically that empires like Zenobia’s ever die. In memory they shall live as long as their restless ghosts may feel the urge to cluster beneath their crumpled columns.

Chapter Eight

ZENOBIA

The Adventure of a Lovely Lady Who Cried for the Moon

*Keep deep sleep when Self and Pride are preaching!
More soar o'er the planets than are wise;
Far are star and sun beyond thy reaching;
Why fly high since clouds must wrap the skies?*

—LAMII.



VIEWED from the hill of tombs, overlooking on the one side the pass into the mountains of the west and on the other the terrible plain of the desert, the pathos of Palmyra is indescribable.

Ruined cities—the flotsam of empires—are everywhere present in the Near East. Where morals were so varied and necessities so dire and zeal so intense, it is natural that there should be many stories of a glorious past, and many ash piles. But somehow Palmyra is different from the rest. It may be its isolation here in its little oasis—its pitiable and unavailing stand against the encroachments of the years and the sands—that will one day blot it out altogether. It may be the remarkable modernity of its inscriptions, legible as if they were carved only yesterday, vivid reminders of a people whom one half expects to see here to-day. The town as a town is gone. What is left of it is shrunken into a little huddled space well inside the walls of Justinian. But the columns, the pediments,—the individual relics,—show no sign of decay. It may be

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this hint of immortality that arouses the emotions. But more likely it is something that is even less tangible than the imaginary skyline of temples and villas and splendid colonnades that the mind reconstructs. . . . The ghostly personality of the city.

The wind sighs through the valley of the tombs and lays golden scarfs of flying sand on the threshold of the Temple of the Sun. And in the wailing echoes one hears the weeping of a little queen. That probably is the real pathos of the place: the heartbreak of a lady who has been dead so long that one really shouldn't be much concerned about it.

Below the hill of the tombs, Palmyra glows in the weird twilight of the rising sun. The deep purples still linger in the angles of the temple which raises a massive façade in the center of the picture. The tops of the walls are streaked with shifting zones of silver and to the right the green of the palm gardens that gave the ancient oasis its name is emerging from the gray of the eastern desert.

In front of the temple rise the rose-pink pillars of the colonnade, a forest of pillars, most of them as straight as when the masons placed them in their bases. From the distance they blend with the Corinthian tracteries of the temple gate to make a filigree of delicate pattern against the morning sky. For a moment in the weird, wavering light of the wilderness, Tadmor breathes again. One is reminded of the brilliant blaze of an ember just before its fire goes out forever.

At the edges of the panorama are piles of stony wreckage. Columns tumbled down by earthquakes. Little shrines—little only by comparison with the immense bulk of the Temple of the Sun—torn apart to make foundations for Arab huts. The line of the old aqueduct is to be seen across one corner of the ruin and here and there a mausoleum remains intact.

In a very few minutes, the sun is well up above the

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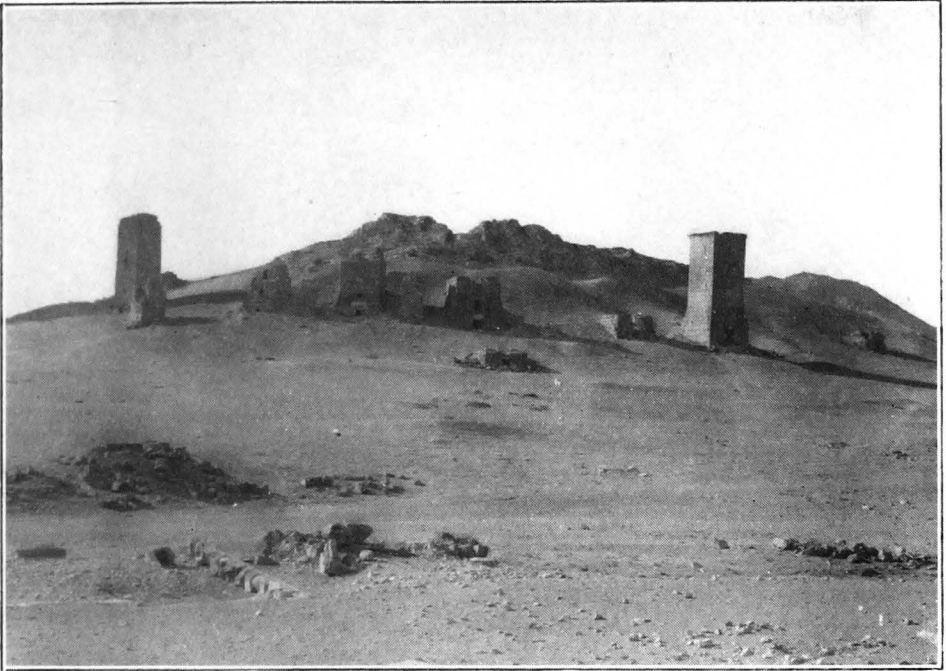
horizon dissipating the chill of the night with a thrust of light. And then the ruins are golden, rising from the loosely woven green of the gorse and shivering in the magic of the heat. The colors change in the portal of the Temple of the Sun, the purple shades drift and vanish. But the sadness, the loneliness and the silence linger on eternally.

The tomb towers rise along the slopes of the valley, great chimneys of pink and sapphire. Some of them are well over a hundred feet in height and eight or ten yards square at the base. A few have been strewn into the valley by earthquake and weather. More than a dozen are in view from the spur of the hill nearest the city, intact and almost new looking, grimly insolent in presenting their obvious message that death is decidedly more permanent than life.

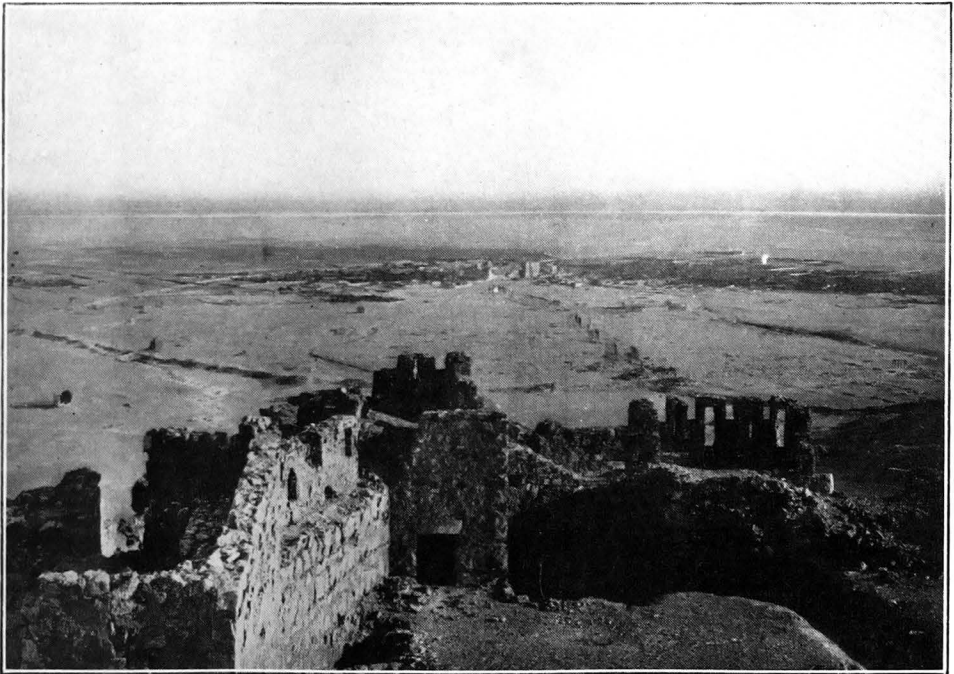
The doors are gone from the towers. The fittings with which they may have been equipped, when the departed notables of Tadmor were brought out here with gorgeous pageantry and a wailing of flutes that could be heard far across the desert, are gone now. But the ancient ones of Palmyra remain where they were laid, unconcerned with politics or royal ambitions or battles.

Brown bones, marked with embalming chemicals—white bones, bleached by the dry air and all-pervading sunlight of the wastes—are strewn on the floor—men and women and children for whom one cannot but breathe a sigh although whatever the fate of the city they had built they could hardly have survived many of the two thousand years that lie between them and us. There they remain in mingling dust, husband and wife, mother and child, sweetheart and sweetheart, undisturbed by the Arab who shivers to walk through the valley in daylight, seldom visited by the antiquarian who dreads the more tangible trials of the journey from Damascus or Homs.

The Temple of the Sun stands on a slight eminence



VALLEY OF THE TOMBS, PALMYRA



THE GRAVE OF A QUEEN'S AMBITION
*Palmyra, from the Hill of Tombs, looking down on the ruins of the Colonnade,
the Enceinte, the Temple of the Sun and the palm garden that
gave the city its name*

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(presumably a rocky foundation)—covered with sand and desert verdure—close by the wretched khan where the motor caravan makes its first day's halt. This façade is the most important of Palmyra's ruins, dominating the city now as it did when splendid processions in silks and gaudy woolens passed through the market place to clash the cymbals at its portal in honor of Baal. The boldness of design, the masculinity of its conception, the lack of ornamentation in its high blank walls are suggestive of a Roman theater. But the style of the capitals at the temple gate is Grecian and the detailed sculpturing of the Corinthian columns is typically Palmyrene.

One marches through the archway to find that the temple behind the towering front wall is lost as completely as the buildings that flanked the colonnade. And the marks of desolation here are the more depressing in that they are contrasted visually with the pitiful poverty of the Arabs who have claimed this heritage of glory.

A town of mud huts has been piled along the sacred way. A mosque with a dome all askew and a pitiful lack of interior proportion stands facing the portals. Dirty children play in the streets. Women with blue tattooing on their chins stand in niche-like doorways elbowed by the ghosts of a sisterhood that was rated among the most beautiful in the world.

Portions of pillars that have fallen down are used to prop up the crazy architecture of semi-civilized builders. Splendidly carved acanthus capitals peep out here and there from the mud walls. And all about isolated remnants of the temple lift up to the sky, clean and beautiful and unaware of the filth at their feet.

They are a friendly enough people, these desert men who have attached themselves lichen-like to a civilization that they cannot comprehend. One looks at them first with a shudder as one would look at ghouls who had come to eke a living from a corpse like this. But one

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feels more kindly toward them after they have tendered their pitiful hospitality and smiled a welcome that is sometimes lacking in villages of the Arab.

Their children speak a few words of French, acquired from men of the camel patrol and the flying corps who, from time to time since the Great War, have been billeted here. And there is no lack of willing—if misinformed—guides to lead the way about the wreckage.

They will take one to the roofs of their houses to make a photograph possible—sometimes breaking in upon the privacy of their women folks with an indifference that causes one to wonder if he is still in Araby. They will point out and frequently attempt to sell broken pieces of statuary that one might suspect had come from some forgotten tomb, were it not for the fact that the Arab and the dead of Palmyra have declared an unbreakable truce. They will trail across the sands to display Greek inscriptions on the pillars of the colonnade. They will lead one to the crypt-like vaults of the underground aqueduct, where the sulphurous waters that made Palmyra the capital of an empire still flow as they did when Zenobia, the queen, came here with her ladies for her bath.

But the Arab, however, bold and venturesome and disdainful of the fallen grandeur of the city in which he lives, will shiver at the suggestion that he lead the way to the hidden door of a tomb or to step inside of one or two of the shrines about which native superstition has built up a saga of fanciful legend.

It was little Ali who first came to the caravansary in the morning, after the troublous night on the desert, and bade the travelers welcome, partly out of a spirit of hospitality and partly in expectation of a piece of bread and jam that he knew to be part of the supplies of these caravans.

“I speak French very well,” he announced with considerable confidence. “I know just how to take one to

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the largest stones and I know the names of all the djinns and ifreets who put this forest of rock here in the desert."

This in itself was interesting, however it might have sounded to the phantom ears of Zenobia who had thought to build to herself "a monument more lasting than brass."

"For twenty piastres I will disclose where Suleiman ben Daoud imprisoned the djinn. For ten piastres I will show where Ahmed the Magnificent pushed over a pillar with his bare hands. I will show where the prints of his strong hands are still in the rock. . . ."

After some haggling that obviously had been expected from the beginning, the price was reduced to five piastres and this mite of a boy marched out through a slit in a wall toward the colonnade, the while he recited a history that many a Palmyrene, two thousand years asleep in the tomb towers, might have had some difficulty in recognizing.

"My ancestors founded this town," said Ali with suitable pride. "They had intended to make it as glorious as Damascus and my father says that they were punished for their pride. As you can see they never got it finished.

"They put more than a thousand of these stone trees along this line. Stone trees, they said, will last better in the desert than the palms such as you see over there by the fountain.

"It is very likely that they would have succeeded in making a very excellent town out of this—a town such as Damascus which my father has seen twice. But they were few in number and they had to work very hard. It is not good to work hard here on the desert.

"Then a wise man among them—whose name I have forgotten—thought of the place where Suleiman ben Daoud had imprisoned the djinn. I shall show you the place presently. And those bold men went over there and let the djinn out.

"They made a compact with him whereby he was to

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quarry all the rock and make all these pillars with the mystic writings on them as you see them now. But you can't be up to the djinns. They will cheat you every time and my ancestors were an honest and god-fearing people.

"All day long the djinn worked for them. They held him with a leash of thongs embroidered with the sacred name and at night they put him back in his tomb and sealed him up with a seal of doom. It was a very excellent device and saved labor.

"But in the end trouble overtook them. A woman—I think she was not one of our people but a hill woman who had been brought here—fell in love with the djinn. She listened at the counsels of our wise men and by night went to the door of his tomb and whispered to him how he might escape.

"As you see each of these columns is lettered in characters that are not Arabic nor the square, unbeautiful letters of Farenji. They are in a secret writing which was known only to the wise men of our people. And each writing was a talisman to protect the pillar from the revenge of the djinn in case he should try to pull down what he had put up. But it was very necessary that each talisman should be in the required number of mysterious words and that one word, which was in the language of the djinn and ifreet, should not be included.

"This traitress went to the djinn and whispered to him this secret word. And the next day when he came out to work he waited until one of the men was not watching and put upon the pillar—this is the very pillar—the usual invocation except that he inserted the secret word instead of the sacred name.

"And at that Allah cursed the enterprise and the djinn was free. He went away laughing into the desert, where on still nights you can hear him laughing. And he turned the woman into stone. She used to stand by a slab of rock in one of the tombs that I could show you if I dared.

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“And Ahmed the Magnificent came out to save the city and tried to push down the pillar that had broken the spell over the djinn. But it was a little dark when he tried it and he pushed down several hundred pillars without finding the right one. You will find the print of his hand in one of them if you look long enough. I do not remember exactly where it is.

“The pillar that caused all the trouble is still standing. . . . Here it is. . . . The cursed inscription in the secret writing is still on it. . . . See for yourself. . . .”

And we saw. The cursed inscription in the secret language was in Greek and it mentioned that this portion of the colonnade had been built by a gentleman named Dimetros at a date which time has somewhat obliterated.

We stood for a long time in silence pondering upon the ambitious ancestors of Little Ali and upon the unspeakable trickery of a djinn that would work such havoc and abandon so great a work by distorting a talisman with a secret word.

Doughty, in his “Arabia Deserta,” observes that the Arab is not by nature a student of history. He laments the fact that modern dwellers about the cold hearths of empires show no curiosity concerning their surroundings. And the explanation seems to be simple enough.

The Arab in an oasis town lives in an Egyptian poverty that can be called a civilization only with some stretch of the imagination. He is out of touch with his kind. His visitors are travelers too deeply concerned in their own affairs to sit down by the fire and discuss such recent matters as the Crusades and the fall of Rome. His religious traditions give him the belief that education, other than that required to read the Koran and recite the ritualistic prayers, is a waste of time. And his children must go to work for their living at so early an age that even this modicum of learning is frequently denied them. So if the Arab is intelligent and imaginative he pieces together out

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of fancy the information that he cannot obtain from fact, and neither he nor the world can be counted any the worse off for the fine narratives he evolves.

That some hint of the actual story of Palmyra had found its way into the lore of the town was seen when it was suggested that Ali lead the way to a subterranean tomb near the Justinian wall. He shook his head gravely.

"I cannot go there," he said. "I am brave enough. All of my people are brave. But I cannot go there.

"My cousin Mohamet went there one night. He was brave but a little daft. A great Maghreby in Damascus looked at him when he was only a baby and told my uncle, his father, that he would bring trouble to the family.

"But he did not know the fear and one night he went to the tomb. They found him the next morning dead. A stone lady had fallen on him from on top of the doorway as he passed in.

"The lady is the spirit of that tomb. She must have been a great lady when my ancestors came here to this place to build a town. I have heard my father tell my uncle that she comes back here often and walks among these pillars crying aloud. And nobody will come out of the village on such nights. . . . I have heard it said that this lady was greatly wronged—probably wrongfully divorced by her husband, although there would be two sides to a story like that. And my mother saw her once. . . . And she said that she wore no veil and had a circlet of gold on her head like a queen. . . ."

Ali's story might have lacked lucidity. It is much more coherent in the remembered translation than it was in the original. . . . But it certainly lacked nothing in drama. . . .

"She had a circlet of gold on her head like a queen." Here in the sepulchral quiet of the colonnade the story had an uncanny, chilling effect. Who but one such lady—

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who must surely wear a circlet of gold on her head like a queen—would have the urge to come back here, a dead woman among her dead, to weep among the columns of Palmyra?

The history of Palmyra is the history of Zenobia. It had been there hundreds of years before her coming. It did not last long after her accession. And yet it is through her and because of her that the desert empire came to its greatness.

It was natural that a settlement should spring up at this crossroads in chaos. To the west rose the great staircase of the barren mountains, a magnificent, colorful dry cascade. To the east the vast table of the desert ran on to the rim of the merciless sky. North and south lay combinations of the two. But here in the oasis of the palms, a spring bubbled from some volcanic crevice to scald the baking earth. The water was bitter even then and odorous of sulphur. But it was water and it was plentiful.

Since men first began to write history on scraps of stone and squares of brick the caravan routes had come along the northern rim of the desert. For one reason the journey between the Euphrates and the mountains was shorter. The hundreds of extra miles, over which the camels plodded before turning eastward along this route, were not counted, for they were made in a region where water was plentiful. For a second reason the hardy and interesting sons of Ishmael, early in their desert careers, discovered that one could get rich much faster robbing a caravan than by herding camels and sheep. They found their best grazing grounds in the region directly east of Damascus and they laid such a tax on trains that came their way that only where speed was of paramount necessity was the shorter and more southerly route chosen.

So Palmyra became queen of the crossroads, exacted a suitable toll, and set up houses of exchange wherein the merchandise of one caravan route was bartered for that

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of another. The origins of the city are somewhat obscure but seem to have been totally Arabic. The circumstances of its development are at best surmises up to the time when Marc Antony found the place worth looting in 41 B.C. Its remains show that Greek influences were prominent in its architecture. Its inscriptions are in Greek and Aramaic. Its gods are the fine polyglot that one would expect in a soil so fertile for politics—Bel, a number of minor deities, and “the Merciful One” identified through the Hebrew use of the same term with Jehovah.

Palmyra was the leading commercial city of Araby when Rome and Parthia went to war. Before that time it had been a single desert city with no great amount of independent strength. With warring nations on its right and left it found a new importance.

Wise statesmen, with the true Oriental gift of diplomacy, chose no sides and gained substantial concessions from both. Trade with whatever army happened to be most easily supplied—an industry which a modern might recognize as war-profiteering—brought great wealth to the oasis and its power began to be felt outside of its own booths and bazaars.

In the third century A.D. Odenathus, the ruling prince-ling, had become a Roman senator and undertook to do a bit of field work either for the empire that had honored him or on his own account. His ambition took him to Parthia where he was promptly assassinated.

In the meantime his place was filled by his wife, the Queen Zenobia, who is probably one of the greatest characters ever produced in the Orient. It is said that on one side this lady came of a Græco-Syrian family and that on the other side her line was purely Arabic. Some commentators consider her to have been of Arab blood undiluted. Her history in a region where woman has been so submerged that only the growth of population testifies

Zenobia

to her existence, is scarcely believable. She took the throne not only as the relict of a prince, but as a queen by every right of intelligence and education. She was physically beautiful—the ancient chroniclers are agreed on that point if on little else regarding her. She had a remarkable magnetism and courage. She could speak and possibly write four languages. She knew history and how to interpret it politically. And she was a born opportunist.

Thanks to Odenathus, the Roman Empire was intact from the Mediterranean to the Tigris at the time of her accession—an advantage which it owed to Palmyrene leadership and man power. There is something to show that Gallienus, recognizing this, had referred to Odenathus as coemperor. When Gallienus died and Roman decadence seemed to have set in, Zenobia began to dream a great dream.

There is something akin to the current history of the Druses in the subsequent story of the lovely queen. In the Jebel Druse some 35,000 persons set themselves up against the great might of France. In Palmyra a beautiful lady stood in the glowing colonnade, looked over the deserts that isolated her and her city from humankind and decided to defy the world.

The story is the more pathetic in that Zenobia's great optimism was in the interest of a son who never seems to have been worth the effort. History tends to show that he did blindly what his mother told him to do, with no great conception of what it was all about, and that in the end he joined her in gracing the triumph of the able Aurelian in Rome.

Zenobia struck first at Egypt after Aurelian had lifted himself out of the soldiery into a throne. She defeated Probus and established herself along the Nile. Whereupon she declared herself empress . . . basillisse . . . Augusta.

One who sees Palmyra on the map instead of through the misleading perspectives of its mighty colonnade is

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immediately struck by the insane audacity of the plan. On paper the forlorn position of the city is evident. The white spots encircle it, the marks of human habitation are far distances away. In all of its glory Palmyra must have been a pretty place and wealthy but its warrior population was just what one might expect to draw from a circumscribed territory inside the gates. There was no district outside the walls where one might hope to levy troops.

Under the queen's standard were her own archers, and a weird array of Oriental soldiery, assisted—and this is the strange part of the plan—by the Roman army in the East. There was no coherence to the mob—nothing to insure its fidelity, save the glowing personality of the lady herself. She could rely upon it only so long as fortune favored her. And in the end Fortune did not favor.

A new Roman attack drove Zenobia's son Vaballathus out of Alexandria and the woman who had seen herself as a new and more seductive Cleopatra was suddenly called upon to face the Roman emperor himself at the head of a force of mercenaries that swept down from the North. She met him, riding in brass at the head of her troops, near Antioch.

The semibarbarous Teuton troops, in Aurelian's command, were not hampered by any reverence for the legends concerning the queen. The Roman legionaries in Zenobia's forces suddenly remembered the might of the Empire. They were routed. The queen retreated on Emesa (Homs) and laughed at Aurelian's suggestion that she lay down her arms and submit to his suzerainty.

The next step in the campaign was a strategic retreat toward Palmyra where the desert horsemen hoped with considerable reason that the heat and the thirst would dispose of their enemy.

And then Aurelian came over the hills.

The passage of the Romans over those long dry miles is

Zenobia

still a legend in the region. This was no punitive expedition relying for its success on mercenaries engaged en route. It was a war, and the infantry that struck into the desert with forced marches shook the countryside with its numbers.

Soldiers—great masses of trained, hardened and ruthless men—swept through the valley of the tombs and up to the walls of Tadmor. And Zenobia, waking one morning to see the barren countryside aflame with armor in the sun, realized for the first time, perhaps, the resources of the power she had defied. It was that discovery probably, more than the weakness of the walls, that brought the siege to its disastrous close.

Zenobia fled and was captured by outflung Roman troops as she was attempting to cross the Euphrates and throw herself on the protection of the Roman general Sapor. At that moment the fighting empress steps out of history. Only the woman, broken, dismayed, and hysterical remains to bring the narrative to the point of a simple funeral, years afterward, from a villa on the outskirts of Rome.

Zenobia blamed her advisers and they were put to death. She and her son followed Aurelian's chariot in his triumph at Rome. And so were disposed the characters in an amazing tragedy.

Palmyra as a city sealed its own fate by rising in rebellion and killing the Roman garrison. Aurelian marched back and tore the town apart. The old trade route was moved northward to Aleppo where ambitions seemed to be less luxuriant. Palmyra as an influence in the world's affairs was finished. Which is the reason that on nights when little Ali's people are safe indoors the wraith of a woman with a circlet of gold on her head comes to weep at the portal of the Temple of the Sun.

Chapter Nine

THE EUPHRATES

Here Marched Nineveh

To Suri, which is in Bit-Halupe, I drew near; the fear of the approach of Asshur my lord overwhelmed them; the great men and the multitudes of the city, for the saving of their lives, coming up after me, submitted to my yoke. Some slain, some living, some tongueless I made. . . . In the valor of my heart and the steadfastness of my soldiers I besieged the city. . . . Abiyababa, son of Lamamana, I caused to send his gold, his treasures, the riches of his harem, his daughters and the wives of his soldiers. . . .

—Chronicles of Asshur-Nasir-Pal.



It is much easier to feel sorry for a beautiful queen than for an unlovely one, and when that lovely creature came so close to change the political contours of the world while riding after one of her own mirages to sorrow becomes truly poignant.

At its best this place must have had a pageantry quite akin to the masque of the red death, for its trade—its very life—was a continual gamble with the grim spirits of the sand that the camel trains from out of the mythic countries beyond the Euphrates would come to the market place by the Temple of the Sun intact. Riders trotted away through the palm gardens and never came back. Barbaric conquerors rode up with the rising sun and pounded on the gates. The death that Aurelian, the great executioner, meted out to the city must have been foreseen the day when the first of the Tadmor Badawi grew tired of chasing his sheep through the gorse and decided to

The Euphrates

settle here and operate a combination tollgate and lighthouse.

Kelman voices something of the spirit of the place when he says: "That Tyrian trader who first 'undid his corded bales' on the coast of Britain is not a more striking figure nor more tempting to the imagination than the merchant of the desert caravan. The wistfulness with which one watches the train of camels dwindling in the Eastern distance is full of the sense of dangers suggested rather than expressible. The risk of illness or of accident that will fill one more of the lonely wayside graves; the forethought and anxious care that must be spent upon the daily supplies of food and water; the chance of the camels staggering to their own destruction or getting out of hand, drunk with poisonous herbs; the madness that may come to men who may have heard too sweetly and too long in their minds the splash of fountains behind them or the sound of flowing waters in front; sandstorms that will be followed up by vultures and whose monument will be the whitening bones of camels and of men—these are but some of the elements of the romance of the caravan. . . ."

Notwithstanding which the caravans continued to brave the perils of the dry and sterile sea. Every conceivable article of merchandise of that day came to Palmyra on camel back. There was no other transportation. So the tax lists show a familiarity with oils and spices, grain and straw, salted fish, wax, dyed fleeces and purple woolens, bronze and marble statuary, wine, skins, fresh and smoked meat, lambs so small that they had to be carried in panniers, slave girls, almonds, fats and pottery.

There was no tax at all on foodstuffs, a half rate tariff on slave girls, and a high levy on refined oils. One may only hazard a guess as to the use of the oil but it is quite likely that it was the desired cosmetic of the day, popular with men and women alike as it was in the times of the

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retreating Ten Thousand whom Xenophon describes as having been partial to the use of unguents.

Women appear to have been fairly popular in Palmyra. Their lovely images adorn several of the smaller tombs. Their fulsome histories are written on the walls of their coffins. And the story of Zenobia, the queen, could hardly have been written in a city where women had not achieved considerable emancipation.

One leaves this place with the feeling that their sisters of the Orient during ages still undreamed distances in the future lost a tangible asset when Aurelian pushed down the temple. Lonesome, frightened eyes peer out over soiled yashmaks, as the mechanics complete their overhauling of the engines and throw their tools back into the cars. For these creatures when the motor caravan hurls itself out into the sun there will be an immediate and despairing return to the monotony of their half-savage existence. For them as for the East there is no future. As Ahmed the Teller of Tales has stated it:

“To-morrow never comes. . . . Beyond the stars it is always yesterday.”

So we tipped our helmets to the memory of Zenobia and rode out into the desert. Palmyra had only one surprise left to offer, and that was disclosed before we had rounded the depression of the old canal and left the remains of the palm grove behind. A great frond—cream-colored with a target of red, white and blue on it—suddenly lifted itself from the underbrush to the right of the road and the startled eye comprehended the familiarity of its outline. It was the wing of an aeroplane, bent upright from the wreckage of fusilage and moor . . . a modern ruin as startling in its way as the forest of the colonnade had been.

A native policeman in the uniform of the French came to a salute and stood erect to be photographed by the plane.

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"The pilot was not killed," he explained with obvious regret. "The palm tree broke his fall so he escaped."

His face gave an inkling of what was going on in his mind. With death in all its guises lurking about Palmyra, most men were still content to leave this life by such prosaic avenues as lying down to sleep forever in the desert or getting shot by ambulant Badawi. Here was a man who had had his chance to do something original in the way of dying and he had failed to make the best of his opportunities.

"Unfortunately he was taken to the village and patched up by a Farenji doctor who was brought here by motor. They took him back to Damascus. . . . And I wish you a pleasant journey."

. . . A moment later all this is forgotten. The ruins of Palmyra are an etched frieze along the foothills of the western mountains, and ahead lies a waterless, shadeless, searing stretch of hundreds of miles.

The Badawi were sighted at the Waddy Hauran about sundown, a few disconsolate-looking men with a number of dejected sheep. They were friendly enough. Their rifles lay about the ground where they might be examined by any of the travelers who cared to look at them—Turkish war material, evidently, for the mark of Erfurt was on the locks although the figures on the sights were in Arabic. The men for the most part were smiling and it was apparent that our gas-driven desert rats, including the boy from Birmingham, were no strangers to them.

The Waddy Hauran is a dry wash underneath which apparently runs a sluggish river. Pebbles, and cuts in its high banks, indicate that in the rainy season one might expect to find following currents, above as well as below the ground. Several wells with mud about their lips bespeak the labor with which the desert sheep men have sought to plumb the bottom of the place.

In the setting sun, with a cool breeze rising from the

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north, this seems to be a lovely spot. The sight of the mud where the sheep and camels have been led to drink, and the full water skins dragged across the pebbled ground, is sufficient to arouse the dormant thirsts that it requires so little to stimulate. One envisions the black waters at the bottom of these deep, slanting shafts. One remembers the springs that rise in the ice pits of the Rockies and one approaches the largest of the wells in glorious expectation.

But psychologically at least this turns out to be another mirage. As one approaches the rim of the well he is startled to see a tousled head come up over the edge. A brown Bedouin, lean and naked, lifts himself out of the shaft where he has been employed filling the skins lowered to him by his companions. The fact that he is cleaner than his brethren brings its accompanying thought that he probably was not cleaner when he slid down the rocky incline to the water. He is not insensible to the demands of hospitality and he does not pause to find his tattered shirt before offering the parched voyagers a drink from the skin that he has just piloted to the surface. The voyagers politely refuse and turn back to the vile mixture—half moisture, half mud—that remains in the canvas bags of the car.

The radiators are filled and the cars pick their way up the bank toward the east again. The sky in that direction is already blackening although the sun is still lingering back in that west which one remembers as a region of leaping fountains and rushing rivers.

. . . So came the cold once more. . . . The cold and the blackness and the weird tricks of a half blind vision that tries to pierce the night. Two more tires blew out, and a carburetor, with a mass of powdery dust in its intake, gave up the ghost. . . . It might be expected that such things would happen to prolong a delay that had already become insufferable. The last of the drinking



THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN, PALMYRA



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE RUINS OF THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN

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water had gone during the hot hours of the afternoon, and the thought of the vanished supply more than any actual necessity made interminable each minute that the caravan halted here west of the Euphrates.

When temporary repairs had been completed the cars moved on once more and the voyagers fell into a semi-consciousness that was not sleep and more depressing than wakefulness.

One became aware presently of a strong odor of sulphur, and a lantern flashed in the road ahead. All the caravan was alert once more and somewhat relieved to discover that the light was not a signal for the Badawi. The youth from Alabama had come back from the baggage car to sound a warning about the salt pits that lay beside the trail ahead. And so, over the ground that seemed white as chalk, under the headlights, we picked a slow tortuous way for miles amid a steaming reek of sulphur to reach an unexpected and blessed haven at the end of an eternity in the amazed street of an Arab town. This was Hitt. And somewhere in the dark beyond the walls rolled the broad Euphrates.

A word about this Hitt. To the eye it is just another Arab town—a singularly happy town after the long ride through the desert but even in the eyes of the thankful traveler a little too dirty to conform to Occidental standards. Its center bulks high above its edges but whether this is due to a natural eminence or to the ancient Oriental fashion of building new houses on the tumbled-down ruins of old, it would be impossible to say without further exploration. All in all it is not much different from the towns in the Anti-Lebanon on the road to Palmyra north of Damascus.

But few communities even in this historic region have been here so long to see "empires lost and murder done." Hitt (or Is, as it was called by Herodotus) was the threshold over which Assyria stepped to conquer the worlds

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that bathed their hot feet in the Mediterranean. While its white buildings were piling up on its ashen hill, war lords in corselets of brass and plumed casques marched under its walls in the most magnificent panoply ever devised by the priests of Mars. Chariots of copper rumbled in its streets. Shields of polished leather spread across its vision like the wings of locusts in a particularly evil plague. Upright lances moved out upon the desert ways behind it until the vast table-land seemed to have sprung a Cadmus crop of metal wheat. . . . And that was not for one day nor for two, but, at intervals so regular that one might plot them like the phases of the moon—for hundreds and hundreds of years. Down the river a bit are the quarries where ancient Babylon cut the marble for the paving of the sacred road and the archways of the temple of Ishtar. Along the bank near the present town are bitumen pits where the modern land of the two rivers follows the precedent of ages in buying materials for roofs and paving and calking for boats of wicker.

None of these things was evident when the cars slid wearily beneath the arch of the khan and came stiffly to a halt in a broad courtyard, among a collection of evil-eyed camels and irritated asses. This caravansary, through which desert trains had been coming by nearly all the routes of the north for hundreds of years, gave promise of food and shelter. And water seemed more important than historical research—especially at two o'clock in the morning.

The difference between the accommodations furnished at this halting place and those of Palmyra was the difference between the resources of a live town—however mean—and a dead one—however grand. A stone stairway led up from the courtyard to a sort of balcony roof over which army cots had been arrayed invitingly under the stars.

The inevitable Arab was brewing his inevitable tea and

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the repast served at the long, board table near the edge of the balcony consisted largely of fresh, ripe dates. Not much after a day of experiment with perishable foods in a heat somewhere around 140 degrees Fahrenheit but enough to take the edge off of poignant hunger. The travelers ate thankfully and presently tumbled into their cots exhausted. . . .

There are few nights like this one to be recorded in an ordinary lifetime. The dead cold of the desert was gone and the air was still. Overhead, a sky such as no Northernner will ever see with stars so thickly scattered that one could hardly decide whether the background was diamond white with patches of luminous blue in it or deep cobalt pricked out with millions of points of cold fire. It is little to the credit of the Chaldeans that they learned much about the stars. Lying on their backs on the rim of the desert looking up at the heavens, they could hardly have done otherwise.

In the near distance an aged water wheel creaked and groaned—now with a low indefinable note—again with a humming like the whir of an aeroplane motor. . . . And eventually with this sound came deep sleep.

Morning broke with the shrill call of the Muddein from a mosque down the blue dome of which the first light of the east was slowly trickling. The people awoke—the faithful to perform their ritual prayers, the kafirs to breathe a word of thankfulness in their own unpicturesque way and to perform unritual ablutions in a tin basin.

Life in the village was quickly astir—and, strangely enough, it was the women whom one saw first. Up the hill from the khan a few hundred yards, a wall led down through the palms to the river or perhaps to a public well. Out of the town came the women, black silhouettes against the dead white wall, each heavily veiled, each carrying on her head a tall, flasklike water container which later investigation showed to be a pitcher made

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of woven grasses plastered with bitumen. In the half light of the dawn they seemed wraithlike. In the increasing glare of the sun they seemed like parts of an Assyrian bas-relief suddenly endowed with life. They moved down the hill in a continuous procession and presently returned in the same black pageant. . . . Ahmed the Teller of Tales and the foreign admirer of the late Scheherezade forgot all necessity for breakfast in watching them.

Smoke curled out of the huddled buildings. Men gathered at the corner near the gate and conversed gravely, to move away after a time into the maze of streets. In half an hour the workers were on their way to the bitumen pits and Hitt was going about its business with no apparent grief over the fact that the brass-bound Assyrians would not come marching along the river road to-day or to-morrow. Save for this trifling change in the day's schedule it is likely that the visible condition of the city had not changed much since Palmyra was a building site.

Soon the caravan was on its way again along roads of marble and paths of sand, while the Euphrates took its way through the heat with clouds of dust hanging over it from the desert to the east. Dry canals—the stele of Holugu or Timur the Lame on the hard surface of the country they had destroyed—made continuous patterns over the rolling plains. The course was still a blistering route through an inhospitable wilderness but the marks of human handiwork were everywhere evident. Baghdad was much closer than it had been on that night before Palmyra when it lay beyond the stars.

Chapter Ten

BAGHDAD THE DUSTY

Golden Domes and Camel Bells

*Some scoundrel owns my horse and harness;
I am, ya hu, the Sultan of
The pillaged realm of rags and poverty.*

—SHIRMIDEDEDEH.



ALL that has been written about Baghdad in recent years by modern critical explorers might be summarized in one brief paragraph: Baghdad is a dust heap—odorous, unattractive and hot. Its monuments are few, its buildings too modern to merit attention, its atmosphere that of squalor and poverty.

Well, perhaps. The town is certainly dusty and none too clean. In midsummer a noon temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade is not uncommon. And the great palaces that made it the wonder of the world under Harun al Raschid have gone the way of all great palaces. So much for that side of the picture.

One who has no imagination had best stay away from Baghdad as it is to-day. There can be nothing but disappointment here for one unable to consider the romantic picture in his mind as something quite separate from and yet related to the Baghdad that he will find along Nebuchadnezzar's dike by the Tigris. One might as well await a Cleopatra on the docks in Alexandria or seek Tutankhamen in the French streets of Cairo as to look

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for tangible evidences of the glories of Harun's capital in the wreck that is left to us. And yet . . .

From far out on the desert one sees a gleam of gold above the water mirages of the horizon. The air is so hot, the evaporation so rapid that the movement of a hand brings a sudden chilling sensation to the armpits. The hot wind burns the eyeballs. The flat, hard surface of the wasteland is aquiver.

Dazed eyes cannot comprehend the golden gleam on the horizon. It is too much like the other optical tricks that have been played upon the traveler for hundreds of miles—a peculiar mirage, perhaps, or the reflection of the sun on some unseen tributary of the Euphrates. . . .

And then one is aware that this mirage is different. The glare becomes less of a glare and more of a yellowy radiance. It separates into golden points that presently are blazing minarets, and MacTavish, director of the expedition, takes the scarf from about his mouth long enough to comment upon it: "The Tigris," he says. "Yonder is Kadamain the Holy City."

For an hour or more Kadamain holds its place on the horizon. The minarets are suddenly seen to rise out of the greater brilliance of two vast domes. And there in that golden glare the realm of Harun the Insomniac comes suddenly to life. The illusion must remain, whatever the disappointments that lie at the end of the dusty trail.

The way leads past a customs station at the edge of a canal. A dark-skinned soldier in a uniform half British, half Eastern, conducts a minute search for hasheesh and cocaine, and one proceeds through another half mile of unbreathable dust to a patch of greenery. Palms, dripping gray in their powdery coating, lean over a long brick wall, and presently there is a succession of coffee-houses before which yarn-spinners, with all the ancient zeal if not the ancient skill of their kind, puff at water pipes or drink coffee out of pewter cups. Thence through a mist of

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powdered clay to the bulking ironwork of a bridge where a sentry takes his toll. . . . And so with a rattle of loose boards over a series of pontoons and up a slight gradient to journey's end in the City of Dreams. . . . Baghdad, always glorious in its ghosts and its memories, whatever the tawdry aspect of the city that the sons of Harun have builded upon the foundations that he left for them.

The never ending wonder of Baghdad is its seething activity—not a hurried activity, for that would be an Occidental innovation which every true son of the East would combat to his last breath, but a steady, pulsating movement like the bubbling of a pot that is just about to come to a boil. The dust is raised by horse gharries—ancient hacks—taxicabs, pack mules and belled camels and a never ending procession of men in turbans, men in fezzes, men in white pith helmets or straw hats, soldiers in casques of cork with quilted padding over their necks, women in the latest modes of Paris, women in veils, women in black square masks. One wonders where all these people come from, what they are doing and where they will go when they get it done.

The city has a population of two hundred thousand of whom one hundred and fifty thousand obtain a livelihood in sundry pursuits that must always remain a mystery to the casual visitor from the West.

The deserts hem the town. And one might think that a small, well-organized trading post would be sufficient to supply the wants of the poverty-stricken Arabs who wander out of the wastes for their supplies. Metropolitan Baghdad does not seem to be self-supporting. Its factories are little shops with dubious custom. Its mercantile establishments, save for one or two stores developed from stocks brought over recently from India, are pigeonholes that provide a scant sitting room for the proprietor. On the face of it here is the civic typification of the snake that ate its own tail. Here is an apparent parasitical

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civilization the members of which exist on each other's labor in an endless chain. And yet the caravans come in from Persia and slip out in the brilliant light of the moon toward Aleppo and Damascus, and wealth from unseen sources fills the municipal treasury. As long as there has been a Baghdad it probably has been much like this—unhurried, lackadaisical, without ambition, but always busy. That there continues to be a Baghdad is the most significant thing about its odd civilization.

The motor caravan comes to a stop in a yard near the Maude Bridge and customs officials—British and Iraquian—step forward to greet the incoming adventurer. Has he arrack or hasheesh or cocaine? The native inspectors seem a bit disappointed at the discovery that he has not. It is the province of an inspector in any land to be suspicious, and the Iraquian needs no special training in that part of his requirements. Why, indeed, should a traveler come across the blazing desert and suffer the hardships that show so plainly in his pale face if not to smuggle a few drugs or a can of taxable alcohol?

The British inspector smiles at the energy of his colleague. He is old at this game of governmental representation and he no longer takes himself seriously. He is on the lookout for an agitator who has been stirring things up a bit in Cairo and perhaps elsewhere in Arab territory. He drops a few whispered inquiries to the English-speaking voyagers and glances at passports with an experienced eye.

A report stating the appearance of the visitor and the strange whims that have brought him so far from the cool beaches of the Mediterranean is prepared for the police. The cramped pilgrims put their identifying documents back into their pockets and attempt to use the legs that have been folded under them for the better part of three days. And so ends the expedition.

Porters are at the gate of the yard clamoring for baggage,

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oddly attired coolies who obviously are not long for this world. They are muscular enough—a trait that is made sufficiently evident by their clothes. They wear little else than a soiled shirt that reaches barely to their knees, and a pad of carpeting across their shoulders. Their turbans are roughly woven caps beneath which shows a matted mass of hair. What they lack in stature is compensated for in an amazing muscular development of calf and thigh and biceps. But they are the pack horses of the Orient, and they live, and die, like pack horses.

They leave the yard in a long, staggering train, each with a trunk or wooden chest on his back, and one is shocked to discover that there is to be no transfer of this baggage. The men who are carrying it now will carry it to its destination whether it be one of the hotels around the corner in New Street or far on the opposite side of the town. The owner may take a taxicab and ride slowly alongside shouting directions to his newly acquired human animal, or he may go serenely about his business, confident that his boxes will arrive at a proper terminus. Nobody pays his porter in advance or bothers to take a second look at him. There is nothing to prevent the carrier from walking off with such luggage as he happens to find on his broad shoulders. But so far as the police records show, no porter has ever exercised this prerogative. This undeveloped resource in the industry of theft has not as yet been explored. Baghdad has had too little experience with the West and its ways to realize the opportunities that are brought to it for enterprising and lucrative crime.

In a few minutes the yard is empty save for the mechanics of the motor caravan who are already tuning up their steaming engines for the return journey or for a further jaunt to Teheran. One moves down the sun-fired alley to the street where hotel runners are advancing their claims in a polyglot of Arabic and a tongue that passes current in these parts for English.

Chapter Eleven

AN INN BY THE TIGRIS

The Flying Carpet

*Think, in this battered Caravanserai
Whose portals are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultan after Sultan with his pomp
Abode his destined Hour and went his way.*

—OMAR KHAYYĀM.



