

# Fanatical Moslems of Central Arabia

BY DR. PAUL HARRISON, BAHREIN, PERSIAN GULF

Missionary of the Reformed Church in America

**M**OHAMMEDANISM is a reflection of the Arab mind, and owes its strength to the fact that it is such a faithful reflection of that mind, which is the world's primitive mind at its best. Mohammedanism's vision of the omnipotent God is at once so magnificent as to command the admiration of the most hostile, and so simple in its intellectual demands that an untaught African bush man can grasp it. This vision has given the faith of Mohammed an almost unconquerable power over the hearts of men for thirteen hundred years.

Now as always the power and drive of that faith are directly in proportion to the clearness and intensity with which this central truth is held. The farther from its birthplace Mohammedanism is studied, the greater becomes its dilution with external pagan elements, and the weaker its impact on surrounding races and religions. The semi-idolatrous Shiites of Persia do not widen the borders of Islam. No more do the half heathen Mohammedans of China. But the orthodox Mohammedan Arab, be he slave trader, or merchant, or Mullah, seems to leave behind him a trail of mosques wherever he goes. Throughout all these centuries Arabia has been the great fountain head of this tremendously powerful conception of God, and man, and the world. Streams from that source have flowed far in many directions, before mixture with other elements has weakened and sometimes finally stopped them.

Throughout Islam's history the purity of the original spring has been preserved only by occasional great spiritual upheavals, which served to call men back to the simplicity of the original teaching. Islam was less than a hundred years old when the Khawarij as a separate body lived and died to protest against the generation of their times. A hundred years later, Ibn Hanbal called his contemporaries back to the true faith with a voice that is heard down to this day. To pass over much intervening history, two hundred years ago Arabia was convulsed by Ibn Abdul Wahab as he called the wandering Arabs back to the pure faith. It is significant that he did not look on himself as in any sense the founder of a new school. His followers dislike the name "Wahabi." They reckon themselves followers of the system of Ibn Hanbal, and term themselves "Hanbalis." Ibn Abdul Wahab's reforms spread all over Arabia, and today many Wahabis are to be found in India and even in Central Asia.

That is all in the past. It is with a feeling of awe, almost of fear, that we see a similar tremendous movement gathering momentum under our very eyes today. Ten years ago the Bedouin tribes who form the greater part of the population of Arabia were ignorant of their own faith, to a degree almost beyond belief.

In those days we longed for the time when we might get into the interior so that work among these tribes could be started. We supposed that they offered the most promising field of any class in Arabia.

Events have moved rapidly since then. Eight or ten years ago some of the religious leaders of Nejd became interested in training teachers for these Bedouin tribes, whose ignorance and indifference concerning their own faith were a scandal. A man when trained so that he could act as an accredited teacher, was distinguished by a white head dress. They termed themselves, "The Ichwan" i. e. "the Brethren." The movement spread beyond all dreams. Hundreds came in to be trained. At first the white head dress indicated a certain amount of training, but gradually as the movement spread, and came to include hundreds, and thousands, and now tens of thousands, it came to stand for little more than a dedication body and soul to the practice and propagation of orthodox Islam, of the stiffest Wahabi type. The effort is still to have every member at least learn the stipulated prayers, but it must be a small fraction who have been trained, even to that slight degree.

The spread of the movement has been almost awe inspiring in its rapidity, and much more in the intensity of devotion it has inspired in the hearts of the Desert Bedouins, whom a casual observer might have considered quite incapable of such religious emotions. Two years ago when we visited Riadh, the movement was in evidence everywhere, but its actual followers were not very numerous. This year, nine out of every ten of the Bedouins that visit the capital wear the white head dress. The camel man who brought us back assured me that he dared not return to his old home, nor would he dare meet his own brothers on the road; "for," said he, "if they should outnumber us, either I would join the movement with them, or die on the spot." Their attitude toward the heretic and the Christian can be imagined.

"Who is that?" said one of them with unconcealed hostility as he saw the hospital assistant in our caravan. "He looks like a Persian."

"Oh, no," replied the camel man who had the uncomfortable job of taking us in, "he is an Arab from the region of the Dubai, a true Moslem."

"Where is Dubai?" skeptically inquired the Bedouin.

"Dubai," replied the camel man, "is the other side of Hassa, to the South."

“There are no true believers on the other side of the Hassa,” replied the man with intensity. “They are infidels, all of them, infidels.”

“The Ichwan” have no new theology. They boast that they are simply returning to the true interpretation of Islam which Ibn Hanbal gave to the world many years ago. “No, indeed,” said Bin Saoud, their political and religious head, “They are not a new sect. If they were, we should have exterminated them long ago. They are simply returning to true Islam, which the Bedouins have known little about, and the practice of which they have outrageously neglected.” They have no organization. There is no head, no initiation ceremony, no hierarchy. Mysticism in religion to them is anathema. Their theology is the farthest removed from it. Neither in origin nor in belief, nor in organization have they anything in common with the Dervish orders that have been such a power in North Africa.

