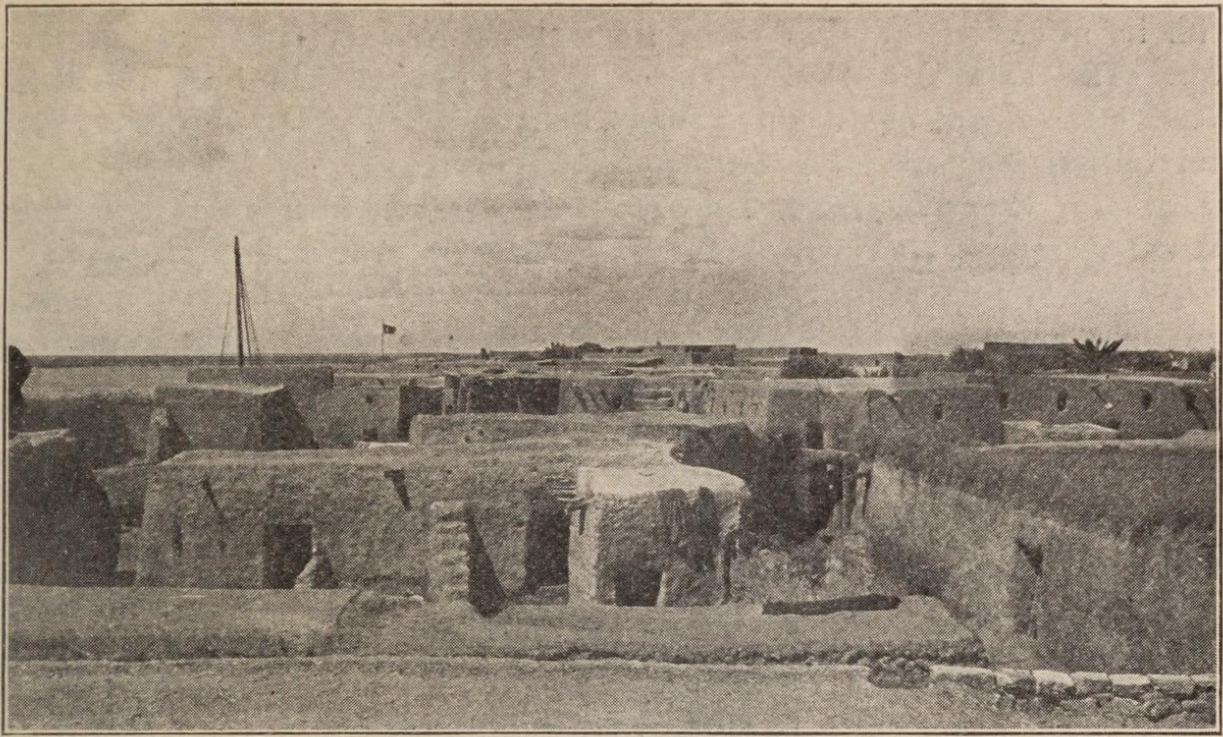




A TYPICAL ARAB TOWN ON THE TIGRIS

GOD'S HAND AS I SAW IT IN ARABIA

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I WANT to tell a story, not of what I have done in Arabia, but of what God has done for me. If the first personal pronoun is used rather frequently, it is only because I want to impress the fact that not a sparrow falleth without our Heavenly Father.

The Arabian Mission has five stations, Mattrah, Muscat, Bahrein, Kuwait and Busrah—stretching along the whole coast of Eastern Arabia. An idea of how far these stations are separated in actual distance may be gained by remembering that if Mattrah and Muscat are looked upon as New Orleans, their out-station, Nakhl, is 50 miles over the mountains; Bahrein is as far away as Nashville, Tennessee; Kuwait corresponds to Indianapolis and Busrah to

Chicago. Busrah has two out-stations, Amara corresponding to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Nasiriyeh, corresponding to Dubuque, Iowa. These distances represent the relative locations in miles but not, by any means, in the time consumed in traveling between them in this land of limited facilities.