IN New Street, around the corner from the Maude Bridge, stands the Maude Hotel, as strange a hostelry as may be found in this somewhat surprising world. It is not European and only partly Eastern, and as a caravansary that enjoys only a male patronage, it is singularly haphazard in its appointments.

One enters from the blazing street through a gate and a low passageway into a courtyard about which rises a quadrangle of gray brick buildings. Outside stairways, reminiscent of the architecture that one views from the elevated train in an American alley, give access to the second floors of these buildings. Balconies with more promise than stability lead from the stair landing to the doors of the sleeping rooms. There is no communicating corridor on the inside of the building.

There is always activity in this courtyard. Near the street gate a dark-eyed boy in European dress stands guard over a bookcase where one may buy an amazing variety of literature: O. Henry and the modern British authors, Layard's "Nineveh," Rawlinson's "Ancient Monarchies,"

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“Arabia Deserta,” Arabic grammars, “The Arabian Nights,” a joyous pamphlet called “Tall Tales from Baghdad,” engineering textbooks, the Koran and the Bible—all are here opening one’s eyes to the greater variety of literature that may be found at the government bookshop from which they have been selected.

The boy at the counter, despite his somber Western dress, has the look of a Mede. He comes from somewhere up in the Kurdish hills and identifies himself not by race but by religion as do so many of his compatriots in Baghdad.

“I am a Chaldean. My people came here fleeing from the Turk. We study English and will go to America.”

But the Chaldeans are not a racial entity unless, perhaps, one may classify all the residents of Mesopotamia as Chaldeans. Those who claim the name nowadays spring not from the stock of ancient Kaldu but from the remnants of Assyria in the north. They take their title from the Chaldean Uniate church which, as a thing to be fought for and to determine one’s political preferences, has come to be the greatest factor in the shaping of their destinies.

This youth of the books is sitting on a high stool, little concerned with the blinding sun. His head is bent over an English grammar and his lips move like those of a devout Mohammedan over his Koran as he pieces together the mystic mottoes of Occidental civilization: “The boy has a hat. I can see the cat. Can you see the cat?”

He may not be certain as to the spelling of titles or their proper pronunciation but he knows the jackets of his books with the proficiency that marks many an American book huckster as a man of letters.

“You wish Awenree,” he repeats pleasantly. “He is popular, Awenree. He is English. He makes books. . . .”

Not, perhaps, a definite or even authentic biography of O. Henry but excellent practice in the desired tongue of the Angles.

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The court is deserted save for a pet gazelle that peers sad-eyed at the bookstall from the dubious shelter of a palm tree. All the accumulated woes of Baghdad are in its thin little face . . . grief over departed Babylon, distrust for the future and nothing but despair for the Mede by the bookstall.

"Ah, the gazelle," observes the Mede. "Here is he well fed. He does no work. He sits all day. Or sleeps. Or eats cigarettes. Or looks at the splendid English sahibs who come here. But Sahib, all the day he weeps. He sheds the tears. Into his food he sheds them. And he drinks very little water. All the time he is crying for the desert and more cigarettes. Is he not silly, that gazelle?"

Of course, a newcomer, especially an Occidental newcomer, could never admit that a gazelle might be silly—even a gazelle that ate cigarettes. Great grief seems automatically to be linked with great capability for emotion, and emotional capacity is seldom ludicrous. It seemed strange, of course, that any creature might weep for the desert. But there is no accounting for tastes—or tears. The gazelle has the run of the courtyard—and for that matter of the hotel. One takes it as a matter of course if he awakes to find those sad eyes peering at him out of a dark corner of his room. Certainly a gazelle used to roaming in the vast open spaces of the desert cannot be expected to remain unfretful in an ordinary courtyard.

Not all of the rooms are entered from this abode of the gazelle. There is a section of chambers at the rear, opening upon a broad terrace along the Tigris. Each room has its own little stairway leading down to the terrace. Each is detached as a separate house from all the other activities of the hotel.

From the front of the establishment one reaches the terrace by a brief march through a basement passageway that lies between the luncheon room and the smoking

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room. One emerges to be dazzled by the striking contrast between a stretch of white gravel and the deep, blue-black shadows of the spreading trees. Beyond is the swirling river and a high bank that might well be the one from which the regretfully just young man of the legends hurled the trunk containing his wife's body. Pink, white and blue enameled cornices flicker through the greenery on the far bank, faintly suggesting the Baghdad that was and never will be again.

A Chaldean bellboy leads the way to one of these rear chambers. He is clerk as well as bellboy for he quotes the price as he indicates the short wooden stairway that gives one entrance:

"Fifteen chips," he says. He may know nothing more of the room than that: "Fifteen chips," fifteen rupees—the price, obviously, for a day's lodging in this great khan of the Frankish civilization. And no amount of training in the English language or Occidental custom could give him a more necessary grounding in the hotel business.

He inserts a great iron key in a scarred lock and shoots a ponderous bolt. The heavy door swings back to reveal a high, rough-plastered room with an electric fan spinning near the ceiling. A silky Kermanshah rug, big enough to grace a mosque, covers the floor from threshold to farther wall and one's first fleeting impression is one of a vast and lavish magnificence. But the impression is barely sensed before it is gone. The appointments of this great room consist principally of two iron army cots, two much-splashed pine washstands, a tabouret of gumwood, three chairs and a number of small cupboards set into the thick stone walls.

A number of wooly pups peer out of a hammered copper pan beneath the bed. But these, the Chaldean youth observes, are not a part of the permanent equipment of the room. . . . They will come in, he admits. It is difficult to do anything with pups and gazelles and other

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dumb animals. They do not like the heat and they find solace in the rooms. The big pan? The Sahib would see it? He drags it out for inspection. It is probably four feet in diameter and eight inches high. It has been pounded out of a sheet of metal and surfaced with melted tin. That, Sahib? It is a bathtub. If you wish to bathe in your room the Walad will bring you water a pitcherful at a time. . . . Of course it is simpler to walk to the little bathhouse at the side of the inner court where one may get water out of a thing called a tap—fresh water pumped directly from the Tigris and poured refreshingly on to the person by means of a Damascus brass bowl in the unsoaped hand of the bather.

Once the pups have been disposed of and the ceremony of ingress completed, the iron key is forgotten until such time as the owner of the room may be moving on to Teheran or Mosul or Basrah or Damascus. The thievery of the East may be notorious, but the heat is worse, and one would sooner sleep on the terrace than close his door during the night. If he should chance to forget and lock the door when going out of an afternoon the management will forgive the foible. The great iron key will be removed promptly from the rack by the boots or the boy who makes the beds or the boy who brings the grapes and lemon squash or the boy who takes the laundry or the boy who brings it back. And so the door will be open when the guest returns.

Typically a man's hotel, this. No women anywhere about the premises before dinner time. No objection to the curtailed garb that midday heat necessitates.

The service is as simple as the appointments. One wishes service: he steps to the door and he bawls in a loud voice, "Walad!" which is the Arabic translation of the French "Garçon!" Sooner or later a Walad appears from the unplumbed depths of the hotel and stands waiting for orders. Of course he is not the one for the particular

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job you wish done. But he will cheerfully call several others and join in the debate until the question of jurisdiction is settled. And so eventually the errand is performed with willingness and celerity.

In the smoking room in the basement a complete file of London newspapers and illustrated magazines is to be found at all times—and singularly up to date. The automobile caravans have brought this one-time outpost to within ten days of London and the voice of civilization is more readily heard than it was in the era when it took thirty days to get a letter from Basrah to Marseilles.

There is always a fair sprinkling of wanderers in this smoking room after luncheon—English advisors and sub-officials, commercial agents, oil prospectors, aviation officers and occasionally a lone American with no interests in the East save perhaps an abiding love for a dead lady named Scheherezade.

It is cool here. As in nearly all buildings of Baghdad wicker mats shade the windows. The Westerner might think them crude awnings, but the Westerner does not know much of the evaporation that comes with 120 degrees Fahrenheit or the crude expedients that make the air breathable at such temperatures. Water is poured on the mats and its rapid evaporation produces a considerable drop in temperature and promotes something of a draft across the tile-covered floor.

Not that one experiments much with such home-made atmosphere after noon. If one is a white man he goes to his room, removes his clothes, turns on his fan and goes to sleep. It is the way of the land. Nobody would think of transacting any business at this hour of the day anyway—and the poorly equipped Caucasian with his blue eyes and white skin might as well preserve his energies.

About three o'clock the town will wake up again. The porters will crawl out of their doorways and the camel trains resume their lumbering motion through the streets.

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Then will be time enough to venture abroad and watch the steam rising from freshly sprinkled highways. . . .

One should not imagine, however, that the fierce heat of Baghdad is something beyond the physical adjustment of the white man. With ordinary precaution against the ultra-violet rays or whatever element of the sunlight pokes death through a pale skin, one may readily get used to the heat. Few of those who have lived in Mesopotamia for any length of time complain of the weather. Most of them might venture abroad at the noon hour on the hottest day of an Iraquian summer and feel no ill effects from it. But at the same time most of them are seasoned adventurers in the East and they have learned long ago to protect themselves and husband their nervous resources against the day when they may be required.

About seven o'clock at night Baghdad is a different place. Cool breezes, no longer competing against the sun, come down the Tigris. The coffee-houses fill up. The streets are molten with home-bound traders who will presently be swallowed up within the dead walls of Arab houses to be seen no more till the Muddein calls them out in the morning.

The tables are spread under the trees of the terrace along the river by the Chaldean house corps, now wearing a local interpretation of dinner dress. Officers, government agents of one sort or another, and residents of the hotel, wander out by twos and threes to take their places at dinner. Whatever might be the classification of this weird hostelry in London, one is not allowed to forget that here it is the symbol of Western civilization. Every guest wears formal military attire or dinner clothes. One goes to the bottom of his bag for starched shirts that he might have despaired at wearing three hours before, and he dutifully exchanges his wrinkled but comfortable tropic linens for the black woolen garb that Scottish weavers designed for the rigors of fall evenings in the British Isles.

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Some of the permanent residents meet the conventions with a fashion of their own—white linen dinner jackets with black lapels and waistcoats fashioned of a black silk sash. Others have solved the problem with black alpaca suits and unstarched shirts. But the newcomers settle down into the confinements of stiff starch and make the best of it.

The Tigris is once more the river of romance, a band of shimmering light. Under the flares on the Maude Bridge the camels are passing in gaunt silhouette. Green and red lamps at the masthead of a river steamer hang from unseen spars in the upper gloom, companions to the evening star. Down the bank from the terrace lanterns are flashing and a motor is pounding like an Indian drum. It is turning over the pumps of an ice machine, but one who does not know would suspect it of no such prosaic mission. One visions a barbaric rite with sacred altar fires and bearded priests with shaven heads thumping skin-covered cylinders.

The palm fringe beyond the river is black lace against the sky. Villas and minarets are mercifully blended in the shadows. The Baghdad of Harun the Sleepless One is stirring in its thousand-year-old grave. Along the bridge road in the near distance the coffeehouses are alight and mirrored in the Tigris. Before each of them a phonograph of a type long forgotten in a land from whence it came is playing wild music—folk songs in Arabic that quaver and fall in competition with the other strange songs of the Eastern night. A caravan is passing and the leaders are pressing their nagas out into the desert with a monotonous chant that only a camel can understand and only an Arab can sing.

This then is Baghdad—not the place of dust and heat that one staggered into out of the wastes a few hours ago. Night, the greatest of the genii, has worked with it a greater miracle than any of those recorded in the tales of

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Scheherezade. The veiled women are peris, every turban that passes under the torches crowns another King of the Black Isles. . . .

. . . A bit of commotion at the rear tables. Some English officers are on their feet to greet a pink-cheeked youth who smiles his embarrassment at the warmth of their welcome. . . . A modern prince has come without retinue out of Samarcand and Baghdad arises to cheer him. . . . The flying carpet of the Cairo air-mail has come to rest in the landing field beyond Hinaidi and a sergeant is inspecting its hot motors. . . . Who can say that romance is dead in a spot such as this where the old customs linger forever and the old stories are lived again?

Chapter Twelve

THE SILVERSMITHS

*"And They Fashioned a Jewelled Girdle
for Balkis, the Queen"*

*When you and I behind the Veil are past,
Oh, but the long, long while the World shall last,
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds
As the Seas self should heed a pebble-cast.*

—OMAR KHAYYÁM.



LONG the river lies the street of the silversmiths. It is quite like the other streets of Baghdad, this thoroughfare—dusty, haphazard, secretive. It leads northward from the approach of the Maude Bridge toward the bazaars, furtively, mysteriously. At its beginning sits a ragged beggar woman with a soiled and protesting baby clasped to her naked breast. Her veil, final bulwark of an outraged modesty, is closely drawn about a face that may once have been the delight of a princely harem, and it filters the whining, echoing plaint of the East: "Backsheesh for the love of Allah . . . : Alms from the Frankish gentleman . . . Allah be merciful." A water carrier curses her in passing. Enough that a man should have to toil in the heat of the day without having his road blocked by female carrion. . . . A pretty pass things are coming to indeed when women sit in the streets and prate of Allah—precious lot they know of Allah or Mohamet his prophet, heaven bless him.

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The dust of the roadway is gray on the woman's bare legs and caked like kohl on the lower lids of her tearful eyes. The baby's brown skin glows with a metallic luster under its powdery coating, and he is so quiet, what with hasheesh or malnutrition or both—that he might well be the poorly molded statue he resembles.

“Backsheesh for the love of Allah—One anna for the love of Allah.”

A rupee dropped into her outstretched hand interrupts the refrain of her demand only long enough for a two-word prayer in behalf of the donor. The lady is a fatalist. She would have accepted the anna. She accepts the rupee. She probably would have taken a ten rupee note or a tauman or a pound with the same fine disdain. She pushes aside more of her rags with further startling display and tucks the rupee into a sash bound about her waist next to the skin. And thereupon she forgets the sahib who heard her plea as she resumes her patient effort to pierce the deafness of other sahibs.

Across the street a latticed balcony bulks out of a white brick wall and occasionally a pair of dark and expressive eyes gaze down upon this scene. The woman of the balcony is undoubtedly interested, for she lingers even after her presence has been detected. An Occidental might wonder at her taste in spectacles, for even in a highway of poverty such squalor as this must seem dreadful to one whose want is less dire. This is the sort of sight that even a stoical woman of the East might look upon only with a shudder. And yet the houri behind the lattice stares out at it with smoldering eyes.

“It's not amusement in her case; it's fascination,” declared the London importer who had volunteered to act as guide through the street of the silversmiths. “The woman of the harem doesn't see the beggar. She sees herself in the beggar's place. That is elemental psychology for anyone who has lived here more than a few months.

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“To-day a wife, to-morrow a divorcee or a widow, and day after to-morrow what? This beggar is young. If you can tell anything from her eyes she may have a passable face—even judging it by European standards. But she probably lacks the gift for matrimony. She is a little too thin to attract the exacting male by means of her own charms, and she hasn’t the connections that could place her sight unseen. So she bundles up her son, her proudest accomplishment, and comes out into the highway to garner such backsheesh as she may in the East’s second most competitive industry.

“Of course this estimate of her situation is largely hypothetical. She may be driven more by greed than by need, for a woman with well-chosen rags and a whimpering baby ought to do pretty well at this trade. She is pretty close to the center of English activity. There are government offices just down the street and the Imperial Bank of Persia is only around the corner. It is conservative to estimate that ten Europeans pass here very hour, and it is safe to guess that most of them give her an anna or two. She’ll get three or four rupees a day out of this and that’s considerably better than she’d get as a living from the average husband.

“Her begging may be a matter of great social significance. It may be the first indication of a movement among the female population toward independence . . . woman’s invasion of the jolly old marts of trade and all that sort of thing. It may be that the girl of the harem is looking upon her with envy instead of fear. And I’ll not pretend to guess. The mental processes of women who have done their thinking behind yashmaks for thirteen hundred years are beyond all comprehension. . . .”

A few paces onward toward the Suk a brick wall in a barnlike house had been pierced in a wide arch to present a view of a cavernous black room where bearded artisans hammered on little anvils. There was a faded sign over

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the keystone: "John the Baptist Nasser . . . Amara Silver Work." And in a case below were samples of the craft that had given this highway its name . . . silver boxes etched in black, serpentine bracelets and anklets, chased rings and bangles, cigarette holders and cases.

The art of the work was crude—malformed camels marching drunkenly across box lids, mosques rising on the face of plaques without regard to proportions or perspective, disappointed palms leaning against the side of jewel coffers, peculiar-looking sad-eyed snakes winding dutifully about hammered wristbands. But the work was at least indigenous—as interesting and original as the craft of the Hopi or the primitive art of Burma.

The designs of Amara work have become almost conventional throughout Iraq. The errors of one craftsman have been repeated endlessly in the product of others, so that it seems that camels must always have bowed legs and mosques must always have flat façades and unsymmetrical domes so long as they are being pictured on Baghdad silver. And presently, when Baghdad is made more accessible to the casual tourist, and the ancient artisans of Birmingham add a line of Amara silver to their interesting catalogue of scarabs and hand-loomed silks, Damascus brass and East Indian ware, the lines in these pictures will become fixed and immutable as only steel dies can make them. Progress in the art of Amara is nearing its finish forever.

It is improbable, whatever the fate of Baghdad's silver products, that they can ever be as interesting as the men who make them. Nowhere else in the world are crafts more a matter of race and inheritance than in Baghdad. The son follows the trade of his father. The father saves the cost of a helper in the apprenticeship of his son. And so it is not remarkable that all these men in the street of the silversmiths are of a common type. It is only slightly startling that the first name of all of them is John the Baptist.

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Ethnologically they are a puzzle, as are most of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia. They claim descent from the family of John the Baptist—hence the common prænomen. And they have a religion of their own in keeping with their heritage of piety. In a way they resemble the Samaritans of Palestine, for, so far as can be learned, they have kept their racial strain pure and they have maintained the beliefs and ritual of their sect despite close association with other religions and peoples.

Their craft takes its name from the town Amara where most of their people live—a holy city to all of their tribe, and a point of pilgrimage to more than one band of Badawi with a superstitious reverence for the shrines of other faiths than the Moslem. Amara is said to be the last resting place of John the Baptist, although the removal of the relic to that point from the court of Herod is an article of faith rather than a matter of history. It is significant that Damascus claims the head of John and that one church in Beirut reverences a casket believed to contain his arm. But then zealots of all times and climes have conspired to make trouble for the Angel Gabriel, and the dismemberment of a religious hero is something that presents neither discrepancy nor concern to an enthusiastic sect.

A clew to the origin of the silver workers is found in their tribal classification as "Sabeans." Balkis, the great queen who came out of the deserts to the south to visit Solomon, the wise king of the Jews, is known to us as the Queen of Sheba. But she was named by her contemporaries not as the Queen of Sheba but the Queen of Saba, and her people were Sabeans. Ethnologists, while taking with a grain of salt the traditions of the Amara Sabeans, have concluded that for all the evidence to the contrary, they may well lay claim to a racial antiquity far greater than that which might be accounted to the descendants of a man who lived early in the Christian era. And

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legend, here as elsewhere the echo of history, supports the claim.

“In the palace of Sheba were skilled metallurgists,” said the old Jewish story. “They made cunning devices of silver and their women walked under weights of massy gold. . . .” It is no trouble at all for one to see in this bearded Imam pounding his ingots with the solemn gesture of priestly rite, the forgotten smith fashioning baubles for Balkis the Queen. Whether Balkis lived three thousand years ago or yesterday, not a tool in this dim atelier, not a process of forging or a trick of design, has changed since she rode out with her glittering retinue to charm a wise king who was only passably wise. . . .

The lump of silver flattens on the anvil under the tinkling ball hammer. The history of that ingot would be interesting—rupees, piastres, American dollars—all have lost their identity in this blackened mass. Coins constitute a source of supply more easily obtainable than bar silver.

It is not surprising that in such an environment as this the workmen in the crafts should be strict ritualists. With implements the same as they were three thousand years ago, it follows naturally that the manner of use, the very gestures with which tools are handled, should become conventionalized and in time lend a mysterious significance to what in a land of drill presses and power stamps might be a very prosaic work.

Until machinery robbed craftsmanship of its individuality, the guilds, even in the progressive industrial districts of Europe and the United States, made a great secret of their arts. None but the initiate might wield the hammer. None but the adept might put his fancy into the lines of wood or silver or gold. In many ways these secrets were no great affair, tricks that might be guessed by anyone who took the time to study the craft. The skill of the adept lay in long training and an inborn artistry rather

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than in any amount of hocus-pocus concerning the formal method of sharpening a saw or holding a chisel. But whatever they were, the secrets were guarded and the past masters of the guild were something more than finished workmen. They were priests with a formal code and a grave sense of personal importance.

And so with their successors—or might one say their contemporaries?—in Baghdad. Here are all the ancient fetishes: One must heat the silver to just the proper shade of redness. One must remove it with one designated hand holding one sort of tongs and one must rap it a certain given number of strokes just four finger breadths from the broad end of the primitive anvil. The process would remind one of the pottery manufactures of rural China where such odds and ends as frogs' bones and cats' eyes were mixed with the glaze to give it lucency.

John Baptist Nasser, late of Amara, looks like a Coptic clergyman as he putters about his little forge. A tarred skin between two wooden boards is his bellows. A neophyte, obviously another son of Amara, operates this end of the business with none of the enthusiasm that one might expect to see in one about to be admitted to the circle of the elect.

When, after a tedious lot of work, the silver is hammered out flat on the iron anvil, John Baptist Nasser cuts it to size with a set of chisels broomed out mushroom shape by the pounding of years, perhaps of centuries.

"They don't make chisels like that nowadays," Mr. Nassar volunteers as he pauses to sharpen one by rubbing it on a bit of stone. And there speaks the true artisan. Craft and its rubrics are not indigenous to any language or race.

The lines of the design are traced in the polished surface with a hand tool that resembles an awl in everything save its flat edge. It makes a thin, chainlike etching on the silver in a vague outline of bow-legged camels or leaning mosques, depending on the fancy of the designer.

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The polishing of the silver, perhaps the shaping, might be left to the hands of an apprentice. But this part of the work is something that cannot be entrusted to one who has not yet learned the pictorial angle of the left hind leg of a highly theoretical camel and the precise position of the third finger when holding the etching tool.

Of greater importance is the inlaying of the material that will transform the etching into a black line. Singularly enough the workers make no secret of this part of the art, although it is by far the most distinctive element of the Amara produce. The dustlike stuff that is pressed into the tracing is antimony.

Once the dusting process is completed the silver is put back into the coals of the forge for a second heating. The antimony, turned jet by the heat, flows into every crevice and gives an effect similar to that which might be produced by drawing in India ink on a polished white surface. The silver is then taken out for its final buffing, which apparently is done with brick dust.

The drilling of holes for filigree work or for the hinges of flat cases is probably the most interesting of the craft tricks of Amara. A breast drill such as might be purchased in the United States for three dollars would undoubtedly simplify this operation. But ah, that would be an innovation, and no true craftsman would countenance an innovation even at the saving of time and labor. The local drill is simply a sharpened spindle mounted so that it can revolve in a wooden handle. About the spindle is taken one turn of a loose bowstring. The operator by moving the bow back and forth twirls the spindle and eventually the sharpened point digs down into the metal.

This bowstring deserves more than a passing mention inasmuch as it is at the back of nearly all of the labor-saving machinery of the East. It is probably as old as Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions and will linger in the productive economy of Baghdad until the city itself is

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dust. For it is more than a practical necessity that keeps it in its position of honor—it is the reverence due to age and untiring workmanship. Why, Sahib, should one discard what has been found good by one's ancestors merely that he may save an hour or two of time? What, pray tell, will a son of Allah do with the hour or two of time?

The obvious reverence of the Sabeans for the name of "John the Baptist" has led many to believe that they are essentially a Christian sect. The Sabeans or Subbi of Baghdad are quite ready to encourage the belief, but an impartial study of their doctrine shows that they are less Christian than the Moslems who candidly admit Christ to a place among the prophets.

For that matter the Sabeans are not even Sabeans but descendants of some skillful religious opportunists who seized upon the name to protect themselves against the energy of Mohammedan fanatics. The Prophet had decreed that the Sabeans were to be spared as a sect which in everything but minor tenets concurred in his own faith. Unfortunately the sect to which the amnesty applied had disappeared by the time that any of the Moslem leaders got around to looking for it. The ancestors of the present Sabeans claimed the honors despite the fact that their religion at that period is said to have been a species of star worship.

The basic article of their faith is that the world was created by demigods, previously created by a Supreme Being. John the Baptist is revered merely as an associate or assistant of one of the demigods and according to their belief baptized Jesus Christ as the result of having mistaken Him for the Messiah.

Throughout the ages their formal worship has borrowed freely from the rites of other religions. Thus one finds them observing a Sunday service, similar to the Christian communion ceremonial and baptizing themselves repeatedly in the water of the Tigris.

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They refused to serve in the Turkish army because the Ottoman government could give them no guarantee that they would be called upon to bear arms only in regions where they could find plenty of running water. And that they succeeded in evading service as religious objectors in a despotism so efficient as that of the Turks is proof enough of their strength as a sect.

Racially little is known of them. It may be, indeed, that they are what they claim to be, the blood descendants of the people over whom ruled Balkis the Queen. It is certain, however, that since the times of John the Baptist, when immersion became part of their ritual, they have been dwellers in towns. There is little room for an habitual Baptist in the wide reaches that lie between the desert walls.

Chapter Thirteen

BAGHDAD THE GOLDEN

“Ivory, Apes and Peacocks”

*Samma yet lingers, yet blushes and blesses,
Dazzling the dells with her sunbeamy tresses;
Here let us revel, defying excesses,
Sky-scalers, madcaps, in wine-wetted dresses.*

—ABDALLAH NIHAUNI.



IN the reign of Harun al Raschid, upon whom be peace, there lived in Baghdad a merchant whose house was of alabaster with gates of silver. . . .”

The rich imagery of the “Arabian Nights” is taxed to the last superlative when it would describe the city that Harun built to be the capital of Islam. All the skill of the Moslem world went into the fashioning of its minarets. All the riches of the East were bulked in its winding streets. Here came the silk caravans out of Iran—relaying the soft fabrics of Cathay across the deserts to the coast cities where the agents of Western women bartered for them with fabulous sums of gold. Here came strange trains laden with ivory and gums and frankincense. Here came travelers from far lands with caskets of rubies and luminous mysteries called pearls.

The domes and spear-tipped towers of the city were etched out in arabesques of turquoise and ocher and blazed in the sun like patches of sky. A bridge of red boats spanned the Tigris from the gardens on the east to farther gardens on the west. Villas decked with columns filched

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from the wreckage of Palmyra, six hundred miles away, made rippling iridescences in the water. Tile walls inlaid with traceries so fine that the whole structure took on the texture of a ceramic tapestry kept from prying vision the languorous retreats of dark-eyed women.

Water ran along the walls, trickling to the shimmering roadway through mossy rifts in the tiling. And green trees dipped their branches into it.

Awnings dyed scarlet with cochineal or striped with Tyrian purple filtered the sunlight in cool, stone-vaulted bazaars. Hammered brassware, damaskeened with silver, transmuted the street of the metal workers into a pathway of fire.

Across the river—stretching its magnificence for many a mile—was the chief glory of this city of wonders, the marble and basalt palace of Harun, Commander of the Faithful. There, roses clustered in wide arcades and fountains spurted from white basins mottled with cress.

The building itself, pink in the sunlight, dead white under the moon, was a marvel in a region that never had been without its marvelous buildings. It was a vast square with high walls and high floating arches, with paved courtyards broad enough for the drilling of the guard, and with awninged pavilions where this modern successor to the "lords of the four quarters of the earth" might receive the most magnificent court in the East.

In the seraglio was a pool fed by clear springs cascading down steps of porphyry into a basin of blue tile and in the colonnade about it were long stone benches where the favored of the Caliph might linger after their banqueting and recite the marvelous tales that one Sinbad of Basrah had brought from over the perilous seas.

Beyond latticed gratings in a central court that massive masonry and running water kept always cool, was the harem.

The finest women that money could buy added to the

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decorative scheme of this great chamber—voluptuous houris from Persia, languorous ladies from India, vivacious Yesidees from the Kurdish foothills, fair-skinned, shy beauties from the deserts north of Damascus, Mongol princesses with slant eyes and evil dispositions, girls of no birth at all from the Isles of the Blessed. Black eunuchs tunicked in gold and crimson and fattened to a point of unbelievable perfection guarded the door, leaning on broad scimitars of Damascus steel as they gazed sleepily at the barred passageways where royal tigers, gaunt and glossy, paced impatiently, awaiting their turn at the watch.

From the broad arch of the gateway of the prophet a street led on toward Kadawain the Golden. Along this street lived the merchant princes who had lured silk out of China and gold out of Phœnicia, the great explorers who had found valleys of diamonds to the south of the Perilous Seas, the thaumaturgists beloved of the genii who had come into Baghdad with marvelous tales of alchemy and what not, and coffers heaped with temple trinkets of India, Burmah and Angkor Vat; the favored of Allah who had learned the elemental miracles of quantity production, price cutting and the elimination of competition; the pious slave traders who dealt in nothing but the handsomest women and had been properly rewarded for their fair dealing—by and large the best people of Baghdad, wealthy beyond the dreams of Ali Baba and daily growing wealthier. And the street itself: They say it was paved with block silver, which may or may not be true. It took its way between enameled walls and villas of porcelain, lustrous walls of black obsidian and polished porphyry.

Graceful bridges white as ivory arched across it, linking hidden gardens. Bronze doors led from it to the dwelling places of the favored.

And all day long the pilgrims passed down this street to the shrines of the saints or to the feet of Harun the

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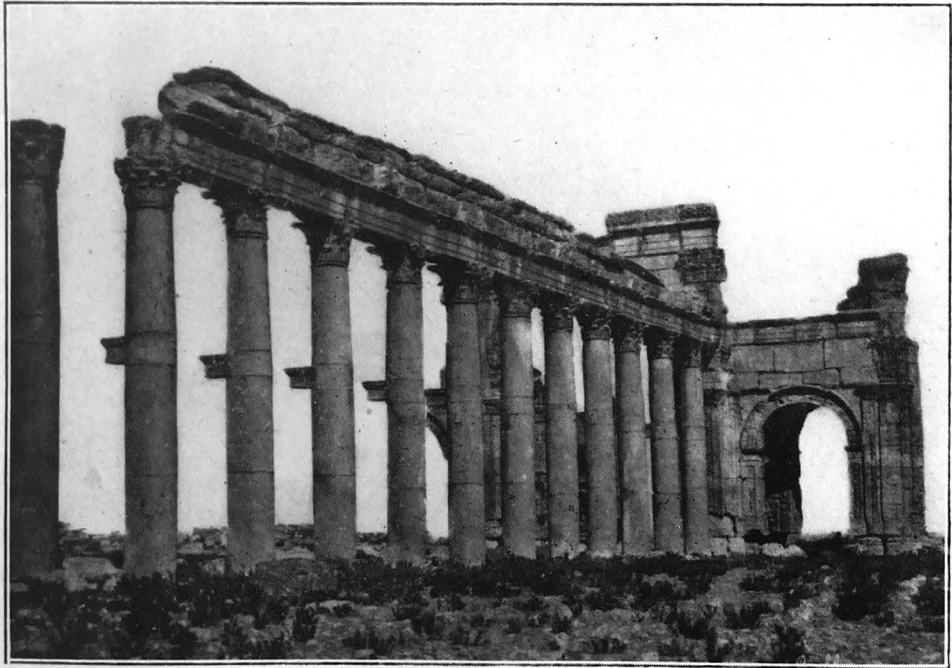
Sleepless One. There came retinues from India, gorgeous with satin and brass, with long trains of elephants and palanquins of peacock feathers; embassies from Cathay on squat, double-humped camels that seemed to bear no relationship at all to their less-favored brothers of Mesopotamia; Tartar princes from the north whose decorations were leather and shining armament, mounted on little horses with gilded hoofs; envoys from Persia, rich and powerful, borne in gem-studded litters on the shoulders of glistening black slaves; traders from beyond the desert whose cloaks of wool were corded about their heads with braids of camel's hair and whose mounts were white nagas; royal visitors from Afghanistan; ebony messengers from Abyssinia; gaudily painted covered carts—the slave trains from Circassia.

The silver street flowed with currents of color that never ceased until night covered it. . . . And even then it lost little of its dazzling sheen, for the moon transmuted it to quicksilver and the flares on parapet and balcony splashed it with patterns of fire opal.

There was no lack of spacious elegance in the bazaars for Harun, as a builder, was hampered by no old structures, no old titles to land, no traditions in street or bridge or garden plot—and he had plenty of money. Islam was a successful venture at the time when he became its leader. Its arms were respected far across the deserts to the edge of the wide sea called the Atlantic. The signs were numerous that these Christians who refused to recognize the divine mission of the muleteer of Mecca must soon be wiped from the face of the earth. The standards of Mohamet were planted across North Africa from the valley of the Nile to the ruins of Carthage. All of Arabia, save perhaps a few recalcitrant Jews, had embraced the holy cause. And now they were paying in advance for their assured salvation. The tithes that came to Harun in his palace of basalt were greater than even those fabu-



ENTRANCE TO THE COLONNADE, PALMYRA



SECTION OF THE COLONNADE

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lous riches that Sinbad of Basrah had brought back from the Vale of the Diamonds. The tribute from subject peoples, the loot of Hispania, the wealth to be filched from the valley of the Rhone made an almost immeasurable pile in Harun's treasure house and there seemed to be no end to the income.

Whatever criticism may be directed against Harun as a ruler, and probably there is much, it cannot be disputed that he was a great builder, as great in his way as Nebuchadnezzar. Baghdad was merely a city when the first of the Abbasides founded it. Harun attempted to make it a work of art that would preserve his name to the ages. He looked upon its streets as he might have looked upon the corridors in his own palace and he poured out gold freely that every back alley might be worthy of his presence should he choose to visit it on one of his nocturnal rambles.

In Samarcand they still speak of the great North Gate with its gleaming towers and its portcullis of bronze, of the tiled roads that led from it into the heart of the spice and amber bazaars, and of the immense braziers that flamed through the night and made these highways of commerce as bright as the day. The stone quays of the Tigris were the marvel of boatmen sprung from a race of boatmen, and there the treasures of the East were stacked bale on bale and chest on chest,—silver and gold and myrrh and frankincense, silken carpets and gauzes from Cashmere, attars from Persia, red dates from Basrah, bright-colored birds from Africa, tea from Ceylon. . . . "Ivory, apes and peacocks," . . . baubles for ladies, saddlery and swords for the busy warriors.

On the outskirts of the bazaars, not far from the high walls, were great camel parks and immense khans where the caravans mobilized. There on high benches the weary travelers rested while dancing girls bade them welcome to Baghdad. Thousands of camels, trapped in red and

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hung with little silver bells, came under the Gate of the Moon every day. Under the stars across the desert, train followed train until, from the Euphrates to Palmyra, the trail was alive—one long slow-moving serpentine. The camels of Baghdad came to know Samarcand and the cool shadows of Damascus as well as they knew their native gorse patches.

The world knew Baghdad then—long years before Scheherezade spun her intriguing tales of its glories. All Arabia looked upon it as the fountainhead of culture—the true culture. The Moslem world saw in it an Eden favored by Allah, an imperishable bulwark of the faith. Christendom stood by and marveled at its bold magnificence. Never before—in Babylon whose territory it usurped and whose ruins it cheerfully tore apart, nor in Nineveh, golden storehouse of piratical kings—had there been such a wealth of civic splendor.

Out in the black tents a Bedouin woman would boast—“I have a Baghdad shawl,” just as a modern woman might boast of a Paris gown. The desert was cluttered with “Baghdad ware” of one sort or another, as indeed it is to this day. And legends sprang up wherever there were men to speak of it, of the magic that had brought to the city by the Tigris its amazing opulence.

Al Raschid established universities and gave Baghdad prominence quite aside from its importance as a theocratic capital and a commercial metropolis. Here came Oriental princes to sit at the feet of sages whose learning has never since been equaled in Islam, to learn the cabalistic mysteries of algebra and to master strange tongues.

“I go to Baghdad to obtain knowledge,” said Abdul of the old nursery tale. And Abdul was something more than an individual. He was, in so far as his statement of an ambition was concerned, the typification of a people. All the Abduls whose parents had cast them for rôles of greatness went to Baghdad to obtain knowledge. And

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they returned to their native countries to be forever dissatisfied with the lesser wonders of capitals they had thought princely.

The women of Baghdad—ah, who will talk of them. They were beautiful undoubtedly—seductive creatures who knew how to make the most of natural charm. For they were chosen to grace the harems of prosperous men competent to pay for what they chose. And "Baghdad of the Lovely Concubines" was probably as well favored in fact as it has since been celebrated in the boudoir anecdotes of the free-spoken Scheherezade.

They were closely watched—as any other piece of merchandisable property might have been—and as women of the East have always been watched since the Moslem law classified them as female rather than feminine. But for all that they had a certain amount of freedom, as charming women will always have.

They thronged the bazaars, veiled mysteries in decorous black gowns whose studied modesty ended with their burning eyes. They jingled their silver anklets in the courtyard of Al Raschid and practiced their arts of revealing concealment in closely guarded marches between harem and hammam.

They were a rebellious lot—converted to Islam by force of necessity and none too greatly concerned with the salvation of souls whose existence was considered debatable by some of the Mohammedan theologians. "The Thousand Nights and a Night" is made up of a thousand and two stories of their adventuring. It was Mohamet's rule that only the beautiful need go veiled lest they be a temptation to men. And so, immediately, the women of Islam became beautiful. But then as now, a face which looked out of the bronze mirrors of the harem with sufficient loveliness to charm its owner, somehow contrived to elude its veiling when the eyes of a handsome man happened to stray toward it.

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So they walked in Baghdad, these houris of the seventh heaven, odorous with attars of roses and hyacinth and enveloped in fragrant clouds of ambergris. Their white arms dawdled from the curtained windows of palanquins, their ankles, bound with links suggestive of their matrimonial slavery, were forcibly advertised with tinkling silver bells. They were in every intrigue of a city that teemed with it, furnishing the intelligence and often the motivation of every scheme for the favor of the Caliph, of every coup of the malcontents. They stood behind the throne of Harun himself and came to be celebrated for their wit in the literature of puzzled males who as a matter of policy classed them as imbeciles. They tricked astute tradesmen, they laughed at the puffy eunuchs who guarded them, they loved ardently—and a bit promiscuously—and they added no small bit to the piquant interest of Baghdad.

Probably the world will never see another female population quite like that. For the polygamous territories that would have an interest in gathering them now are without the wealth necessary for so striking an enterprise. Matrimony is now expensive as a local affair, and ideas of beauty have had to conform to traditions. These queens of the harem loved as they listed and ordered their lives to suit their loves. Their morals may have been influenced to a certain extent by the religion of their husbands—probably not. Their entire existence, unless motherhood came to occupy their time and attention, was a game of wits between them and the guards set over them, and if Scheherezade may be credited, the guards were seldom equal to the task.

They brought to Baghdad quite as much fame as its caravans of textiles and its streets of silver and its mosques of alabaster. The palace of the caliphs is gone. A railroad clatters over what was once its splendid court of the fountains. The streets of silver are alleys of dust. But

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the ghosts of the lovely concubines are always present in the memories of those who would link modern Baghdad with its romantic past. Harun may be forgotten but the ladies upon whom he spied so endlessly will live as long as man is able to make characters in a book. Where lies Harun? Who can say? His bones are crumbled in dust far afield from the city that he made glorious. But his favorite wife sleeps among her people in her tomb by the switchyards on the road to Kadamain.

A thought, that, in the unchanging East where women still are chattels a bit less valuable than camels. Of the theocratic capital that Harun al Raschid built only one shrine remains to draw the reverence of the faithful. Only one thing keeps his memory alive and vivid in this land of forgetfulness—the grave of Zobeideh . . . a woman. And men and women alike come here to do her reverence.

Chapter Fourteen

THE RULE OF THE CALIPHS

The Adventure of the Wazir Jafar Who Took His Marriage Too Seriously

*Then youth was mine, and a fierce, wild will,
And an iron arm in war,
And a fleet foot high on Ishkar's hill
When the watch-lights glimmered afar,
And a barb as fiery as any I know
That the Kurd or Bedouin rides,
Ere my friends lay low—long, long ago,
In the time of the Barmecides. . . .*

—ANON.



BAGHDAD the Golden—city of the caliphs—was founded in fear. El Mansur, second of the Abbasides, thought—probably with some reason—that the life of a spiritual chieftain of such an excellent people might be expected to terminate suddenly. He was a fatalist by necessity of his religion. But like many another fatalist he could see no sense in making his removal too simple for the fore-ordained agents of doom.

He looked over Mesopotamia and hit upon the garden region, near the ancient Babylonian market town of Baghdad, as highly suitable for his plan. The circumstance that influenced his choice is not recounted by the Arab chroniclers, but it is reasonable to suppose that the ruins of Ctesiphon and Seleucia in the same neighborhood may have suggested to him that the region had long been

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avored as a site of great capitals. At any rate he came here with thousands of artisans and began to erect on the right—or west—bank of the Tigris a circular town the like of which the world has never seen before or since.

Three circular walls protected the new capital. The circle described by the outer wall was three miles in diameter. The inner wall inclosed a comparatively small area in which were located the caliph's palace and the government buildings. The populace lived in the area between the inner and intermediate walls. The space between the intermediate and outer walls was left vacant for the use of the hardy troops who might one day be called upon to defend the city against an invader.

The town was divided into four quarters by two walled streets that ran through it at right angles, terminating at the outer wall in four great gates.

The advantage of this system of defense is readily seen. The caliph could enter or leave the town unobserved by the populace. Any riot, insurrection or similar festivity could be isolated by closing the gates that led from the gate roads to the residence districts. The entire population could be imprisoned at a signal from the palace tower and an invader lucky enough to smash down the outer gates would do so only to find himself in a cul-de-sac.

There was no commercial quarter in the town. El Mansur had no trust in merchants. Baghdad's unforeseen rise to importance in the trade of the deserts later led the caliph to make some concessions, and a quarter was established for merchants west of the town.

The work of building the city is said to have been completed in five years. It was a flourishing community as soon as its gates were opened, but in a decade the basic plan of the caliph had been frustrated by an unprecedented growth in population. El Mansur had located his troops in barracks on the left bank of the river and connected the garrison to the town with a bridge. A new city

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sprang up about the barracks on approximately the present site of East Baghdad. By the time that Harun al Raschid came to the throne of the caliphs the capital had within its gates a permanent population of more than two million and the original circular city was disappearing.

Eventually it did disappear—so completely that a few years after Harun's death the scholars of Islam were already disputing the site on which it had stood. Major Yates in sinking foundations for a freight platform at the railroad station came close to solving the problem when he turned up a portion of one of the walls. It was not determined, however, which of the three walls had passed that point, so at best the location is only approximate.

Harun al Raschid was fifth of the line of the Abbasides and his succession to his elder brother El Mahdi came about through his ability to mobilize the scimitar vote on the east bank. One night El Mahdi, who had done considerable toward carrying out the traditions of El Mansur in the building of the capital, was skillfully assassinated. Harun thus became caliph and, as it turned out, just in the nick of time, for other painstaking assassins were at his gate prepared to do him a service similar to that already done to his brother when the heralds arrived to proclaim his great good luck.

Richard Coke, who paints in his book "The Heart of the Middle East" a striking picture of Baghdad's life in the Golden Age, points out that in most of his characteristics Harun was the perfect type of a Persian potentate and says that he differed from Cyrus of Chosroes in period rather than morals or method of thought.

What is known of his capital seems to bear out this theory. There is something significant, for instance, in the legend of the streets paved with silver block. Even if the tradition is based upon a pure fiction, that fiction may be paralleled in fact as deciphered from the cylinders of Nebuchadnezzar describing the temple of Nebo in

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Babylon. And there is at least a basis of fact in the chronicles of the Arab historians, who tell of the vast halls of the caliph's palace each one aglitter with precious metals and gems of fabulous worth.

Gibbon quotes the description that one of them records of the court of the golden tree in Harun's gardens where goldsmiths had duplicated in beaten metals an arbor in full leaf and flower and filled the branches with golden birds that sang a natural note whenever the fountains played.