As a testimony to the present vitality and strength of Islam, this movement is worth our study. It offers nothing in the way of worldly pleasures or advantage. No country rich in easy loot is to be invaded. There is no new mystical theology to fascinate empty hearts, and no powerful organization to direct an efficient campaign for the winning of men. Here is a movement which has already captured the hearts of tens of thousands of the Bedouins and stirred in them a devotion which seems to know absolutely no limit. It is a movement which has nothing to offer except the rewards of the next world, which has no arguments except the inherent power of the religious ideas it presents, and no organization or method, except the spontaneous enthusiasm of its devotees.

What effect is it to have on the evangelization of Arabia? In the first place it is a call to prayer. Those men have not been brought nearer to Christ by the movement. The vision of the Church of Christ taking form among the Bedouins seems faint and far away. The Gospel probably has no such fierce and uncompromising enemies in the whole of Arabia as these same Bedouins. They are more cruel than before. The pride of their fanatical hearts is past all description. The springs of brotherly love seem quite dried up, except toward those of the Brotherhood. He must be a strange Christian who can witness such a phenomenon unmoved,—the hearts of a nation hardened to stone against Christ and against His Truth, almost overnight.

And there is nothing to anticipate from human governments in the way of help. Quite the contrary. Bin Saoud\* sits as ruler over Nejd, and the shereef sits in Mecca as ruler of the holy cities, but they know as everyone knows, that the Ichwan rule Arabia, and the

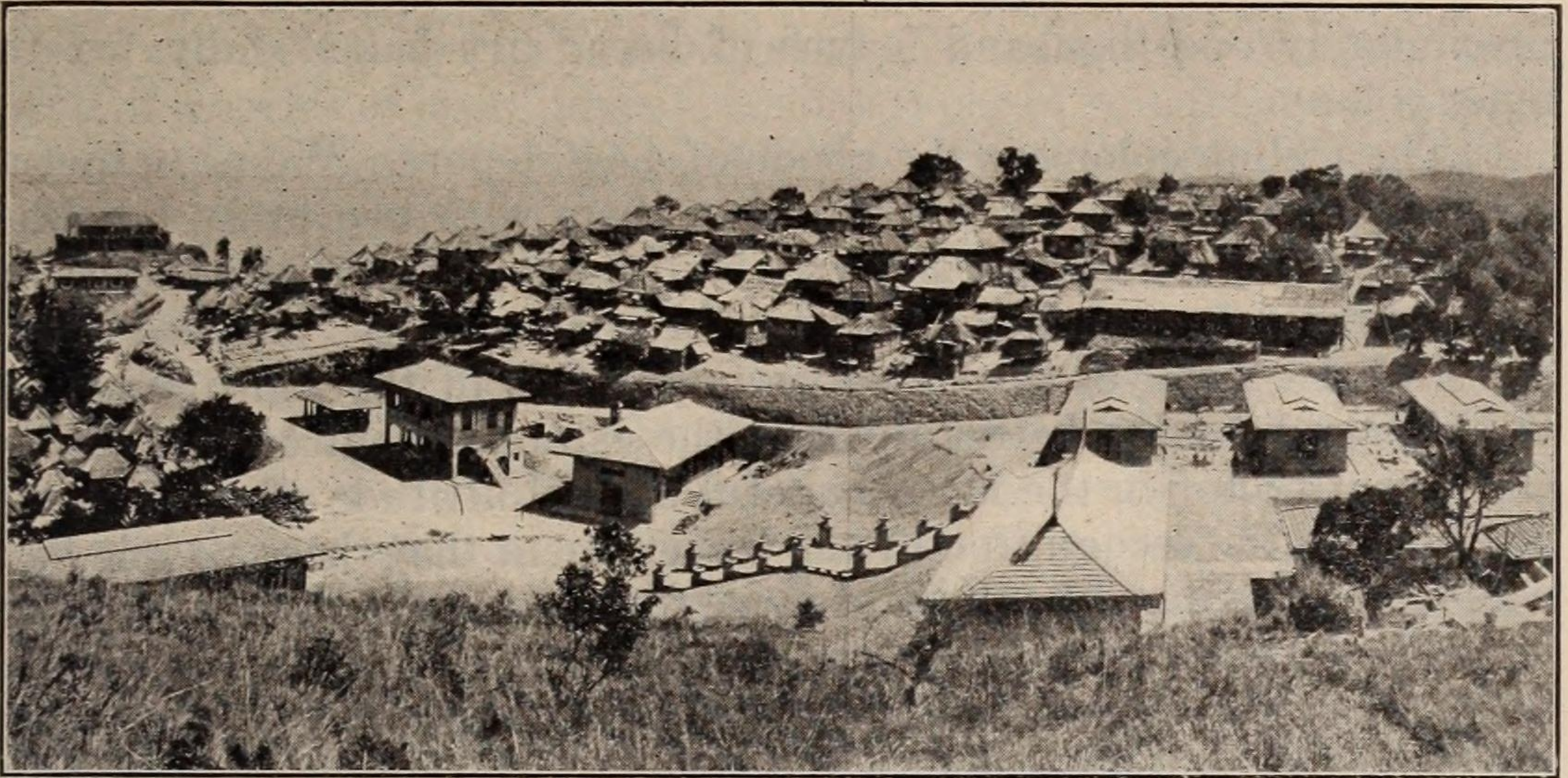
---

\* Bin Saoud has recently been killed in Central Arabia. This will have a great influence on the future of political and religious affairs in the Peninsula.—EDITOR.

