

The Quraish, who inhabited Mecca and were the guardians of the temple Ka'aba, traced their descent from Ismael, son of Abraham. About the time Muhammad was born, most of them were idol worshippers, but a few, called Hunafa, did not believe in idolatry. Some were atheists. Some did not believe in the resurrection and thought death as the end of life. A few had become converts to Judaism and Christianity.

One or two years before the death of the Prophet, almost the whole of Arabia acknowledged him as its spiritual and temporal head. Medina became the seat of the new Empire. The Prophet died in 632 A.D., and was succeeded by Abu-Baker, who ruled for about two years and ten months. During this short period, he subdued the tribes who had revolted and commenced the invasion of Iranian territory in Mesopotamia and the Roman in Syria. During the reign of Umar, the second Khalif, Persia, Egypt and Syria were conquered. Usman, the third Khalif, extended the Islamic Empire towards Afghanistan in the East, and Tripoli (Africa) in the West. Ali, the fourth Khalif, transferred the seat of Government to Kufa in Iraq. Since then Arabia remained a province of the Islamic Empire. At present, it is divided into the kingdoms of Nejd, united with Hejaz, Yemen, Kuvit, Umman and a few other small States in the south. British influence is to-day predominant. The inhabitants are for the most part Sunnat-Jama'at and Wahabi. There are Shiah in Iraq and Yemen, and Khawarej in Umman.

SYRIA.

Syria was the battle-ground between the Roman and Persian Empires. Its inhabitants are a mixture of Arabs, Greeks, Romans, Jews, Macedonians, Persians and aborigines. The Semitic race form the majority. It was a country sacred to the Arabs. The Prophet had prophesied its subjugation by his followers. He had himself sent an expedition just before his death. It was to leave Medina in the beginning of the reign of the first Khalif. In 637 A.D., Jerusalem was surrendered to the second Khalif and Syria became Islamic

territory. Moaviya, the first Umayyad Khalif, made Damascus his capital, and it remained so to the end of Umayyad rule. When the Abbasids succeeded, they made Baghdad their seat of Government. Syria was attached to Egypt under the Fatemid rule. After that, it passed to Ayyubid and the slave rulers and finally was subdued by the Ottoman Turks, who retained it till the Great War of 1914. At present, it is a Mandatory State under France, divided into several small States. Palestine is administered by the English. The majority of its inhabitants are Muslims, but there are considerable numbers of Christians and Jews also in it. The spoken language is Arabic. The people are intelligent and progressive. The first Arabic drama was composed by a Syrian.

EGYPT.

Egypt was invaded by Amir, son of A's, in the reign of the second Khalif, in the year 639 A.D., with an army of three to four thousand men. He captured Pelusium. In 640 A.D., he defeated the Roman army under Augustales Theodorus at Heliopolis⁷ and occupied Babylon (Egypt), a city close to present Cairo. Since then, Egypt has remained an Islamic territory. The Arabs ruled upto the extinction of the Fatemid dynasty in 1171 A.D. They maintained a policy of non-interference and toleration in the religious affairs of their subjects. During Fatemid rule, Egypt became an independent country, stretching from Algeria to the frontiers of Iraq, and was one of the chief centres of Islamic learning and culture. Salah-ud-din, the hero of the Crusades, deposed the last Fatemid Khalif in 1171 and founded his dynasty, which lasted upto 1250.⁸ Afterwards, Mamelukes, or Slaves,

⁷ Near the apex of the Delta of the Nile. One of the most ancient and important of Egyptian cities. It was the chief seat of the wisdom of the Egyptians.

⁸ The "Saladin" of history books; the hero of the third Crusade on the Muslim side. First a soldier under Nur-ud-din and then Vizier of Egypt and ultimately sovereign; captured Damascus, Aleppo, etc.;



THE CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS AND THE SARACENS

(From a picture on a window of the 12th century, in St. Denis' Church, Paris)