Abulfeda states that once when a member of the royal house was married "a thousand pearls of the largest size were showered on the head of the bride." He says also that on the occasion of a visit by a Greek embassy to the caliph Moctador, the distinguished guests passed to the palace through a lane between the ranks of one hundred and sixty thousand soldiers whose armor of chased silver and polished bronze made a river of flame under the noonday sun.

At the gates stood the attachés of the court in gold armor with capes embroidered with rubies trailing the ground at their feet. And he says, "Nor was the palace itself less splendid, in which were hung up thirty-eight thousand pieces of tapestry, twelve thousand five hundred of which were silk embroidered gold. The carpets on the floor were twenty-two thousand. In the courts stood a hundred lions with a keeper to each lion."

Coke—quoting from the same source relative to the nuptials in which the pearls were showered on the bride—mentions that the ceremony lasted seventeen days and cost, according to tradition, about \$5,000,000.

"Each of the guests," he says, "received a ball of musk which upon being opened up was found to contain a ticket entitling the recipient to an estate, a cultured slave, a well-bred horse, or other generous gift. The hospitality of the minister on this occasion was rewarded by the

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allotment of the revenues of two prosperous provinces for a year; and to the unhappy provincials fell the cost of paying for so fabulous an entertainment."

One reads of how the caliph rode out each Friday in pomp and power to preside over the services at the mosque, dressed in black and riding a fine white horse. On such occasions he wore a belt studded with jewels and a gold chain about his neck supporting a single great diamond. The high peaked hat which he made an article of his ceremonial costume soon was adopted as the mode by the élite of Baghdad as were his shoes of red kid leather.

Islam has always been a thing of surprises. In such barbaric splendor one might well expect to find the luxurious ignorance of the capitals that Baghdad so carefully copied. But while halls were being frescoed with pearls and rubies and diamonds, libraries and colleges were rising on the east bank of the river and whole caravans of learned men were journeying here from all parts of the world. Baghdad's fame as a center of futile magnificence soon was rivaled by the fame of Baghdad the learned. It is said that algebra was brought to a practical development here and the literature of the Eastern world was collected by the expeditions of Harun and brought to the Tigris to be copied, translated and spread abroad to increase the knowledge of the faithful.

It is not to be supposed, however, that this sudden endowment of learning lessened any of the natural instincts of the rulers as Arab gentlemen. Coke tells of how some of these potentates tired of officiating at the cathedral mosque delegated the task to ministers and how one went so far as to allow himself to be represented by one of the favorites of his harem disguised as a doctor of laws.

Harun himself, stepping over the bloody corpse of his brother to lead the faithful in the way of light and righteousness, is known to have caused the execution of Jafar, his wazir, who figures with him in so many of the adven-

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tures of the "Thousand and One Nights." It seems probable that this execution had its basis in justice, for Jafar had been negligent enough to permit the escape of a political offender intrusted to his care. But the slaughter of the other members of the Barmecide family is something else again. The policy of extermination seems to have been carried out with sufficient thoroughness to remove what might have been one of the most distinguished lines of the Moslem world from history within fifty years after its rise from obscurity to power under Mansur.

Biographers of Harun have sometimes ascribed the execution of Jafar to his indiscretion in his marriage to Abbassa, the caliph's favorite sister.

She occupied a place of considerable note in the court of Baghdad and was her brother's associate and adviser in numerous campaigns and adventures. It was not long, however, before scandal began to attach to her because of the fact that Jafar was so often in her company. Harun desired the companionship of Jafar, but he had no wish to send Abbassa back to the seclusion and propriety of the harem.

"You'd better marry the girl," he told Jafar. "That ought to satisfy the gossips. I'll give her to you on condition that you forget you are her husband as soon as the wedding ceremony is completed."

Jafar, of course, acceded to so fair a proposition and he and Abbassa were wed with ceremony and ostentation that would have been a credit to a real wedding. And there is said to be evidence that Jafar was willing enough to keep his part of the bargain. There is also evidence that Abbassa was a lady with a mind of her own.

When Jafar bowed to her formally at the end of the celebration and started back to the palace of the Barmecides, she seemed to be put out about it.

"Are you my husband or aren't you?" she inquired with excusable curiosity.

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"Well, yes and no," replied Jafar. "Your brother—whom heaven preserve in the manufacture of excellent idea—says you are wedded but no wife."

"Just between you and me," replied the bride, "my brother is a silly egotistical ass and what he doesn't know about me is plenty. What did you think I went through all this dreary song and dance for? Just so he could keep me around to advise him on how to keep from making a fool of himself?"

"Well, all I know is what he told me," explained Jafar. "You know I love you, Abbassa, but I'd be the last man in the world to cause you a lot of trouble just because I love you."

"Listen," said Abbassa. "You're my husband according to all the laws of our holy religion. And what's mine is mine. I love you and I'd rather be your official wife than my brother's unofficial prime minister."

"Oh, very well, then," decided Jafar helplessly.

And they do say that when a child was born to Abbassa some time afterward, Harun was downright nasty about it. Abbassa sent the baby to Mecca, but somebody found out about it and told the caliph. . . .

Whatever the cause for the removal of the faithful Jafar he was eliminated from the picture soon after that and what became of Abbassa and her son is left to one's imagination.

Other little details of the stern love of justice that actuated the ruling classes after the Abbasides came into power are to be found in the chronicles. Coke has compiled a few of them.

"The townspeople of Mosul who had rebelled at an unfortunate moment against the new dispensation were slaughtered to a man in the courtyard of their principal mosque, their womenfolk being surrendered to the embraces of the soldiery. One youthful member of the house of Ali, suspected of revolutionary tendencies, was built

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alive into the wall of his prison. And the caliph's own uncle, who had rebelled but who had afterward been given reason to expect clemency, was granted a residence in a house constructed on salt foundations which, the first night of the ensuing rainy season, collapsed on top of him and killed him. With such humorous diversions did the early Abbasides lighten the monotony of their cruel progress."

No history in the world has been so involved as that of Mesopotamia. It has always been a hopeless task for the college student, skipping gayly, from high point to high point in the chronicles of mankind, as set forth in a single volume, to determine for instance where Babylon left off and Assyria began, what Chaldea was and what was the basic nationality of the invaders from Iran who seemed to have been called by turns Elamites, Medes, Parthians and Persians.

No single volume could permit of adequate treatment of this subject. It seems almost useless to discuss the history of the land of the two rivers at all, for a chapter of it is no sooner written than some new cylinder is unearthed at Kish or Ur of the Chaldees and all the information is changed again.

However, in a thumbnail sketch, here is the genealogy of the ancestry of Baghdad:

Mesopotamia—the land between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers—is fertile, or at least capable of cultivation. And it lies a flowering crescent in the midst of deserts. In the alluvium at the mouth of the rivers, an unknown people came to live thousands of years ago and presently there sprang up in the lower end of Mesopotamia strong centers of population which after the fashion of such centers found plenty to quarrel about. The race of the people who built these cities—as recently learned from tablets excavated from the ruins of their libraries—was called Sumerian and seems to have been of Indo-European extraction.

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Kish, between the rivers, some fifty miles south of what is now Baghdad, appears to have been their most important city. Recent excavations in Kish, under the direction of the Field Museum and Oxford University archæologists, have given the world the most complete data on the Sumerians, who, in their own inscriptions, seem to be entitled to an antiquity dating back four thousand years before Christ and claim an ancestry in the same region ten thousand years before that.

The story of the Sumerians in Kish is largely that of the race throughout the delta. A Semitic race which came from no one knows where mingled with the Sumerians, and eventually blotted them out in their own cities. The next era of civilization in Mesopotamia is seen with the foundation of Babylon as a city eight miles west of Kish—a change in location possibly caused by shifting in the course of the Euphrates—and the consolidation of the various city states as a single empire which history knows as Babylonia. The name Chaldea originated with a dynasty of the Chaldei and is used by early commentators interchangeably with Babylonia.

Assyria was an offshoot of Babylonia and was distinctly a Semitic nation. A large population migrated from the lower regions of the river and founded Asshur, Nineveh, and other cities in the upper reaches of the Tigris and for centuries Assyria and Babylon were rival empires.

They warred continuously. But in the end Babylon, joining with the Medes, a race developing a civilization in the region now known as Persia, sacked Nineveh and ended the domination of Assyria forever.

Media, Parthia, and Persia, while distinct kingdoms, might be roughly classified as a unit. Geographically they were much the same.

In the last two centuries before the Christian era, Greek conquerors came into the land of the two rivers, driving eastward, and Persian conquerors came driving west.

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Cyrus, the Mede, conquered Babylon after the fashion described in the Bible, but it remained standing and powerful until after the successors of Alexander the Great, who died in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, moved the capital of Babylonia northward.

Parthian defeated Macedonian and then came Rome to vie with Parthia, and the Arab fanatics to conquer what they had left.

That, in one jumbled mosaic, is the story of the land in which Baghdad rose. It is a story that must repeat itself endlessly so long as men must live on the barren lands of western Asia and the two rivers run down through fertile plains to the sea.

Chapter Fifteen

ETHICS OF MASSACRE

*The Adventure of the Just Man
Who Was It the Inkle of Tomas*

*No borrowed splendors round me shine
But Virtue's luster all is mine;
A fame unsullied still I boast. . . .*

—MAUID EDDIN ALHASSAN.



TOMAS brought in the morning bowl of grapes, laid out the long bath towels and stood expectantly in the doorway. It was not often that Americans came to Baghdad, and Tomas had many things to talk about. He had frequently been to see the American consul regarding a miracle by which he might be set aboard a date steamer bound for New York and so eventually reach the land of promise that lay so many miles beyond the deserts. And no amount of refusal had abashed him. If the consul would not listen to his plea—well, there were other Americans and there was no telling when one of these others might prove to have the password.

"Some day," said Tomas, readjusting the long towel across the tabouret before he turned to pour the coffee . . .

"Some day I go in America."

"What for?" I inquired.

"Well," said Tomas, "it is a big place where is everybody rich."

This legend of the wealth of America might not have been surprising in Europe where the peasant folk have

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been repeating it so long that they have come to believe it in spite of a canny financial instinct. Here it was novel enough to be startling. Wherever lie the sainted bones of Harun al Raschid they probably stirred uneasily at the suggestion that one might leave Baghdad and traverse an unknown sea in a quest for wealth. It certainly was not being done in Harun's day.

"You live well here, do you not, Tomas?" I asked him.

"Better as once," he admitted. "Now is the Tork gone is better. Once I live in mountains near Mosul—my broders, my modar, too. And all the time we fight.

"We are Christian—Chaldean—and Torks are Moham-medan. They chase us and kill us—always they chase and kill us. Then we chase them and kill them. It is not like that in America."

"Not exactly."

"Well, that's how is it in the mountains near Mosul. One night the Torks come—the soldiers—on horses. They steal the sister of my modar. She is nice girl. Good worker. They smash door. They take her. My fader he go out. He say to his brodar, the Torks they take Miriam. His brodar he say, 'How many Torks?' My fader he say, 'Twent'-five Torks.' His brodar say, 'Not enough Torks. She be back. Sixty Torks maybe she stay. Twenty-five Torks not enough Torks. She be back.'

"So when is it mornink comes Miriam. She is sister of my modar. Yes. Well, there it is Miriam. My fader he say, 'Miriam, how do you come back?' She say: 'I kill some Torks—one—two—three Torks—I jump over high place. I walk back. Now I milk it cow.'"

"She killed three Turks?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"She sticks knife in Torks—one—two—three Torks. She is big and strong. The Torks die."

"Admirable woman!"

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“Well, yes. But the Torks come back after her. Yes. They get more soldiers—maybe sixty. They come back. They chase Miriam. They catch her. She say, ‘No! No!’ They take her anyway.

“This time my fader goes to his brodar. He say, ‘They catch it Miriam!’ His brodar say, ‘How many Torks?’ My fader he say, ‘Maybe sixty Torks.’ His brodar say, ‘This time we do somethink. Sixty Torks is too many Torks!’

“So they go around. They say to everybody, ‘Miriam is gone. The Torks got it.’ Everybody is get gun. It is night. Everybody is go out—forty—fifty—sixty men, all horses. They ride clickety click. Fast like that. All night they ride. They catch Torks.

“It is a big fight. Many men killed. Not many my people. Most the Torks. My people kill the Torks. They bring Miriam home. She stay there one—two—three weeks. Camel bite her. She die. Too bad.”

Tomas smiled not so much at the tragic dénouement of his sprightly anecdote but in pride at having got through with it in such lucid and intelligible English.

“Your people are brave people,” I observed.

“Oh, yes,” admitted Tomas. “Yours, too. The Inglis, too—” And then, lest the heroism of his brave relatives in the rescue of the camel-bitten Miriam lose any of its luster he made haste to add: “And the Tork, too. He brave. Bad man but brave.”

Tomas gazed out across the white terrace toward the Tigris and there was in his eyes the reminiscent gleam that marks the prodigal who thinks of the blue hills and the light in the window. The light in the window of Tomas’ home was probably only theoretical, but the sentimental attachment represented by such things undoubtedly was there. Tomas was thinking of the bloody green fields north of Mosul where as a boy he spent so

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many happy hours herding his cattle and escaping massacre at the hands of the Torks.

"You miss the old home, Tomas?" I inquired.

"Well, yes. It is good home. My people all die there. All but my modar and my brodars. They come here with me when I come. My people get killed. Always get killed. They fight such a lot."

Which had a ring of truth in it. People who fight a lot frequently get killed, and Tomas' pastoral idyl of the land that lies in the hills beyond Mosul while somewhat lacking in detail was none the less replete with the atmosphere of deadly climax. One tilled the soil, one lived the quiet life of the tribesman—a third of one's time at one's hearth. . . . Two thirds of one's time in the saddle defending one's hearth or something equally important. One was a shepherd who played weird songs on a hand-made pipe, and shot a Tork with an obsolete gun, and died with a romantic gesture.

"Surely all Mohammedans are not bad," I suggested. He meditated on that.

"Not all. Most. Near Mosul is Mohammedan woman. No face. All veil. Good woman. The Tork catch her. He say 'Come along.' She say 'No! No!'"

Nearly all of Tomas's stories were like that. Somebody was always saying, "Come along!" And some lady was always saying, "No! No!"

"The Tork he say 'Come along!' She say 'No! No!' But he take her. Comes my fader. He say, 'What you do?' The Tork say, 'I take it this woman.' Mohammedan lady say, 'I got husban'.' My fader say, 'Let it go.' The Tork say, 'Ha! Ha!' My fader he take gun, so, like that. Bang! Bang! Tork dead. He take it Mohammedan lady home. Her husban' glad. They now friends my family. When Mohammedans say, 'Kill Chaldean!' this lady say, 'No! No! Not Tomas. Good man.' When it is

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nothing to eat to us, they have, they give. When it is nothing to eat to them, we have, we give.

"Well, now, good people these Mohammedans. Not all Mohammedan. Not bad."

And there was more of a picture in this than Tomas the Chaldean might have imagined. Occidentals, aware of the plight of the Christian peoples in northern Syria and Iraq, unanimously had pictured the life of Armenian and Chaldean as one continuous warfare. But, after all, people—Arab, Armenian, Kurd or what not—seem to be human. They cannot always remember the deadly enmities that are supposed to consume their lives. About once in a dozen Ramadans or Easters, some Mohammedan or Chaldean commits the great disloyalty to his caste of believing that the targets for his inevitable musketry practice may also be God's creatures. And that, Sahib, is obviously a silly idea. If the Mohammedans and Chaldeans are alike the children of God, then there would be no excuse for war—a manifest absurdity.

"Your boyhood must have been happy, Tomas," I said to him as I interpreted his smile of reminiscence.

"Well, now, yes," replied Tomas. "My fader is good man. My modar is good woman. My Inkle is very good to me."

"Your what?"

"My Inkle—the brodar of my modar—He is very good to me but the Tork make him go away."

He sighed at this recollection of the evil nature of the Tork.

"Well, now, yes, they make him go away because he is good man. He has wife, my Inkle. But she is not good like my Inkle. She is bad like Mohammedan. The Tork come and say to her, 'Come along!' And she do not say, 'No! No!' She say, 'All right!' She go away with Tork. After while she come back. She say Tork is not bad man.

"My Inkle say, 'What?' She say, 'Yes!'

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“My Inkle come to my fader. He ver’ angry. He say to my fader, ‘My wife is go away with Tork.’ My fader say, ‘What of it?’ My Inkle say, ‘My wife he is come back now and he say he likes the Tork—the Tork is good man. What about that?’

“My fader he say, ‘What?’ My Inkle he say, ‘Yes!’

“My fader say, ‘It is too bad. Your wife he is bad woman. You must kill it.’

“My Inkle say, ‘My wife, must I kill it?’

“My fader say, ‘Yes, he is bad woman, no good, you must kill it.’

“So my Inkle kill it.”

Simple enough, this recital of stern justice and uncompromising morals among the elemental tribes of the hills. Bad enough that the wife of Tomas’ Inkle should have gone away with the Tork. Such an act might have been construed by the prudes of the neighborhood as an approach to loose conduct. But that she should have returned singing the praises of the unspeakable Tork—that was something no austere moralist could brook.

So out of Tomas’ bald narrative one might imagine the picture of a dark young woman with deep, sad eyes stepping forth from her stone house to do her bit of work in the fields—to milk the cow or wash her children’s few ragged clothes in the brook, cheerfully unaware that she was walking out to her death. . . . The outraged husband meets her at some distance from the house.

“You are a disgrace to our people,” says the angry Inkle.

“What have I done?” demands this simple-minded daughter of Iniquity.

“You went away with the Tork.”

‘If I hadn’t gone he would have killed me. And he wasn’t such a bad Tork. . . .’ Undoubtedly she says that. It is the logical defense of so abandoned a creature. And her intellect—no better than one might expect to

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find in a woman—does not grasp the fact that in her very argument she damns herself. The Inkle by this time is almost speechless with rage.

“That’s just it,” he storms. “It isn’t bad enough that you go away with the Tork. Women are like that, always running around if they aren’t chained to the doorstep. That is to be expected in any household although it is bad enough. But this Tork. . . . You praise him. You say that he is not only a good Tork—and heaven knows there is no such thing—but you have the brass also to say that he is a good man—he of whom the worst that may be said of any biped is true—he is a Tork.”

And despite the justice of the Inkle’s cause, and the grave provocation that drives him to this necessary deed, one feels a sort of sinful sympathy for the treacherous woman who cowers before him. One might wish that she could have chosen some lesser error—such as arson, mayhem or murder—anything save this unspeakable offense of saying a good word about the Tork. But at the same time one realizes that nothing can be done about it. One is witnessing in imagination a scene that is already well ended. . . . “So my Inkle kill it. . . .”

The woman is on her knees weeping in the path. The Inkle with a holy light in his eye is raising his rifle.

“And the Tork make my Inkle go away!” Tomas’ indignation at this further evidence of Turkish misrule is awe-inspiring. Some day, when he has made his fortune selling rugs in America beyond the deserts and the seas, he will return here and pay the Tork with interest for this evil act. “The Tork make my Inkle go away.”

“They make him go away for just a little matter like murder?” I inquired. “Just for killing his wife?” The skepticism with which I spoke was genuine.

“Yes,” said Tomas. “Because he kill it this woman, she is no good. They make him go away. More yet: They think they kill him. It is terrible. Just because he

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is good man. When Ahmed kill Hassan do the Tork kill it? No. When Kemel kill Barsumian do they kill it? No. But when my Inkle kill it these woman—she is no good—they try to kill it. He go away. In the night my people take it away. Forty men—all horses.”

Tomas paused dramatically and one sympathized with him. The little boy Tomas had loved this brave Inkle and now the Inkle was being driven away from his ancestral fireside into a land of strangers . . . and exile . . . forever. . . . Well, not exactly forever:

“Seven years my Inkle stay away. He go Smyrna. He make money when he sells figs. Then he come back. She marry new wife. He is good woman—not like other wife. But my Inkle remember how the Tork make him go away. He is very sad until one day he go to Mexico. Now he is reech. While he is away there is big fight. My fader is killed. The brodar of my fader—my other Inkle—is also killed. All my cousins killed. My Inkle very sad because the Tork make him go away. He is not there when is it the big fight. Now he is in Mexico. . . .”

Well, that is the history of the just man who was it the Inkle of Tomas the Chaldean boy. His business interests in Mexico probably will prevent his ever coming again to Mesopotamia to engage actively in the blood feud that his nephews have inherited. But all of his life he will remember the perfidy of the unspeakable Tork who because of a trifling murder drove him to exile and wealth and thus prevented his being present to be massacred with his loved ones.

Chapter Sixteen

BABYLON IS FALLEN

Ishtar the Goddess Is Dead

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down, yea; we wept, when we remembered Zion. . . . O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

—PSALM 137.

Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!

—REVELATION, CHAPTER XVIII, 16.



BABYLON," wrote Isaiah the prophet, "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and the ostriches shall dwell there and the he-goats shall dance there. And the wolves shall cry in their castles and the jackals in the pleasant palaces. . . . 'I will also make it a possession for the porcupine and pools of water. . . . And I will sweep it with the besom of destruction,' saith the Lord of Hosts."

Quoting which Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, the Assyriologist, appends this picture from Layard's "Nineveh and Babylon":

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“To the vast mound of Babel succeed long, undulating heaps of earth, bricks and pottery. Other shapeless heaps of rubbish cover for many an acre, the face of the land. On all sides, fragments of glass, marble, pottery and inscribed brick are mingled with that peculiar nitrous and blanched soil which, bred from the remains of ancient habitations, checks or destroys vegetation and renders the site of Babylon a naked and a hideous waste. Owls start from the scanty thickets and the foul jackal skulks through the furrows.”

The prophesy has been fulfilled. The “beauty of the Chaldean’s pride” has vanished and it is probable that in all the world there is no such picture of desolation as here where the hanging gardens marched definitely toward heaven and the great Euphrates ran as man willed it to run between dikes of brick and under water gates of brass.

Babylon is some fifty miles southwest of Baghdad along a desert trail that gives no hint of the days when this land was the most fertile in the known world and yielded the crops that made the region the envy of the nations. One rides on and on over depressions scarcely recognizable as the canals that they once were and so comes at last to the mounds that rise out of the flats of the Euphrates to mark the grave of the splendid and terrible city.

The site, despite the explorations of the Germans, and the adjacent works of British and American archæologists, is little different from the Babylon that Layard described. The “lion and the lizzard” still keep its courts, and pools of water settling in its public baths have come of recent years to carry out to the last letter the doom foretold by Isaiah.

Something of the Babylon that was, has been brought to light by the excavators—enough to give an inkling of the splendor it must have had at the time when the busy

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Cyrus was turning aside the river that he might break through its otherwise impregnable defense, and the fatal hand was sketching on the wall of Belshazzar's great hall the message of what was about to happen to him.

One may stand on the mount of the citadel and gaze along the Sacred Way to the ruined temple of the forgotten Ishtar and reconstruct in his mind the city of brick that lined it—the straight streets that ran across and beneath it and the daring concepts of masonry that rose out of the mass to inspire the populace and amaze the traveler.

In point of foundation there is probably more of the outline of a city disclosed here than at Palmyra. And yet there is no comparing the two places. Weird beauty clings to the Palmyra in the cleanly outline of its pillars when the night blots out the desert or when the colors of dawn play about the portico of the Temple of the Sun. But there is none of that here.

One does not need to be told that a prophet once forecast that the curse of God would fall on this place. One sees the curse in every tumbled brick of it. There is terror in the atmosphere of the city for Occidental as well as for the Arab who stands afar off and watches him with troubled eyes. And the tints with which the day drops quickly into night serve only to paint its mysterious deeps with a more impenetrable purple and lave its crumbling walls in a suggestive red.

In the days of Babylon's prime, when Nebuchadnezzar had lifted its skyline out of the plain with the broad heights of its stepped temple towers, and planted growing things on the tops of his massive buildings, it is probable that this was the most impressive if not the most beautiful spot in the world. Probably a million people crowded its streets in a vast pageantry that time has never duplicated.

The river, manacled with a thousand canals and forced to do the bidding of its masters, came down into Chaldea

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with constant volume and unchanging beauty and slid under the brass gates to move through Babel in a deep channel under bridges of tile and marble when vines dipped down to trail in the water. Walls so thick that none of the engines of antiquity might hope to breach them rose out of the water to heights beyond the reach of scaling ladders. Miles farther the river slipped out once more under another brass gate and turned dizzily into the ditches that made the present desert a series of green fields all the way to the Persian Gulf.

Trees grew here then—not the parched palms that struggle for a foothold on the edge of the temperamental river—but trees such as one sees now by the Barada in Damascus. And there is evidence that inside the city were parks like the temple groves where of an evening or on a holiday, the people of Babylon might gather for their simple recreation. Flowers were planted along the marble pavement of the sacred way as an added honor to the God Marduk whose processions passed over it.

At one end of the Sacred Way a broad gate, barred at night by portals of thick brass, gave onto the quays of the Euphrates and in bas-relief on the bricks of the gate were figures of strange animals—slim and graceful, unlike anything else under the sun, save in the art of the skillful sculptor who designed them.

Near the gates were the baths and if one may judge from what remains of them they were among the most splendid structures of an advanced civilization. They were broad—and vaulted—probably enameled with barbaric tints inside and out. Their domes must have risen to heights well over the housetops. Their basements went far down into the moist sands and springs flowed through tiled aqueducts to freshen their broad pools.

The Sacred Way itself was about a story above the commercial pavements of the city and was carried along between lofty temples past the palace of Balthazzar. . . .

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Past the hanging gardens in which the great Nebuchadnezzar had sought to imitate the mountains of Iran to allay the homesickness of a Kurdish wife.

At the end of the way farthest from the river the groves of Ishtar spread out under the shadow of the Ziggurat—the step temple—built in honor of the goddess of love. And here in cool shadows the priestesses of the temple practiced their allurements and earned the fees that the goddess demanded.

For miles on all sides of the temple rose the homes of the populaces—great brick piles without windows, closely crowded and densely packed—as homes of the Orient always have been packed—with families and their household animals and their slaves.

Here and there rose the terraces of other temples out of green patches that marked the sacred parks and on the far horizon stretched the ceintures that insured the peace of the nation.

The ships of the ancient world—red-sailed craft from Phœnicia, queer proas from the far islands—tied up at the docks along the Euphrates. Caravans from Cathay, embassies from Persia, and wanderers from nowhere, clamored for admittance at the gates to the north. Great armies drilled in the fields along the road to Kish. Fleets sailed out to ports of adventure across the deserts to the south. The treasure of India, the tribute of Persia were laid at the feet of the man who sat in the broad throne room of the palace at Borsippa west of the river and south of the great market place. And this was Babylon, “the glory of kingdoms” that is now no more.

The German excavators who brought a comprehensive sight of Babylon back to the world after nearly three thousand years have unearthed much besides the historical tablets that tell what sort of a town this was.

The animals that flanked the great gate are exposed once more to the light and cast baleful eyes upon inquisi-

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tive folks in queer costumes who come to look at them. The rubbish has been removed basket by basket from the baths. The throne room of Balthazzar, scene of the banquet that preceded the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, is laid out to view—a bare skeleton beside the pyramidal foundations that tradition has identified as the remains of the hanging gardens. The broken flags of the Sacred Way—stripped now of the marble that spread the fame of the street wherever travelers were wont to gather in the inns and market places—come to an abrupt ending near the crushed foundations of the shrine of love. Here more than elsewhere in the terrible upheaval of brick is the desolation of Babylon made evident. Archæologists may quarrel with the suggestion that Ishtar was the principal deity of Chaldea. Written records may show the continuing popularity of Bel Marduk and the numerous gods who came up out of the lower desert when Hammurabi linked together the scattered components of the empire. But in the spirit if not in the physical glory, Ishtar has always personified the Orient and the queer religions that rose out of the Land of the Two Rivers. She is more than the patron of Love as an Occidental thinks of love. She is Ishtar, the sensuous, the goddess of primitive passion, and though her shrine be smashed forever the East still pays her homage. With Ishtar destroyed Babylon is no more.

Across the desert one may make out the lone point of the Birs Nimrud which commentators have classified as the original tower of Babel mentioned in the Bible. It is interesting to note here that Babil, the common name for the city of Babylon, is a translation of a Sumerian word meaning "Gate of the God." The Jewish commentators in mentioning it play on the word Babel, meaning "confusion," and so picture in the very name of the tower the chaos that came of its building. There on the horizon it stands as it did when the ambitious sons of the plains

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sought to thrust it up to heaven, still reaching out to the skies but yearly drooping farther and farther from its goal.

On the side of the town looking toward the Tigris one may discern other mounds similar to El Kasr, the one which has been excavated. It is reasonable to suppose that they in time will be forced to yield up further information concerning these people, who until a half century ago were as mysterious as the ancient Mayas. Men from a world that had not yet seen the sunlight when Babylon was rising from the slime of the marshes have torn from the ruins the secrets of a language that is no longer spoken by a human tongue. They have learned its pronunciation, and its grammar, and have traced the changing forms in the script with which it was styled on cylinders and tablets. They have put into books that may be bought for a silver piece or two, in almost any civilized capital, the mysteries of a religion that only the priestly caste was allowed to know in the days when this language was really a language instead of a laboratory study. Babylon the dead is being resurrected again through a magic more wonderful than the most sanguine of the Chaldeans would have dared to prophesy.

The ruins which the twentieth century visitor finds strewn before him, date for the most part to the rebuilding campaign of Nebuchadnezzar, who found the city in ashes after he had finally succeeded in breaking the might of Assyria, the power to the north. It is astonishing to find the trade-mark of the emperor on every fragment of tile that emerges from the rubbish heaps. . . . "I am Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon; I paved the Babel way with blocks of Shadu stone for the procession of the great lord Marduk. Oh Marduk, Lord, grant long life."

Even more astonishing—when one's eyes become used to the terrific brightness of the sun—is the extent of the plan on which the city was laid out. The throne room of the palace, for instance, is some 200 feet long and

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80 feet wide and it was arched with a vault that would be something of an engineering feat even nowadays.

There were many stories concerning the erection of this palace—most of them rivaling the djinn myths of Palmyra—for centuries after it had ceased to exist. Wiseacres in nations that were yet to be built after Babylon had died used to scoff at the simple faith expressed by Josephus in his account of it: "And after he had in a becoming manner walled the city and adorned its gates gloriously, he built another palace before his father's palace but so that they joined to it; to describe the vast height and immense riches of which would perhaps be too much for me to attempt; yet so large and lofty as they were, they were completed in fifteen days." The suggestion that a building of brick and stone with walls thick enough to support arches with an eighty-foot span could have been built in fifteen days seemed even more preposterous when the Germans had separated the remains of the building from its bed of rubbish and ceramic fragments. And then, just when Josephus and Bescrus had been thoroughly discredited, somebody unearthed the great brickyard that was Nebuchadnezzar's diary and with it the tile describing the building of the palace. The length and breadth of it are described with pride and then follows this astounding and unornamented declaration: "And this I built in fifteen days."

If indeed this palace was erected in fifteen days, the picture of the building activity that produced the new Babylon comes out of the past with amazing clearness—the plain is swarming with legions of slaves and architects who drove them like animals to their work. It is the vision of the building of the Great Pyramid all over again. Babylon is a limitless ant hill governed by an organization which for sheer efficiency probably has never been surpassed in the known history of the world.

Something of this was realized by the great French

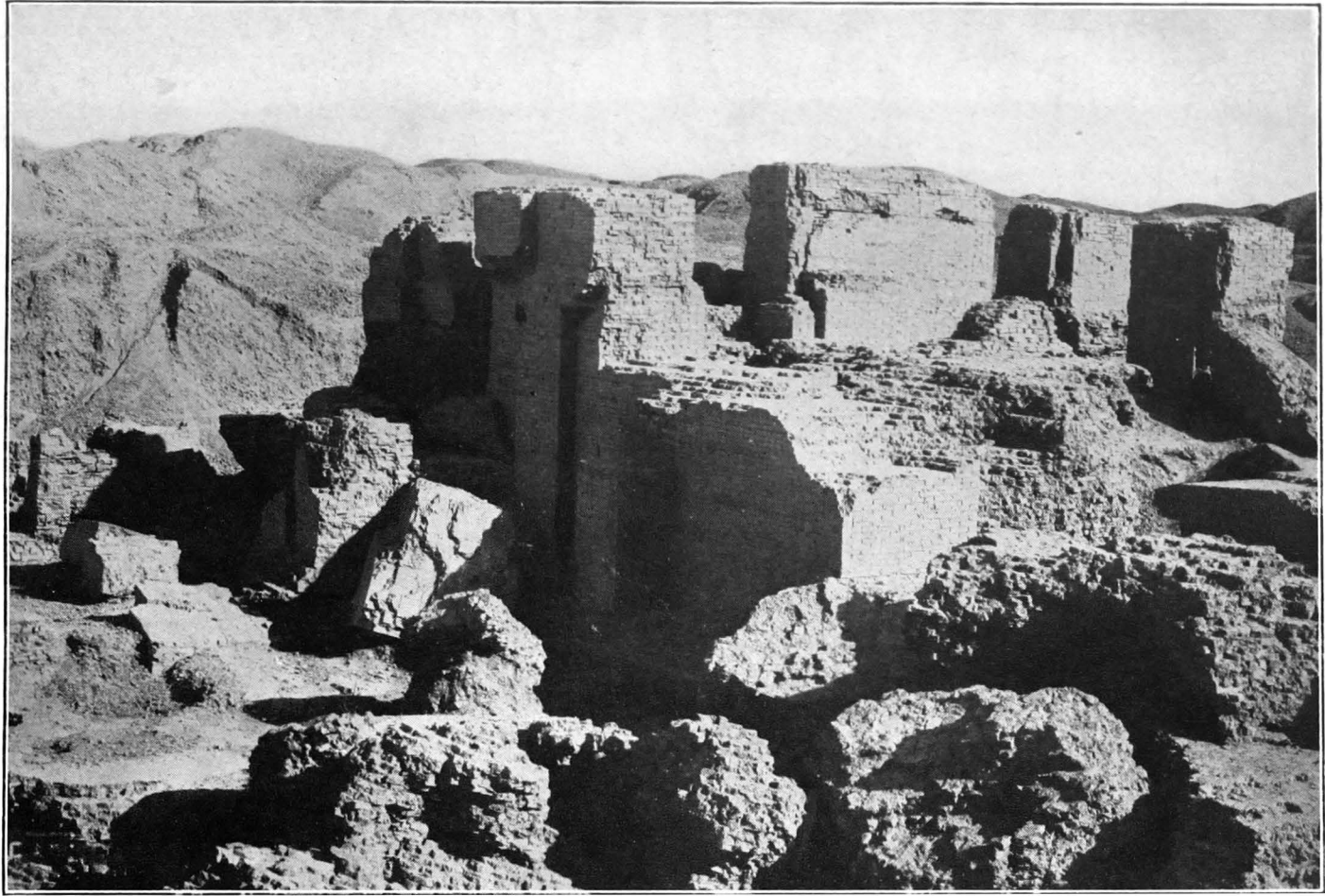
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architect and archæologist Violett-Le Duc when he wrote his history of the habitations of man. He traced the arch—probably the most remarkable achievement of human building craft—to Babylonian invention and in following its use through the centuries he pointed out that until the beginning of European civilization vaulted architecture was always significant evidence of the employment of slaves. Cheap labor alone made possible the massive erections that remain to attest the glories of nations that are remembered not as slave drivers but as potent forces in the spread of culture.

Dr. Koldewey, who for fifteen years led the army of workmen that broke through the hundred-foot crust on top of the ruins, suggests that the shape of Babylon as a whole may have suggested the outline of the step temples that dotted the plains about it.

The defense of the city started with the abrupt rise of glazed brick from the surface of the river. Toward Nebuchadnezzar's palace rose a secondary defense wall with a moat about it. This wall was probably twenty feet in thickness and also built of burnt brick. Some analysis of the plan suggested by such foundations as have been uncovered has led to a theory that this wall may have been about sixty feet in height. Beyond that was another wall, thicker and higher and so on to a sixth enceinte with towers on it stretching into the sky to heights as great as that of any building ever erected by man, thrusting into the clear air an artificial mountain that probably was visible for fifty miles in any direction. Herodotus estimates the height of the inner defenses above the street level of the city as 335 feet, and modern discovery is tending to the theory that he was well informed.

The height of the ruins uncovered by the German excavators is a little more than twenty feet, for burnt brick was valuable building material in a region where rock and wood are scarce. For hundreds of years Babylon has



BABYLON THE MIGHTY STIRS ITS DUSTY BONES

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been a quarry. The sacred city of Kerbela is built largely of its filched bones. Its bricks are found in Baghdad, and the entire town of Hillah, not far from the ruins, is erected of materials bearing the signature of Nebuchadnezzar.

When Seleucus Nicator founded his capital at Seleucia near Baghdad, after the death of Alexander the Great, it is more than likely that he preceded his removal of the Babylonian population with a wholesale wrecking campaign. For Nebuchadnezzar's bricks are to be found also in his chariot ruts and in the remnant of Chosroes' great palace that stands at Ctesiphon across the Tigris.

The line of the Sacred Way is still well marked, though its embellishments are gone. None of the bronze and marble decorations that were a part of it remains. The only ornament left in the terrible desolation of Babylon is in the delicate sculpturing of the animals on the gate of Ishtar and they remain probably because the wall in which they are inlaid was too deeply buried to be reached by Arab ravishers.

There is art in these reliefs quite aside from their pictorial worth. For the most part they are made up of from four to six tiles and apparently were molded into the brick before it was fired and glazed. The matching of fine lines evidenced in the ensemble is a feat of ceramics that could not be bettered to-day.

The picture of the city that was, is to be gained in the libraries dug out of the débris rather than in the pitiful remains of palace and temple in which they were found.

“Babylon I made glorious that men might behold,” declared Nebuchadnezzar in one of his tablets. “The great walls of Babylon I put into good condition and the walls of its moat with mortar and burnt brick I made mountain high and constructed it about the city to strengthen it. Terrible bronze bulls and serpents about to strike I placed in its great gates.

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“At the upper tower of the gate of Ishtar from the bank of the Euphrates up to this gate, I built a great fortress of mortar and burnt brick to strengthen the side of the city. Its foundation I placed down deeply in the depths of the waters of the abyss on the level of the sea. Its top I raised mountain high.

“At that time the palace—my royal abode—I rebuilt in Babylon. Great cedars I brought from the beautiful forest of Lebanon to roof it. A great wall of mortar and burnt brick I threw about it.

“The great gates of both Imgur Bel and Nimitti Bel were too low because of the grading of the streets of Babylon. At their entrances I tore down those gates and upon the water level I laid a foundation of mortar and burnt brick. With burnt brick and brilliant blue glaze tiles on which bulls and serpents were engraved I made them skillfully. Great cedars for their covering I framed. The wings of the gates of cedar I overlaid with bronze. . . . Those great gates I ornamented richly to the astonishment of men.

“In order that the throes of battle against Imgur Bel, the wall of Babylon, might not draw nigh, for 490 cubits of ground along Nimitti Bel, the outer wall of Babylon, I made with brick and mortar two huge moat walls, a fortress high as a mountain I made. Between them a construction of burnt brickwork I erected. Upon the top of it I built a great abode for my royal dwelling place. I made it high. To the palace of my father I joined it. In a favorable month upon a lucky day I placed its foundation upon the breast of the abyss. Its top I raised like a rocky cliff. In fifteen days its work I completed. A frieze of blue glazed stone around its top I caused to be laid. A great wall of mortar and burnt brick as a mountain I threw about it and beside the brick wall a huge wall

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of immense stones, the booty of the mountains and like a mountain I raised its top.

“. . . Babylon I made strong as a cliff.

“Ezida the original temple, beloved by the Divine Nebo . . . in Borsippa, I built. For its ornamentation I used great cedar beams. Beams of durable oak and thick cedar beams I covered with shining gold. . . . With radiant gold I covered them and with jewels I adorned them.

“As to the six side chapels of the shrine of Nebo with cedar beams I made their roofs and I adorned them with lustrous silver. Giant bulls I made of bronze work and clothed them with white marble. I adorned them with jewels and placed them at the gates of the shrine.

“Thresholds, doorposts, cornices, wings of the doors of the gate of the shrine I clothed with dazzling gold. With tiles of bright silver the aisles of the shrine and the path of the temple I constructed. Doors of oak and cedar I overlaid with lustrous silver and within all the gates I fastened them. The shrine and the chapels and the thresholds of the temple I ornamented with work of shining silver. The cedar roofing of the shrines I overlaid with silver.

“For the departure and entering in of the honored child Nebo when he visits the inner city Suanna I made it shine as the day. That no former king had done for Nebo, my Lord, I did it with pomp.”

His description of the ceremonial way is detailed and graphic:

“What no former king had done for Nebo my Lord I did magnificently. From Ishtar-sakipat-tebisa to the shining gate, Ishtar-lamassi-ummani-su, the wide street, the processional street of the great Lord Mar-

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duk to the entrance gate of Nebo into Esagila, the wide street, the processional way of the royal son Nebo, I graded up with a high grading and with mortar and tile I made the road smooth. . . .

“ . . . On the boat of the Gan-ul canal, his radiant bark, I turned my eyes and I caused it to be constructed. The cabins of oak and the two high masts of cedar I covered with gold and shining ornamentation. At the time of the Zagmuk on New Year's day for the Akitu feast in honor of Marduk, divine lord of the gods, Nebo his strong and faithful son comes in procession from Borsippa to Babylon. In the bark of the Gan-ul canal which is adorned with riches and laden with luxuries I placed tents of brocade and a brilliant baldachin on either side for his pompous journey. I put in a spectacle for all men.”

Such was the Babylon that Cyrus took when he passed under the brass gates. Such was the luxury amid which Alexander the Great came to the sudden end of conquest and life at the same time. . . .

High over the green pools and the echoing moats swings the terrific sun of a Mesopotamian noon. The mirage is spreading its lakes behind Borsippa and dust clouds are hanging over the palms near the river. Four Arab boys from Hillah march solemnly along the Sacred Way retailing a smattering of information that they gathered from their fathers who worked in the German excavation camp. Unidentified creatures slink away in the deep shadows of the pits with weird rustling noises. And the corpse of Babylon steams in a terrific heat. . . . On every hand chaotic piles of brick and crockery and beyond as far as the eye can see through the shivering light, mounds such as this one way—dreary sepulchers of a dead city. And that is Babylon as it is—a place of silence and inexpressible dread.

Chapter Seventeen

THE SWORD OF ISKANDER

*The Adventure of Gilgamesh and the Adventure of
Nimrod the Mighty Hunter*

*Oh, come, dear Zir-ri, tune your lyres and lutes,
And sing of love, with chastest, sweetest notes,
Of Accad's goddess, Ishtar, Queen of Love,
And Izdubar, with softest measures move.*

—TABLET OF GILGAMESH (Hamilton
Translation).



It is normal enough that the residents of Hillah should feel the spell of the great capital that lies buried to the north of the town. It seems probable that many of the present residents could trace an ancestry straight back to the days when the priests of Nebo walked on the silver tiles at Borsippa. It is within the possibilities that the blood of Nebuchadnezzar flows in the veins of some of them. Perhaps—had there been no Xerxes or Seleucus Nicator—this boy in the lead of the volunteer guides might be sitting now, an oriental despot, in the resplendent throne room of the castle whose remains we have just passed ruling a populace that might be happier and certainly could be no more wretched.

“The djinns live in this place,” observed Hassan the Arab boy with fervor. “It is they who keep Babylon as it is and prevent the restoration of the empire that would give my people riches and fine dwellings.

“My people used to think that it was this hill that

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was heaped over the sleeping place of Nimrod and Gilgamesh. But they were mistaken. It must be one of the other hills."

"Gilgamesh?"

"Yes, he is sleeping here. He cannot die. Some day he will rise again and the desert will be turned into green fields covered with palaces.

"He will rise up and shake the bricks from the top of the place where they laid him and he will dig under another mound until he has found the sword of Iskander. . . ."

"The sword of Iskander!" There is a thrill in that. The Orient from Persia to the fountained courts of Damascus has made a fetish of that famous sword—a symbol of resurrection, the physical resurrection of limitless empires and towered cities.