man who has their support is King. While his son was making a great impression in Paris, the shereef himself was ignominiously defeated, driven from Taif even, and compelled to flee for safety clear to Jiddan. The newspapers doubtless will credit his defeat to the ambitions of Bin Saoud, a rival ruler, but the truth is far otherwise. The shereef was foolish enough to cross swords with the Ichwan. It is safe to say that he will hesitate a long time before he attempts it again. Whatever European Power becomes responsible for the peace and tranquility of Arabia will soon learn that to stir up the Ichwan is to kindle a tremendous conflagration. Peace at practically any price must of necessity be their policy, and except as God rules otherwise, we have nothing to expect from them except opposition and hindrance to all efforts to evangelize inland Arabia.

But the outlook is not hopeless, far from it. Indeed it takes no abnormal or fanciful faith to believe that in this way God is shutting off a part of the Arab race from the destructive influence of modern civilization, till such a time as His own truth in Christ shall prepare them to make their own splendid contribution to His completed Kingdom; and not only is the end discernible to the eye of faith, but the means are in our hands. These Bedouins, although about as fanatical as human beings are capable of becoming, are still perhaps the most susceptible to real democratic human friendship of any people in the world. It is interesting and at the same time terribly pathetic, to see them slowly thaw out, as they come into contact with the friendly messenger of Christ. They come for medicines, and even for operations, and they learn to be very friendly. They admit that if these associations were reported against them, in their own tribes, it would mean immediate death, and they dare not recognize the infidel doctor on the street, however much they may owe to his skill. Last year for a month and a half, these stern, fanatical, grizzled war horses of Islam came for all sorts of medical treatment to the improvised hospital in Riyadh. At first they were very cautious about jeopardizing their souls for the sake of their bodies, but in the six weeks of our visit, prejudice of that sort seemed to melt away, and when the time came to return, we left behind us sincere friends who regretted our departure, and a community that will rejoice over our return.

And so it comes to pass that in the face of a revival of fanatical orthodox Mohammedanism, such as the world has not seen for a hundred and fifty years, the messenger of Christ is welcome in the capital city of that faith, as he never has been before. Indeed the permission to set up permanent work seems almost within our grasp. It is a time to pray. "Who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient."



CULION COLONY, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, WHERE THERE ARE OVER 4,000 LEPERS

## The Largest Leper Colony in the World

BY WILLIAM M. DANNER, NEW YORK

Secretary of the American Mission to Lepers

UNCLE Sam's'' leper colony in Culion, Philippine Islands, is the largest and best conducted leper colony in the world. Under the guidance of Dr. Long, the Director of the Philippine Health Service, we sailed from Manila to Culion in the Governor General's boat. \*

Culion, where eleven years ago the American Leper Colony was established, is an island with beautiful tree-covered hills and valleys with luxuriant vegetation. Vegetables and fruits, gorgeous flowers and birds of gay plumage brighten the dark green of the forests.

Dr. O. E. Denny, Chief of the Colony and efficient physician in charge, escorted us on our tour of inspection. The first *Balala* (Clean Section) contains the Administration Building. Two Spanish Catholic priests of the Jesuit Order and one lay brother reside in the house of the padres in the *Balala*. They hold religious services in a chapel, which is a part of the building, for the benefit of the non-leprous employees and visitors. Two modern buildings of reinforced concrete are the quarters for the Filipino non-leprous laborers, and the kitchen and bake-shop where their food is prepared. Ap-

\* The party consisted of a number of those interested in the Leper problem: Dr. John D. Long, Director of Health, Major, U. S. A. Public Health Service; Dr. Lewis R. Thompson, Assistant to Director of Health, Captain, U. S. A. P. H. S.; Dr. H. W. Wade, Biologist, Bureau of Science, Manila; Rev. Bruce S. Wright, Pastor Union Church, Manila; Rev. Marvin A. Rader, D. D., Supt. Manila District M. E. Church; Rev. James B. Rodgers, D. D., Sec'y Union Theological Seminary and Professor in Theology; Mr. Harold H. Peterson, Army Y. M. C. A. Sec'y India National Council; Dr. O. M. Dill, Christian Mission, Women's Board; Miss Marion Parsons, Assistant Supt. Mary Child's Hospital, Manila; Miss Mabel F. Dobbs, Dietitian and Nurse, P. H. S.; Dr. J. W. McKean, Chiengmai, Siam; W. M. Danner, Mrs. Danner, Lois Danner.