Iskander, as one has learned who has dwelt a day or two in the East, is Alexander who died where Balthassar had died in that palace "mountain high" which now is a haunt of the "strange beasts from the islands" and the stranger wraiths of a day when the world was thousands of years younger. There is a legend that when he died his sword—the sword with which he cut the Gordian knot and insured himself a success in his conquests—was taken away by a priest of Bel and hidden in the foundations of a temple. What temple? Old Iran looks for it in the hills above Teheran. Armenia dreams of it. Alexandria knows that it is somewhere in the delta of the Nile. But wherever it is the Oriental nations know that some day it will be found and on that day great miracles will take place on the face of the earth.

As for Gilgamesh he is more definitely placed and of more importance locally for he is peculiarly the creature of Babylonia.

Gilgamesh, so the story goes in the tablets of Asshur-Bani-Pal of Assyria, was a demigod who ruled in Erech.

The Sword of Iskander

Just how he came to Erech is not known but the first tablet describes the condition of the town during a siege which may reasonably be supposed to have been conducted by Gilgamesh in search of a palace to exercise his manifold talents:

*“The gods of strong-walled Erech are changed to flies
And buzz about the streets.
The spirits of strong-walled Erech are changed to serpents
And glide into holes.
For three years the enemy besieged Erech,
And the doors were barred and the bolts were shot.
And Ishtar did not raise her head against the foe.”*

And if, indeed, it was Gilgamesh the hero who was the cause of all this epidemic of flies and serpents it is not strange that Ishtar proved to be so deficient in her duties. For Ishtar was a goddess who was likewise a woman and she had fallen in love with this fair-haired youth.

At any rate Gilgamesh took the town and was as popular with his new subjects as anyone would suspect him of having been. The folks of Erech called upon the goddess Aruru to construct a new demigod who would rid them of this heroic pest.

Aruru manufactured one Enkidu. Whereupon Gilgamesh met the situation by sending a woman to seduce Enkidu. Gilgamesh seems to have had a fine skill in strategy. The woman practiced arts which the tablets show to have been everything that Babylonian women have been credited with and so won him over to the friendship of Gilgamesh.

Things were complicated somewhat by the ardor of Ishtar whose virtues do not seem to have included ladylike restraint. She offered Gilgamesh a chariot “of lapis lazuli and gold, with wheels made of gold and horns made of diamonds.” And Gilgamesh who was a canny soul re-

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membered the way she had of destroying those who loved her and he declined the offer.

The next tablet tells how Ishtar sent a great bull to destroy Gilgamesh and how the hardy Enkidu held the animal by the tail while his friend disemboweled it. The goddess was terribly angry and she cursed Gilgamesh from the topmost tower of strong-walled Erech, a process so simple that it seems strange she had forgotten it. Enkidu laughed at her and threw odd bits of the bull at her cursing place and after that things started to go bad for Enkidu.

On the other hand the princes and priests and the noble ladies of Erech made a triumphal procession for Gilgamesh singing the refrain:

*"Who is glorious among heroes?
Who is mighty among men?"*

And answering their own query with a reply that in view of his bull-fighting abilities seemed reasonable enough:

*"Gilgamesh is glorious among heroes.
Gilgamesh is mighty among men."*

Almost immediately after that Enkidu died. But he chose to do it on a broken tablet so the manner of his passing must forever remain a mystery. Gilgamesh then went a-journeying with the aid of the Moon-god seeking advice on how he might escape the fate of his friend. And he crossed the mountains and he passed the sun, and he crossed the seas to the waters of death and did other feats of travel. And then he found out that he had made the trip in vain. His ancestor Tsit-napishtim informed him of something that even the lower grades of intelligence in Erech must have already known—that every man some day must die. And to prove it Enkidu was called back from the underworld to describe the condition of the dead.

The tablets come to an end at that point and the further

The Sword of Iskander

exploits of Gilgamesh might be lost forever were it not for the younger sons of Chaldea who sit by the dusty doorsteps of Hillah and yearn for better days. . . .

It was here, too, that Etana fell if one understands aright the peculiar pronunciation of Hassan's English. No one may guess whether the legend is one grounded in the mossy traditions of Hillah or merely the result of the war during which, British flyers say, many a more recent Etana learned that landings were difficult where Babylon had stood.

Etana, a character of long standing in Babylonian myth, was the first aviator. It came about in this wise:

It had been forecast by the gods that Etana's wife was to bear a son and Etana went out into the fields to look for a potent herb that would make her lot the easier. He did not find it and appealed to Shamash, the sun god.

"Shamash," so Hassan reported, "told this Etana to ask an eagle for it.

"'An eagle?'" asked Etana.

"'Yes, an eagle,' said Shamash. 'To the very good eagle of this place you must go now and ask it him.'

"So Etana go to the eagle and ask it him.

"And the snake was very angry. You ask it, 'What snake?' Then I tell you. Once is the snake the eagle's friend. But the eagle eat the snake's family. That is the snake. That is why it is angry. The snake sting the eagle. The eagle is weak when comes Etana.

"But the eagle say he will take Etana to heaven where is goddess knows about the herb.

"'Catch on,' says the eagle. Etana catches eagle's feathers. They go up. One, two hours, they go up. All the land is very little. All the water is like one drop. Below. Far below.

"Still they go up, up. Comes very dark. Etana is afraid.

"Etana says: 'We go home now.' But the eagle dies

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and it is very far up, I think, up there in the sky. They fall down—right there by the old canal. What happens to the little baby. I do not know. Malesh. It is no matter.”

So through the midsummer afternoon Hassan babbled on about deities that were dying when the armies of the middle east were bringing the Jews here into their long captivity. His Moslem faith seemed to be in no wise impaired by his seemingly atavistic belief in them.

He told all the old yarns—how Ishtar went down into the underworld and left the mortal creation without love—how Adaps, son of the first man, broke the wings of the south wind and sought for immortality—how Nimrod, mighty hunter before the Lord, quarreled with Abraham and fought with deity. And Chaldea seemed to be breathing there in its brick-piled grave as its cultural specters shook themselves and awoke at the calling of their names. . . .

Chapter Eighteen

MODESTY

The Adventure of the Old Woman and the Lady with the Loosened Veil

*Leila, when e'er I gaze on thee
My altered cheek turns pale
While upon thine, sweet maid, I see
A deepening blush prevail.*

—CALIPH RADHI BILLAH.



WE rode down toward Kerbela—the Jewish “boots” of the Maude Hotel. The Moslem taxi driver, Ahmed the Teller of Tales and the Christian admirer of the late Scheherezade. In front the desert stretched out to the lakes of the mirage. Behind a haze was making a pastel of the blue and silver and white of Baghdad’s skyline.

It was a strange exhibition. Ishak the “boots” who spoke no English had asked to make the trip as an interpreter. It was Saturday and therefore a holiday and he was radiant with the spotless white of the Sabbath. Normally Ishak was a handsome man, tall and straight as an Arab Sheikh and dignified beyond what one might expect of his twenty-five years of age. He was probably the most picturesque shoe shiner in all Iraq. To-day, what with gold raiment and a new responsibility, he might have been the prime minister of Feisal’s court or at least a wealthy goldsmith. After presenting his request to go a-voyaging to the holy shrines of the Mohammedan—a request put into writing for him by one of the Chaldeans

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at the hotel—he sat back in the rear seat and made remarks in Arabic.

The Moslem driver who recognized him instantly as a Yahud sneered at him openly. But it was apparent that any animosity between them would be confined to an interchange of harsh glances—at least until we came to Kerbela—so there seemed to be no need for changing the personnel of the party. Complications are all that make any situation interesting.

“Somebody ought to get killed in Kerbela,” observed Ahmed hopefully. “I wonder if the poor Yahud knows where he is going.”

We asked him and were made aware that Ishak knew where he was going. He had been there before and had learned that in the apathy that had fallen over Islam after the war a Yahud was just as welcome in a Moslem holy place as a Kafir.

“Well, anyway, you may be glad that he has come along,” observed Ahmed resignedly. “Whether they kill him or not he will serve to center the attention of the driver whom I believe to be a cutthroat. . . .”

So we rode down toward Kerbela with joy in our hearts while tricks of the morning sun made the desert a magnificent thing—a floor of gold beneath a casque of molten blue enamel.

Beyond the Tigris and beyond the canal that skirts the desert lie the old Turkish earthworks bulking high as the ruins of Babylon with the pits of the cannon still plainly marked. Beyond that the road is another streak across the plain with a railroad track wandering off from it haphazardly and signs in English directing the traveler on his way to the Euphrates towns and points in the desert above Kish and Babylon.

In another mile the skyline seemed to be embroidered with camels—thousands of camels as far as the eye could reach. There were camels in the foreground too and over

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the wilderness until it seemed that the landscape was made up of them—a shaking, rolling, undulating brown landscape. It was only after careful looking that one became aware of the camel drivers—a great company of herdsmen bringing up the rear of this strange procession on its march to the west.

One hears much about the freedom of the Bedouin—the magnificent individualism which he buys so cheaply at the cost of all the comforts that make up a modern civilization. As a matter of fact, there is no creature under the sun who is so much a slave to the sources of his livelihood as the gay and carefree Bedouin.

Inasmuch as man is naturally a lazy animal, it seems unlikely that the nomad is propelled in his wanderings by an innate urge. Were he changing his scenery while moving about, it would be quite another matter, but there is very little difference between one desert hot spot and another. Were he kept in motion by nothing save his own whim in the matter it seems reasonable to suppose that eventually his fear of the wastes and his memory of hardships would cause him to halt for good at the edge of some convenient water hole and let the rest of the world go by.

So it seems we must search further for the cause of the Bedouin's unrest and we find it in the camel. The camel is the food, clothing and transportation of the desert tribes. But whatever its virtues, and they are said by intimates of the camel to be numerous, the animal has to be fed and the prickly gorse of the desert grows over a continent of space but in scattering patches. The herd browses about one pasture ground until the food is all eaten up and then it moves on to the next patch. Thus it will be seen that the wild, untrammled life of the freedom-loving Arab is not all that it is represented to be in the cinema.

The town Arabs, scorned by the Bedouins, live their little lives in crowded little villages and have to answer

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to the laws of some man set up as their ruler. The Bedouin, on the other hand, lives in a tattered tent and is ruled by the camel. Where the camel goes he goes. When the camel dies he dies. And in the meantime he blisters by day and freezes by night for a great ideal which the scenario writers call Liberty and the Bedouin calls something else. If Liberty is a weird survival of the prehistoric with long wiggly legs and a hump on its back, then the Bedouin is a true worshiper of Liberty.

Along the Kerbela road we counted five thousand of these animals. Ahmed the Teller of Tales said that the herd was not exceptionally large. There would be many thousand more of them within a few weeks, he said. The pasture lands of the north had been exhausted and the tribes were moving southward to regions where the spiny gorse grew in greater abundance.

Somewhere beyond the old Turkish earthworks we came upon the old woman lying in the road.

The driver turned out of the trail a little to keep from running over her but gave no hint that he intended to stop. When it was suggested that he wait a minute he halted in obvious surprise, muttering volubly as he reached for the brake.

"He says that she probably is dead," observed Ahmed.

"Didn't he intend to find out?" I asked.

"No," said Ahmed. "Alive she is no concern of his. Dead she is obviously the worry of the civil police." And he showed by his manner that he considered this quite the logical analysis of the affair.

But we halted and Ahmed got out to see what had happened to the woman. She was lying almost across the trail, face down, a huddle of black and gray. A pottery water bottle was stretched out in front of her, apparently empty.

As Ahmed approached her she raised her head and her veil fell away slightly to disclose a face wrinkled and old and marked with pitiful fatigue.

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"You seem tired, my mother," said Ahmed.

"And indeed I am," replied the old woman, sitting up with difficulty in the camel tracks. "When one gets old one underestimates one's strength and the way between Baghdad and Iskandria is very long."

"Poor old lady," commented Ahmed. "Only a mile on her journey and all gone with the weakness."

"Tell her to get in," I directed, and Ahmed, after considering the matter, conveyed the message.

"My mother," he said, "if you will honor this poor hack with your presence we shall take you to Iskandria. We shall get you over the entire fifteen miles in less than half an hour."

The old woman demurred.

"Is it permitted that I a woman should ride in one of those inventions of the Kafir," she asked. "I think I had better walk."

"Forget your scruples," counseled Ahmed. "No one will know that you have made this journey and surely it will be better to get back to your home and the presence of your many loving and dutiful sons than to lie here and die."

"I do not know what to do," she answered. . . . "The way is long and hot and yet on the other hand you offer me a place in your caravan. Such courtesy deserves recognition, my son. I shall ride with you, however unseemly my conduct might appear in the eyes of a strict disciplinarian."

She clambered into the car and sat in the front seat, brave despite the dangers of speed and the ominous roar of the devilish mechanism under the tin nose of the beast. The ancient instincts of the Arab lady were strong within her and she did not utter a word of complaint.

She even seemed pleased when the driver pulled up just outside the mud walls of Iskandria that she might alight without attracting too much attention.

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"I must thank you, my sons," she said, including all the occupants of the car—including Ishak the Yahud—in a sweeping gesture with the water bottle. "You have gladdened the heart of an old woman and have given me a very pleasant outing. And the time has not been wasted either—for it is only fifteen miles to Baghdad and I shall reach there easily before night."

"Baghdad," gasped Ahmed, shaken for the moment out of his Oriental calm. "But you were almost inside the gate of Baghdad when we found you in the road."

"Truly," admitted the old woman. "I had walked from Iskandria as I thought you understood."

"Then why did you come back here with us?"

"It is probably something that I should not tell. But I have always wanted to ride in one of these strange new camels," she confessed. And she raised her wrinkled chin shamelessly as she started out once more onto the desert trail. . . .

It turned out that this was the only adventure of the journey for the people of Kerbela had apparently become so used to the comings and goings of inquisitive kafirs and even to the appearance of Jews in splendid raiment, that they paid no attention to our caravan. The city itself, save for the fact that it is another of those reincarnations of old Babylon scattered about the desert in great profusion since the Arab learned that it was easier to dig into Nebuchadnezzar's store of brick than to make his own, is little different from the other holy cities of Shia Islam. One comes away from it, however, with something very near to sympathy for the Mohammedans who shed real tears during the ceremonies of Muharram for Hussein and his little son killed in sight of these walls.

The visitor from the West is surprised to note the emotion displayed by the Arab when the reader in the ceremonial quavers over the passages describing how Hussein dying of the thirst cried out for water. Here the reason

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for the vividness of the reënactment is not far to seek. Hussein has not been dead more than a thousand years and as a mere religious figure, however important and holy, might be difficult to reconstruct. But the thirst—the terrible danger of the desert—is still here and the sufferings of Hussein and his little son are a poignant, living thing to the sons of Mohamet who have known these things.

The desert lies round about Kerbela, grim, expectant—content to wait as it has waited, centuries, æons, to swallow up this town as it has swallowed the other towns that have dared its violence.

Another woman was traveling when the car rolled onward toward the blue minarets of Baghdad late that afternoon. She was with her husband and other women of his household and her place in the little caravan was astride a small donkey, behind a pannier filled with fagots.

As the car turned abruptly about the old fortifications the donkey shied and the lady lost her balance. Her one-piece dress caught on the pannier. It developed that her veil had been pinned to the dress, for as she slid into the road she looked as Eve might have looked—only dustier.

There was little enough to attract attention about the scene here in the Orient where no regulation concerning proper attire seems to prevent unexpected revealments. The car would have moved on and spared the woman further embarrassment had not the donkey veered suddenly across the road and forced a stop.

And the lady, thoroughly alarmed at her situation, was in complete possession of her faculties. She reached into the chaos of clothing still hanging to the pannier and with one deft snatch seized her veil and drew it across her face. Not till then did she go about the business of quieting the donkey and rescuing the remainder of her attire.

Modesty in the East differs somewhat from the virtue similarly labeled in the West.

Chapter Nineteen

CRIME

The Adventure of the Sarraf and the Vengeance of the Outraged Uncles

. . . *This frail tenement
Belongs to death. No living man has ever
Gone up to heaven—for all are doomed to die—
Some by the sword, the dagger or the spear. . . .*

—FIRDUSI.



ONE of the most surprising things in this surprising country is the evidence that even the most complicated practices in crime are independent of culture and climate. One might expect to discover that murder in Iraq is quite the same as in San Francisco, for after all murder is quite an elemental thing and the taking of a life in one instance differs from the procedure in another only in the tools used and the disposition shown by the killer. There is nothing astonishing in the fact that thievery, prostitution, forgery, and fraud are just as much of a problem in Baghdad as elsewhere in the world. But when one learns that rum-running occupies the attention of the police and that the picking of a pocket with all its elaborate preparation and paraphernalia in Mesopotamia resembles a similar exploit in New York—except for the language used by the victim in shouting for help—one feels free to admit that progress in crime is by no means what one would expect in a highly specialized civilization.

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Most Occidentals who dwell in cities have learned that the picking of a pocket is not what it was when Oliver Twist was learning the business. Nowadays no one man, however skillful, trusts himself to practice this ancient art alone. Our latter-day pickpockets are quite proficient. They can reach into a pocket and pull out a wallet just as deftly as they ever did. But the consensus among our best thieves is that the stealing of a pocketbook counts for nothing if the thief gets caught with it.

Hence the expert instructors of the great Western metropolitan districts have given a great deal of attention to a scheme for promoting quick and undetected exit. Of recent years pickpockets have operated in groups which American argot indicates as "mobs." Generally a "mob" consists of four trained specialists. And it works in this fashion.

Two of the thieves start a fight in the vicinity of the person who is about to lose his pocketbook. In the fight they contrive to jostle him—a procedure of which he is seldom suspicious inasmuch as there seems to be no personal animus in it. While he is being jostled the principal operator picturesquely described as a "dip" picks the pocket. But the "dip" does not attempt to get away from the scene. It is the theory that even the confusion of the fight might not be sufficient to protect him were he to be seen running away. He hands the wallet to the fourth member of the "mob" and that man mingles with the crowd and vanishes when opportunity offers.

Even should the victim discover his loss at once—which seldom happens—he is able to identify only the three men nearest him and it is infrequent that evidence enough to warrant a conviction is found on the person of any of the three. Later the "mob" will convene at a prearranged rendezvous and divide the spoils.

The chief feature of this elaborate scheme in the eyes of criminologists has seemed to be its modernity. Its

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simple efficiency has seemed to possess all the marks of Western thought and resourcefulness. And here in the Baghdad police headquarters one may learn that it not new but old—that the pickpockets of Kish probably were using the same stage setting and personnel four thousand years ago.

Save for the fact that the native costume has no pockets the process is unchanged in any detail. The disturbers jostle the victim, the pickpocket lifts his purse from his girdle and gives it to number four of the band. Number four disposes of it to number five and he to a sixth associate who walks away with it.

It would seem too much for normal credulity to suppose that the system shown here originated in the West as Occidentals have supposed and came into widespread use in Mesopotamia, by reason of its inherent worth. It is much more likely, as the police officials declare, that it originated here, that it was introduced into the West by some of those people who had witnessed its use, and that it was copied without change by the dullwits who live by petty thievery in all of the regions of advanced culture.

But the close link between crime in the East and West is evidenced in other particulars.

In many cities of the United States where coin box telephones are used, bands of fourth-rate criminals have sprung up to make such coin boxes their targets. For a number of reasons, which need not be discussed, these bands are difficult to catch and difficult to convict. As in pocket picking one of the first requisites toward a conviction is to arrest them while they are still carrying the nickels taken from the looted box. Recently one such thief was detected in a Western city just as he was leaving a cigar shop. The proprietor and a number of customers gave chase as did a hundred or more pedestrians. The capture of the thief seemed imminent when he began to obey his basic instincts and rid himself of incriminating

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evidence. By the handful he dropped the stolen nickels to the pavement and so—intentionally or otherwise—he halted the pursuit. The indignant citizenry behind him stopped to pick up the nickels, tripping each other up in the scramble. And the thief escaped.

Substitute "money changer's table" for "telephone coin box" in the foregoing and you have a tale that amused the coffee-houses of Baghdad all last year. A young thief snatched a pile of coins from a money changer and fled toward the North Gate. His escape was brought about by the baiting of his pursuers with coins judiciously dropped and though the trick was sufficiently unusual to excite comment in the coffee booths the records show that it is not without precedent in Iraq. There is nothing new under the sun even in the ways of sin.

Occidental interest in the Orient is built upon a number of factors not the least of which is the close association between the two cultures that existed until the Moors were driven out of Spain. It has been kept alive by the magic of the Arabian Nights, the mystery of the holy cities in the desert and the eternal puzzle of polygamy.

The morality of Islam has been a topic of discussion in the West since the time of the Crusades. Occidental ideas of love and lady worship fostered in the race for hundreds of years, have made it impossible for the Westerner to understand the yashmak, the harem and the general degradation of womankind throughout the East. The term "The Morals of a Turk" has come to be a synonym for "no morals at all" and by Turk we generally have meant any representative of the Moslem culture.

‡ But the proposition is not so simple as all that. If we were to accept the Arab at his face value as a person of no sexual restraint we certainly should be drawing logical conclusions from the evidence. And yet we should be doing him an injustice. His own teachings, and more convincingly the police records, tend to show that he has

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some well-grounded principles and that he lives up to his own standards.

Out on the desert seduction is promptly punished by death; the man for his presumptuousness at avoiding dowry payment; the woman for bringing dishonor on her house. The visitor from that other planet beyond the Mediterranean, remembering the yashmak and the latticed windows, might find himself bewildered at this statement in the case because he might not be able to distinguish between the dishonor that one concocts for himself and the dishonor that is thrust upon him. But anyway the woman is held to have dishonored the family and so she is killed. Frequently members of the seducer's household are also killed. And then the parents or proprietors of the girl who sinned are able to hold their heads up in society once more. It is all very simple when you analyze it.

Mr. Lyell relates such a case. A "sarraf"—money changer—and his wife were found slain in the holy city of Najaf. The house as described in the account was the usual Arab abode and for the most part a one-story structure surrounding a square courtyard with a single second-story room at one end from which a stairway ran down into the court. The "sarraf," stabbed eleven times, was lying on the stairs. It was apparent that he had been in bed when attacked. His wife, fully dressed, was in the courtyard.

Here was manifestly a situation for Zadig, the great Babylonian detective. In its essentials it was just a murder of a type not too uncommon in Iraq. In its details it was baffling. That the wife should have been wandering about the house fully dressed after her husband had retired was contrary to all the etiquette of a land where the yashmak and musharabieh window have so important a place. It might have been advanced that she had killed her husband and in attempting flight had herself been

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killed. But that was merely substituting one mystery for another.

The answer to the riddle came not so much through the skillful detective work of any of the local officials although the unraveling was quickly and efficiently done. The story interest of the tale reaches its climax not so much in the achievement of the police, but in the rediscovery of a savage melodrama that had begun years before the British troops were pounding at the earthworks south of Baghdad.

Two men were picked up in one of the coffee shops of Najaf with blood on their clothes and were taken before the magistrate. Questioned separately each began to throw upon the other the blame for the crime with which they had not yet been charged. Within a very short time it was established definitely that they were the murderers.

"What was your reason for killing the sarraf?" the magistrate demanded. "Was he your enemy?"

"No," replied the more talkative of the two. "We had seen him only once or twice before we acted as agents of justice in his case. And we had never spoken to him."

"Was his wife your enemy?"

"We had never heard of her. This was the way of it. While we were sitting in the coffee bazaar four days ago there came to us two old men asking our service in a holy cause. They explained that it was the will of Allah that the sarraf be removed. We refused at first because we are men of peace and there were other less dangerous ways of serving Allah. But these old men offered us five rupees (\$1.60) and that manifestly put another complexion on the matter.

"We went with them to the house of the sarraf and would have dispatched him quietly without disturbing anyone but he awoke and fought with us. He had got halfway down the steps before we could kill him. That was unfortunate.

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“We left the house and then we remembered the woman. She had seen everything and it was certain that she would talk about it. There was only one thing to be done. We went back and killed her, too. We were not a moment too soon. She had put her clothes on and was starting out of the house to call the police.”

The moral worth of two men who would commit a murder for a dollar and sixty cents was set down by the magistrate at something less than their fee. But it was not considered unusual, for life—the life of somebody else especially—is not held so dearly in the Orient. The murderers gave a description of their employers and told where they might be found.

Soon afterward the two old men were taken into custody.

Their story was startling to the Europeans in the court but caused no surprise among the natives. Many years before, when they were young men, the sarraf had seduced one of their nieces. She was immediately killed. That was simple enough, for she remained within reach of her outraged family.

The sarraf, however, got word that his crime had been discovered and he fled northward. The uncles followed but did not locate him until shortly after the beginning of the World War. By that time he had been drafted into the Turkish army and taken prisoner.

After his discharge from the army the sarraf came to Najaf, found himself a wife there and prospered in his business. He might never have been discovered had not one of the uncles come to the Holy City on a pilgrimage. Despite changes in the appearance of the sarraf, his enemy recognized him, but the recognition was not mutual. The vengeful relative gained his confidence and then sent word back to the family that everything was in readiness for the payment of the old debt.

Because the uncles had grown old and did not feel

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capable of the murder, they hired the two coolies to do their work, and inasmuch as they were generous in fixing the price for the deed there was no further delay in the accomplishment of the revenge.

What with polygamy and simple divorce the marriage relation, such as it is, is pretty well respected in Iraq. The code of the Arab is so flexible that to Western eyes it might appear to be no code at all, but it is rigidly enforced. Mr. Lyell, whose book shows his intimate acquaintance with the life of the people among whom he served, sums up their attitude toward home breakers in one sentence:

“Retribution may be delayed but it will most assuredly come.”

In the same connection is mentioned the kidnaping of a girl named Miriam by a cousin whose suit had been looked upon with disfavor by her father.

The suitor showing more persistence in the matter than is generally characteristic of an Oriental wooing, raided the tents of her tribe and carried her off.

It was a festive engagement party. The tribe to which the girl's father belonged was following its camels from pasturage to pasturage over the desert when the ardent suitor and three somewhat less ardent friends rode suddenly down upon the camp and fought a running battle. Miriam's brother was wounded. Another man, whose relationship is not established in the records, was killed. The girl was lifted into the saddle beside her lover and carried to his tents.

This bit of action, prosaic enough to those who know the desert from pictures of Long Beach, California, portrayed in the enthusiastic cinema, was followed by another less hackneyed in these parts. Miriam's father took the matter before the newly established courts of Iraq.

Because of the tribal law involved the sheikh of the tribe was asked to sit with the court and he called another

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sheikh to counsel him. Miriam and her abductor were brought into court and in the end everything was settled to the satisfaction of all concerned by the payment by the kidnaper of a fixed sum of blood money to the relatives of the men killed and injured during his impetuous wooing and the further payment of the dowry which would have been negotiated had he married the girl according to the book of tribal etiquette.

Women, Mr. Lyell remarks, were almost the only cause in cases of premeditated murder during his service as a political officer. Quarrels over one thing and another quite frequently result in killings but such deeds are generally done on the spur of the moment and with no particular malice. It is the gift of the Arab for epithet that produced the climacteric result rather than any peculiar bloodthirstiness on his part. Thus it frequently happens that arguments which are at first mere differences of opinion on extremely inconsequential subjects are accompanied by a rising of temper and an interchange of compliment that in the end produces a hand-to-hand encounter and perhaps a tribal feud.

To premeditate a murder would be to spend much time in thought upon methods and consequences and, Allah be praised, what good ever came of thought?

Chapter Twenty

ROBBERY INSURANCE

The Adventure of the Forty-Times-Forty Thieves

*Were I ambitious to behold
Increasing stores of treasured gold,
Each tribe that roves the desert knows
I might be wealthy, if I chose. . . .*

—HATEM TAI.



WHEN Harun al Raschid walked the streets of Baghdad and inserted his inquiring nose into the private affairs of the faithful, crime was not entirely unknown in the Caliphate. There was, for instance the sprightly occurrence of the young man whose wife was found cut into little pieces inside a trunk floating on the Tigris. Of a similar note was the matter of the Forty Thieves—the very number of the band being interpreted by some to indicate that thieves in groups of less than forty were not worth the notice of a chronicler.

The "Arabian Nights" are replete with instances that show how the scimitar, quite as much as the ready enchantment, gave a piquancy and zest to life in the golden city. And one pauses to wonder if electric lights and ice have changed the nature of the populace to any great extent.

A lean Englishman, playing Richelieu to the local police force in a purely "advisory" capacity, smiled at the suggestion that Islam might have become better spiritually as it became poorer physically.

"Standards are not the same here as they are in Eng-

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land," he said. "Therefore it is probable that the native conscience is not so often wounded in the commission of acts that would give old Bailey and Brixton a busy season. But the new code of Iraq is largely Occidental and so whatever be the moral intent of the citizenry there is quite enough crime to satisfy the most exacting police official who ever attempted to preserve order.

"Thievery, for instance, is an offense with many nice gradations. Out on the desert plundering expeditions of one tribe against another take on the nature of little wars and are seldom brought to us for adjustment. They do not tend to promote domestic tranquillity but on the other hand they do not attach any great stigma to the perpetrators. In the city there is a very definite resentment on the part of the loser against those who steal from him. But one may hear numerous tales in circulation in the bazaars in which clever thieves are represented as eminently respectable citizens.

"There are two hundred thousand citizens—representative of every race under the sun—crowded into the alleys of Baghdad and by and large they probably are not much better, or worse, than two hundred thousand human beings compressed into a similar area anywhere else. We have cases of robbery and petty theft. Once in a while a corpse is found in the Tigris. And it is reasonable to suppose that many a woman who dies in a harem has had assistance from some of her admiring sisterhood. Poison and harems have been concomitant plagues since concubinage was recognized in Babylon.

"But the town has perhaps more than its share of virtue. It is singularly orderly considering its size and singularly moral considering its opportunity. The narrow, poorly lighted streets afford excellent fields for footpads, but by way of compensation nearly all of Baghdad is in bed an hour or two after sunset, so a robber might wait in the areaways for weeks before encountering a belated victim.

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“The Arab is a liar, a sharp bargainer, not to say a cheat, and sexually loose—but otherwise he isn’t such a bad chap. Viewed strictly from the conning tower of the policeman he could be a lot worse.

“There used to be a lot of dueling here. When some impetuous soul was guilty of a mortal offense, such as cutting the throat of a friend or getting caught in the wrong harem, he frequently started a sizable feud. And even under the Turkish régime any wholesale depopulation of the countryside was looked upon without favor.

“The problem confronting the aggrieved family and volunteer assistants was considerable. Blood guilt was something that called for immediate and drastic action—just as it did in the days when the leading families of lower Arabia formed a syndicate to kill Mohamet so that the responsibility would not fall on any one tribe. But for all that it might be one’s duty to commit a murder the deed was certain to entail disagreeable consequences among the highly civilized Turks.

“So it became the custom to move Eastward. Over the Persian frontier men were still men strong in the simple old faiths and loyal to the lovely old customs. Whatever might be the written laws in Teheran it was a simple matter to dispose of one’s dueling obligations in the hills and receive all due consideration from the police and the merchants who profited by the liberality of the convention.

“Such complications as the removal of corpses were a worry to only half the party. If the duel reached a climax in a sort of mob fight, of course the casualty list was sometimes rich and varied. Frequently the caravans returned to Baghdad corpseless. But there always will be room to bury a true believer in the sacred soil of Iran.

“Since our coming conditions have changed somewhat. Of course I cannot speak from experience, because our jurisdiction does not extend across the Persian frontier and it is more than likely that the border towns are still

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getting the business that once flourished here in Baghdad. But with the importation of Western ideas there seems to be a growing school which holds that it should be the function of the police to keep the citizens of our fair community from killing each other where, as, and if found.

“We have exercised a pretty close supervision of the routes leading Eastward from Baghdad and occasionally we have been able to cajole or threaten some of the aggrieved and dishonored ones and so have postponed the murder indefinitely. Recently we seem to have the upper hand over the situation, but whether that is due to a change of heart on the part of the populace or merely to the condition of the roads it is impossible to say.” He sighed expressively and smiled.

“Whatever way you take it there are certain to be serious consequences to any interference with so old a pastime as dueling. Right now I suppose we are facing international complications. You can easily see how it is.

“Over there beyond the frontier are Persian merchants, innkeepers and ammunition salesmen who have invested fortunes and given their lives to the service of Baghdad feudists. They have acted in the best of faith and have built up a flourishing trade by close attention to business and interest in their customers.

“Then we interfere. We tell these excellent people whose ancestors were living here amid high civilization when our ancestors were leaping from cave to cave in the cold places of the North—we tell them that it is a social error to kill somebody. And they quit going to Persia. And immediately all that investment in dueling grounds and caravansaries and what not is lost. It is a proposition that should not be considered lightly. And if you mention this please don't refer to me by name because my clients in the population might resent so free a discussion of their affairs.”

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"How often do Americans come here?" I asked.

"Not very often," he replied.

And so it brought something of a shock later when an entirely disinterested observer of Baghdad's quaint customs apologized for the condition of his house.

"My man went to Persia last week to fight a duel," he said. "And he hasn't come back. I think I shall have to get a new man."

In Baghdad anything is believable and it is best to believe it.

Over on the Euphrates south of Babylon one may make the acquaintance of the successors of the Forty Thieves, the tribe of the Zhennebat which toils not, neither does it spin, and is considered the best dressed and best fed among the peoples of the river. The Zhennebats are rated throughout the region as idlers, though one who has watched an Arab workman at his work might wonder how they achieved this distinction, and they are men of standing in their community—thieves, all of them, and good ones.

It was Ahmed the Teller of Tales who made the important discovery.

His vivid account of them savored somewhat of his sprightly but no doubt accurate chronicle of the life of Yusuf the Able Assassin, but it was discovered that in this instance at least his imagination had little to do with the account. The interesting Zhennebats are well known—too well known—to the British police advisers. And they are mentioned as an indigenous flower of the desert civilization by Thomas Lyell, former district magistrate of Baghdad, in his remarkable book on "The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia."

Were they merely a robber band the Zhennebats probably would attract no great amount of attention from the investigators of Arabian life. Robbery on the desert is nothing to write books about any more than the startling

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fact that the members of some of the tribes have two feet. But these robbers have traditions and a culture of their own—or did have until recently—and obtained the respect of their neighbors by sheer ingenuity and intelligence.

In the old days, as now, it was difficult to bring the authority of the central government to the river towns. Settlements were widely scattered and traditionally opposed to the maintenance of local police forces, and when crime developed it attained a full and luxuriant growth without the blighting interference of outsiders.

To meet this situation a sort of Citizens' Protective Association was formed—an organization sworn to suppress all lawlessness and insure peace in the villages. And with true economy in the use of materials, the vigilantes and the robbers were precisely the same troop.

It was an admirable arrangement, as Ahmed pointed out. By combining criminal and policeman in the same person the community was assured of a law enforcing efficiency such as probably never had been achieved previously in the history of the world. One criminal—one policeman. And that at a tremendous saving of honest labor which might continue its goat herding or date picking without having to serve in the unproductive trade of the detective.

The arrangement was a bit different from that tried by the French in Northern Syria when banditry was wiped out with the installation of the ablest of the banditti as members of the gendarmerie. Under that system the bandit, nominally at least, forswore brigandage in exchange for a new rifle and a shining uniform. Here, where life is older and simpler, the new policeman was not called upon to undergo any radical change in character.

This was the way of it: The Protective Society—known as the Paswanyah—undertook to insure a village against crime upon payment of a set tax. On the face of it there

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could have been no more equitable settlement. If the talented thieves were going to give up their means of livelihood in the interest of civic uplift it was only fair that the citizens should compensate them. Everyone saw that instantly. And to show their good faith the thieves submitted to a further contract that should robbery, mayhem, murder or arson occur in a village under the protection of the Paswanyah the tax was to be forfeited.

And—so said Ahmed after an exhaustive inquiry concerning the subject in the bazaars and coffee shops—the plan worked excellently. The villages had peace and prospered and the Zhennebats felt that they had made a profitable deal inasmuch as they had an assured income without necessity for work—the ultimate aim of all civilizations.

But even amid such Arcadian surroundings some of the stingier citizenry began to fret. Some of them became actually resentful against the Paswanyah and looked not upon its benefits but its burden. It is always the way in the world. There must always be malcontents and disruptionists.

So—said Ahmed the Teller of Tales—when Abdullah the Mason set himself up as a leader of a reform element—may Allah excuse the term—he found dozens of the citizenry ready to follow his mistaken leadership.

Sheikh Hassan of the Paswanyah was unaware of this treasonable breach of contract. Abdullah picked his associates with care—some of them, it is said, from among local thieves whose business had been ruined by the superior organization and efficiency of the Zhennebats. At any rate, there was none to rise to the support of the ancient racial honor and rush to the robber barons with warning of the cabal that had been set afoot. Totally unaware of what was going on, the Paswanyah sat in its courts and drank coffee scented with cardamom and am-

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bergris and smoked tobacco through pipes whose bowls were filled with rose water.

Then one morning came the coup of the revolutionists. Abdullah the Mason raised a cry that his house had been robbed. In great indignation he reported the matter to the Sheikh Hassan.

"I can't understand it," declared Hassan with every indication of surprise. "I feel sure that none of my men did it. The field forces were not here last night; they were at work in a village near Quernah where the tax payments have been lagging."

"I am not interested in other villages," replied Abdullah. "I will appeal to your honor." Can you imagine the hypocrisy of the man. "I appeal to your honor pledged to us when we signed your treaty. You have promised us your protection and we have paid you your price. Is the word of a Zhennebat no longer good?"

"I shall certainly look into this affair," promised Hassan. "But what is it that was stolen from you?"

"I had a Frankish clock that rang a bell and a Frankish phonograph that sang sweet cacophonies in Turkish, and both, alas, have been stolen."

"I sympathize with you deeply," admitted Hassan. "It is plain that this wrong should not go unavenged. I hope to get your treasures back."

One might imagine that the trouble ended there and that Abdullah, recognizing the hand of fate in the robbery as his punishment for stirring rebellion against the Paswanyah, spent his days in retirement and his nights in prayer. But that was not the case. There were three more robberies on the following night. And four more shortly thereafter. The whole village felt the urge to sedition.

The chiefs of the town waited upon Sheikh Hassan and demanded an indemnity according to the terms of the

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contract. Sheikh Hassan admitted that the claim had some basis in equity.

"But," he said, "the payment of an indemnity is going to be difficult—not for any lack of good will on our part, because, as you have seen these many months, we are men of our word and anxious to fulfill our part of the contract. But unfortunately it has cost us a great deal to live. We have had to spend freely of the substance that we earned by refraining from our work. Our treasury is low. And it could be replenished only through the involuntary generosity of some of the villages hereabouts.

"You must realize our position. All of the villages, save one, have been paying their tax regularly—and that one we have already looted to the full extent of its capacity to pay. Certainly you would not have us break our word given to people who like yourselves have been promised our protection."

The chiefs of the people were obdurate.

"Pay up," they suggested, "or we shall be put to the necessity of calling the clans to exterminate you—which after all might not be such a bad idea."

The situation in the village was tense for the next few days. Peaceful citizens feared to step out into the streets at night. True they had always made it a point to go to bed at sundown and there was hardly a man in the community who had ever seen how the town looked in the dark. But the fear was there, none the less. If they had wished to journey abroad they would not have dared.

And then, at the height of the tension, Sheikh Hassan sent for the chiefs of the people.

"Well," he said, "this has certainly been the most difficult problem of my career. But as an institution, organized for the public weal, it has devolved upon the Paswanyah to suppress this crime wave.

"Our investigators discovered that the village was

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being raided by inexperienced robbers, lacking in technique and otherwise a disgrace to the profession.

"It was not surprising to us, because, as I stated in the first place, we were certain that our men would not make work for themselves needlessly."

"What about our losses?" inquired Abdullah. "Didn't we come here to discuss that matter—and the indemnity?"

"Patience," counseled the Sheikh. "It is said that a quick tongue runs away from a slow mind. There will be no indemnity. Instead we shall undertake to stick closely to the terms of our original bargain. We are returning to you—to all of you—the loot that was taken from your homes. Abdullah, here is your clock and there is your talking machine. And the rest of you, my brothers, may find what you have reported missing in neat piles at the end of the court."

So the chiefs of the people marched out. Hassan put a fresh coal on top of his pipe. Ali, his able lieutenant, looked at him wonderingly.

"But how did you do it?" he asked. "How did you recover all of this property from this rival band that sought the destruction of our glorious order?"

"It was simple enough," admitted Hassan. "I suspected from the very first that these crooks were robbing themselves. So I went around last night and visited them. I found Abdullah's goods in the house of Omar, and Omar's goods in the house of Yacub, and Yacub's goods in the house of Abdullah—and so on, so I reclaimed it all—taking with me for my trouble only such gold as I happened to find loose in the purses of these wretches. I do not think they will complain on account of this secret compensation."

And it is said along the Euphrates that the Zhennebat continued to protect the people with zeal and efficiency for many a year.

The case recited by Ahmed is by no means extraor-

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dinary in the life of the Euphrates towns. The Paswanyah is not so strong as it once was. The power of the Zhennabats is only a shadow of the power that it exercised before the war. But where its influence for good has broken down the collapse is always to be traced to some such dishonest maneuver as that of Abdullah the Mason. Where men rob themselves, where is the chance for well-trained professional thieves to compete?

Chapter Twenty-one

THE RIGHT TO BEAT ONE'S WIFE

The Adventure of the Chivalrous Magistrate, the Wronged Lady, and the Literal-minded Wazir

*Those radiant cheeks are veiled in woe,
A shower descends from every eye. . . .*

—MOHAMMED BEN ABAD.



AS in that golden day when the tired porter followed his beautiful employer to the house of Zobeideh and there was entertained by the three ladies of Baghdad, woman is still the most interesting thing in the East. The problems of the Orient are peculiarly her problems. The basic difference between the philosophies of the East and the West seem to be largely of her making. In her shroud-like veil as she jingles her silver anklets in the bazaar or behind her mask of gauze as she clicks her high-heeled shoes in the synagogue, or under her abbas of silver damask as she sits demurely on her own side of the Chaldean church, she is a mystery—a mystery the more complicated when one seeks to determine what she has been and what she is likely to become.

From far-away Constantinople echoes reach Iraq of important reforms in the status of her sex. She is about to become something more than a female creature. Some of the enlightened authorities of Turkey have gone so far as to admit that she has a mind and possibly a soul and that the veil and the guarded harem, tokens of her slavery,

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are necessary neither to the preservation of her chastity nor the peace of the community.

It is impossible as yet to determine how much effect the news is going to have upon the population of Shia Islam. It has been said—although it must be admitted that the authority is none too good and the statement unsubstantiated—that Mohamet never intended the veil to be a part of the sacramentals of his religion.

“Women,” he is quoted in this intriguing version of the matter, “if thy beauty be such that it may cause strife among men, then it is best that thy faces be veiled.” Whereupon, so the story goes, every woman in Islam became marvelously beautiful and veiled.

Whether the story be true or not it is obvious that the veil has done excellent service in the interest of the æsthetic in Mohammedan regions. Imagination outdoes nature in giving to woman beauty and allurements and behind the yashmak “age cannot wither nor custom stale her infinite variety.”

Is it vanity that veils all of the face except the eyes? Only an unbeliever would dare to hazard so impious a theory and yet in Baghdad where Christian and Jewish populations are large enough to give one an idea of the average loveliness of the fair Easterner the unholy thought keeps suggesting itself. The boyish form has no place in an Asiatic mart of pulchritude. Obesity is a carefully cultivated art and the duck-like carriage that comes of corpulence is the local interpretation of grace. The fat girl never need worry about her future. The house of the slim one is never bothered by female relatives of prospective husbands. All the mystery that the most alluring of face veils might produce would be insufficient to call attention to her unless she should stoop to such an inexcusable device as padding. . . . And of course she is manifestly above such trickery.

One of the saddest stories of business failure produced

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in Iraq since the war has to do with an enterprising young man who sought to find a market in the "reclaimed East" for the corsets that the ingénues of the West were declining to wear. The noble womanhood of Islam rebelled promptly against the corset. What end could be served in the wearing of a device so obviously calculated to destroy shapeliness and charm?

So the women of Iraq are still overfat and their diet is still of the sort that produces weird complexions. Whatever regularity there may be to their features one may suspect that it is not particularly embellished by the régime best calculated to meet the standards of beauty. Within the history of the Arab race—and of the Assyrian which was a nation of veiled women before it—there have been many movements of tribes and many changes in the male domination of the land. Consequently there have been many changes in the notion of charm. Through all of that one trait of the Arab woman has remained unquestioned by the critics—universal and sempiternal in its appeal—the light that smolders in her dark eyes.

It is a sort of providential compensation, perhaps, that these women should have been given the mesmeric power to make the observer forget their shortcomings. And in the centuries of their suppression they have acquired a strange knack of expressing themselves without words. Veil the Moslem woman completely—as she is veiled in many tribes and in many families of Baghdad—and she retains her mystery but none of her allurements. Cover her all but her eyes and there is a strange suggestion of beauty about her—the more incomprehensible because the beholder knows instinctively that she probably is not beautiful.

Wherefore the insistent temptation to ascribe all this veiling not to the jealousy of the male but to the vanity of the female. The Eastern woman's beauty is in her eyes—and those eyes have been free to spread trouble in

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the bazaars and coffee shops since Mohamet, who apparently knew no more about womankind than prophets of lesser talent, thought that concealment would bring an end to strife among men.

A word here for Mohamet. He was the first modern cultist to put the sex appeal into religion and so was directly responsible for the subjugation of womankind in the Orient. But it would be unjust to attribute to him all of the abuses that have crept into the social life of Shia Islam.

Mohamet received one of his convenient revelations on the subject of polygamy right after a battle when things had not been going so well with the Moslem cause. Widows and orphans were far too numerous for the encouragement of tribesmen who might presently be required to take the field. So it was revealed to Mohamet that "two and three and four" marriages would be permitted for the better protection of these relicts of warfare. And he died before he could have the situation unrevealed—if such had been his intention.

In the Arabian peninsula and Syria and North Africa and other strongholds of Islam west of Mesopotamia four women are considered enough of an ornament to any harem. But the Shia by one of the "interpretations" which distinguish this cult from the orthodox read into the edict of the prophet a sanction for concubinage, and so in Iraq the extent of "the feminine touch in the home" is limited only by the wealth of the home owner. Households of four wives and thirty or more concubines are not sufficiently unusual to cause comment even in these days of curtailed graft and Occidental interference.

Ready divorce made effective by the simple word of the husband gives further complication to the domestic life of the neighborhood and in addition to that the Western moralist may find plenty to puzzle him in a system of trial—or rather temporary—marriage in vogue among the

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Shia whereby a couple may undertake to have and to hold, to love and to cherish one another for any stated period, it being understood in such a contract that any children accruing to the match shall be considered the property of the husband.

The attitude toward divorce seems to be the same in all the branches of Islam but it is only among the Shia that an institution so closely resembling the social life once exemplified in Reno and now in Yucatan and Paris, has found favor. The police say that prostitution in Baghdad is a poorly paid business and in view of the legalized competition the statement seems to be past all argument.

The effect of this social system upon the character of the people is easily traced by men who have made a psychological study of the Mohammedan. The women who are a purely physical factor in the scheme speak and think as one might expect them to speak and think. The tone of their philosophies may be judged from unaltered translations of their literature. And in the environment in which they are the most active influence the sons of Islam grow to manhood.

It is an axiom in the Occident that woman's influence determines the level of a civilization. Where she is respected and free, her sons are like her. Where she is an animal so are her sons.

Unfortunately changes in the complexion of the men who control the governments of these strange countries are not going to effect any very deep alterations in the character of the people. Governments are after all only popular expressions. One is tempted to the belief that after all any sort of government is just exactly the best sort of government for the people who will submit to it. Once more it is the problem of the egg and the chicken—does a despotism produce ignorance or does ignorance foster despotism? If Iraq had not been content to sit by and allow its imported Turkish cavalry to master it, five hun-

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dred years of Turkish misrule would have been avoided and very likely five hundred years of local misrule substituted therefor. At any rate the life of Islam is what it has been for centuries. The political attitude of Islam has not changed overnight any more than its domestic attitude has changed and its government is considerably more of a problem than the mere placing of a figurehead king on a throne and the enumeration of civic virtues in municipal bulletins.

The fate of reform is graphically pictured in one story that still brings a smile to the harried English officials at the Serai and probably a blush to one idealist who thought that legislation might eliminate evil.

This story, verified by Lyell, concerns a youthful magistrate who came to Baghdad when the new government was still in the process of formation.

He was of the pattern of nearly all the advisory officials whom England picked for the very complicated and discouraging work of making order out of the muddled remnant of Turkish chaos—well-trained, keen and capable.

But it must be confessed that he came to Baghdad under a considerable handicap. He was an idealist. The realization of the state of woman in Iraq aroused in him more than the customary disgust. It shocked and angered him.

He was still in that frame of mind when one day a woman came before him to recite a heart-breaking story of injustice.

"I am Amina," she said. "Amina who was the faithful wife of Achmed the unspeakable carpenter, and he has beaten me."

"What for?" demanded the magistrate.

"Ah, who am I to say what for?" replied Amina. "For many years I was his faithful wife, the mother of his stalwart sons. For many years I slaved in his household with a heart that sang his name. And now he beats me."

"That," declared the magistrate, "is the unspeakable

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thing that civilization is going to crush in Iraq. It is time that men were brought to realize something of the duty that they owe to their wives and the respect that they owe to the memory of their mothers."

The clerk of the court who was not so new to the East—having been born there—shook his head uncomprehendingly.

"Does the Sahib undertake to interfere in what is plainly a domestic quarrel?" he inquired.

"Women are going to have protection in this court just the same as men."

"But the Sahib should consider that this woman's husband might have been acting in accordance with the law of the Prophet which defines his rights in his own house."

"I am not concerned with his religious beliefs, but I am concerned with his domestic conduct in so far as it affects the well-being of this community. Bring the man in."

So they brought before the magistrate the reluctant person of Achmed the unspeakable woodworker. Amina stood by and so far as her eyes depicted her emotions she was well pleased.

"Is it true that you have beaten this woman, your lawful wife?" demanded the magistrate.

"It is true that I have divorced her and that she was my lawful wife," admitted the puzzled Achmed.

"Why did you cast out this woman who had been a good wife to you and had borne you sons?"

"Because she was a shrew and barren."

"She charges that you beat her."

"Well, maybe I did. What of that? As I have told you, she was my wife. I had a right to beat her."

"We shall see about how much right you had to beat her. Wife beating is about to be ended in Baghdad forever and I shall make an example of you to prove it. You are sentenced to thirty days hard labor on the Hinaidi ditch."

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Achmed the unspeakable woodworker left the court in bewilderment. Even after he had been put to work with other law breakers on the Hinaidi ditch his attitude was not so much one of resentment at his punishment as of uncertainty as to his offense. And in Baghdad the populace was aroused as it had not been since the Turkish retreat.

In the coffeeshouses and in the bazaars and in the khans—in all places where men foregather there was talk of the mad official who had made a crime of wife beating.

“It is the desert sun,” they said with kindly thoughtfulness of his Occidental deficiencies. “He is unused to our lovely climate and Allah wot he may soon be dead of it.”

“He has been seized by a djinn” was the verdict of others. And throughout the comment ran an undercurrent of genuine alarm.

So it might have been with the American colonists when they considered the tax on tea. So might the French paupers have felt when they were preparing the reign of terror for Paris. The invader had come with open hands and high-sounding promises and he was trampling underfoot their sacred liberties. He was violating the sanctity of the home and dictating to husbands what they might or might not do with their wives. It was a madman's act and therefore partly excusable, but an unspeakable affront to public zeal and common decency none the less.

The sages of the people were confident that the British authorities would remove their poor, sick magistrate before he had a chance to do much harm. England, they felt assured, could not be the great power that it was if it chose to act in such high-handed fashion with the peoples it undertook to govern.

But, unfortunately, the djinn did not let go of the magistrate. The streak of insanity became every day more pronounced, partly because the official had set himself to

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crusade against an ancient evil and partly because the women did not share the male point of view regarding the indecency of the situation. They were free to admit that their husbands had a right to beat them. But on the other hand here was an opportunity for revenge, and what if a wife were rebelling against the rule of the prophet when she complained to civil justice? In Islam woman had never been expected to be deeply religious.

The added sin of having her husband sent to jail she felt would have little effect upon her status. So other business of the court was at a standstill while women came to weep on the books of law and demand redress. And they got what they wanted. Justly or unjustly wife beaters soon came to make up a large colony among the workers on the Hinaidi ditch. In the coffeehouses the mutterings became louder and the excuses for the poor mad magistrate less numerous.

What might have come of this crusade no one shall ever know. For in the midst of it the magistrate was stricken by a fever.

The ailment was of a type common enough in Baghdad—enervating, irritating, but not necessarily fatal. The officer felt little inclined to leave his lodgings but he remembered that a doctor of his acquaintance could be found at that hour at the serai and so he forced himself to stagger out to a gharry which took him to his office.

The temperature, as shown by the thermometer outside, was 120 degrees Fahrenheit and it was little less indoors. The magistrate sank into the chair behind his desk to await the doctor, only half conscious of what was going on about him. His bones were an aching torment, his head pounded and his eyes were aflame.

At which juncture an angry wife came to him demanding the customary redress. Only those who may read the thoughts of Allah the Inscrutable may guess why it was that the most vocal of all the distressed ladies who had

The Right to Beat One's Wife

come into the court should have been saved for that day. But there was no doubting the fact. Even without his headache the magistrate might have been somewhat irked to have to listen to the shrill screaming of so positive a character. In his present state she seemed to him like a terrible symptom of his fever.

Her husband had beaten her. He guessed that before she started to speak. But she had made his punishment much more simple than was usual in such cases. She had dragged him along with her to save the attachés of the court a journey to his place of work on such a hot day. She paused to be complimented on her thoughtfulness. The magistrate groaned.

The husband hung his head. He had never been in a crazy kafir court before and for all he knew a groan might be the magistrate's silly way of pronouncing a sentence of death.

"Get out of here," ordered the magistrate.

"But you do not understand," shrilled the angry complainant. "This man has beaten me just as other wives were beaten by husbands whom you, the chosen servant of Allah, have so generously sent to the Hinaidi ditch. I throw myself at your honorable feet and crave justice. . . ."

"Get out of here. . . . Come back to-morrow. . . ."

"To crave the justice that you have brought from your excellent land to my downtrodden sisters. . . ."

"Get out of here. . . ."

"To have this fiend who has beaten me. . . . Stand up there, Yacub, and let the magistrate look upon your wickedness. . . . To have this fiend given the punishment that is his due. . . ."

"I shall hear you to-morrow. . . . Not to-day. . . ."

"It is to-day I claim justice. My cause is worthy of your attention. . . . Stand up there, Yacub, or I shall give you a beating—you can't chastise me and have me

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stand in silence. . . . Think of your promise to right the wrongs of the oppressed—to deal out justice. . . .”

“Ahmed . . . Ahmed . . .” The native bailiff leaped forward. Yacub, the errant husband, hung his head and prepared for the worst. His not to reason why. His not to offer a defense. Of what use would be a defense in a house of madness such as this.

“What is it, Sahib?” asked the bailiff.

“Get this woman out of here,” groaned the magistrate.

“Take her away. . . .”

“But the justice of my cause,” shrilled the woman.

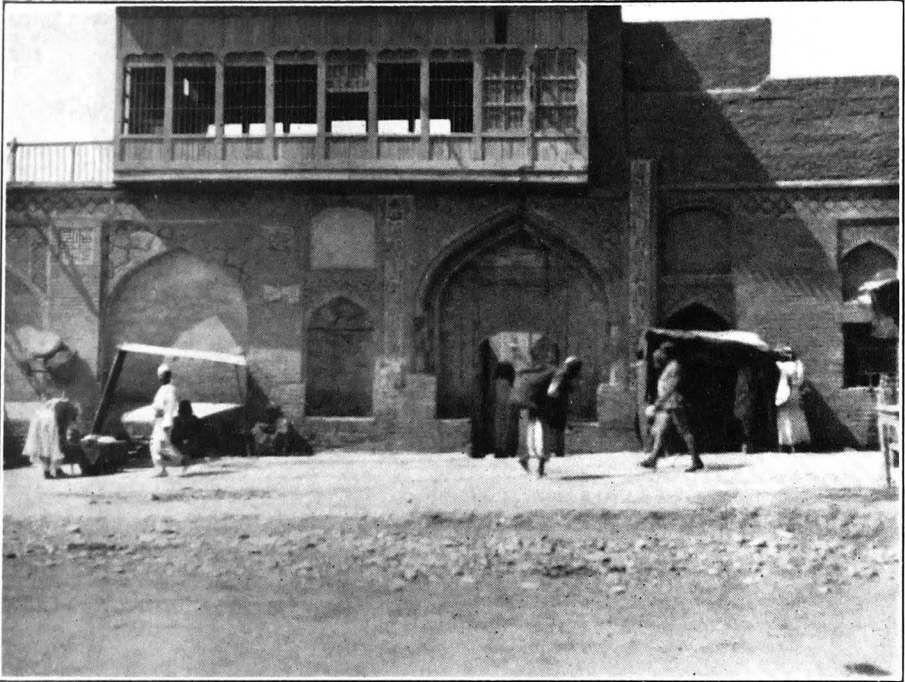
“What shall I do with her?” inquired the placid Ahmed.

“What do I care what you do with her? . . . Throw her into the river. . . .”

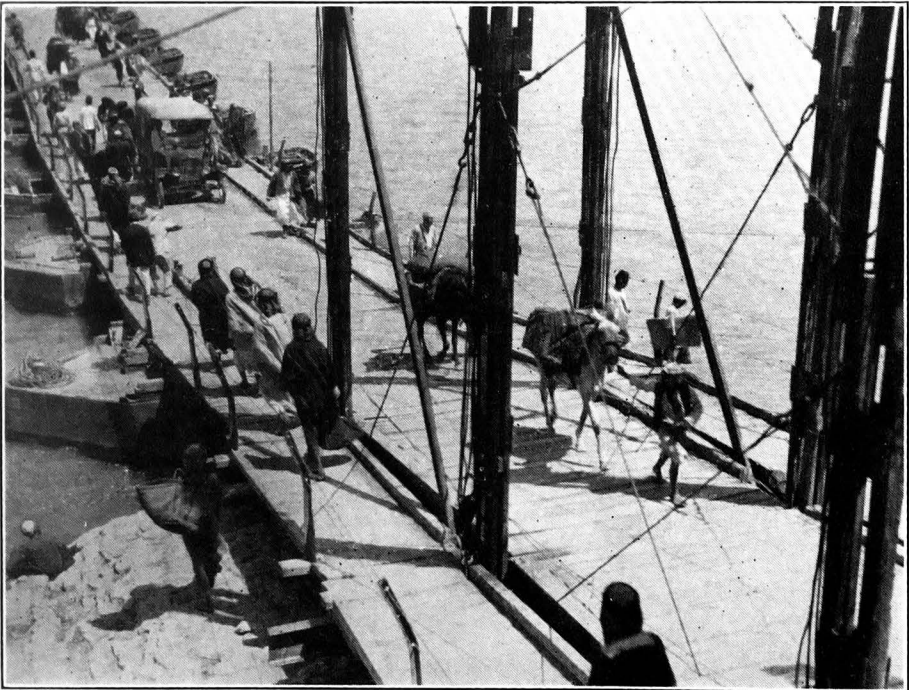
So the bailiff, who was nothing if not a literal-minded chap, took the injured plaintiff out to the bridge of boats and threw her into the Tigris. The husband who had followed the procession out of the courts all a-tremble watched this proceeding with wide-open eyes. It dawned on him suddenly that he was not to be punished at all and that his shrew of a wife had by some magic been tossed into the current where the waters ran still and deep.

Somebody fished the lady out before she got to the Maude Bridge, which of course was unfortunate—it seemed in truth to be thwarting the will of Allah. But after all there can be no perfect act in this naughty world, and Baghdad was well enough satisfied to have things turn out as they did.

The husband, rescued from a certain sentence to labor on the Hinaidi ditch, ran shouting through the bazaars and to the coffee-houses, spreading the glad tidings that the magistrate was no longer sick—that a miracle had restored his reason. And there seems to have been a still greater and more incomprehensible miracle. Wife beating in Baghdad stopped from that day forward. At least there has never been another complaint of it.



OLD BUILDINGS NEAR NORTH GATE, BAGHDAD



MAUDE BRIDGE, BAGHDAD

Chapter Twenty-two

THE FLAME OF ISLAM

The Holy City of Kadamain

*Life is a sleep of three-score years,
Death bids us wake and hail the light.
And man, with all his hopes and fears,
Is but a phantom of the night.*

—ALI BEN MUHAMMED ALTAHAMNY.



O glamorous legend of the "Arabian Nights," no weird myth born in the dim twilights back of Babylon, is quite so strange or so unbelievable as the verified history of Islam.

As the world now knows from the lips of men who speak through clay cylinders and rocky tablets there was plenty of splendor in the land of the rivers before Baghdad was more than a village on the Tigris. The empires that settled down here in high vaulted palaces to expire of inanition on down-stuffed pillows of damask and satin were greater some of them than the holy empire of the prophet. But it was Islam that made Baghdad the capital of romance and built about it the cultural glory that to-day shields it from the critical eye of the world with a rose-tinted veil.

It is hardly necessary to narrate here the story of how Mohamet of Mecca left off his work as a director of caravans to preach a new dispensation and to urge the unification of the Arab tribes. The history of Islam has so completely woven itself with the early history of

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Europe, with Spain, and Carthage and the heritors of the Eastern Roman empire that one knows at least its essentials. This religion sprang up overnight, a mélange of doctrines already taught for centuries by a variety of prophets; it was laid before half-savage tribes that looked upon it with suspicion and scoffed at its founder; it was spread by force of arms against mighty nations which for hundreds of years had shown only contempt for the Arab and his works. And presently, what with the invasions of France and the Crusades, it came to be a matter of vital import, not only to the East but to the Occident.

The manner in which the capital of Islam shifted from Mecca and Medinah to Baghdad and the nature of the civil wars which left to this religion a number of golden domed and sacred cities and a number of serious doctrinal dissensions is less well known.

Mohamet, after overthrowing the strange deities that still lingered in southern Arabia, raised high the hope of immortality. Whereupon he died.

Left to mourn him and to meditate on the fact that death had not shown him an expected preference, were his youthful widow Ayesha, his father-in-law Abu-Bekr, his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali and the two sons of Ali, Hassan and Hosein. Abu-Bekr, then an old man whose life had been spent in merchandising and similar pursuits, found himself Caliph or viceroy of Islam and proved himself to be one of the greatest generals of all time.

The armies of Mohamet, assured of booty if they remained alive and a very comfortable heaven if they died, went out like a plague of locusts and captured virtually all of the Arabian peninsula. They met serious resistance in Persia alone and eventually were successful even there. The sons of Zoroaster looking along the keen scimitars of Mecca recognized that there might be some truth in the words of the great Mohamet, swallowed the new

The Flame of Islam

gospel without serious protest and sank back into a state of rest where they have remained ever since. So came the climax of the great epic.

But the fortunes of Islam were not completely settled as one discovers even nowadays when Iraqians cry out against the son of the Shereef of Mecca who sits on their throne, and the Wahabis rise up in their sheep patches to spread reform and corpses all over the ancient land of Sheba.

The trouble came first through the philosophies of the Persians who had been a thinking race too long to accept the Mohammedan's doctrines without salt. The Persian doctors saved themselves from infidelity by "interpreting" the Koran in a fashion that probably would have surprised the late prophet. They evolved a sect known as the Shia in contradistinction to the orthodox faith of Mecca which the fundamentalists called the "Sunni."

New difficulties arose almost immediately in quarrels over the caliphate. The Omayyad family of Mecca, strong and wealthy among the Arabs, was found to be fitted by every noble tradition to carry on the great work of ecclesiastical dictatorship. The proponents of the schism of the East looked to the descendants of Ali for their direction. Highly fantastic legend was built up about Ali and in time he became a saint to whose memory were paid honors but little—if any—less than those accorded the prophet himself.

Before Mohamet's body was very cold in the coffin which no Occidental and every Moslem believes to be floating in the air between two lodestones, his little empire was torn apart with civil war. Moawiyah of the Omayyad clan was well entrenched and carrying on the prophet's work in Damascus. The companions of the prophet, in open rebellion against the aristocrats of the Omayyad clan, found ready support in Mesopotamia. A pitched battle was fought near Basrah and Ali was estab-

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lished in Iraq and the peninsula. The Omayyades at that time came out with a candid claim to the caliphate—a claim which they pressed vigorously for seventy years.

Ali was assassinated at Kufa in 661 A.D. Hassan accepted an indemnity from the citizenry of Basrah and withdrew as a competitor for pontifical honors. Hosein, hemmed in by Omayyad troops, was drawn into a trap on the desert near Kerbela and died of thirst. The Damascus caliphate would have been supreme had it not been that in murder and tragedy Ali and Hosein had been given a canonization in the mind of their followers. Najaf, where Ali's body is believed to lie, and Kerbela, where Hosein died, became holy cities as important spiritually to Eastern Islam as Mecca and Medinah.

And so things remained until the Abbasides, descendants of Abbas, an uncle of the prophet, took advantage of the decline of the house of the Omayyades and the spiritual indecision of Shia Islam to seize the caliphate. It was under the Abbaside caliphs that Baghdad came to its glory.

A word here of the beliefs of Shia Islam.

It was held that the Imams—popes—of the faith must be of the house of Ali and that God had ordained it so. There were twelve such Imams starting with Ali and descending through Hassan and Hosein to Mohammad-al-Mahdi whose disappearance in a cave in Samara in 890 A.D. gave Mesopotamia another holy city. Since that time the Shias have awaited a golden age of spiritual excellence when another Imam would be sent into the world. The vigil, resembling as it does a wait for a Messiah, has given the Mesopotamian and Persian Moslem a mystical character quite different from that of his orthodox brethren and has endowed it with pageantry and romance. Shia Islam, searching for a savior or digging in the pits of Babylon for the sword of Iskander, seems to be actuated by the same motives. And there is something splendid in its forlorn hope.

The Flame of Islam

All of the holy cities lie close to Baghdad. Kadamain with its golden domes might be classed as a suburb of the city of the caliphs. Its claim to distinction is perhaps not so great as that of Najaf with its tomb of Ali, Samara with its mysterious grotto where the last of the Imams went out of sight, or Kerbela where the sainted Hosein succumbed to the thirst. It is noted among the followers of Shia Islam as the burial place of two of the Imams who immediately preceded the disappearing Mohammad-al-Mahdi and augments this fame as a shrine of miracles.

It is said that a pilgrimage to its blue enameled gates is an insurance against pain in childbirth and possibly as a result of such promise has come to be associated with divine aid in predetermining the sex of unborn children and otherwise influencing the destiny of the future of the race.

Kadamain is reached by what is probably the oldest and strangest street car line in the world. The rails are of wood and are laid on the earth just as it happened to come to the hands of the engineers. The track, relying more upon the blessing of Allah, which must freely be given to pilgrims to the holy city, than upon any of the known principles of railroading, careers with a wholly irreligious gayety out of Baghdad from a terminal near the old bridge of boats and not far from the tomb of the Sitt Zobeideh. If it curls a little bit about high spots in the road, if it leans so far that it threatens to tip the little tram car and its cargoes of pious passengers into the ditch—well, Malesh! Allah be praised, if there is no safety in a journey to so sacred a spot as Kadamain, then where under heaven can safety be found? It is foolish to clutter up the decrees of destiny with such manifest tosh as the mathematics of gradients, wheel gauge and similar machinations of the Occidental and the evil one.

The coach which hauls the pilgrims out to Kadamain

Baghdad and Points East

and sometimes hauls them back, resembles the little single-truck horse cars that once infested American cities. It is a little more than ten feet long and apparently is set without springs on a single truck. Originally it was painted blue and white and gold and inscribed with pious invocations. Now its paint is peeling and the management is either unable to refinance or unconcerned with the æsthetic for there is no promise of restoration.

Seen among the ruins of Babylon or under the mighty arch of vanishing Ctesiphon this coach would not seem much out of place. Its flanged iron wheels alone take it out of the class of transportation that one sees represented in the chariot brigades of Assyrian battle friezes. The motive power is similar to that of the chariots except in speed. Two disappointed mules who have nothing to live for and show it plainly in their sad eyes draw the coach on its lumbering way. They are hitched with a simple arrangement of ropes and leather of a type that probably came into Mesopotamia with Alexander.

The pilgrims, unlike street car patrons in more secular regions, find no cause for protest in the performance of this splendid vehicle. It is not fast . . . two mules even in the prime of health are hardly likely to be possessed of any great zeal for such a work. And on feast days when the car is jammed with worshipers inside and carrying as many as can find a hand hold on the roof outside it is to be expected that Shaitan should fan the unwillingness of these his creatures. But still there is no complaint. If there is no speed there is likewise no hurry, which is obviously one of Allah's compensations.

The road to Kadamain leads northward along the Tigris between the walls of date plantations and olive groves. In the sunlight it is ghastly with the dust. At night, when the moonlight is picking out the golden glory of the domes and the Muddein is calling from his minaret, it is an enchanted walk. The tramline is lost in the

The Flame of Islam

shadow and the palms are black silhouettes, a trembling fringe against the luminous sky.

Kadamain itself, save for the splendid mosque, is much like Baghdad or more correctly as Baghdad was in the days between the collapse of the Abbaside caliphate and the coming of the British. There are quarters of it that reek with filth—and strangely enough those quarters press close to the area where the delicate blue traceries of the portal start their march to the aureoled towers. The bazaars are steeped in the grime of centuries—a condition that seems to be a necessary part of the municipal scheme in the holy cities of Shia Islam and over the awninged streets bulge houses whose lattices shriek of dry rot and the peril of collapse. . . . A dead dog lies unheeded near the booth of the perfume seller and priceless carpets are displayed on a mud floor blackened with malodorous débris.

Through the narrow ways file the pilgrims. . . . Veiled women praying for children as they did when Etana flew with the eagle to heaven in search of the twilight sleep. . . . Tall sheikhs with a plea for sons. . . . Undiluted fanatics come to make their offerings at the tombs of the Imams and hope for a miracle.

One is surprised to notice in this spot, where if anywhere the East is East and the West should be unwelcome, an indifference to the Occidental visitor that might almost be interpreted as hospitality.

The black-robed pilgrims under the blue arch are outspokenly proud that even a benighted Kafir should notice the beauty of the mosque. A boy . . . it is always the little boys in any country on the face of the globe who feel a thrill in acting as guides . . . approaches diffidently with the suggestion that the roof of his mother's house is an excellent spot for a bird's-eye view of this charming town. His mother will not object. He will run on ahead and notify the harem so that it may betake itself to other

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quarters while the noble Farenji honors the roof with his curiosity.

One declines this offer less in the logical fear of having one's throat cut than because of the no less pressing danger of having the roof fall apart under one's feet. The boy is persistent even after the backsheesh has been distributed. It may be that his zeal comes of an atavistic hospitality. It may be that he enjoys this opportunity to practice his English within hearing of his elders. At any rate he is manifestly downcast when the Noble Farenji makes polite overtures to be rid of him and marches out to the edge of town.

It is natural enough that he should be concerned about this matter. The Farenji probably will wander out into the desert after the manner of the venturesome Kafir and fall a prey to the djinn that swirls in the dust storms or to the Badawi or to the thirst and will die without ever having known the blessed peace that must come of looking at the mud roofs of Kadamain from the vantage point of a similar roof.

Viewed from a less favorable but safer position on the ground the town presents many novel features. In the southern end the streets may be no less dirty but they are wider and the houses that line them have some appearance of permanence. Here are palm gardens that lose none of their æsthetic quality even when one knows that they are not intended for mere ornament: In one instance a palm tree is growing straight up through a house, shading the sleeping quarters on the roof and providing the tenants with the material for a meal within an arm's length.

In the broad square beyond the south walls the little caravans that are continually meandering off onto the desert like tramp ships plying between second-rate ports come to rest—sometimes to dispose of wares, sometimes to resume the journey to Baghdad.

One such had come out of the North while the youth

The Flame of Islam

with the showman's instinct and the desirable roof was conducting himself as a one-man chamber of commerce. The caravan leader, a tall, pleasant-looking scoundrel, came forward to watch closely the taking of a photograph across the open space toward the golden balloons above the mosque.

The ways of the West are not so little known along the caravan routes that cameras were totally unknown, but he had never seen one quite like this with a minaret on top of it—and he said as much to the interpreter.

After an interchange of ritualistic courtesies such as might have opened a council of war or a service of prayer, he leaned over and put his face into the hood.

His exclamation of pleasure was loud and heart-felt. He had believed, as most of his people whose acquaintance with such things is largely through hearsay seem generally to believe, that all images in the camera are turned upside down. Here where the reflex mirror threw the image onto the ground glass in beautiful color and detail and right-side up he seemed to feel that he was dealing with magic.

But he did not seem to investigate. The sight of his own camels lying there in the picture as they lay in the outer sun was almost too much joy for one afternoon. When he raised his head again it was to proclaim the numerous reasons for his thankfulness and to wish the blessings of Allah in several guises on this unbeliever who none the less had conferred upon him a great honor.

Kadamain the old might be the scene of a potent thaumaturgy. As a true believer he was well acquainted with its wonders as told in song and story. But here was a more recent miracle—and much more tangible.

Chapter Twenty-three

THE TIGRIS

We Follow Sinbad

*See the palace dome, its pride uprearing
One fleet hour, then darkly disappearing!
So must all of lofty or endearing
Fade, fail, fall—to all the night is nearing.*

—PERSIAN, ANON.



IN some respects the navigation of the Tigris is very little different from what it was before Iraq broke its hour glass. Rafts of inflated skins, such as are pictured on the tablets of Assyria, large round baskets covered with pitch, such as are minutely described in the Babylonian cylinders referring to the story of the great flood, skin-covered skiffs, clumsy sailing craft that might have been sired by Phœnician galleys—a thousand and one evidences of how man first learned to live on the waters—ply the river now as they always did. Cargoes of bitumen, rock, food products and licorice root come down from the north on the bubble rafts. The materials are laid on the bank near the bazaars after which the boatmen deflate the skins, sell the wood spars to which they were lashed and join themselves to a caravan for a return to their hills. The basket boats—gufahs, as they are known locally—carry glistening piles of eggplant from villages upstream to the Baghdad market. And they do a brisk business as ferries between points above the old bridge of boats. All in all

The Tigris

if Noah were suddenly to revisit this scene of his boyhood, he probably would see no change except that the ark had been moved to a new anchorage.

But it would probably be unfair to place upon the ancients the responsibility for one craft that is docked near the serai. It looks older than the *gufahs* and less seaworthy than the skin rafts that intrigued the curiosity of Xenophon. But it is steam propelled and that seems to identify it with a later, though no less interesting, period of antiquity.

Sinbad the Sailor, upon whom be peace, for all his reputation as a venturesome traveler, might hesitate to embark on this weathered *Hesperus*. One less well acquainted than he with the perils of the waters must know that it would require no mountain of lodestone to pull the nails out of the hull and drop the teapot engine to the bottom of the Tigris. True, the river is not so wide nor so treacherous that one might not swim ashore but in such an event he might not wish to be hampered with a steamship.

The boat is an end-wheeler of a type that may still be seen rotting at docks along the Ohio or Mississippi near St. Louis. It has two decks and a straight stack, from which are festooned gay pennants that might mean many things in the signal codes of many of the world's navies. Here they appear to be purely decorative for there would manifestly be no sense in interpreting the group near the top as the original British designers may have intended them to be interpreted: "Full Speed Forward . . . I shall fire a broadside." Anyone who might be tempted to feel a thrill at this startling intelligence is instantly deterred by the presence of a Siamese flag farther down the string and the old Turkish crescent that flies at the bottom of the garland.

In one thing, however, a great maritime tradition is followed scrupulously. At a stubby masthead, near the

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prow of this Ark, the Blue Peter is aloft, and preparations on the lower deck indicate that this flag was hoisted with full knowledge of its meaning. . . . The Blue Peter is always displayed in our best ports by a vessel about to put to sea.

There is quite as much confusion about them as one might expect aboard an ocean liner just before the lines are cast off and the tugs begin to pull out into the bay. Last-minute passengers are rushing aboard. Last-minute donkeys are dumping their cargoes over the taffrail and onto the deck. Deckhands are shouting imprecations at tardy shippers. The captain is on the bridge, and the brown stokers, stripped to the waist and then a little, are throwing fuel that looks like charcoal into the fire beneath the leaky boiler. The anchors are up and all is in readiness for sailing. . . . And in an hour or two or sometime thereafter the interesting ship will wheeze out into the channel, and stick her nose into the stream bound for Basrah unless held up at the Maude Bridge.

The Occidental passenger is struck immediately by the simplicity of the docking arrangements. Close to the bank—so close that it can be reached over a five-foot plank—is a flat-bottomed scow upon which all cargo transfer has been taking place. As one walks across it to the less safe-looking deck of the steamboat he grudgingly concedes that the native mariners have shown a bit of ingenuity here. Lacking a suitable quay they have floated one to the place where it is most needed and it fills its purpose, quite as well as if it were built of steel and concrete. . . . And then, with no more turmoil than has been observable on board, for an hour or more, the boat suddenly casts off. For a moment one is surprised to hear the churning of the paddle and to note that the ship has not moved an inch from the scow. And then one sees that there is no intent to move from it. The dock remains attached to the boat and is being dragged

The Tigris

with it out into midstream. Allah willing, it will make the entire journey to Basrah.

From this point one discovers that sailing the Tigris is a maritime accomplishment such as one probably never will see on any other body of water that flows to the sea. On the starboard side one finds a similar scow and the suspicion arises that these auxiliary craft are being taken along for some purpose other than life saving. Their mission becomes evident at the first sharp turn in the river below Baghdad. The pilot does not worry himself as a Mississippi River pilot might worry under such circumstances. He does not bother to find a deep channel or to keep to it.

Behind him the paddles are dipping noisily and energetically into the river—behind that the current is driving down with the speed that gave to this stream its name—Tigris, the Arrow. An amateur sailorman might think that considerable skill would be required to make the turn without burying the boat in the bank. But the captain has made this trip frequently and he knows his technique and he has his scows.

The secret of navigation is the talismanic word "Mal-esh"—what difference does it make? There comes a sudden shock, as the craft slides into the bank, a sudden swirling of waters as the starboard scow goes aground and progress ceases.

Then the boat crew, standing by for this maneuver, looses the hawsers. The steamboat swings out into midstream again, properly pointed for her journey. The ropes are made fast once more, and the paddles and current—exerting a force at a proper angle—pull the scow back into deep water. In a few minutes the crew have taken up the slack and all goes gayly until the next curve.

Hucksters, shepherds and inquisitive ladies with rings in their noses, walk along the bank near the curves, keeping abreast of the boat without difficulty. Vendors of

Baghdad and Points East

eggs, dates and other commodities occasionally leap aboard at a narrow passage and leap off again when next the bank is touched. Sinbad, himself, never embarked upon so weird a journey.

The passage down the Tigris is for all that one of the most remarkable voyages that one may take in all the East. The river, which saw the Sumerians found their civilization in the meadows by the Persian Gulf and Nineveh rise to its glory, and floated the ashes of Empire down to the sea, rides on unconcerned with the petty works of man that are falling down in ruin along its banks.

Below Baghdad only a few miles, the channel lies between old Ctesiphon on the left and Seleucia on the right. Seleucia, which marked the high tide of Greek culture in Mesopotamia, is now a mere collection of mounds—a bit more dust in a region of desert.

Ctesiphon, empty and silent, is a single arch, final glory of the white palace of Chosroes, but it is doubtful if in all Asia one single ruin is so startlingly impressive or so suggestive of story.

Two more empires have their graves at this spot. Seleucia covers the dead bones of the Macedonian. Parthia, or we might say without departing too greatly from the truth, Parthia and Persia, are asleep under the highly theoretical weeping willows of Ctesiphon.

Seleucia was a none too permanent monument for Seleucus Nicator, successor to Alexander the Great in the region of the Tigris. And it is said that Seleucus with all the wealth of the Orient and all the culture of Greece at his command built a capital city that for a millennium was the wonder of the world.

He tore down the palaces of Babylon to build it. The golden ceilings, the jeweled panels, the silver tiles, the bronze gates of Nebuchadnezzar's city were brought here by Babylonians who presently made up the new population. In a short time half a million people had taken up

The Tigris

their abode here amid luxuries that were considered mythical by potentates whom history classes as the richest men of their time. Greek columns lined the river banks for miles, and flowering gardens, and arches of onyx and enameled brick made little rainbows in the sky.

Eventually the town was taken by the Romans, sacked and burned and took its place among the mounds that are the tombs of every civilization from the primitive Sumerian to the primitive Turk.

Ctesiphon was founded by the Parthians while Seleucia was still a city of importance and, taking the Greek capital as an example, was soon attempting to outstrip it in magnificence. The Romans pressing their empire to the hills of Iran stopped here frequently to strip its castles and temples of their gold and ornaments and to put its bazaars to the torch. But these waves of destruction seem to have had little permanent effect. Before the Roman legions the populace would scatter, to return in a little while and lift new splendors out of the smoking ashes.

As Maydan, it was a capital of the Persian kings and remained so until the wandering Arabs swept down upon it. Irving, in his "Successors of Mohamet", gives a vivid description of the city's fall: "In roving the streets they (the Arabs) came to the famous palace of Chosroes, begun by Kobad Ibn Firuz and finished by his son Nushirwan, constructed of polished marble and called the White Palace, from its resplendent appearance." It is the remnant of this palace that one sees to-day as "the arch of Ctesiphon."

"As they gazed at it in wonderment, they called to mind the prediction of Mohamet when he heard that the haughty monarch of Persia had torn his letter: 'Even so shall Allah rend his empire in pieces.' 'Behold the White Palace of Chosroes!' cried the Moslems to one another. 'This is the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Apostle of God!'"

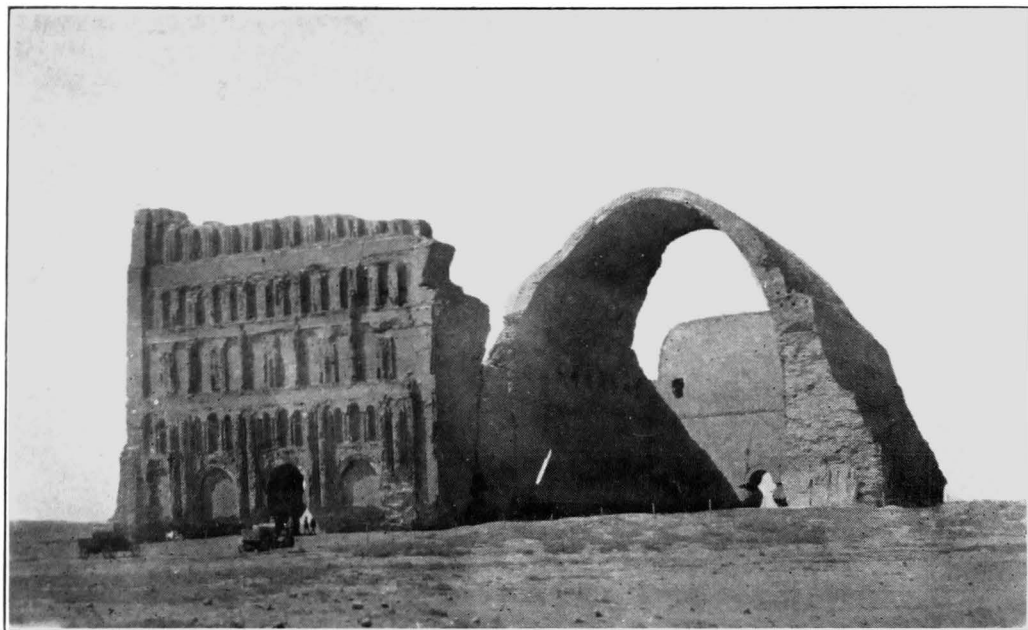
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The simple Arabs from the flats of Mecca and Medina, from cities of mud huts and from desert clusters of the houses of hair, stood before this marvel as they might have stood at the threshold of the sensuous heaven described by their prophet. Their historians have become incoherent in describing its beauties and the treasures that were snatched from it.

Arab chroniclers speak of luxurious chambers, vast stores of jeweled armor and deep vaults piled high with treasures of gold and rubies. "Three thousand of thousands of thousands of pieces of gold were in the treasury," recites one whose veracity can only be guessed. Abulfeda, Gibbon, and other historians list marvels of gold and silver and jewel work. And particularly, they give their attention to a more or less authentic account of a carpet inset with jewels—a paradise in which sapphires and diamonds were interwoven among silver threads to simulate the sparkling water of a fountain. That there was such a carpet is evidenced in the less emotional chronicles of Mecca, which describe the removal of the carpet by Said, commander of the Moslem troops, to the Caliph Omar, then living at Medinah, and Omar's division of the treasure into little squares which he distributed as rewards among the chiefs.

In a way the story of Ctesiphon itself is like the story of the jeweled carpet. It has been torn into small bits and distributed among the chiefs.

Under its new name Ctesiphon continued to be of importance during the early rivalries of Islam in Mesopotamia. It was still here, at any rate, when Tamarlane came down from the north in the fourteenth century, bringing to Iraq a desolation alongside which the thoroughgoing destruction of the wars between Babylonia and Assyria seems trivial. It is said that Tamarlane, whose ideas of art and architecture were practical and robust, built in this vicinity a great pyramid of heads and that ninety thousand of the principal citi-



THE ARCH OF CTESIPHON, ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE WHITE
PALACE OF CHOSROES



RUINS OF THE PALACE OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR WHERE
ALEXANDER DIED

The Tigris

zens gave involuntary but essential support to his undertaking.

After that, the sites of Ctesiphon and Seleucia seem to have continued barren. At any rate no subsequent conqueror finds them worth the mentioning.

Southward from Ctesiphon the landscape along the river takes on the appearance of the desert through which one moves out of Hit on the Euphrates. There is some natural greenery, some scrubby underbrush on the banks and here and there a palm or citron tree. But there is nothing at all to indicate that this region was once a garden spot from horizon to horizon—a place of beautiful hunting preserves, and well-kept estates—a granary for a hungry population of thirty million.

Over against the eastern horizon one may pick out of the mirage a slightly rising, regular line of earth. This is the bank of the Nahrwan Canal, through which flowed the history of Babylonia. It was the great bit of engineering magic through which the desert became the town and barren land blossomed with roses and became a prey to conquerors.

There were two branches to this waterway. One left the Tigris near Dur, and the other at Samara. The two came together again near the Adhem which they absorbed. Then, replenished by all the minor tributaries to the Tigris southward from that point, it ran parallel to the river as far as Kut. The soil along the Tigris is naturally rich. Water lifted it out of the desert and perhaps gave it a different climate. It was reputed to have been the richest spot in all the domains of Persia.

Then, in the ninth century A.D. when the declining caliphate occupied more of the attention of Islam than the condition of irrigation in Mesopotamia, the Tigris overflowed its banks. It established a new bed which broke down the dikes of the canal in several places. A bit of engineering might have turned the river back into its old bed, but by that time the energy of Islam seemed

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to have expended itself. If a river should have stepped out of its course that must be the will of Allah. If, in consequence, a paradise should become a desert—Malesh. Were not the sons of Araby the sons of the desert?

Some centuries later the Tigris grew tired of its inconstancy and came back to its old bed where it has remained ever since. But there has been no change in the conditions that it produced by its wanderings. The British engineers, aware of what this region has been and acquainted with what has been done in Egypt, are working on a plan to reclaim once more the burned acres, where once grew fields of roses for the attars of Baghdad and fields of wheat from sky to sky.

If the plan succeeds and experiment now in progress north of Baghdad is successful, it is possible that capital may be raised to redeem this land for cotton planting. But unfortunately the British are attacking the same vicious circle that was encountered when first the canals broke down. The new irrigation system would make arable thousands of acres of what is now desert and when it had been made arable the present-day sons of Babylon the implacable, and Assyria the restless, and Islam the inspired, would stand at the edge of Baghdad and wait for somebody to do something about it.

“The desert has been redeemed and now will grow cotton? Malesh. What of it? If it be the will of Allah that farmers come to work the land, then perhaps farmers will come to work the land. Let us wait and see.”

Mesopotamia once supported a population of thirty million people. Less than five make up the present census. The engineers smile at the puzzle before them. It is the problem of the priority of the egg and the chicken all over again. Which comes first, the population or the means for supporting the population? A posterity that one day may fill new villas about the arch of Ctesiphon, may read the answer to the riddle.

Chapter Twenty-four

BASRAH

The Adventure of Tommy Atkins in the Garden of Eden

*Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue
Appeared with gay enamelled colors mixed.*

—MILTON, "Paradise Lost."



IN many ways the story of the poor fisherman who let down his nets and pulled up the terrible djinn in the bottle, and the strange fishes of assorted colors, is the most remarkable in all the history of the "Thousand and One Nights"—not particularly in its magic, for of course ifreets and peris and djinns, sealed in brass bottles, were no great novelty in the days when the lovely Scheherezade worked her conjury, but in its scene. Lakes where one might cast a net were far more interesting at that period than any mere assemblage of wonders and wonder-workers. The idea of the Black Isles rising out of the magic sea bulks out of the tale as something more significant than the sleight of hand of a djinn or even of a Scheherezade. It was a reflection of the suppressed desire of the Arab for water and the marvels that come of the water. Granted the existence of a wide, cool lake with dark blue mountains rising out of it, then the appearance of the castle of sorrows where ruled a king who was half human and half marble is a sort of anticlimax.

It is quite likely that Scheherezade, sheltered lady, had never beheld such a lake save in the strange geography of

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her limitless mind. Thus one sees a motive in her trick to give her story an air of verisimilitude by introducing a footnote to explain how, when the King of the Black Isles was finally freed from his marble anchorage and his interesting wife, it was discovered that the lake and the isles were a year's journey from Mesopotamia. Down the hot reaches of the Tigris there is plenty of evidence that this bit of history was entirely fantastic.

And then comes morning to present an entirely new scene. The Lauriston Mountains on the east have stepped up into the sky. Shadows play over them and the sun sparkles on the rocky heights where the blue shades off into white.

Some such place as this was the locale of the Black Isles. A lake would not be impossible with a mountain behind it, and indeed the tangled nets of canals along the eastern countryside give indication that at some time there may have been pools here, with grassy margins, and cows standing in them. The landscape here is not much different from that just past save that verdure is thicker and that the low banks are sprinkled occasionally with flowers. Here and there are clusters of black tents and thousands and thousands of camels turned out to graze.

In another twelve hours the river finds its way through bewildering mazes and comes at length to Kut-el-Amara, once an insignificant military post, then a British base of supplies and finally a turning point in Mesopotamian history. It was because of the precipitous advance of the British under Townshend from this point and the subsequent capture of the town, after a siege by the Turks, that the eyes of the West were turned upon Mesopotamia in the World War and sufficient forces were thrown into the land of the Two Rivers to drive into the mountains its masters of five hundred years.

And down the river lies the Garden of Eden.

Quernah, a happily situated town at the junction of the

Basrah

Tigris and Euphrates, is only one of the towns in Mesopotamia where tradition has fixed the scene of the fall of man. Indeed the honor is claimed even by Hit, although the Arabs, out of deference to its atmosphere of sulphur and brimstone, refer to it picturesquely as the Mouth of Hell.

But the scriptural suggestion that the Euphrates was one of the rivers that flowed through Paradise is solemnly quoted by the present inhabitants as proof that even the Jews must admit its distinction.

After the hot silent trip through the slit in the desert it would be a critical nonconformist who would quarrel about so unimportant a matter as geographical proof. Quernah, in the midst of palm groves and cultivated fields, has the look of Eden here in the twilight—whatever it may look like to-morrow when the sun comes up to disclose its dust.

One may go ashore here while the boat is at anchor and see all that remains of the Tree of Knowledge. It is a dead thing now and like other trees in the region white with the breath of the wasteland. Its original variety cannot be detected by any visible marks on its white and bony skeleton.

They tell this highly unbiblical story of the "Tree of Knowledge":

When the British troops were moving northward on the heels of the Turk and wiping out with strong decisive blows the defeat at Kut, Quernah in Eden became a base of supplies and because of its historical and religious associations an object of much attention.

It is related in that unbiased document, "Record of Courts Martial in Mesopotamia," that a British soldier named Adam Frawley, asserting that a distant relative of his family had once been a large property owner in these parts, made a special pilgrimage to the tree, accompanied by other brave and courteous soldiers carrying cameras.

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Mr. Frawley was photographed in numerous positions about the tree that had meant so much to the fortunes of his ancient house and presently, just for the novelty of the thing, climbed into the lower branches.

It is a matter of history that men have been unlucky who loitered about this tree, but Mr. Frawley gave that point no consideration. Instead he posed out at the end of a limb and is said to have been photographed flying in midair just after the branch collapsed under his weight.

The Arab population was highly incensed against Mr. Frawley and complained in bitterness to the British High command. Mr. Frawley, who might otherwise have passed through the war as a simple hero in the rear rank, was suddenly brought into international note by court martial.

And in the end justice was done. You may read about it in the records of the Farenji—how he was fined a month's pay "for breaking a branch off of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden."

The native populace was fairly well pleased with the finding of the court when the edict was put in black and white and posted with its Arabic translation on the walls of the town. Of course there was no way in which the tree could be restored to the beauty it had known when Adam was a young man. But on the other hand here was tacit recognition by the English that Quernah was indeed on the site of paradise—sufficient evidence to confound the scoffers of other towns that had sought to capitalize a much less authentic tradition.

The names of the rivers of Eden as mentioned in the Bible were Phrath and Hiddekel. The Arabic name for Tigris to-day is Digleh—which is not so far from the biblical name—and the basic similarity between Phrath and Phrat, as the Euphrates is known, is too obvious to require comment.

Myres, the American traveler who passed along this

Basrah

route several decades ago, was convinced that the site described by the authors of the Hebrew scriptures was undoubtedly somewhere in the district below Quernah where the two rivers unite to form the Shat-el-Arab and then divide into the Gihon and the Pison, declaring that historical evidence fails to support the theory that lower Mesopotamia was built up by alluvial deposits in a period subsequent to the appearance of man in the fertile crescent. Excavations at Erich on the Euphrates give some indication that the seacoast reached there at some time during the existence of the Sumerian civilization, but it is obvious that the problem will never be closed to discussion until more of the plain is dug up.

At any rate the suggestion of Eden grows on one as the boat steams on down the Shat-el-Arab. The date palms are dense along the shore, and memory of the desert is shut out by the vision of green and the insistent if indescribable smell of verdure.

At Marghil above Basrah the groves are cut up by a fretwork of little canals arched over with mulberry trees. Small boats are tied to the thick trees in endless array and natives in white pass like ghosts through the deep shadows under the palms.

Basrah, once reputed to be the dirtiest town in all the dominions of the Turk, hardly justifies that indictment now. Like Baghdad it has been cleaned up considerably under British rule, and a continuous and profitable commerce with the Occident has brought it tangible prosperity.

As one wanders through its maze of gardens, with its wavering shades of green and its high spots of color where pomegranate, apricot, date and banana are visible through its foliage, one cannot but realize how the land of the rivers looked when Sinbad the Sailor was setting out from Bassorah on his unfortunate voyages. There is a jungle-like luxuriance in the scene—luxuriance and peace, and

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no hint of that poverty which even more than dirt is characteristic of Eastern cities.

Basrah is the ocean port of Iraq and great cargoes of wool and other produce clear through it from the Occident. But even so it might not come to the attention of the ordinary citizen of the West were it not for its dates.

Some day, probably, books will be written on the date culture of Mesopotamia. There are tales of it which stir the imagination even more than the accounts of ancient mysteries and ghostly civilizations.

On the day of the full moon in September feverish rites occur at the docks of Basrah. By that day the date crop must be in and packed and aboard the boats, for then the tide will be high and the deep draft steamships can slip across the bar and down the river to the Persian Gulf.

One not acquainted with the circumstances that govern the date trade might be a bit puzzled at the totally un-Eastern bustle. But it appears that there is a reason.

It appears that the first steamer to dock in New York with dates of the new crop can command its own price for its cargo and that frequently—so the date exporters say—the price may be fully twice as high as that paid for the second shipload even though the two ships come into their slips only a few hours apart.

So rival exporters make every effort to get their pack completed and the boats loaded before the hour of the high tide. To-morrow Basrah may go to sleep again. To-day it has all the energy of a Western port. The ships with smoke curling from their blistered funnels are ready to get away. In an hour or two they will be gone.

The date ships as a class are not the most beautiful things afloat. The casual traveler might underrate them considerably were he to judge them by their rusty exteriors. But hair-raising stories are told of these ships. There are some among them that could step away from a

Basrah

fairly fast ocean liner. All of them are faster than the rating generally given to boats of their size.

It is said that two or three of the craft that slide out onto the gulf with Basrah's crop each year have two sets of engines—either one of which would be sufficient for a ship of half again the tonnage. One set of engines is mere cargo for eleven months in the year, packed in cosmolene and tended only by oilers while the boat tramps from port to port for cargoes that will pay its fuel and upkeep bills. For the twelfth month it is put into service shearing rivets from plates and lifting the white spray well up onto the decks as it lends its power to drive the ship westward.

The romance born of such intense rivalry can only be imagined. One knows what goes on at Basrah. One is never told the story of the race through the gulf, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, down the Mediterranean and past the Pillars of Hercules toward New York.

A railroad now links Basrah with Baghdad. It was built during the war—a fairly well-equipped meter gauge line. Its rolling stock, carried over from India, is far more comfortable and well kept than that of most of the rail-ways east of Constantinople.

Compartments are commodious enough to accommodate the traveler and his trunks and to provide him with ample sleeping quarters. The custom in this region is for the voyager to furnish his own bed linen, and so army bed sacks have become part of the paraphernalia of every man who has occasion to wander from his own doorstep in Mesopotamia.

One difficulty with the road is that the so-called "expresses" are run only on certain days of the week. On other days, one must be content to travel in long "mixed trains" whose interminable lines of box cars slow progress to a rate only slightly faster than that of the river steamboat. Still, for a northbound trip, one would have to be

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thoroughly acclimated to the Orient to risk the river. With the current, the journey may be made in two days. Against the current only accident and the Grace of Allah can determine when the little teapot will push its scow into the bank near the bazaar and debark its passengers.

Chapter Twenty-five

WHERE PASSED SEMIRAMIS

The Adventure of the Youth Who Loved the Caliph's Daughter

*Thy waist, many swear,
Is the region of Naught,
And they call thy loose hair
The Black Desert of Ghaut;
But persons of taste
Are content to declare
That thy hair is a waste
While thy waist is a bair.*

—LAMII.



IF one could go a-journeying into the ancient Assyrian lands north of Baghdad he had best go by railroad. It seems a sacrilege to stir the ghosts of the crinkly beards and brazen breast-plates with the whistle of a locomotive. But, to follow the route of the rival conquerors with the transportation that they used—horses and camels—would be to undergo hardships for which they were better fitted and for which they probably had more time.

The line that straggles out to the north past the tomb of the Sitt Zobeide and the golden bubbles on the sky line above Kadamain, is the accepted method of transportation between Baghdad, Shergat, Mosul and the regions to the north.

The journey is hot—similar in all respects to the train journey to Basrah. But it is accompanied by a romance

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that must compensate for any discomfort. It was over this same route along the Tigris that empires fought for a thousand years. Here passed Asshur when he went forth from Shinar to build Nineveh.

Here passed the descendants of Asshur in their marches upon Babylonia and the descendants of the ancient Sumerians in their marches upon the mighty Assyria. The train route is part of the famous Berlin-to-Baghdad Railroad, the part which was started northward from Baghdad as a terminal. The railroad station to which the line was never connected still stands as an empty shrine to the memory of Hajji Wilhelm and German ambition in the East—a shrine to which nations yet to come may some day trace the causes of the World War.

The northern terminus of this part of the railway is at Shergat, an arbitrary stopping point even for an unfinished line, inasmuch as most of the wealth of Iraq lives in the oil fields about Mosul. Of recent years, however, automobile transport has been provided between Shergat and Mosul and is fairly efficient and reliable despite haphazard roads and detours through dangerous dry washes. This railroad is of considerable importance to the spiritual side of Iraq. It passes not only Kadamain, which is reached thirty-five minutes from Baghdad, but Samara, one of the most important of the holy cities, the scene of the disappearance of the twelfth Imam, Mohammed Ibn Hassan el Mahdi. Samara is worth a visit not only for its fascinating buildings and its beautiful site, but the legends which have given it a peculiar place in the folklore of Islam. It is probable that there was always some sort of settlement in this region from the days when the Sumerians first came out of the hills to make towns in the alluvium at the mouth of the two rivers.

The name of the original town has been lost, but it is known that when the Caliph Motassim brought his court to this place, in 836 A.D. he gave it the name Surra man raa, which translated means "who sees it rejoices."

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With the decline of the Abbaside Caliphate, Samara ceased to be a city of much importance to commerce but it is still the scene of much activity because of its religious significance. Like Kadamain it has a Shia mosque with a great dome of beaten gold and is remarkable, as one traveler puts it, for "its flower-like minarets covered with delicately gay Persian tiles and its invitation to the holy of holies within, richer as one may guess than without."

The dome has been placed over the shrine which marks the spot where the vanished Imam was last seen.

According to the story, Mohamet at the time of his Imamate was a boy of twelve. He fled into the cave pursued by soldiers and never appeared again. It is said that the cave was fired and filled with water but no trace of the body was found. The holy men of the Shia declared that the Imam had been miraculously taken into heaven and that some day he would come back to lead Islam to its ancient glory. . . . Once more, in a slightly different dress, the legend of the sword of Iskander.

One of the most important monuments of Samara is the Friday mosque, erected by Motassim. The minaret of this structure was designed by the Caliph on the model of the Chaldean Zigurrat or step temple. It has a staircase rising to its top in a spiral about the exterior.

The tower, which is all that remains of the mosque, is about half a mile outside of the city wall. It is still in a commanding position—the best place to stand for a view of the city. Below one stretches out a series of gardens, walls and decaying mansions. Amid them the ruins of the days when the Abbaside Caliphate was in its glory. What is left of two of the Abbaside palaces may be discerned. The marble arch of one of them is still in its place. It is called the Bet-el-Khalifa—(Mansur's palace).

Looking from this arch across the bed of the old river one sees the remains of the Bet-el-Ashiq enveloped in the fading sunlight as tradition invests it with an ancient love.

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"The Palace of Love," the place is called. And here is its story.

In Samara when Islam ruled the world and Samara ruled Islam, there lived a youth of many graces and an immense fortune who had followed the court hither and built a mansion of marble in the gardens to the north.

There were rumors that he had journeyed through Ind to the far places of the East and that his coffers were filled with great rubies and the walls of his house covered with cloth of spun gold.

Hassan, his name was, but with his antecedents or history, tradition is not concerned. His first appearance in the local narrative occurred on a feast day when the train of the Caliph was setting out for the mosque.

This must have been a sight rivaling Baghdad in the days of Harun. Horsemen in armor of silver with silver lances uplifted in the sun rode from the Bet-el-Khalifa toward the great pile of Persian tile which was even then a holy of holies although the miracle of the disappearing Imam had not yet been performed.

Behind the horsemen came trumpeters in scarlet silks sounding the shrill music of the march from long horns of gold. A guard of honor, in gold and white and armed with golden scimitars, followed them and then came the Caliph on a black horse trapped out with golden chain, polished leather, and silver plate, and afire with thousands of cut jewels.

The people of the court followed in a pageant of iridescent silks and peacock feathers, a procession that stupefied the populace with its grandeur. All the men of Samara lined the streets to see the passing of the pageant—that is, all but Hassan, who lay asleep in his house beyond the river.

The blasting of the trumps awoke the youth. He hurried to the street and toward the mosque and in his haste laid the foundations for a lovely story.

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It occurred to Hassan that if he were to attempt to reach the bridge the procession would have passed into the mosque long before he could cross the river. Therefore he stepped into a *gufah* near his own house and attempted to row across. The Tigris was high and the current strong, and Hassan apparently knew little of oarsmanship. At any rate he was taken far out of his course downstream and eventually came to the opposite bank at a point where the marble stair of a private garden stepped down through white walls to the water.

Hassan went up the stairs. He did not realize until he had come to the top and saw the alabaster gleaming above the palm trees that he had landed on the Caliph's grounds. Then when he would have retreated he caught sight of a woman moving among the flowers.

In this private retreat she was unveiled and her garment—a silken gauze as brilliant as flame and as thin—revealed charms such as Hassan had not known could exist in all Islam. Then and there Hassan was smitten with a great love and in the throes of it lost his better judgment.

Manifestly he should have retreated instantly, praying at each step of his short journey to the river that he might not be overtaken by a serious-minded eunuch and put to death. But the thought of retreat never occurred to him—nor any thought of the peril to which he had exposed himself by looking upon a lady of the court in the privacy of her own garden. So it came about that he was still standing there wide-eyed when the girl turned about and saw him.

It was the favor of Allah that saved him then. The woman had only to give a startled cry, to call into the garden half a dozen murderous Nubians whose services had not been required to add to the glory of the procession. But she did not cry out. Instead she readjusted her diaphanous gown with a neat regard for pictorial effect

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and looked frankly at the young man with eyes that piqued and chilled him at the same time.

"Who are you?" she asked in a voice so low that its music did not disturb the song of the birds in the trees about her. Hassan, finding his tongue with difficulty, told her his name.

"You are a fool for coming here," she told him. "If you were to be seen here your life would not be worth a dinar though you should flee to Dimishk esh Sham or the high mountains or Iran."

"Now that I have seen you I know that you speak truly and that the penalty would be little enough to pay for the experience," said Hassan, who deserves little credit for a pretty speech. It seems that he meant it.

"Do you know who I am?" inquired the maiden, looking at her pretty bare foot.

"A peri, I think," Hassan hazarded, "certainly not a creature of this poor world—although your garb makes one think of Ishtar, the beloved of the Babylonians."

"I am Miriam, daughter of the Caliph. And compliments do not lessen your danger—nor mine."

"I love you."

"A djinn has taken your poor brain."

"I love you."

"The eunuchs would be glad to kill you for saying so."

"I mean it. I have traveled beyond the seas to Spain where the countryside is a vast garden as fair as this. And I have journeyed beyond Iran into Kashmir. But never have I seen your like."

"I can believe that. A man who goes spying upon women in the harem does not live long enough to see many of them."

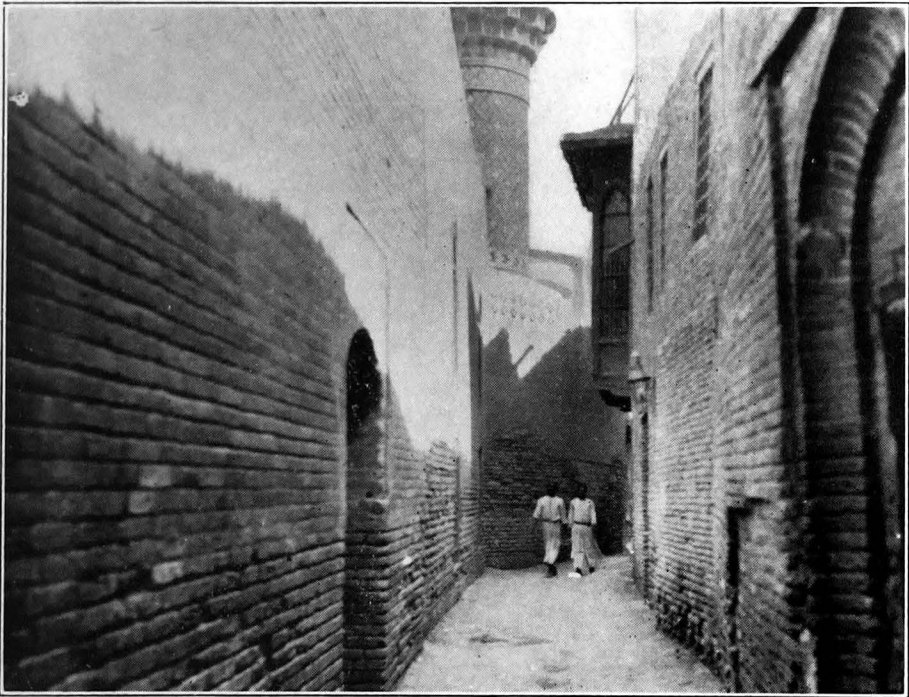
"Will you believe that I love you?"

The girl ceased suddenly to look at her tiny foot and gazed frankly into his tense face.

"Yes . . ." she said slowly . . . "I think I can believe



THE TOMB OF ZOBEIDEH, BAGHDAD



AN ALLEY IN KADAMAIN

Where Passed Semiramis

that. . . . For, Hassan, the djinn has seized me, too. . . . And I love you."

A pattering of bare feet on a walk beyond the hedgerow startled them from further indiscretion. At a sign from the lady Hassan disappeared down the marble stairway to the Tigris and fell dizzily into the gufah. When the eunuch arrived Miriam was singing softly to herself and picking flowers.

It is related that the next day Hassan, accoutered in garments that would have done credit to a prince, waited upon the Caliph and asked for the hand of his daughter.

"I have come hither from Spain to crave this boon," he lied convincingly. "The fame of the beauty of your daughter Miriam is one of the stirring legends that drive your troops to victory in the passes of the Pyrenees and on the flats of the Rhone. And I, because I am braver than the rest, have dared to forget my unworthiness and present myself to you. I cannot but recall that unworthiness now and submit, in asking the Commander of the Faithful to consider my request, that there is no man alive who could be worthy of her."

"You have guessed correctly," replied the Caliph. "You are a nice lad and all that, but I think Miriam probably will marry a prince. I haven't given much thought to the matter."

The court marveled at the magnanimity of the Caliph, who refrained from calling the guard to put an end to this upstart then and there—a normal procedure and more than ordinarily advisable in view of the youth's tangible estate. But somehow Hassan was allowed to get out of the palace grounds before the thought suggested itself to the Caliph. And later an embassy from Persia took the matter out of his mind. Hassan went back to his house to lie on a divan at a window looking out over the Tigris, toward the high walls of the palace. He refused food and could not sleep. Which shows that love in a

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climate like that of Mesopotamia is a dangerous thing.

According to all the forms Hassan should have realized that the affair was over and that he could be thankful that he was still alive. But he was young and foolish and persistent to an unbelievable degree. That night and many nights thereafter he swam the Tigris and stood at the head of the marble stairs gazing for hours at a time at the spot where he had seen the marvelous Miriam.

Of course this could not go on forever without some one finding out about it. An investigative eunuch wandered out into the garden one night and was found dead in the morning. The story was circulated in the harem that he had engaged in a terrific fight with a bronze statue that arose from the river, and Miriam, whose intelligence was sufficient for her needs, guessed somehow that this statue, dripping with the water of the Tigris, might be her moon-crazed lover. A few nights thereafter she slipped out of her quarters unobserved and was waiting at the head of the stairs when Hassan emerged from his swim.

"You must not come here," she declared distractedly. "You have been seen. You will be ambushed and killed. There will have to be an end to this affair—for the good of both of us."

"Yes," admitted Hassan airily. "I shall concede that. To-night I was so weak with love that I could scarcely swim the Tigris. Another night may see the end of me without any assistance from the able eunuchs. So tomorrow I shall come here at high noon. And you will be waiting for me in this spot."

"Do you want us both to be killed?"

"What difference does it make if we are? I know that I cannot go on this way. And if you feel as I do you would rather die than be sent away in marriage to some far land where our love would be only a distressing memory. . . ."

"Yes," admitted Miriam. "That is true."

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"But death is only a secondary consideration," went on Hassan. "I do not intend that we shall be killed—either of us—until we have taken our last chance with happiness. And to-morrow we may try to convince your father. . . ."

"He will never consent," demurred Miriam with tears in her eyes. "But I shall be here, my beloved. . . . To-morrow at high noon."

On the following day Hassan, dressed in the finest raiment of an extensive wardrobe, came across the river in a *gufah* and landed as he had landed before at the entrance to the palace grounds. He took some precautions about landing and then strode quickly up the stairs to the top of the river wall where Miriam waited for him in her dress of flame-colored silk. Before she had a chance to speak to him he seized her and threw her into the river. Then with a loud cry he leaped in after her.

Thanks to his knowledge of the palace routine and his careful planning, the first that the guards knew of his presence came when they appeared at the top of the wall and saw him breasting the current with powerful strokes toward the Caliph's daughter. As they looked hereached the girl's side and drew her toward the bank. They stood aside as he carried her up the stairs.

The Caliph came presently. His joy at hearing that a man had rescued his daughter from drowning in the Tigris was tempered somewhat when he looked up at the youth and was reminded of his oversight in neglecting to have him executed.

"You," said the Caliph.

"Yes," said Hassan.

"What do you mean by laying hands on my daughter?"

"I could not let her drown. . . . I still have hope of marrying her."

"You are insolent."

"Your charge is just, O Commander of the Faithful.

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But my status is changed since last I made my presumptuous request. You see I have looked upon the unveiled face of your daughter. I have held her in my arms. And to meet the requirements of etiquette it would seem that I who have had the privileges of a husband, should be a husband in fact."

"Not necessarily. There is another page in the book which provides that the man who has looked upon the unveiled face of the Caliph's daughter may be restored to favor by drawing and quartering."

Hassan shrugged.

"As you will, my lord," he agreed. "But on the other hand it seems to be a good social usage in cases where the family honor is so to be protected that the girl in the case must be killed also. . . . And obviously that is not the way to collect a dowry for a Caliph's daughter."

"Young man," stated the Caliph, "I think I like you. What Islam needs is more sophists and far be it from me to murder a man of such obvious talent."

So Hassan and Miriam were duly wedded and presumably got along as well as most husbands and wives. Hassan built for her The Palace of Love adjoining his house across the river and is reported to have brought about the construction of the bridge whose piers still are to be seen in the old bed of the Tigris, that the lady might walk dry-shod to her father's house. . . . It is obviously without prejudice to so pretty a legend that history ascribes the building of The Palace of Love to Mutamid, the last of the Samara Caliphs and makes no mention of Hassan or Miriam or the dress that was like a flame and as diaphanous as the light.'

Chapter Twenty-six

NINEVEH

Cryptogram of Emperors

*The characters the slight reed traces
Remain indelible through ages;
Strange, then, that Time so soon effaces
What Feeling writes on Memory's pages.*

—FOOZOOLI.



FROM this point northward the road is through a depressing cemetery of lost causes and lost peoples. Close to the walls of Samara is a mound which the natives designate a bit arbitrarily, no doubt, as the tomb of Julian.

The identification is interesting whether or not the bones of the apostate emperor lie under the hillock that looks so much like another imperial rubbish heap. It shows what most travelers in the East are soon ready to believe, that behind the most preposterous tale one may generally find a basis in fact. It is far from likely that Julian, the Roman, is buried here despite the positiveness of the Arab tradition. But it is true that he died somewhere in this vicinity and that his body was placed in a Mesopotamian tomb close to where he fell. If not a grave, this mound is at least a catafalque whose written legend must forever mark it as the point from which Christianity began its march to dominance in the world's affairs.

"Thou hast conquered, O Galilean," cried Julian as he died. And so the valley about Samara takes on a

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new significance as the spot where Rome surrendered to the spiritual influence which it had so long denied.

At Tekrit, north of the holy city, are ruins—great panoramas of ruins—the tumbled remains of kingdoms that rose out of kingdoms and palaces that were built upon the wreckage of other palaces. Civilizations might be traced here through a sort of geological process in the succeeding strata of bricks and cut stone and crockery which one people piled upon those of another. But except to the patient archæologist, competent to read with a magnifying glass the story of this world in miniature, and to reconstruct the life of men from the burial ornaments and kitchen utensils that they left behind them thousands of years ago, there is more of desolation than of interest in the scene. One feels in looking at it the depressing atmosphere that always seemed to linger in shelled towns—although here the ruin is far from recent and shows more plainly the slow vengeance of Time than the sudden ferocity of cannon. Unlike so many ruined places in the East the chaos here seems never to have been a part of life but always the charnel house that it is to-day.

It is not difficult to see where the idea of reincarnation started in the Eastern sects and less difficult to find for the theory a scientific basis. These pitiful tombs of racial epochs indicate that millions upon millions of men must have lived in the Land of the Two Rivers between the morning of the world and the gloomy twilight that Mohamet brought. All of these millions lived in the narrow belt of verdure that runs down from the Kurdish foothills to the sea. And as one population died the chemical elements that had composed its physical personality went back to the soil to be incorporated in the verdure of the valleys and presently to find place in the bodily structure of other men. There is no dust cloud in all of Iraq but has in it substances that once were combined in the living person of some man or woman or perhaps a

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number of them who saw Asshur rise—and Nineveh—and who stood by the side of the road as empire quarreled with empire and Time followed the sun out of the East to conquer everything. . . .

About ten hours north of Samara the railroad comes to an ignominious end at Shergat, near the ruins of Asshur, the capital which the ancient Assyrians called ancient.

The ruins of Asshur lie about four miles from the railway station in a beautiful site. The suggestion of the desert so common to the other ruins of Mesopotamia is entirely absent here and so is the feeling that one has fallen by chance onto the surface of a dead planet. One knows that men could have lived in such a place as this—men not much different, by and large, from those of whom we are so boastfully proud to-day.

Although the extent of the remains scattered about the Hill of the Moon, where the capital stood, seems to be considerably less than one might expect from the descriptions of the might and proportions of the city as given in early histories and the sacred writings of neighboring peoples, it is none the less evident that it must have been large and imposing. It occupied a rocky spur of land rising well out of the valley. At its stony skirts stretched a placid lake. At one time this must have had a population of several hundred thousand and thanks to its predominating position was probably one of the most formidable towns of the warrior kings in all this end of the world.

The principal feature of the city was the ziggurat, an artificial mountain of marble, brick and cut stone which rose from the top of the eminence on which the city was situated to a commanding height. This step temple was a monument, a shrine to the god Asshur, and was called Kharsaq-gal-Kurra, which is the great mountain house of all lands. Asshur, the founder of Nineveh, was deified as the patron of war.

The temple was similar to the Egyptian pyramids in

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construction. Save for a small chamber on the interior, devoted probably to religious exercises, it was a solid structure with a stairway spiraling about it. Much of the building and its stairway remains to-day and is easily accessible to the tourist. From the height one may look down upon the lake on the crumpled ruins of the city and on the Tigris, marking the route to Babylon as it did so many thousand years ago.

Much of Assyrian legend clings to this region. According to enthusiastic but unauthenticated legend the lovely Semiramis went forth from here at the head of three million infantrymen to do battle with the monarchs of the farther East. For a lady who in her infancy had been nourished by doves this seems to have been a considerable undertaking. But the ancient chroniclers tell how she met the legions of Ind and how, though their forces exceeded hers by several millions, defeated them and came back to Asshur bearing with her the contents of their treasure houses. There is, of course, little or no historical basis for such tales as this. But the tale of Semiramis or Sammuramat, as she appears to have been called in the language of her people, has been found among the ruins. The inscription referring to her reads:

“Sammuramat woman of the palace of Shamshi-Adad, king of the world, king of Assyria, mother of Adad Nirari, king of the world, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser, king of the four quarters of the world.”

It is with something of surprise that the archæologists discovered in this inscription some authentication of the existence of the legendary Semiramis who figured so prominently in the lore of the Greeks of several centuries later. It is not yet known if the Sammuramat, woman of the palace, was really the Semiramis of whom the Greek myths were written. But here science has been able to

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decipher many tablets, tending to show that at least there ruled a woman in Assyria, a woman who had the respect and the loyalty of her followers, who occupied a position never thereafter equaled by another of her sex in this portion of Asia. It is only within recent years that the world has made any headway in reading the riddles that were printed in cuneiform upon the bricks and stones of Asshur, but in the reading of that riddle modern necromancers have brought back to light and to life hundreds of heroes who like Semiramis occupied a highly dubious position in the world literature and in the history that so often seemed akin to folklore.

Among the recent discoveries is the tomb of Sennacherib the Second, and great quantities of inscriptions reciting the sanguinary deeds of the warrior kings who built Assyria with the bones of other nations. There are tablets setting forth how the temple of Asshur came to be built, a detailed account of its construction and the engineering problems that went into it. Save for the weird marks of the script in which it is recorded, this chronicle might well be the report of The Building and Commercial Association of Des Moines, Iowa, for 1926. It would seem after all that civilizations do not die. They merely change their names and their exteriors.

Thanks to the profusion of growing things this great ossuary is not so desolate as Babylon. Across the lake it is not difficult to reconstruct the gardens that must have extended down the river all the way to Baghdad. It is not hard to imagine that in the day of warfare a king might rise on the steps of the Ziggurat of Asshur and sound a call that would bring hundreds of thousands of able men to arms. They are out there now, those armed millions, who made the Hill of the Moon the pivot of a world—a gray and ghostly crew that peeps silently and sadly—and perhaps a bit proudly through the dust.

One gets into the motor car and makes the delirious but

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not too tedious trip to Mosul and poor gaunt Nineveh where oil men fight about a frontier and the skeletons of the Robber Kings turn over and over in their rocky graves.

Mosul, as one might gather from the story of Tomas the Chaldean boy, has always figured since the vanishing of the Abbasides in the Turkish military operations in the north of Iraq. For many years it supported a large force of the imperial regulars and of recent months, since the wrangling over oil fields and frontiers has assumed something of its former appearance. It is once more in a state of unrest with large forces of Turks camped in the hills out of which flows the Tigris.

Quite aside from its importance as an oil city, Mosul is a town which the Turks naturally would not wish to lose. It is in a fertile district, perhaps the most fertile of all modern Iraq and in the spring is a fairyland. The river at its feet is clear as a mountain spring—which indeed it is—and about it the slopes are covered with scarlet anemones and daisies.

The beginnings of modern Mosul are unimportant as compared with the splendors out of which it rose. But even so it seems to have occupied a respected place in the fungous civilization that came to spread itself over Sumer and Akkad. With the decline of the caliphate, when it was able to obtain its independence it took on a commercial significance that far exceeded that of the expiring cities to the south. It seems to have come to its greatest prosperity about the twelfth century, at which time Saladin laid siege to it unsuccessfully. But then after defying civilized destroyers it fell into the hands of the barbarians with the Mongol invasion and was almost totally destroyed. Throughout its subsequent existence it was the object of much rivalry—and bloodshed worth recording even in that region of blood—because of the conflicting ambitions of Persia and the Turks.

In common with the rest of Mesopotamia it fell under

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Turkish rule but was recovered by the Persians in 1623. Its existence as a Persian town was short-lived, however, for Murat the Fourth succeeded in recapturing it. In 1743 the Persians made another effort to retrace the steps of Cyrus into the land of the two rivers. But this was the last attempt and entirely unsuccessful.

As the center of the oil controversy and the perils of a new war, Mosul has figured largely in the news reports from Iraq in the last year. It has assumed a commercial importance in the eyes of the world far exceeding that which it is accorded by those who live near and in it. To the traveler in Mesopotamia it will always be important chiefly because it is within sight of the ruins of Nineveh.

The ruins stretch out for miles on the opposite side of the Tigris, testifying to the might and extent of Assyria at the time when Assyria was Nineveh. This was the last and most formidable of the capitals of the great land pirates. It exercised and influenced and enjoyed a fame far beyond the edges of what its inhabitants believed to comprise the surface of the earth. The date of its foundation, aside from the meager statement in the Bible that "Asshur went forth from Shinar and builded Nineveh," is nowhere definitely fixed. Some of the tablets that were recorded here by Layard and others lead it to be deduced that there may have been a settlement here and a considerable settlement as early as nineteen hundred years before Christ. But it is also evident that the capital came to occupy a position as a world power only at the time of Sennacherib. Sennacherib's own inscriptions claim no originality in the construction of Nineveh. He describes himself merely as repairing its buildings and strengthening its great walls. From the time of this emperor until the destruction of the empire in 626 B.C. the crinkly-bearded warriors, who spread the dread of Assyria's name throughout Palestine, the Mediterranean coast as far as Egypt, and throughout the hills beyond Iraq even into the remote

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corners of Cashmere, were directed from the palace that stood on the heights beyond the river.

Regarding the might, the wealth and the extent of the city there need be no doubt. Ctesias refers to it as a city whose walls were four hundred eighty stadia in length. The prophet Jonas refers to it as a city of three days' journey, a somewhat obscure passage which some commentators have taken to mean that the circuit of the streets of the city would require three days, while others interpret it as meaning not only the central fortified stronghold of Nineveh itself, but the entire metropolitan district which embraced Galah and Zab and Khorsabad, the fortress of Sargon, fifteen miles to the north.

Even though Assyria has vanished and Nineveh had ceased to be a city six hundred years before our era, there was never any doubt as to where it had stood. Arabic tradition continued to apply the name to the group of mounds through the centuries, and Persian historians and Greeks give many accurate descriptions of the countryside as it appeared when they saw it.

One of the most remarkable accounts concerning it is based upon the journey of Xenophon past the spot. Xenophon describes it merely as a vast ruined city whose walls even then rose out of the wreckage to a height of one hundred and forty feet. Probably because he had no way of questioning the natives of the district he did not attempt to identify it.

No ruins in Mesopotamia have been so completely lifted out of the realm of the purely physical and into the philosophical as those of Nineveh. Nearly all of the commentaries of travelers who have visited this place, and even the great works of Layard and Rawlinson, give much space to supposititious conjecture concerning the size of the walls at the time of the city's preëminence and the actual extent of the capital which Jonas described as a metropolis of three days' journey.

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The reason for this is that numerous palaces and palace cities have been found in this neighborhood starting at Asshur and extending northward and including among them the great palace Sargon to the northeast of Nineveh proper. Recent commentators explain this by calling attention to the restlessness of Oriental monarchs, pointing out that something of the same sort of administrative migration may have occurred here as has been marked in Cambodia and for that matter closer to home in Babylonia. It is a sort of point in common with these allied races that their capitals, arising to great grandeur and importance, were suddenly blotted out as the court moved to new sites for the building of greater cities and larger palaces by men who wished that by such works they might preserve their names to posterity.

It is said also that these movements may have been prompted by a "Superstition forbidding the rebuilding of a capital on the exact spot occupied by a conquered city." Referring to this, Myres says: "Thus the capital of the Babylonian plains was refounded no less than five times and as many times it changed its name. And even now Baghdad is called by some The New Babylon. The Indian City of Delhi has shifted its site nine times and scattered its ruins over a score of miles along the Jumna. Of the same migratory character was the Assyrian capital.

"It suggests to us the nomadic restlessness and the love of change displayed by the rude Parthians whose tented capital is pitched now in the plain of the Tigris, then amid the hills of Media. Before Nineveh was founded or at least while it was but a provincial town, Asshur and Calah each had in its turn been the seat of the residence of the Assyrian kings. Both of these cities were adorned with palatial structures that were scarcely rivaled by those of any of the succeeding capitals. But before the reign of Asshur-Nasir-Pal had closed, Nineveh had certainly grown to importance and perhaps to the possession

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of a royal palace. When Sargon came to the throne and built a few miles to the northeast of Nineveh a new palace and a new city, he said in his inscription of Nineveh:

“At the foot of the Nusir hills, to replace Nineveh, I raised after the divine will and the wishes of my heart, a city which I called Hisr-Sargina.” The ruins of this city of Sargon are now represented by the mounds of Khorsabad.

Upon the succession of Sennacherib to the throne, Calah and Dur-Sargina were abandoned. And Nineveh became the chosen capital. Suddenly the city took on all the glory that had always attended the Assyrian court.

“I raised again all the edifices of Nineveh my royal city,” says Sennacherib in his inscription. “I reconstructed all of its old streets and widened those that were narrow. I made the whole town a city shining like the sun.”

“But we must not,” says Myres, “and perhaps need not pursue this discussion further. Believing that these ramparts are actually the crumpled walls of Nineveh we shall proceed to examine them and the inclosed mounds, the graves of the palaces of the Assyrian kings.

“And as for the walls—at the time of the expedition of Cyrus against the Persian King Artaxerxes, about 400 B.C. Nineveh was a deserted city and its walls and palaces were then fast crumbling into ruins. For two hundred years had passed since the city was sacked by the Medes and Babylonians.

“Still the strong walls had not yet sunk into those broad lines of earth that now grace their course. But when the Ten Thousand of Xenophon passed by they still retained much and in some places perhaps all of their original height.”

At which point the romance of ancient Nineveh went into retirement to come forth again when Layard, the archæologist, stood upon these mounds and attempted to reconstruct glories that had been buried for three mil-

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lennia. In this undertaking about Mosul one may see progress to a satisfactory end, probably the greatest feat of all modern magic.

We see Layard lifting out of the ground the cryptic tablets of emperors whose language was no longer spoken on the face of the earth. We see men who only a few years before had regarded as mythical the bulk of so-called history available concerning Assyria and Babylon, poring over these strange marks on tile and stone and out of them bringing back not only the meaning but the sounds of the tongue that once echoed between these walls. The method whereby the cuneiform inscriptions were deciphered is in itself worthy of a book and has received something of its due in the chapters accorded it in Dr. Jastrow's excellent book on "The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria."

As we stand among these mounds, noting with some regret the lack of coherence evident in the Babylonian excavations, we may still follow the work that Layard did here.

His tunnels still pass through the mounds and here and there we may see some of the colossal winged bulls that he did not remove. It is pointed out that in one of his tunnels he discovered heavy slabs of stone that once formed the pavement of the principal thoroughfare of Nineveh and that the ruts of chariot wheels were worn deep in the surfaces and as Myres points out here was abundant evidence of the prophetic declaration: "Fire shall devour thy bars." For in this shaft, Layard found great quantities of charcoal amid the wreckage of the great gate of the city. It was thus made manifest that the conquerors who destroyed the city had not overlooked the potency of fire as an assistant. It is in the imagination rather than in any physical aspect that Nineveh casts its spell. For it is not, like Palmyra, a region of magnificent structure, a pathetic tangible monument to men who somehow

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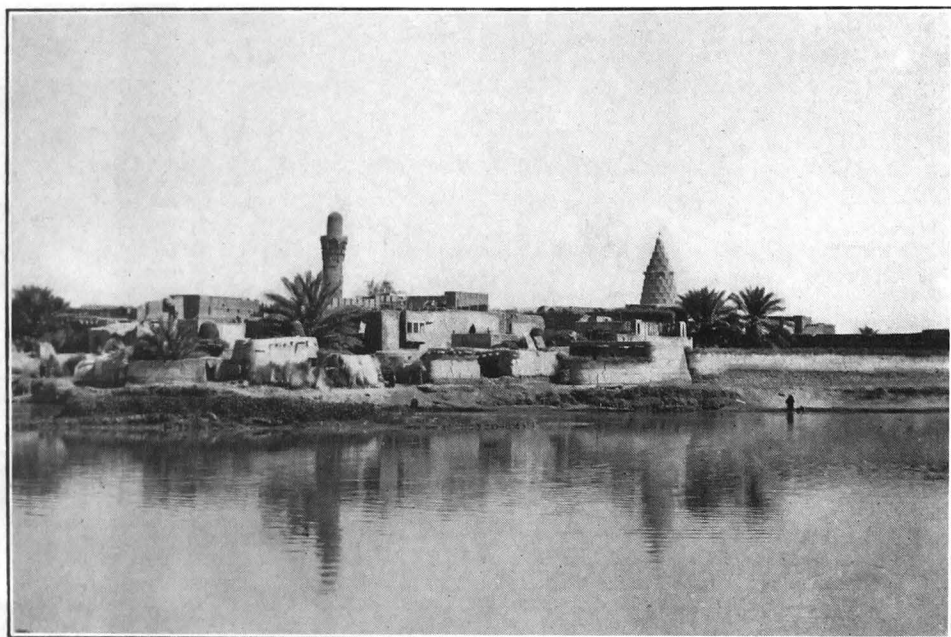
seem to have been something like ourselves. It is great in its extent. On the other side of the Tigris one may discern large regular stretches of verdure-covered rampart that once defied the great armies of the Orient. But there ceases its resemblance to a city. To see it as it was, one needs something more than the twilight that nightly rebuilds Palmyra. One needs the sympathy of a poet and the far-seeing eye of an architect.

Nevertheless, or perhaps for that reason, it does appeal to the imagination. Gone these thousand of years, it still brings to one a sense of understanding for the men who in the school histories appeared to have no more tangible existence than the strangely inhuman gods of the Greek Pantheon.

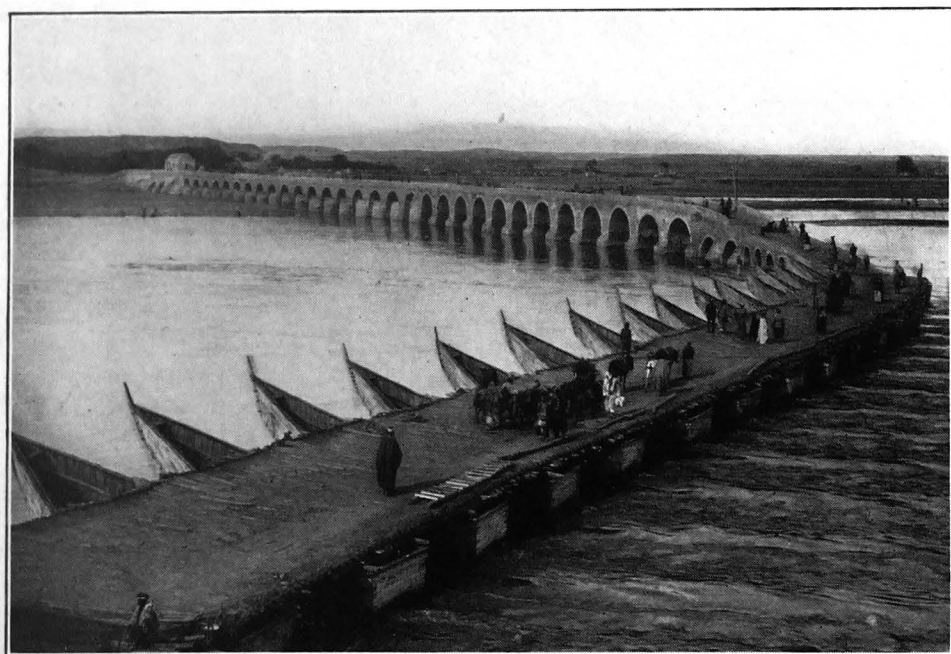
There was a city here. When night falls and the moon picks out here and there a bit of wall or a slab of stone atop a mound, it looks as if the city might still be here. The great bulk of the palace or citadel lies close to the river bank. Beyond are flat places where normal creatures probably lived very normal lives in between the wars that they undoubtedly considered necessary to the well-being of humanity. Through the dusk one sees them in the market place, sitting on their doorsteps, telling of fathers who had died in Palestine to make the world safe for Assyria, nursing their babies, baking bread, weaving cloth or pounding out armor. . . . And in the mind rises the picture of their dwelling places ranged along straight streets out toward where the rampart ends in a dim shadowy outline.

Beyond stretch the plains and out of the plains rise the mountains.

Assyria, we read in the best authenticated histories, was a nation of robbers. It was given to rapine and plunder. Its conquests were a story of massacre and bloodshed and the slaughter of innocents. In reading that, we are glad that we live in this century and while we may



KIFIL ON THE EUPHRATES



THE BRIDGE OF MOSUL

Nineveh

still feel a certain interest in the millions who lie dead out there beyond the Tigris, we are free to admit that they might have been a bit trying as intimates.

As we pause in our reading we may take up our newspaper and discover that England and the Turk are engaged in one of the age-old arguments as to which will rule in Nineveh. Both of these nations have just stepped out of a war in which the numbers engaged would dwarf even the imagination of the chronicler who described the throng that followed the lovely Semiramis into Ind.

Northward from Mosul we may find the stark remains of houses that had a physical existence and supported life at a much more recent period than that of the semibarbarous Assyrians. And close by we may see the slab of some Chaldean peasant sacrificed to the lust of the Kurd and we may hear from the lips of his survivors the story of populations set afoot that the Turkish administration might maintain superiority over the hills of Armenia.

The laughter that echoes through the night may be that of the jackal that roams the ruins. Or it may be that of Sargon, the great King, the King of Kings, the King of Assyria, enjoying a joke that probably would be beyond the understanding of a finer and more modern mind.

Chapter Twenty-seven

MAGIC

Assyria Rides to the Wars

Allah Akbar!

*All things are vanished after brief careering
Down one gulf Life's myriad barks are steering;
Headlong Mortal, be wise! The night, thy night, is nearing.
Night is nearing.*

—PERSIAN, ANON.



LF one is content to sit out here by the river bank until the black of the hills is swallowed in the larger blackness he may feel the stirring of an unseen life about him and presently he may behold the misty walls of Nineveh rising out of the gloom.

They are bright, smooth, solid walls with massive gates of cedar and brass that give onto the quays where river boats of Phœnician pattern are moored. Chariots are rumbling on the stone pavements; beyond the gates and above the hum of human life is that clanking of metal that is the keynote of Assyria's existence.

It seems to be high noon in Nineveh. Flaming banners are on the walls. Men in bronze greaves with short skirts of mail, breastplates of iron and potlike casque parade the streets.

Behind the walls rise the brick and stone terraces of the palace of Sennacherib, the builder, and on top of a great mountain of masonry the stepped pyramids of the towers

Magic

and the great stretch of the vaulted court blot out the sky line.

We may walk through the outer courts of the palace and into the echoing hall. The human-headed bulls stand guard over the entrance as they did when this conqueror put them there. It is moonlight that gives them their ghostly sheen where once a thousand torches may have made a dazzling show of the gold and silver plate that covered the vanished timbers of the ceiling. But one need not look up. One does not dare to look up, for the ancient scene is unfolding as clearly as a picture in a mirage. Sennacherib, the mighty, is on his throne.

Phœnician and Egyptian ambassadors are bowing before him—courteous as they have need to be in this capital, but firm in their belief that not even Assyria can conquer the world. They are warning the Great Sennacherib that he had best make peace with these nations beyond the desert and save the thousands of lives that otherwise must be spent needlessly.

And Sennacherib laughs at them. . . .

"I might have you torn to pieces by wild bulls," he tells them. "I might hang your heads to the gate as a warning to other petty kings who think that words will outweigh lances. But you are little men of little nations. And I shall need you to carry back to your own courts the word that Sennacherib will be smashing down your walls, a few hours after you arrive."

They go out. . . . Down through lanes of uplifted lances held by swarthy men with curly beards, flashing eyes and ready smiles.

And as one watches Assyria which we saw an hour ago in a mossy grave is on the march again. Out through those gates and across the Tigris pour the legions of the conqueror. The earth is a-tremble to the step of marching men and the jingle of mail has frightened the gazelle far in the hills. Out into the sun they go until the plains

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are too bright for the eye to look upon—a shimmering lake of molten metal that flows steadily westward.

Hour on hour it flows out of the gate and over the river. Women with babies at their breasts come to the street to cheer and go back to their homes to weep.

Little boys are clustered on the housetops watching the tidal wave of brass and iron roll out to the western horizon and their eyes are moist with regret for their lack of years.

Trumpets are sounding. Princes in silks ride out of their palace courts, their gonfalons before them on rods of polished wood topped with the brazen emblems of their houses. The wild, weird music echoes between the walls of the emptying city to be lost presently in the clatter of hoofs and the crashing noises of the chariots and engines of war.

Then presently this martial vision fades into the sunset as it faded those thousands of years ago and one is conscious of the silence. . . . The impenetrable deathly silence. . . . But one feels no sudden return to the twentieth century. In the darkness the day of Nineveh is not yet done. The silence that broods in the unseen alleys is only the natural aftermath of the spectacle that has just been enacted. The women of Assyria, and the old men and the little children—the weary thousands to whom this picture is an old and terrible thing—are sitting now in their homes praying dumbly to Asshur and the ghostly gods of Babylon for the day when what is left of the army will come back again. The service of those who sit at home and wait is going on now, as it must always go on while women's sons go out to battle and mothers try to sacrifice their instincts to the very abstract and unsatisfying god of glory.

The sun has gone down on Nineveh. A newcomer to the hall of Sennacherib—forgetting the age from which he has come—feels that he must shout out from the balconies of the pyramid towers the prophecy that the sun

Magic

has gone down on Nineveh forever. But he restrains himself. Perhaps he feels that ghosts might not understand the carpings of the alarmist. Perhaps he feels that after all his better judgment and the memory of dust heaps and battered walls that he has brought down with him through thirty centuries may be erroneous. Perhaps he hesitates to verify the sorrow of those phantom creatures who sit weeping within their houses of star dust.

So he stays on and sees the pandemonium of joy in the streets when the legions in rusted armor come out of the West driving whole nations as slaves before them. He stays on to hear the singing of the girls in the temple precinct and to witness the wild riot under the torches in the hall of Sennacherib.

He stays to see the tide of steel flow out once again—and again—and so he is still at the side of the winged bulls when the Medes and the Babylonians ride like a storm through the valley of the Tigris and hurl their steel-plumed surf on men at the gates. With a lump in his throat he sees red flowing through the ancient chariot ruts in the moon-white paving, the maniacal slaughter of Oriental conquest, the ravishing of women, the murder of children. . . . And presently a pillar of flame and smoke rising up to shut out the hideous sights of the streets of Nineveh.

Wearily he starts on his march back through the ages to the day of idealistic peace and thoroughly practical world wars . . . the day of oil leases, democracy and Versailles. . . . And he pauses only twice on his journey: Once to see the half starved Ten Thousand encamped on the plain and marveling at the walls of what they take to be the remnant of a city which they call Mespila—a might that rocked the world, forgotten in two short centuries; and again he pauses to watch the power of Rome roll over the grass-covered ruins through the fields of scarlet anemones to crumple the phalanx of Persia. . . . While not a man in either of the armies that crowd the

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valley from rim to rim realizes that the shock of battle is shaking the bone of conquerors who once ruled all the lands for which they are reddening the stream of the Tigris. . . .

The moon is up. A water wheel is turning. The outline of the ghostly city has faded. Overhead is a great roaring and an aeroplane sweeps its black cross over the white disk in the sky. Over in Mosul there is a turmoil and fires are being lighted to mark a landing place for a pilot from Baghdad. And Nineveh fades once more into the shadow. . . .

Chapter Twenty-eight

DEVIL WORSHIP

The Slighted Godiva

*Kings and Kalendars combine
To honor me—the pure and placid. . . .*

—FOOZOOLI.



UST because mere piles of brick and stone and bitumen have crumbled down to forgotten dust heaps in a few thousand years it does not follow that all traces of the old order have met with a similar fate. Up in the mountains, northeast of Mosul, there are still to be found traces of the worship of Bel and the superstitions that are described minutely on the clay cylinders of Babylon. Where religions have changed—and there is evidence in these hills of nearly every creed under the sun—there are still to be found survivals of social customs that antedate the remotest traditions of the region. Assyria, or possibly the civilization of which Assyria itself was an outgrowth, lives on and on world without end in the spirit and customs of its descendants.

There is, for example, the sect of the Yezidees, looked upon without too great a regard for accuracy as devil worshipers. They live in villages side by side with Christian and Moslem, for the most part a simple, kindly people who cherish no more rancor than other sects of the neighborhood against zealots who have made their lives interesting for ages.

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Considering their reputation it seems remarkable that any of them are left. For Shaitan is a spirit of considerable prominence in the legends of the mountains. His voice is heard in volcanic rumblings underground and the atmosphere of his kingdom is sensed in the sulphurous clouds that rise from hot springs and clefts in the earth throughout the district. With most of the tribes that range the valleys, tilling the soil, herding their flocks and killing one another for high-minded principles of one sort or another, practical religion is not so much the establishment of good as the prevention of evil. And protection against Shaitan and his various works is highly desirable.

The Yezidees, whose weird philosophy has put them entirely on the other side of the argument, probably have been spared throughout the centuries by the fear of their neighbors. The yearning for virtue in this primitive zone has not yet reached the point where the yearner feels safe in taking chances with curses, black magic, and the numerous troubles which the evil one is able to muster so easily. Here, as sometimes happens elsewhere in the world, Fear and Hate have wedded and brought into being a thin, weak, rickety little child called Tolerance.

The Western world is filled with stories of the Yezidees. By other names they were known to the witch cults of the early Middle Ages and to the wandering alchemists who in a later day acted as agents in merchandising the souls of such gentlemen as Gilles de Rais. Largely through legends that have come down to us through such sources, they have always been looked upon as a totally immoral and vicious community without a sense of decency and damned from birth.

But these stories are not true. The Yezidee is a devil worshiper, probably, but he is negatively so. His attitude in the matter is largely that *laissez faire* which in other departments of human endeavor is so typical of the East. He is by no means arrayed against God and right and

Devil Worship

virtue in favor of the principles generally attributed to Brother Shaitan, but on the other hand he sees in the lord of the underworld an active agency for discomfort here and hereafter who might just as well be placated.

Ahmed the Teller of Tales, with that inquisitive interest in things of no concern to himself which had characterized him since first he attached himself to this expedition into the East, had no hesitance in asking questions of members of the sect whom we came upon in Erbil. They answered him without hesitancy, gratified rather than displeased that he should have displayed an interest in their religion. "God is good," declared one old Sheikh by way of explanation. "And if God is all good, He will not—He cannot harm us, His children.

"But arrayed against Him in this world is an angel once of great standing in heaven and now going about doing things according to his own lights which mere mortals should not feel competent to criticize.

"I do not mention the name of this angel because he might take it as a mark of disrespect, although God forbid that I or any other Yezidee should be guilty of such an offense. He is represented in our places of worship by the symbol of the brass peacock and is known to us as Malek Taous—King Peacock—and has a place in our ritual worthy of his rank.

"Although he is down on his luck just at present there must come a day when he is restored to his old place and heaven. And then he will punish those who have reviled him and will reward those who have been kind to him in his exile. It is all a very logical belief, as you will see."

And the logical belief is carried out in the lives of the believers to its very last detail. Not only do they refrain from pronouncing the sacred name of Shaitan but they have obliterated from their vocabularies all words containing syllables that in hasty conversation might sound like that name. Shaitan, as a fallen angel, is supposed

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to be a being of great intelligence, but even so he may be getting a little deaf as a result of his long life in the underworld beneath the Kurdish foothills, and brooding on his plight may have made him just a little careless in listening to the speech of the peculiar souls who do him homage, in the valleys above his domain. At any rate, it is simple enough to be circumspect in one's language and manifestly such care is abundant evidence of good intent.

Layard, who got to know these people quite well during his investigation of the Assyrian ruins, discounted the old reports that the Ishtar worship of Babylon and a lack of sexual restraint that would shame a well-married Shia Moslem were a part of the Yezidee ceremonial. He attended the rites of the sect in a sacred grove near Semil about the tomb of the Sheikh Adir and he describes a performance of ritual dancing and the singing of hymns in a strange tongue that in many respects must have resembled a modern Negro camp meeting. He points out that a respect for the lord of the sun—inherited, no doubt, from the worship of their ancestors of hundreds of years ago—is quite as much a part of the Yezidee cult as respect and fear of evil.

The entire ceremonial—from the manner of its occurrence in a sacred grove to the weird music with which it was accompanied—was stamped as a survival of rites that existed in the Land of the Two Rivers ages before the Hebrew traditions were in sufficient circulation to identify the prince of evil as Shaitan, the Fallen Angel. The rites go on to-day as they have always gone on—less furtively perhaps now that the tolerant English government is to be seen behind the throne that is the symbol of power in Moslem Iraq. And they probably will go on until new philosophies replace the rifle and bayonet as civilizing influences in the Kurdish hills.

The temple in the grove at Semil is dedicated to Sheikh

Devil Worship

Shem—the Lord Sun—and in arrangement has almost a Druidic significance. Its placing was evidently thought out with much care so that the first rays of the sun would always fall upon it. Its exterior and interior are white and scrupulously clean. By day and by night it is illuminated by a number of small lamps which burn oil of sesame.

Thousands of pilgrims come here from all parts of the hills for ritualistic observance at the tomb of Sheikh Adir and thousands go back to their homes carrying with them as effective talismans against disease and misfortune little balls made of clay taken from the grave. It is probable that if the orgies attributed to the sect take place anywhere they might be seen here at one of the great conclaves.

Instead they sit about the tomb singing by day and gather in the grove for further singing by night. Men and women take part in the choral performance, assisted by orchestras of flutes and tambourines. Such excitement as attends the rites is not brought about by suggestive display or immoral exhortation. The devotees are given their spiritual uplift by a steadily quickening cadence in the beating of the tambourines until in the end they are stirred to a weird dance that has no significance other than as a personal and individual expression of zeal. The erotic motif, according to students who have studied the Yezidees in person rather than in the legends that men of other faiths have made for them, is not present at any time in the rites.

The women of the cult, in common with their neighbors, wear the veil about the villages in which they live. But in their own conclaves, they remove all face coverings and shyly take part in conversations with the men. Some women occupy high places in the cult and female voices are a prized contribution to the ceremonial music.

The history of the Yezidees has been largely unhappy. They have been persecuted even more than the Christians and the Jews of Northern Iraq. For the Moslem feels a

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sort of spiritual kinship with those whose religion has at its background the Hebrew scriptures. He is bound by no such pretty sentiment in dealing with the Yezidees and he has done his best to make life a burden for them.

It is said that during the rule of the Turks, raids upon Yezidee villages were a frequent occurrence and Yezidee women were constantly on the march northward along the lonesome trails that led to the slave markets which filled the harems of the Ottoman conquerors. And this was not in the day when Nineveh was building up a reputation for sin but only yesterday when civilization was abroad in the world.

In the upper reaches of the River Zab which joins the Tigris at Mosul one comes upon things more startling than devil worship only to realize after some study of the matter that untouched innocence rather than evil has caused the shock. Whatever be one's experience with the quaint habits of the East he is never quite prepared for the day when the road leads him about a projecting rock above the river bank and he comes suddenly upon the end of a hidden village to see a group of young Godivas bathing themselves in the public fountain. Nor will he be any better prepared for the total lack of concern shown at his intrusion by the bathers. They will take no notice of him, but under the somewhat diaphanous veil of their own modesty will go on with their laughing conversation as he passes by and perhaps exchange a word or two of greeting with him should he chance to speak.

The stranger to the hills feels instantly that he has come upon one of the weird and unmentionable rites of Satan concerning which he has heard so much in advance. But he is wrong. These women are generally Christians—although the Kurdish Moslem damosel is not averse to cleanliness and so frequently will be seen in the fountain along with her sisters of another faith. And while one's

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skepticism may be difficult to remove, he must come at length to realize, as Dr. E. T. A. Wigram, the English traveler, realized, that lack of decency has nothing at all to do with this ancient custom and that as Dr. Wigram put it: "It is the sense of indecency that is absent as it was in the Garden of Eden."

It is explained that public bathing is the result of two necessities—the need for personal cleanliness and the need for dry dwellings. Obviously no bath is possible without a certain slopping of water, and where all houses have earthen floors the overflow of a tub is certain to make a lasting and uncomfortable dampness. What could be more natural, therefore, than to perform such ablutions out in the open air where there is plenty of clean water and excellent drainage? And so of a warm Saturday afternoon the women bring their washing and themselves to the bathing place and spend their time in gossip and profitable endeavor. In some villages the menfolk are allotted their own time at the fountain or creek. In others the whole population turns out for its bath at once and if the process has any effect upon the morals of the community other than in the promotion of personal hygiene it has remained undiscovered by numerous highly suspicious investigators.

It is remarkable how quickly one becomes used to a performance of this sort. The participants, partly because of habit and partly because of a sense of personal security, seem to feel all the privacy they might hope for in a locked bathroom. And the spectator—as is customary wherever human beings come into contact with one another—soon accepts their point of view as his own.

Dr. Wigram tells the story of an English clergyman who walked through the valley of Tyari one afternoon and came upon a lady taking her tub in front of her own house. The Englishman, suddenly overcome with a sense of intrusion, blushed, turned aside and attempted the rather difficult feat of passing by with his back turned.

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With all the urge of his European culture he tried to deny the woman's existence.

But alas for his good intentions he had neglected to take into account the cultural traditions of the bathing lady. She had been properly brought up, she knew what was expected of well-bred young ladies, so she leaped out of her bath and ran after him.

The Englishman, aware that the formula of "see no evil" and the rest of it had failed him, could think of no other course of conduct but flight. He started down the path like a frightened gazelle and after him came the dripping vision of St. Anthony.

There could be but one outcome to such a race. He was hampered by clothes and slow. She was not. And presently she overtook him.

In his embarrassment he could not find words for reproof, even in his own tongue. But she was subject to no such inhibition.

"Rabbi, Rabbi," she exclaimed mournfully as the tears mounted to her eyes. "What have I done to offend you? I am a good girl and I wish to do the things that my mother has taught me to do. Would you have me go back to my house and confess to her that I allowed a priest of God to pass by without kissing his hand and asking his blessing?"

So the clergyman saw that he had been wrong in obeying his own inconsequential little impulses, and, not stopping to lift his hat, inquire after the family and have his hand kissed without causing this innocent Aphrodite to arise from the foam. He covered his eyes with his left hand and extended his right to be kissed, muttering little exclamations that were taken for apologies—as perhaps they were.

The clergyman lived for some months in Tyari and, Dr. Wigram says, soon came to view the odd spectacles of the village with perfect indifference.

Chapter Twenty-nine

THE ARAB MIND

The Adventure of the Suspected Smuggler of the Hasbeesh

*I meddle with the future none,
I travel not into the farness.*

—SHIRMIDEDEDEH.



IT is probable that the Westerner will never be able to understand the Arab mind. It must have been incomprehensible even to the Crusaders who were of a similar period, and whose consideration of the problem was not hampered by the developments and complications that have come to the Occident during the past thousand years. It certainly is conformable to no known system of psychology as it operates to-day in the ruts of ten centuries ago with its background of meager experience, its fatalistic future and its highly material and sensuous physical surroundings.

Two outstanding characteristics of the race are immediately observable by the visitor—a distaste for the truth when a skillful fiction will suffice, and a stinginess which is probably beyond parallel on the face of the earth.

The attitude toward truth may be laid perhaps at the door of politeness. It has been argued that the Arab prefers pleasant romancing to unpleasant fact. And there are students who ascribe the penny pinching tendencies of Islam to the poverty that has come with the encroachments of the desert and the carelessness of Turkish rule.

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However, penuriousness seems to have been a vice of the Caliphate during the reign of Harun the Just—and in his day Islam was in the zenith of its glory, and wealth was to be had for the asking or taking.

To-day one sees its application in numerous ways. There is, for example, a native automobile caravan that skirts the desert on its northward margin between Baghdad and Aleppo. As in all this region the gasoline supply is carried in five-gallon drums. The English companies have made a sort of trail across the routes to Palmyra and Damascus with their empty and discarded tins. But not a single abandoned can will ever give the excavator of a future age any indication that the Arab motor caravan ever made the trek along the Euphrates.

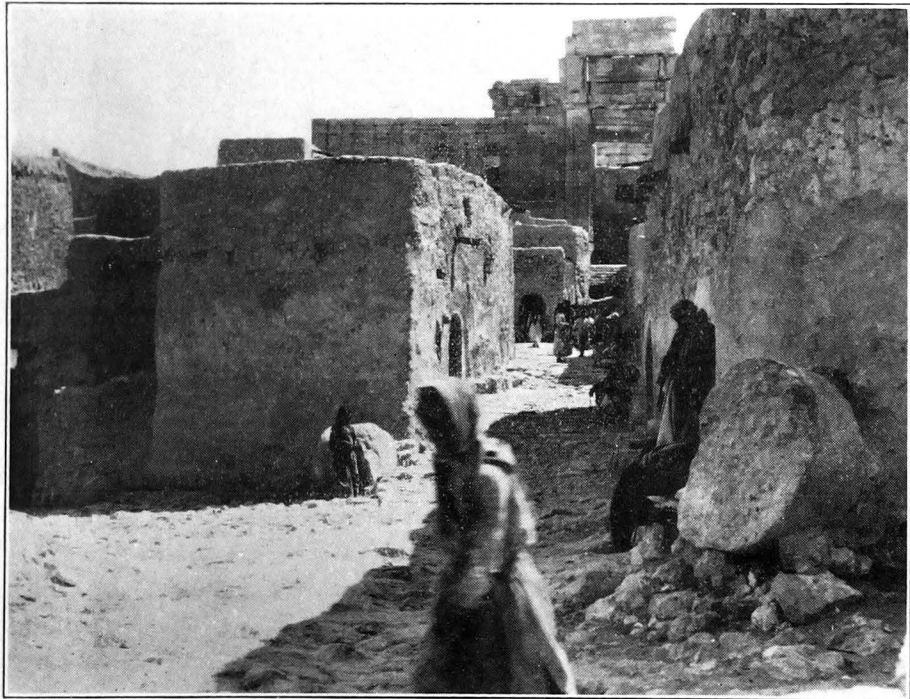
Despite the crying need for space, the Arab motor driver conserves his empty tins and carries them on to Baghdad. If his passengers' legs are cramped by the bulk of six or eight of them in the already crowded tonneau, Malesh—The passenger must expect discomforts in crossing the desert. One might think that he would dispose of the drums in Baghdad without haggling—content to take what the market offered for material that is virtually salvage. But not the Arab. He conserves his cans in the shed at his Baghdad terminal and when next he starts northward takes them to Rimadi on the Euphrates some thirty miles, where the quotations on tin cans may run two or three cents higher.

Lyell says that he will hold a drum of oil in his cellars for twenty years to get a profit of a penny. Anyone at all acquainted with him knows that he will waste a day of time in an argument to save a few annas on a sale.

It is difficult to reconcile this trait with the great displays of generosity that one encounters in the smaller towns and in the camps of the desert where the conferring of gifts seems to be the foremost evidence of the ancient and highly respected laws of hospitality.



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ARAB VILLAGE IN TEMPLE COURT, PALMYRA

The Arab Mind

But there is an answer to the puzzle that the unwary traveler is not so long in reading. It is the law of the desert that in accepting a gift one tacitly contracts to return a more splendid one. So obviously the party to the transaction who does his giving first is in the strategic position. Such is generosity in its strangest garb and does not conflict so much with the acquisitive instinct as one might gather at first sight.

The other side of the picture is seen in the universal admiration of the Arab for one who is generous. It is possible that he gets a vicarious thrill out of seeing some one else do what he thinks he ought to do for himself if he could ever make up his mind to it. Throughout Islam—not alone in Mesopotamia but wherever the prophet's word is spoken—the measure of a man is the extent of his equipment for the entertainment of guests. It was so in that mystical period of "The Thousand and One Nights." It is still so.

As for the tendency of the Arab to leave the statement of bare fact to the more unimaginative races, it is not such an unspeakable vice as some travelers have led us to believe. True enough the Arab is a born liar—probably the most skillful zealot in plain and fancy lying who ever lived. But if he is a liar the neighbor to whom he speaks is also a liar. And if the vice of lying is traceable to intent to deceive, then there is no vice whatever here. For the ablest of all liars does not expect to be believed.

The interchange of pure fiction about the hearths and in the coffee-houses is the native's most piquant mental exercise. Nature, which provides a compensation for every ill, has given to the Arab an understanding of his kind. It is to be expected of the listening neighbor that he will be gifted with sufficient discernment to see through trickery and to counter with trickery of his own. And so the discussion of some ordinarily unexciting topic such as how Ahmed's camel lay down and died in the desert

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becomes with proper embellishment a sort of forensic competition. And so passes an interesting evening.

It is a surprising obverse of such a mind that it will accept literally statements from persons of alien races. The action of the court attaché who threw the complaining lady into the Tigris because the magistrate had suggested that it might be a good way to dispose of her, is illustration enough of this trait. But it need not rest upon a single instance.

John Randolph, American consul in Baghdad, whose endurance and sense of humor have been sufficient to keep him at Eastern posts for many years, recently made a trip to Babylon in a car which was probably serial Number One of the two million or more that have come out of a widely known Detroit factory. On the way back—at a point between Iskandria and Baghdad, about five miles out on the desert—the gasoline supply gave out.

The Arab servant of the consulate suggested a very obvious remedy.

“I shall go to Baghdad and get some more gasoline,” he said. “I have had some experience with these things and I know that without more gasoline the car will not run.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Randolph. “In the meantime we shall see what can be done about the matter here.”

“I shall bring the gasoline to this place as quickly as I can carry it,” said the porter.

“All right, we’ll probably be somewhere in this vicinity when you get back,” commented the British driver, and he began to look through the rack at the side of the car to see if he might not have overlooked a drum of fuel. He had been guilty of no such fortunate oversight.

The porter had gone probably two hours when a British military truck came by. The stranded voyagers borrowed a few liters of gasoline and resumed their journey toward Baghdad. All along the route they kept a close watch

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for the porter. There was no sign of him. He was not at the consulate nor did he appear there all that night.

"It seems strange that he should not have reached here," the consul decided along toward morning.

"He said that he would get a drum of gasoline and bring it back," commented the Englishman. "By that he probably meant that he would get a few pounds of dates and carry them to Damascus."

"I don't think so," disagreed Mr. Randolph. "I have found him to be very intelligent and reliable. I think we had better go look for him."

So once more the expedition took the road toward Babylon. They found the porter sitting out in the desert with a five-gallon drum of petrol by his side.

"What are you waiting here for?" inquired the consul.

"You said you would be here," replied the porter. "And this is the exact spot. I put up a stick of brush before I left to make sure. And your wheel tracks are everywhere."

"But when you got here you must have discovered that we weren't here," commented the Englishman.

"Yes, Sahib," admitted the porter. "But you had said you would be here and so I knew you would be back. And Allah be praised so it has turned out."

It is related also that in the reign of Feisal the Just, public sentiment was much aroused concerning the importation of hasheesh and arak from points beyond the desert into Baghdad.

Just how serious was this complaint it is difficult to determine, for it is said on the very good authority of the police that despite the prohibitions of the Koran and the vigilance of the law, alcohol and drugs still play a considerable part in the simple home life of the native rich.

Arak distilled in generous quantities in the hills about Damascus commands a high price in Baghdad—not particularly at the bars of the hotels frequented by Europeans,

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for there supplies of liquor are brought in through the regular customs and declared and taxed—but among the natives who look upon customs duties much as many Americans look upon them, as a silly nuisance that should be avoided whenever possible.

So this concoction of alcohol and anise frequently finds its way through the back doors of the bazaars in drums that once contained gasoline and reek as if they still contained it. And there are stories of desert rum fleets in which camels take the place of speed launches that come to terminals out in the desert where business men in good standing and even pilgrims to the holy cities may step out of the paths of virtue long enough to replenish their cellars.

Hasheesh, being less bulky, is brought in concealed in regular cargoes of calico, cutlery, and what not—to the great joy of the drug peddlers and to the lasting discontent of the native inspectors.

Recently there has been a profitable traffic in cocaine smuggled across Syria and Iraq into Persia and the Baghdad authorities have been even more concerned about this than about the other pleasantries of the customs evaders. It is not that the Iraquian officials care so much about the physical well-being of Persia, but manifestly an article taken to Teheran would be assessed not only the regular import tax but the regular export tax as well and the total is something well worth considering in any customhouse.

At the height of the feeling on this subject Forbes-Leith, the English lecturer, came through Baghdad on his way to the Persian capital.

“I have some things coming through in the baggage car of the Eastern Transport Company,” he said. “The agents of the transport company will pay whatever duties are laid against these materials but I must request that you do not delay them. I cannot duplicate them nearer than Rome and that is obviously a long way off.”

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The authorities assured him of their complete coöperation, wished him good luck on his journey and saw his car move out through the dust to Teheran.

In due time the convoy of the transport company arrived and the equipment of Mr. Forbes-Leith was laid out for inspection.

"There is something peculiar about this," declared the Iraquian examiner. "Perhaps we had better call our English colleague and have him advise us."

"There is nothing he can do," declared the assistant examiner. "Our duty in the matter is very plain. This stuff is all in cans but they can be easily pried open with a device that the Kafirs call a tin opener. Any amount of cocaine and hasheesh could be concealed in such cans. So we should be derelict in our highly important duty if we failed to see what was on the inside."

And so it was done with thoroughness that would have been a credit to any customs office in the world. Can after can was ripped open and its contents examined in the blistering light of the Mesopotamian sun, which was climbing along toward a particularly brilliant noon.

True, the lids did not fit the cans as well after inspection as they had fitted before. But Mr. Forbes-Leith had been obviously a man of the world. He must have come through customs posts frequently in his long journey and he would understand. The chief inspector stepped out of the yard to the street and summoned the baggage man of the convoy.

"We are happy to report that there is no contraband in this shipment," he said. "There will be no duties against it except the ordinary nominal taxes set down in the book."

He paused suddenly, for the baggage man did not seem to be happy. Instead this incomprehensible Farenji was leaning against the wall and opening and shutting his mouth without saying a word.

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There came suddenly a wealth of expletive in English and Arabic. For the incomprehensible Farenji was paying no attention to the very lenient bill proffered by the inspectors. Instead he was looking upon the somewhat disordered arabesques of five thousand feet of motion picture film—yellow and worthless.

Chapter Thirty

THE CAUTIOUS KING

The Adventure of the Bromide Tablets

*Think not that we will take the cup
From any hand but thine. . . .*

—ABD ALSALAM BEN RAGBAN.



It is related how in the reign of Feisal the Just, King of Iraq and candidate for the caliphate, there came to Mesopotamia a number of blue-eyed, fair-skinned Fahrenji to discuss with him the important matter of the oil that comes out of the ground in the region about Mosul.

It is true that our land had come upon strange days when such unbelievers might appear with no gifts in their hands and obtain an audience with the king. But on the other hand historians of future ages may credit that to his generosity and magnanimity. And there is likewise the possibility that the forgotten gifts might make their appearance as soon as these lowly Fahrenji learn something of the customs of our country and its ancient traditions of hospitality.

But at any rate they came and for days they sat in the audience chamber at the palace and spoke of boundaries and leases and other kafir devices that should have no place in the conversation of one who would become holy in the sight of Allah. And the upshot of the matter was that the king called for his private car and made arrange-

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ments whereby he and the delegation from this far-off England which seems to have been remotely interested in the oil leases might make a journeying to the north country and meditate upon the advisability of a concession where the visitors could be duly impressed with the prowess of our holy ancestors the Assyrians.

It was night when the train was in readiness and all of Baghdad—or at least so much of it as happened to be awake at that unseemly hour—journeyed to the station and watched the king and his advisers and the Fahrenji and their advisers start out upon their expedition.

In due time the delegation returned to Iraq and it was said that the negotiations had come to a profitable and pleasant termination. It was not until several days afterward that the story gained circulation among the Fahrenji, and also among the native sons in the coffee bazaars, regarding the perilous predicament of King Feisal the Just, and the able manner in which he had dealt with what might have been a very trying situation.

The story varied a little in transit from the British colony to the bazaar, but it is probable that its main plot suffered not at all in the retelling. And all were filled with words of commendation for the king, in that he had done wisely and certainly in accordance with all the traditions of his glorious throne.

It happened in this wise:

King Feisal, partly because he had much work to do and partly because he had such worries as might be expected of a Sunni who had been set down suddenly as ruler of the destinies of the queer-minded Shia, was suffering from insomnia. As he boarded the train and took his place in the royal compartment he realized that he was going to be unable to sleep at all with wheels pounding under his head and the smell of oil and sulphur coming in through his open window. So for a long time he paced the floor.

The Cautious King

When he had tired of floor pacing he called in his secretary and by gracious royal privilege allowed him to pace the floor the while he contrived to read some sprightly passages from literature suitable to the occasion. The literature failed to put the king to sleep. But it probably was very restful to see the secretary walking backward and forth across the floor.

Now it so happened that in the compartment adjoining the royal quarters there was a Fahrenji named in his own weird tongue by the outlandish title of Smith. And Smith, who had no insomnia at the time that the train pulled out through the switchyards beyond Zobeideh's tomb, found himself acquiring it as he listened to the fine reading voice of the secretary coming through the partition. As he sat awake and cursing after the fashion of the kafir, he heard scraps of conversation that led him to believe that his majesty the king was sleepless and prepared to remain so throughout the long night.

At a stop north of Kadamain, he presented himself at the door of the royal suite and bowed low in obeisance to the king.

"May royal pardon rest upon me but I could not but overhear the plight of your majesty," he said. "Though I tried to close my ears I could not and then I came to feel deep sympathy and sorrow for one who is compelled to sit up all night and listen to literary exercises. So I have hastened hither to convey my regrets."

Despite the unconventionality of the visit, the heart of the king was touched that this Fahrenji should have shown such excellent intentions. So in place of showing anger he smiled.

"It is historical that the kings who dwell in Baghdad are sleepless," he said. "There is the excellent precedent to be read in the life of Harun al Raschid of holy memory. And so I do not quarrel with whatever lot Allah may send me."

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“A very proper attitude,” conceded this Smith of the adjoining compartment. “But as your majesty knows it is not considered at all irreligious in the very strictest circles to invoke supernatural aid in obtaining the heaven-sent gift of sleep with a simple talisman known as a bromide.”

“Yes,” replied the king. “I have heard of these bromides. They do not seem to kill the Fahrenji.”

“They are as harmless as one could wish. I have heard that they were brought to Europe a thousand years ago by a skillful Moslem physician who lived in Granada and whose fame survives him there to this day. I have heard other stories of the origin of this excellent remedy. But they are unimportant.”

“That is very interesting. I shall have to add some of these bromides to my equipment for traveling. Unfortunately, however, I cannot get any to-night.”

“That is the very point I would touch upon. I have been able to feel a deep sympathy for your majesty—although I am a man of no particular rank who must deeply appreciate the fact that the chosen of Allah will even so much as speak with me—I have been able to feel this sympathy, I repeat, because I am also a man who has been troubled with insomnia. And to that end I carry a few of these efficacious and harmless tablets with me at all times. I should crave it as a boon, your majesty, that I be allowed to place at your disposal a bottle of these pellets and the wish that your dreams may be numerous and pleasant.”

And the king was pleased at this attitude on the part of his fellow traveler from the next compartment, and he accepted the gift in the spirit in which it was tendered.

“Three tablets constitute what we call in our barbarous tongue a dose,” this Smith directed as he put the little bottle in his majesty’s hand. And Feisal the Just thanked him in accordance with the Occidental custom.

The Cautious King

Then, as this Smith stood there, the king turned toward his secretary.

"Here, secretary," he said. "Here are three tablets, which in the barbarous tongue of the interesting Fahrenji constitute what is termed a dose. Swallow them." And the secretary swallowed them.

Then he turned with his ready smile toward this Smith.

"And now," he observed vivaciously, "we shall see what we shall see."

It is further related that the tablets were not poisonous, as some might have concluded. But the secretary slept for two days and nights, the while the King's guard walked constantly with this Smith.

And as for this Smith it is had on the high authority of his associates in the oil delegation, that he slept as if he had nothing at all on his conscience, although, of course, he lacked the soothing influence of the secretary's voice reading passages of the Koran suitable to the occasion.

There may be, of course, some influence astir in the world that will one day remove Feisal the Just from the throne that he occupies among the queer-minded Shia. But that removal will never be brought about through his taking any unnecessary chances.

Chapter Thirty-one

TAXICABS IN BAGHDAD

The Adventure of MacPherson and the Beautiful Persian

*Then stole I up and trancedly
Gazed on the Persian girl alone,
Serene with argent-lidded eyes,
Amorous, and lashes like to rays
Of darkness, and a brow of pearl
Tressed with redolent ebony . . .
. . . The fairest lady of the time.*

—TENNYSON, "Recollections of the
Arabian Nights."



NEW STREET strikes north and south through Baghdad for the full length of the town, an immense open wound that seems to be the Occident's most important gift to this last stronghold of Eastern isolation. It is fairly wide, hazy with dust, and somehow reminiscent of a back alley in Galveston, Texas, save for the unending march of camels and Arabs, and Levantines, and soldiery and beggars and porters and police. The people in it, with their peacock's pride of coloring alone, save it from being the most uninteresting thoroughfare in the world, for the haphazard method by which it was engineered is evident in its odd angles and the weird appearance of building fronts wrecked in its construction.

Travelers who went through this region in 1876 testify that at that time a movement was afoot to widen this main street and that the progress was as naïve as one

Taxicabs in Baghdad

might expect to find even under Turkish rule. To have plotted the street on a map and sent laborers out with pickaxes and crowbars to reproduce the plan on the ground, would have entailed a certain expense. And Allah wist had it been possible to collect more taxes the collectors could have found some better use to make of the money. So Time was called in to aid in this great improvement. It was decreed that whenever a building fronting on this proposed street happened to fall down, it might not be rebuilt.

The simplicity of this plan is quite as amazing as its inevitable effectiveness. No building erected by human hands could stand forever. Eventually it must fall down. Wherefore one had only to wait long enough and the street would build itself.

How well this measure succeeded it was difficult to find out. Natives say that the process was expedited somewhat by the Turkish army when it became necessary to drag artillery through the town. When the British arrived some of the effects of the dilapidation method of road building were evident in the bottomless pits that gaped at times to swallow five-ton trucks and armored cars and sometimes flivvers. It was discovered that the cause of such cataclysmic disturbances could be traced to the presence of forgotten cellars under the new road. The houses that owned the cellars had vanished and continuous traffic had crumbled the masonry of the ancient vaults.

The pits were filled in and at present the street seems to be fairly safe, although the most sanguine of the British engineers will not attempt to forecast what new mystery may some day be disclosed by the yawning of an abyss in the dust.

Toward the southern end of the town gardens are more numerous and there are many pleasant residences—occupied mostly by members of the British colony. The British residency, an imposing place with wide lawns and

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a picturesque array of guards, is in this quarter. A bit south of it is the American consulate.

European life is best represented at this end of the street. Along the Tigris lie the green lawns of the Alwayeh Club, a social organization, whose entrance requirements are as rigorous as those of a West End club in London. Here in the cool of the evening comes British Baghdad to dine or dance or discuss a system of ethics that seems doubly important out here where home is remembered as something that lies far beyond the sunset. One may suspect that the morality of Baghdad—or that part of Baghdad represented by the English—is in the hands of this club membership. One can see that its power in governing the social life of the colony is far more effective than that of a law court or a mere system of police.

To be ostracized here is far more deadly a catastrophe than to be banished by one's caste in the cities of Europe. The Occidental who "goes native" generally appears to be pretty sick of his choice in a short while. The only salvation of the Westerner in this corner of the world is the society of his kind. Deprived of that he must inevitably succumb to the terrible realization that he is alone. The Arab with whom he may seek solace must despise him—and his training, his thought, his impulses are not those of the Arab. He cannot turn to his own who will have none of him. So he may drink himself to death, shoot himself, or go home. It is said here with the ring of truth that all three methods have been tried not infrequently since Britain became a power in the land of the two rivers.

The bitter cruelty of ostracism in such a place as this is too obvious to require comment. But here even more than elsewhere it has its excuse. It is only in the maintenance of a national superiority that the English have been able to rule over great populations of Europe with an inferior force of arms.

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Probably the whole secret of the success of the British empire as a colonizing force may be read here in the unwritten laws of the Alwayeh. The ruler must preserve his status as a creature foreordained by God for his job and he can't do that if he places himself on a social level with the peoples subject to him, living the life of their menfolk or competing for the smiles of their women.

There are social levels among the exiles as elsewhere in the outflung zones of British influence. It is estimated that there are three thousand English men and women in the immediate area about Baghdad and the membership of the exclusive club is about three hundred. Of the two thousand seven hundred whose interests are outside the gardens on the Tigris a large number are railroad men,—some of them with families,—another group government clerks, and a fair-sized minority of young bank employees.

It is among the latter that one finds the most amazing picture of an indigenous culture to be seen in Baghdad. They have no club—unless one may call a loose federation along purely racial lines a club. But they do quite as much toward representing the British government and impressing the natives with the heaven-sent mission of the Aryan in the East as do the socially elect.

I think it was Kennedy, a smiling young Scot, who with other smiling young Scots had volunteered for a five-year exile in the service of the Imperial Bank of Persia, who told me the story of MacPherson, the idealist.

MacPherson came from a family of bankers in Glasgow. But he was not like other bankers . . . nor like other Scots. He lacked the cool practicality of his race and spent his youth nodding over his schoolbooks while he dreamed of distant places and heard the temple bells of silken cities. There must have been some Irish in him.

When men were being signed for five years of experiment with the finances of Iraq, MacPherson sought an assignment—but not with the idea of spreading the influence of

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the empire or making the world safe for the oil companies or even of earning an indemnity that might be large enough to set him up in a business at home at the end of the five years. MacPherson contracted for the job merely that he might see camels swaying through sunlit streets and more particularly that he might complete the eternal mystery of ladies who wore veils.

So he came to Baghdad.

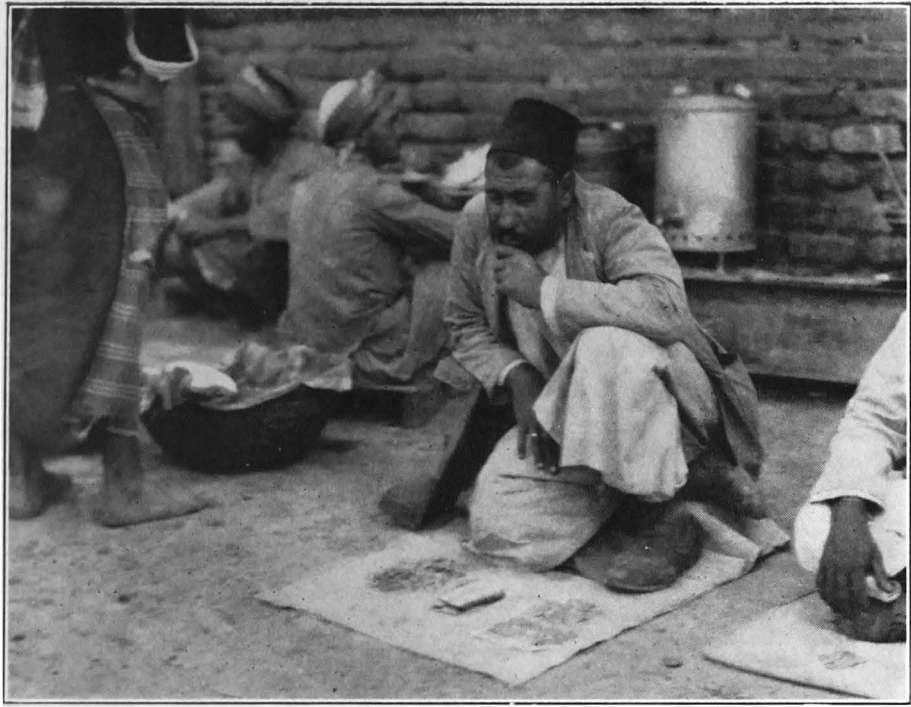
"It is a man's life, here," said the youth who told this story—maybe it was Kennedy—maybe not. "You can see how we get along. Four or five of us have a house over on the right bank. We have a couple of male servants and we don't do so badly—not by half.

"We have a bit of hunting in season. We play a bit of golf. And on Sundays we swim in the Tigris up above Baghdad near King Feisal's palace. The life could be worse but except for the fact that we try to amuse ourselves instead of spending our time in prayerful contemplation it is quite a bit like the routine in a monastery.

"I don't say that the lads picked for this service are moral paragons or anything like that. But I do say that they have some sense. Dissipation in this land is death and all of us learn that very rapidly. On account of the heat only a very reckless man would dare to drink alcohol before nightfall. And then his wants are simple and his consumption sparing.

"And you can see for yourself that the old tradition of the comfort of women as a cure for nostalgia is frowned upon here. A white woman can't get a visa to come here without showing good cause and then going through so much red tape that she dies of old age before permission is granted her. And one doesn't consort with the native woman. It just simply isn't done. When we sign our contracts we know that we are taking a mental vow of celibacy until we can get back home. . . ."

Well, it seems that MacPherson didn't understand the



MONEY CHANGERS, BAGHDAD



WOODWORKERS, BAGHDAD

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rules—or if he did, that he was too highly gifted with imagination. MacPherson had not heard that Harun was dead and he would not believe the inscription on the tomb of Zobeideh.

By day he might find evidences of a change in Iraq since the days of its glory—there is undoubtedly no more steady influence in the world for a victim of imagination than a bulky ledger and great quantities of uninteresting figures. But by night he stepped out of the bank into streets where he had no trouble hearing the footsteps of the caliph and his wazir echoing in the shadows just ahead of him.

He learned Arabic. He picked up a quantity of useless tales about djinns and ifreets and cities of brass and gold that lie in the heart of the "empty places" in the southern desert. And he slept very little. For it was not predated that one should sleep in Baghdad.

Through his nocturnal ramblings he got to know many police who thought him just a little daft. And occasionally he fell in with some belated muleteer who was too sleepy to find any romance in the encounter. But the sounds of revelry by night that used to lure the sleepless Harun off the streets were never heard by MacPherson.

Whatever romance might be astir in the blackness of the Arab quarter was well concealed behind thick walls. Ne'er a hand beckoned from a latticed window nor plaintive song quavered an invitation to adventure behind some half-open door. MacPherson wasted many a night in hopeful contemplation of the alleys of Baghdad and would have given up the investigation and gone back to his bookkeeping had it not been for the incident of *The Beautiful Persian*, *The Cry in the Night*, and *The Brutal Slave Driver*.

Mr. MacPherson was going home along toward dawn on that fated evening and was just about to cross the Maude Bridge when he heard *The Cry in the Night* and

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ran forward to see The Beautiful Persian struggling in the arms of The Brutal Slave Dealer. The Beautiful Persian seemed to be doing pretty well, considering the inferiority of women in the Orient. She had torn off her veil and was biting The Brutal Slave Dealer's ear.

"What's the matter?" inquired Mr. MacPherson, intrigued, as anyone might be, by this edifying scene.

"He would make a slave of me, Sahib," declared The Beautiful Persian, temporarily removing her hold on The Brutal Slave Dealer's ear.

"But he can't do it, you know," announced Galahad MacPherson.

The Brutal Slave Dealer said something in rapid Arabic to the effect that if he could pry himself loose from the unspeakable she-cat, that he would black her lovely kohl-fringed eyes and toss her into the Tigris to bring calamity to the harems of the djinns of the deep.

"Let go of her," commanded Mr. MacPherson.

"Gladly," responded The Brutal Slave Dealer, who apparently could hear pretty well with his unoccupied ear.

"Take him away, he's killing me," screamed The Beautiful Persian, without removing her muscular arm from its grip about the man's neck.

MacPherson did some rapid calculation. He recognized the situation from what he had read of such things in "The Thousand Nights and a Night." Slave dealing was strictly forbidden in Iraq. It had gone out of vogue, it was said, even before the Turk went northward before the guns of Maude. But any Occidental must feel that it still flourished in the barred courts of nether Baghdad. There were so many good places for such nefarious trade. Mr. MacPherson had never been deceived. It was obvious then that the problem of The Beautiful Persian might be speedily solved if he should care to call the police, and yet that, too, had its complications.

The woman undoubtedly would continue to scream until

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help came. By that time the entire river front would have turned out to see what was going on. And presently MacPherson, sole representative of the Glasgow MacPhersons in Baghdad, would be involved in a fine scandal. It appeared that speedy compromises would be advisable.

While he was still pondering the matter The Beautiful Persian jerked back her assailant's head and so let the light from one of the lamps at the head of the bridge strike her full in the face. And MacPherson discovered that she was not difficult to look upon.

"Listen," he said sternly as he broke in between the two antagonists, "what price do you expect to get for this woman in the market?"

"She'd be high priced at two annas," stated the honest if Brutal Slave Dealer.

"Are you going to buy me?" inquired the lady.

"Yes," said MacPherson.

"Then don't haggle over the price," she advised. "Give him much silver and let us get away from here before the watch arrives."

So MacPherson gave the man whatever he could find in his pocket—presumably about five English pounds. The Brutal Slave Dealer put it in his pocket without counting and turned into River Street, saying unkind and untranslatable things about the girl. She replied in kind and won the argument because it turned out that she knew two or three epithets to the poor slave dealer's one.

Mr. MacPherson didn't know exactly what to do with the lovely slave, now that he had bought her, so he took her home and laid her out in a hammock in the court while he retired to his room to consider the problem. During the consideration he drank a great deal more than was good for him and in the morning he married her.

"And so," went on the narrator, "all the other lads in his branch of the service got together and issued an ultimatum that he should be dismissed or they'd quit. I

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wasn't here at the time but they say there was much feeling. He was sent home. . . .

"It was such a terrible mess, you see. This woman was the divorced wife of a wood turner who lived near the Maude Bridge somewhere. She came that night to cause him trouble for having divorced her and sat down on his doorstep. He saw her and walked around most of the night until he got so tired that he had to risk meeting her.

"The poor old bird probably explained that to MacPherson, but MacPherson's Arabic wasn't as good as his imagination. . . . It was a dreadful affair and of course the men working with him tried to hush it up."

"But he married the girl," I interposed. "His morals weren't so bad."

"It is very immoral to be laughed at by Arabs," said the story-teller. "Going native is bad enough but letting oneself in for ridicule is worse. . . . They went home and then to Canada or America. I hear that the woman made him a very good wife. She should have made his life a hell—that's the proper procedure in such cases. But you can't depend on Eastern women to observe any of the conventions."

Chapter Thirty-two

THE TREASURES OF THE BAZAAR

*"Who Shall Say That the Old Ways
Are Not the Best Ways"*

*Like sheep we're doomed to travel o'er
The fated track to all assigned,
These follow those that went before
And leave the world to those behind.*

—EBN ALRAMACRAM.



THE bazaars wander at weird angles off New Street in a district between the Maude and the Kotah bridges. The construction here is probably very modern although its appearance suggests an antiquity greater than that of the Babylonian ruins. New Street cuts squarely through it, leaving isolated walls with doors opening through them into nowhere, empty houses whose fronts have been torn off, and arches—part of the covering that still roofs most of the bazaar—sheered through the center and poising haphazardly in space.

Along New Street in the bazaar area are the woodworkers, barbers, tinsmiths, harness makers, tobacconists, nut sellers and ironmongers—all of them reproducing a soiled but vivid cinema of the life that teemed in Babylon's New Street—whatever they called it—and in the New Street of Nineveh and possibly the New Street of Kish.

One need go no farther than the nearest woodworker's booth to see how man employed his time and energy when

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first he learned how to make things with his hands. In the first place his booth is barely larger than the haircloth tent in which his ancestors went into the woodworking trade. The back of it is filled with articles he has made. His materials, tools, and work bench, if any, are piled on the mud floor under the arch at the street.

Wooden pillars, ax-hewn into rough octagons, uphold the booth. They are not painted but some semblance of ornamentation has been given the capitals by scraps of wood nailed on like the blocks of a jigsaw puzzle in imitation of carving.

The products of these carpentry shops run largely to cradles, chests, tabourets and a local interpretation of European four-poster beds and the artistry in all of them is crude. The chests are either of rough packing case wood with tin corners and no other ornamentation, or of smooth wood painted a screaming blue and dotted with brassheaded nails.

In seeking an explanation of the low estate of cabinet-making in Iraq one has only to look at the tools of the workers—ancient saws pounded out by hand at still more ancient forges and given teeth by a patient artisan with an ancient file, oddly shaped hammers, thick bladed draw-knives, hand-forged nails . . . implements only slightly in advance of those in use in the stone age. The primitive turning lathe used for shaping chair legs is an affair that probably will be duplicated in very few places in this world—even though one travels beyond the fringes of civilization. It consists of a rough frame about three feet long, at either end of which is an upright with a nail driven through it as a pivot. Between the nails is placed the billet that is to be machined. A twist of the inevitable bowstring is then taken about the billet, which is then made to revolve by moving the bow back and forth by hand. Generally the bow is held in the right hand. The chisels are manipulated by the left hand and two bare feet.

The Treasures of the Bazaar

The feet of the woodworkers are their most important and strangest asset. It is fair to suppose that such trades are handed down from father to son and have run in families for hundreds of years. It may be the result of such breeding or it may be the result of the gymnastic training incident to apprenticeship in the craft, but whatever the cause the feet of the woodworkers have long, prehensile toes. One boy in a booth, toward the north end of Baghdad, showed a positively uncanny control of the chisels that he held clutched in his toes. He could pick up a pin from out of the dust of the street with two toes as easily as a less gifted person might have done with the thumb and forefinger of a sensitive hand. The pity of it is that four-handed men such as these should be adding so much to the hideousness of the world with their craftsmanship. A more thoughtful Nature would have seen to it that woodworkers never developed more than the usual two sets of fingers. Such a precaution would have decreased their terrible output by half.

The cigarette makers whose booths adjoin those of the woodworkers have less of interest to offer in the way of equipment, but their product is none the less striking to the eye of the traveler. Turkish cigarettes are still to be had at nearly all the booths, all of them bearing the stamp of the "regie"—the old government monopoly. But native taste runs to the cheaper and stranger-looking smoke that is made up of Iraquian tobacco, light in color and loosely flaked. The tobacco resembles that sold extensively for pipes and home-made cigarettes in the United States, but the cigarettes in which it is placed are unlike anything else under the sun. It would be impossible to place such tobacco in cylinders with open ends and it would be impossible to keep cigarettes ready rolled and for sale with the tobacco falling out of them. The Arab merchant has met this difficulty by encasing the flaked leaf in long spills of cigarette paper. The tobacco

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is poured in without packing and the end of the paper is folded over to hold it in.

The art of smoking these things is acquired with difficulty. After one or two puffs the smoker must remove the cigarette from his mouth, hold it with the burning end up and tap it gently. This binds the tobacco sufficiently for another two puffs and the process is repeated. Unless one takes this precaution the fire falls on one's shirt front and the results thereafter are quite the same as with other cigarettes.

At the edge of the road about the Mosque of Merdjan sit the money changers conducting a banking business as primitive in everything but the tokens of exchange in which it deals as the woodworking crafts so well exemplified to the north. This business for the most part is in the hands of the Jews. And it is evidence of the cosmopolitan nature of Baghdad that their trade is fairly brisk.

Their equipment is reminiscent of sculptured pictures of Roman banking as recently excavated from the ruins of Pompeii. Each dealer spreads his own little rug out in front of him and arranges on it little piles of currency from all corners of the globe. Here are piles of silver rupees, the nickel coinage of Egypt, the brass piastres of Syria—old pieces from Turkey and Russia—English and Egyptian pound notes—odds and ends of European mintage—and now and then an American or Mexican dollar.

Strictly speaking, the business of these bankers is not banking at all, but an exchange of money to suit the needs of the men of the caravans who presently will be journeying across frontiers into far lands. The surprising thing about it is that for all the crudity of office furniture the ancients who practice this numismatic profession are not at all averse to using the telegraphic reports on the condition of the world's exchanges. Wherever they get the

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information it is certainly accurate. One might as well hope to beat down the Bank of France on a rate of exchange as to get the better of these currency hawkers through whom so much of Baghdad's polyglot coinage is cleared.

To the right of the Mosque of Merdjan, as one goes north, the grain market is found. Farther north and to the left the bazaar jogs into a long gallery parallel to the river.

It is in this latter gallery that one finally loses all trace of the Occidental invasion of the city. The backwash of battle has left it untouched. The inevitable engineers—the modern improvers who work more havoc with traditions than the ancient conquerors who would have blotted it out—have found enough to occupy their time elsewhere, and so it is an entirely unsuspected Baghdad that lives here under the dim arches.

At stalls in the lower end of the gallery women are haggling for bits of bee-swarmed meat or carefully selecting red dates, green peppers, okra and mangoes. On the mud floor of the narrow aisle sit other women and their children eating hasty luncheons before returning to their shopping tours. It is probable that they have come in from some of the Tigris villages near by and are prepared to make a day of marketing.

But farther along are workmen from points close at hand who have come into the bazaar for a noonday meal much as their Western brothers might go to a restaurant. One is surprised to note the similarity between some of the booths purveying hot food and the quick lunch counters of a more recent civilization.

Near the road that goes down past the customhouse to the Kotah Bridge is a youth frying patties of ground meat over a brazier of charcoal. He occupies a niche barely wide enough for himself and his equipment, and the casual observer might wonder that he is not done to a turn before the meat is off the spit. But he does not seem to

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mind it. The Arab got used to heat of all sorts thousands of years ago.

His cooking process is elemental but worth a note. He pats out the meat into a thin layer on a board and then wraps it about an iron cone. The cone is placed over the fire and revolved like a spit and the patty of beef cooks rapidly. When it is sufficiently browned, he pushes it off into the waiting hand of a customer, collects the few annas incident to the sale and puts another patty on the spit.

Another restaurateur in a similar cubbyhole doles out peppers stuffed with a meat dressing and another serves Persian tea in pewter cups. Custom is quite brisk at this end of the bazaar throughout the noon hour and it does not fall away perceptibly except for the period between one and three o'clock when so many shopkeepers put up their shutters and go to sleep. Leaving the cooked meat shops one passes through a pastry alley amid great piles of sugared indigestibles and thence through a spice bazaar redolent of cinnamon and clove into a region of hand-loomed silks and brilliant carpetings.

The Occidental idea of the East is best fulfilled here. One imagines that the treasure houses so vividly described in the "Arabian Nights" might have been much like this—bales of costly fabrics—rugs from Kermanshah, Tabriz and Mosul, silver brocades from China and soft gossamer weaves from the Vale of Cashmere.

Not far from this center one follows a narrow staircase down into a rabbit warren that leads, Allah knows where, beneath the bazaar. Along the dimly lighted passageway the topography of the upper bazaar is repeated in miniature—little booths succeeding one another like slots in a letter rack. But it is decidedly in miniature.

Three of these niches, for instance, if placed end to end, would not total the space occupied by the smallest of the rug shops up above. Two of them would not equal the

The Treasures of the Bazaar

cramped quarters of the youth who cooks the ground meat on the iron spit. But there is no need for more space. The workers here might carry their entire stock in their pockets—as indeed many of them do—for these are the goldsmiths—heritors of the shining tradition that was the Baghdad of Harun.

The air is dense with the smoke of oil lamps and the haze of cigarettes. The whole scene has an atmosphere of unreality that is heightened by the misty veil through which one beholds it. But it is a picture that the traveler will remember forever.

It is a fantasy as old as the human race that gold trinkets should be fashioned by gnomes working below the surface of the earth, and these gnomes appear to be well aware of what is required of them. At one end of the passage beaters are at work on golden sheets. At another filigree workers are fashioning trinkets that some day will grace the person of some beauty in a favored harem.

Gems twinkle and are gone again under the impatient play of the candlelight and one who has seen only the dust and squalor of street-level Baghdad may be excused for speculating about how much treasure is hidden under the crumbling walls in such places as this. Where there is much poverty there is generally a great centralization of wealth and it is probable that Baghdad is no exception to the rule despite the painstaking acquirements of the Turkish governors. These piles of bracelets, anklets, necklaces and nose rings will one day pass out of here and through the walls of native dwelling places, to be seen no more in public. But the goldsmiths will not cease from their hammering until they die and then their sons will carry on in the same little niches with the same little tools. . . .

In the spangled shade of the road that leads down to the Kotah Bridge are gathered the letter writers—some in European costume, some in the white robe of the Arab,

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each with gold seals and two ink cups on the little table in front of him. Close by them are coffeehouses where ancients come to sit on high-legged benches and drink a sirupy beverage or puff at tall water pipes kept alight by means of a glowing coal set on top of the tobacco. And passing them onto the swaying pontoons go the endless processions of camels outward bound to follow the sun to Damascus.

Across the bridge the road leads through an older and more uninviting section of the bazaars—a region of shops where cordage and iron and crockeryware are sold. There are other pseudo restaurants on this side of the river. In every alley of the shop region one may stumble over Arabs clustered about open braziers and eating roasted or fried vegetables.

The shops here seem to cater to a poorer class of trade than those on the East bank—if that be possible. There are stocks of ready-made shirts and English calico—women's garments of black cotton—brass nose ornaments and cheap veiling—loosely twisted ropes of wool for binding turbans—piles of unglazed pottery—bins of hemp and hills of scrap iron.

It seems there is no end to the place but for all that it is overcrowded. There are more than two hundred fifty thousand people in Baghdad and it seems that they must all do their shopping at once, for the traffic through the narrow aisles is endless. . . .

Here comes a donkey train piled high with fagots of wood. One dodges into a booth to escape being crushed and one cannot but remember the daughter-in-law of the Caliph who had it in her power to end this nuisance when she reported that a wood seller's pannier had scratched her as she walked decorously through the byways of the bazaar. . . . It could not have been so very long ago.

Chapter Thirty-three

THE WORKERS

So It Was Done When Zobeideh Was a Girl

*My place is with the learned and solemn
And where the student with clasped hands
Muses like Medjnoon and stands
All day moveless as a column.*

—FOOZOOLI.



NE of the loudest complaints against the Arab, that one hears from his European mentors, is that he is lazy. The cases cited are fairly conclusive. The agent of the Desert Transport Company, for instance, is greatly put out because he cannot hire men, at many rupees a week, to work on the needed masonry of his new automobile khan on the edge of Hitt. The British engineers cry out against the slow-moving coolies who have been drafted from one source or another for railroad or irrigation work. Always the cry is the same—The East is unchanging because it is at a standstill. It will never progress until it learns how to work.

Well, maybe that indictment is true. One cannot argue well on the subject without considerably more information than he is likely to obtain from the entirely biased observers in Baghdad. But this certainly is true: The Arab, thanks to his conservatism, has very good reason to be lazy. Whether or not the Arab lacks essential energy is a problem for psychologists. What he lacks in tools is painfully evident.

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Here on the west side of the river labor goes about treading on its own feet. At the turn of the river near the bread market are two Arabs, naked save for towels wrapped about their waists, whitewashing a brick building with sponges. They are almost entirely covered themselves but apparently have yet to feel the irritation of the lime.

As they ply their sponges with the dignity of true artists, other Arabs—graduates of an inferior apprenticeship—plod by with immense burdens on their backs. Their brown calves bulge and their bare shoulders knot under the heavy weights. In a younger civilization derricks and block and tackle would carry this tonnage up from the river bank to the top of the bluff where wanders the bazaar. But men are the cheapest thing in all the East and coolie porters are the cheapest class of men.

The right bank is a never ending amazement of scenes like that. One turns out of one blind alley into another and comes upon a group of rope makers. They have carded and spun their hemp into hanks of loose fluffy yarn about fifty feet long. They have fastened several strands together in a frame at one end of the alley. At the other end a youth is turning a crank handle slowly, and under the careful hands of the watchers the hempen yarn is flattened down into a sizable rope. It is a tedious process. But what use is time in a place like this except to twist rope by hand or whitewash a building with a sponge?

Turn away from the alley of the rope makers to the narrow stone steps that lead down to the river. The place is swarming with bright-eyed children praying for the benison of Allah on the Kafir stranger—and will the stranger take their pictures. It is remarkable that here where poverty is easily observable there is no plea for alms. Possibly opportunity has been insufficient to warrant their learning the approved methods of begging.

At the foot of the stairs a Moslem woman is washing

The Workers

her clothes, her dishes and her babies in one process.

Her skirts are tucked up rakishly about her hips but her veil is in place and it remains there despite the inconveniences it may cause her in her triple task. In a way her veil typifies not only her own serfdom but that of the male who thinks he is her master. If she cared to she could remove the veil and perform her household tasks with open eyes, if not comfort. If her husband was of the mind to do so he might free himself of the traditions that make whitewashers use sponges and masons spread mortar with their bare hands in lieu of trowels. But neither cares to do anything that was not done yesterday, and so the East goes about in its own circle, treading always in the marks of its own footsteps. The veil is more than the emblem of a theoretical modesty. It is the banner of *laissez faire*.

The woman finishes her washing, calls to her children who come stumbling happily out of the water, and herds them before her up the stairs without bothering to dry or clothe them. They disappear into the darkness of a cul-de-sac, their progress marked by the continued jingling of little silver bells hung to the smaller baby's anklet.

Out of the house into which they have gone there comes presently a dyer. He is one of the brown-dyeing family—so the information hereabouts goes. He knows just how the various decoctions of barks, herbs and whatnot should be mingled to produce the rich brown color that is the secret of his family.

Somewhere else in the neighborhood is the gentleman who knows how to produce red dye. The blue dyer may be across the river. But this business—no matter what the evils of geography that may attend it—is strictly a one family affair—let the rug makers worry about gathering their yarns or finding tints to match work already in hand.

So this man of the brown-dyeing family appears with a

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dozen spindles of woolen yarn in a rack with a handle on it. He makes his way to a row of iron spikes ranged like fence posts for some two hundred feet along the river bank. To the stake farthest south he attaches the end of each spool of yarn with the knots well separated. Then he marches northward, weaving the dozen strands in and out among the iron spikes and back again until all twelve spindles are empty. He then fastens the ends and leaves his woolen basketry standing in the sun unwatched and uncared for as he goes back to his atelier to boil other skeins of wool in his dye pot.

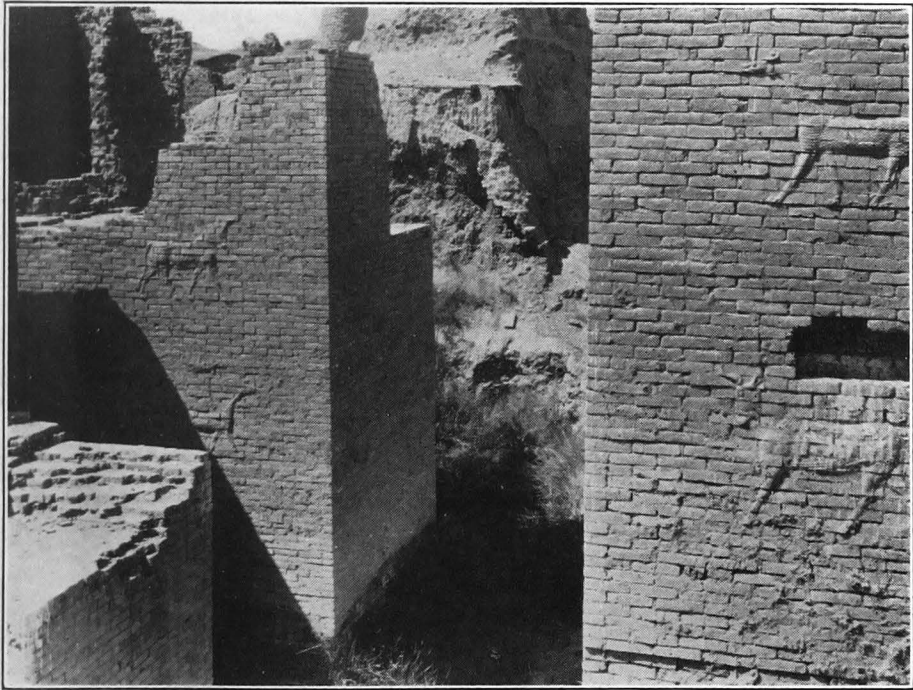
Mesopotamia is filled with such strange things as this—masons laying brick quite efficiently with only their bare hands as tools; potters forming their clay on wheels which they turn by means of a spindle worked between the soles of their feet; confectioners beating ice cream in a churn-like freezer surrounded by a modicum of ice and salt; barber-shop patrons sitting in open front stalls with yoke-shaped copper wash basins fastened about their necks like guillotines; weavers pedaling looms that creak at each shift as they toss their shuttles back and forth to make the heavy brocaded fabrics that will some day bring a high price as women's abbas—always the same picture, whatever the variety in its details, Toil exacting his eternal fee and Mankind going the longest way around to pay it.

Masons working on a new addition to the Maude Hotel made possible a close study of this handicraft without necessity for wearying journeys to the zones of building activity on the edge of town. Construction was about as primitive as it could be. Save for the use of mortar instead of bitumen as a binder it was quite as it had been since Noah grounded the ark and went into permanent quarters.

One need only look on the picture through half-closed eyes to see Babylon once more in the building—half-naked artisans weaving in and out among the rough uprights of



PALM GROVE, RAMADI



THE GATE OF ISHTAR, BABYLON

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their wavering scaffolds—boys with baskets of cement on their heads, climbing ladders like strange acrobats, their long, thin feet bending about the rungs with a practical deftness that was almost ape-like—other boys carrying bricks about fifteen inches square and three inches thick, similar in everything but Nebuchadnezzar's inscription to the tiles that went into the Temple of Ishtar.

Thanks to the dimensions of these brick, only one layer of them is used for the wall of a building. The resulting construction is as strong as might be wished, but it does not follow approved Western practices. The framework of the building is made of wood with diagonal braces crisscrossing the frame between squares about ten feet wide. The brickwork is laid flush with the outer face of this cross timbering to achieve a result similar in appearance to the timber and stucco houses of the Norman period in England. It probably is strong, or the hit-and-miss engineers of Araby would abandon it for some more modern system. But it does not appeal to the eye of the visiting skeptic.

An amateur at such things might point out that when a wall is completed it does not represent a coherent erection of brick and mortar but rather a collection of triangles of masonry set in between the crosspieces of the frame. However, there seems to be no use in commenting on it. Francis, the manager of the hotel, is convinced that in his new additions he has given something of permanent value to the architectural records of Iraq; he has one answer that is unassailable.

"It will last. It will stay there forever—and is not that long enough?"

And the masons, questioned through an interpreter as they slap handfuls of mortar into the interstices in the brick, twist their plaster-spattered lips into a smile. Their fathers put up buildings that way. Why change the method?

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It is to be noted, however, that the Arab workman is seldom so set in the traditions of his craft that he cannot be taught. Southwest of the city are rows and rows of modern bungalows that would not seem at all out of place in the latest of Florida's bubble cities. They were built within the past few years to accommodate members of the British civil service who had been hard put to find lodgings, but, although the design is that of the typical English cottage, the workmanship is Arab. The masons who put up these houses probably feel that the silly Farenji would not have wished such construction had they not been ignorant foreigners. The work on the Maude Hotel seems to show that they considered themselves bound to no precedent merely because they had taken part in this architectural sacrilege.

Electric lights and ice and taxicabs have come to Baghdad, but for all that should Sargon, King of Kings, some day return to this his ancient playground and cry out for artisans to build a duplicate of his vanished palace Iraq will be all in readiness for the summons.

So Baghdad walks in its old ways as it did when Zobeideh was a girl. For something more than eight years the English have been a part of its population and they have done much to clean up its chaotic business district and to modernize its suburbs. Out toward the flying field green gardens are pushing out into the desert as they did in the day before Hulagu or Tamerlane destroyed the irrigation ditches. Progress, felt rather than seen, has come into this land and is stirring its hoary dust. And yet the British are in, but not part of, Iraq. They themselves are not so much in evidence as the French officialdom in Damascus. Their works—save for New Street and the electric light—are evident principally in their own colony. About them the old town stalks in all the dignity of superior age and mild tolerance for the impetuosity of youth.

Costume, for instance, shows little of the Occidental

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influence that has done so much to make a nondescript city of Beirut. Where European dress has been adopted by the natives at all, it has taken as the mark of the Jew who tops it with the red fez that was so universally a badge of subjection to the Turk. The Arab clings to his long white garment and twisted turban. His headdress maintains its old-time status as an indication of his piety and religious standing—white, if he has made the pilgrimage to Mecca, green, if he can claim to be a Seyed—a descendant of the prophet. If he is a student or a scholar he may cover his white garb with a thin cape-like wrapper of black with red piping along the collar line and the seams of the sleeves but in doing so he is following a tradition as old as the folk tales of Harun. The abba has always been more or less popular in the modes of Baghdad.

In thought it may be that the Arab is showing progress. It seems hardly likely that he could have sat by the ruins of Babylon and watched the tide of khaki sweep northward without wondering what it was all about. There are several periodicals printed in Arabic and one English daily newspaper in Baghdad and over at the end of the flying field a radio station is in touch with Cairo and the Mediterranean coast. Information is brought into Iraq and disseminated in a few minutes where formerly the speed of travel of news was measured by the pace of tired camels.

It must be pointed out, however, that changes in mental processes are slower than the weathering of granite, whatever influences may be abroad in the coffee shops. Type and paper may be expected to work a miracle with the civilization of Mesopotamia, but before the thaumaturgists of the editorial rooms can accomplish these reforms, reading must become something less of a novelty among the populace than it is at present.

A half-amused, half-discouraged British engineer in the irrigation office at the Serai said something to this effect when he was pointing out what had been done to restore

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some of the ditches that Hulagu and his sanguinary brethren had eliminated in the frolicsome days of the Mongol conquests.

“Mesopotamia once supported a population of more than thirty millions,” he said. “Probably a tenth of that number could be found by a general census now, but the land is no less fertile than it was when Herodotus and others considered Babylonia the garden spot of the world.

“We probably could duplicate much of the system that the Babylonians put in here. But we are faced by two or three problems. First we have to consider the ways and means for doing the work. Then we have to consider what good will come of it when we have it done.

“Our agricultural experiment station has shown that cotton can be raised here rotating with crops of berseem and cereals in a single season. The crying need of the British Empire is independence of the United States in cotton culture. Even the acreages of Egypt are not enough.

“So the agricultural experts issued great quantities of seed to the farmers in the Baghdad district to determine how such a crop might thrive under native cultivation.

“At the end of the season several farmers were called upon for a report. One spokesman made it for them.

“‘We have had the same experience,’ he said. ‘We have found it difficult to go about planting this cotton. But thanks to the kindness of the Sahibs who gave us the seed our cows produced much more milk this season than last season. We do not know how cotton seed will grow in our regions but we do know that it makes very good cow food.’

“And that seems to sum up the great problem of Mesopotamia—rehabilitation can be hoped for only when the people have been educated sufficiently to see the necessity for it. . . . And only Allah can say when or how that will be brought about.”

Chapter Thirty-four

BAGHDAD THE IMMORTAL

Romance Wears a Veil of Moonlight

*I see rich Baghdad once again,
With its turrets of Moorish mold,
And the Caliph's twice five hundred men
Whose binishes flamed with gold;
I call up many a gorgeous show
Which the pall of oblivion hides—
All passed like snow, long, long ago. . . .*

—ARABIAN, ANON.



WHEN one has lived for a time in a Baghdad of his own reconstruction, he finds it difficult to open his eyes to the sordid truths that figure so largely in the observations of the realists who have written most of the books about this region. Still when one goes abroad at high noon to look at the city through spectacles whose only magic is in Crookes lenses, he is conscious that actualities and dreams have many points of dissimilarity.

Where is the Baghdad that was the glory of the civilized world a thousand years ago? What becomes of its reincarnation that is conjured back out of the mists by night? Where are the streets of silver and the walls of porcelain? Perhaps it is best that one should not leave Iraq without providing an answer.

Numerous agencies contributed toward the destruction of Baghdad—not the least of which was the caliphate that constructed it. Quarrels within the family of the

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Abbasides were not infrequent and civil war for whatever cause is a disintegrating influence. There were no more men like Harun in the royal line and the history of the region after his death is a continuous chronicle of Persian conquest.

The Crusades—for all that they failed in their immediate objective, the recapture of the Holy Sepulcher,—shook Islam to its foundations and paved the way for the rise of numerous factional parties and sects. The centralized effort that had made Mohammedan arms the terror of Europe ceased to exist and the long Eastern frontier was laid open to invasion from a new and hitherto unnoticed source, the vast mystery of Mongolia.

Nasir, one of the last of the Abbaside caliphs found himself in a quarrel with Persia early in the thirteenth century and with what he considered, no doubt, an excellent stroke of diplomacy, he augmented his own weakened force of arms by enlisting the aid of great barbarian hordes that had been brought westward by Genghis Khan. Islam realized too late that it had turned loose its own destruction.

Some obscure influence—possibly a superstitious fear of warriors whose reputation had lingered long after their prowess had departed—delayed the death stroke for a generation. Then on the dawn of an evil day the yellow men began to pour over the frontier.

They came westward over a trail of corpses and hot cinders and spread over the plains about Baghdad like a plague of carrion birds. On the throne of Harun sat the Caliph Al Mostasim b'Illah (The Protected of the Lord) who relied a bit too much on the talismanic quality of his name and, with a selfishness that has few parallels in history, sought to protect his own fortunes at the expense of his people. Baghdad surrendered to Hulagu the Mongol and shortly was afire—the funeral pyre of the Moslem civilization.

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The blood that flowed in the smoldering streets should have been sufficient to quench the flames, for Hulagu was a thorough workman and his soldiers were frank barbarians who knew their rights. Women, tapestries and gems fell to them as valuable loot. The men died on the butcher's block and the ruddy Tigris was roofed with floating corpses as far as the whispering mounds of Babylon—which was no new experience for the Tigris.

To the unappreciative eye, it would seem that this orgy of blood and fire should have been enough to satisfy even the painstaking zeal of a barbarian conqueror, but the world has seldom seen a murder with the true instinct for destruction so highly developed as it was in this one. Hulagu went a step farther and obliterated the great irrigation system that had given Mesopotamia its life since the men of the fertile crescent moved out of their skin tents into permanent dwelling places.

One might pause at this point, for there is where Baghdad and all that was tributary to it ceased to exist. But perhaps some note should be taken of the pitiful anticlimax that ensued. The Mongols passed on. The Caliphs arose once more to the task—common enough in this zone of buried empire—of rebuilding their capital out of its own ashes.

And when they got it all done came Timur the Lame—Tamerlane as we know him—from the region about Samarcand to repeat with less dramatic effect, but hardly less energy, the terrible conquest of Hulagu.

Some historians represent Tamerlane as less of a barbarian than his predecessors and credit to him a magnanimity that would have been a credit to a Maude or an Allenby. But there is a tradition which will not down that Tamerlane's contribution to the varied architecture of Mesopotamia was a pyramid which he constructed as a quaint conceit out of ninety thousand human heads.

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One word more and the story of Baghdad is brought up to date. About the time of Hulagu a company of four hundred Turkish horsemen, impelled by the traditions of their race, who had found favor in the armies of the latter-day caliphs settled in a district in the hills up near the source of the Tigris. In two hundred years the descendants of these four hundred cavaliers were battering down the inner defenses of Constantinople and proclaiming themselves the overlords of the old Roman Empire of the East.

All of Arabistan was under their power and there it remained decaying and unlovely until one day H.E. shells began to drop upon the south defenses of Baghdad and a mild-eyed conqueror named Maude rode northward in the chariot tracks of Babylonian, Ninevite, Mede, Persian and Roman to die a romantic death in victory.

What will become of this haunted crescent between the two rivers? The historian is not yet born who will tell of it. The Tigris has nourished a dozen civilizations and probably will nourish as many more. In the meantime nothing is permanent save the memory of a lady who sat up nights in her boudoir to tell marvelous and unbelievable tales to the late Shahryar who probably did not appreciate them.

In the Maude Hotel, Ahmed the Teller of Tales is packing a small leather trunk. The diners in white evening dress are leaving the terrace and the pounding of the ice machine on the river has ceased.

From some hotel near the bridge come sounds of music vaguely traceable above the wailing of the native phonographs on the farther road . . . "Hands That I Loved Beside the Shalimar." . . .

Shadows are dancing under the palm trees, sketching untranslatable talismans in Arabic on the blank wall. And across the Tigris the fringe of wall and minaret is white-blue in the moonlight.

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Baghdad probably never was more romantic than it is to-night. . . . And that is because to-morrow the motor caravan will be on its way westward again in the tracks of the conquerors toward a region where the sun goes down in a cobalt sea. To-night the lover of the late Scheherezade bids her good-by.

She understands what is required of her, this lady. Djinn and peri and spirit slaves of ring and lamp—all the creatures that moved unseen through the atmosphere of mysticism that was Baghdad's in its glory—have been called back to put this house in order, to reconstruct the city as it was before the Mongol blight. That they have been assisted by the magic of the moon is of course merely incidental.

Across the town the blue domes of the mosques glow like great fragile bubbles that may presently float away. The towers and minarets, that on other nights have been black silhouettes, are dripping with turquoise on frosty white and luminous. Even New Street, ghastly cicatrix of a modernist operation, is silvered and refurbished and the square lanterns that flicker at the street corners are no longer the offspring of petrol cans but the artistry of the skilled artisans who built the mosques of Harun.

And the people are changed. They are not the creatures of poverty who choked with the dust at high noon. Through the misty light one can see that they have been touched by the magic of the evening. They parade now in ancient splendor, their soiled woollens lustrous as silk, the cords with which they are girded transmuted into gold.

One sees them through Scheherezade's eyes—Sinbad the Venturesome home from Basrah, The Fair Persian, The Ensorcelled Prince of the Black Isles, The Peri Banou, Ali Baba and his murderous retinue, Morjaneh the slave, Nurmn-Aldin Ali, The Barber and his Brothers, The Old Man of the Sea, The Three Kalendars, sons of Kings,

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Julnar the Maid of the Sea, Ibrahim of Mosul, Ma'aruf the Cobbler, and Harun and Jafar and the lovely and talented Zobeideh herself. Knights from Khorassan ride with silver lances poised toward the round city of Mansur. Houris in diaphanous silks pass on through the misty light.

And in watching them one who has known Baghdad by daylight suddenly realizes that after all the Golden City of the Caliphs has never died. The pyramid of ninety thousand heads that Tamerlane piled in the ashes of Mansurieh was a pitiful monument to the futility of destruction. Baghdad was never destroyed. Hulagu may have beaten down its iron doors and made a horrible wreck of its palaces. Timur may have massacred more than half of its population as tradition asserts. But what of that. Baghdad was already immortal when the barbarians rode out of the chill steppes in the land of Og and Magog to trail a torch across Mesopotamia. Romance is something inside of one. It is independent of geography and architecture.

Baghdad in the period of its greatest scintillance probably would have aroused no more emotions in the breasts of some of our modern travelers than does the dusty shell strewn over the site where Islam had its moment in the sun. That Baghdad probably was like all other cities—a place admired not for its magnificent ensemble but for a few individual details. To the weary camel driver it was a place of running water; to the politician it was a place where one might whisper into the ear of a great caliph; to one man it was a home and probably no great marvel of a home at that; to another it was a prayer carpet in a mosque; to another it was the smile of a woman who waited behind the tall gates.

Imagination is after all the great magician. And it accomplishes its marvelous restorations the more readily when ages have fallen through the hourglass.

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Baghdad will always be Baghdad the Golden, in spite of ice machines and electric lights and taxicabs, so long as men have time to read about it. Zobeideh sleeps no less easy for the shunting of box cars under the wall of her tomb. Nor is her memory the less bright because the fortunes of a war, in which she had no part, have brought to Mesopotamia a race of white-faced, blue-eyed men with forceful manners and artillery and a great impatience with the continuing past.

The Persian tent maker who lamented that—

“To-morrow I may be as yesterday’s seven thousand years” was unduly alarmed. He is gone, but his name travels on. He lives as truly as he did when he lolled in the flesh among the wine pots of Teheran. . . .

So do they all live—the millions of men and women who trod this highway coming up out of the cradle of time. One sees them now as vividly as one sees the flashing march of Harun and his eerie crew. . . . The explorers from Kish who ventured this way as pioneers in a strange land—the wise men of Babylon, the crinkly bearded conquerors of Assyria—Xenophon and his Ten Thousand—Alexander pausing here as on the frontier of the world—jewel-covered potentates of the Medes and Persians and Greeks—Julian the Roman—the fanatic hordes of Islam.

Here is a ghost—thinner and daintier than the rest—that can be none other than Semiramis, for what can be more gossamer than the ghost of a Myth. Behind her in the moonlight one may discern Sargon, King of Kings, in a ponderous chariot of brass and gold. Through the shadows flit Nebuchadnezzar barking like a wolf and Balthazar, whose face is still pallid with the fear of a message that he saw written on a gold-flaked wall by a ghostly hand.

And then a cloud passes over the moon and all is changed again. One sees a dark moisture trickling in the gutters

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and the gray current of the Tigris turn slowly to red. The Mongols are in the streets. The swords are out and the torches are alight. Red flame is creeping up along the lapis lazuli of the towers and massive walls are tumbling down.

One hears the defiant shouts of men to whom death is merely a step on the road to Paradise and the shrieks of women who will presently pass through the slave markets into racial oblivion. Death has come to Baghdad. . . . And one turns back shivering, despite the warmth of the night, into the disillusioning arc of the electric lamps. . . .

“I have lived in Baghdad for thousands of years,” says Ahmed the Teller of Tales as he returns to the packing of the trunk. And it is not difficult to appreciate his sentiment. The names that are written on Iraq—from the cylinders of Kish to the broken tablets of Harun—are names as familiar in America as they are in Asia—the names of old acquaintances. And one cannot but feel that he has come very close to their owners through having visualized them in wraithlike clouds of their own dust.

To-morrow—the desert again with its unbreathable day and its shivering night—with its actual mirages more fantastic and unreal than the fabled creations of the djinn. . . . To-morrow the terrible chill and loneliness of the waste land when the dipper begins its slow somersault in the northern sky. . . . To-morrow a steamship putting out to sea with her prow to the west.

But here—on this side of the stars—it is always yesterday.

THE END