All of these stations are more or less under foreign protection, except Busrah, which is in Mesopotamia, near the junction of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. In the Busrah field we are under the Turkish flag and under the jurisdiction of His Ottoman Majesty. The population of the country consists entirely of Arabs, each tribe governed by its sheikh. Until 50 years ago the Arabs were independent, each tribe living within its own borders, tilling the soil or keeping flocks and herds, at peace

with its neighbors, or more often at war. The Turk is an interloper in North Arabia, and holds the country and collects the taxes only by force of arms. In consequence a large standing army is always needed and very often is not sufficient to subdue the rebellious Arabs. Until nine years ago the Turk held his own and the Turkish flag inspired fear and respect in the hearts of the natives. But owing to repression the Arabs finally rebelled in a body and in less than two days cut to pieces 13 battalions of soldiers. Since that time the country has been in a state of constant turmoil, the roads have been cut off and travel sometimes all but impossible.

An Exciting Journey

On the third of March, 1910, I left Bagdad whither I had gone on business, and proceeded down the Tigris River to the town of Koot. There I disembarked and took a sailboat, intending to sail 150 miles down the Hai River to a town called Shattrah, thence to proceed on horseback 35 miles to Nasiriyeh, our out-station on the Euphrates. The river journey was accomplished in safety and on Saturday noon, the 12th of March, we reached Shattrah. Yusuf Pasha, the commander of the Turkish troops, with about 2,000 soldiers, had already been there two or three months, negotiating with the Arabs for a resumption of friendly relations with the government.

Outside of Shattrah, about half an hour's walk is a mud-fort, which is the headquarters of a tribe of about 250 Arabs, called el Sanajir. This tribe owed the government four years' back taxes, and Yusuf Pasha had that day sent 25 soldiers to demolish the

fort and to install another small tribe called El Jasem. The soldiers were unsuccessful and were badly beaten and maltreated.

It was my intention to spend the Sabbath in Shattrah and to proceed on my journey on Monday morning. The house in which I was lodged was on the outskirts of the town and adjoining the Turkish fort. Early Sunday morning I was aroused by the tramp of many feet, and looked out to see Yusuf Pasha pass by with four battalions of soldiers, a battery of artillery and a troop of cavalry. These he placed in a ditch just outside of the town. The Arabs, in anticipation of Yusuf Pasha's movements, had during the night already occupied a similar ditch in front of the mud-fort. But no one expected it to be more than a skirmish, and crowds of people from the town had collected at the edge of the plain, laughing and joking at the pretensions of the Sanajir in thinking themselves able to stand off such a strong Turkish force. But soon from all directions Arabs began trooping in, dancing and shouting and waving the tribal flags, until in two hours the 250 Arabs had grown to about 5,000 and stretched in a great half-moon before the Turkish position. At nine o'clock the soldiers advanced and the Arabs retreated in four bands, each band in a different direction, and each pursued by about one-third its number of soldiers. When the four battalions of soldiers had thus become far separated, each in pursuit of the band before it, the Arabs suddenly turned upon them, surrounded them, and cut them to pieces. The remainder of the soldiers broke and fled panic stricken into the town.

About half an hour before this occurred I received an invitation from a friendly native to come and take dinner with him. So I left the house, with the two evangelists and the Arab cook in charge, telling them that I would be back in a short time. Just as we had finished our dinner, we were startled to see soldiers come running in disorder past the house,

The native with whom I had taken dinner told me that it would be better for me to leave his house, as the Arabs had a grudge against him and he feared attack at any moment. He pushed me out of the door, and he following. We ran along the wall about 100 yards, then turned the corner and entered the house of a wealthy Arab merchant who was



AN ARAB WAR DANCE, MESOPOTAMIA

and artillery mules with the traces out. At the same moment shooting began in the street. After the soldiers had broken and fled, the Arabs followed them and took possession of the town. The street along which I had come a short time before was now cut off by a heavy rifle fire from the Arabs at the end of the bazaar. The soldiers locked themselves in the mosque and began a heavy return fire.

friendly with the Arab and where we could stay in comparative safety. All that afternoon and throughout the night the firing continued and all around we could hear the Arabs shouting and cursing as they plundered. As night fell the firing became heavier and the sound of crashing timbers came nearer and nearer as doors and windows were shattered. To add to our alarm fire broke out in

the town, but God mercifully restrained it and it soon burned itself out. The little room where I had taken refuge was filled to suffocation with natives, each calling on Allah for deliverance. But God was good to me and throughout the night I slept soundly. Once as I turned on my bench and half awoke I heard an Arab say, "Allah must love that Christian there, see how he sleeps."

All through the next day, Monday, the plundering and shooting continued until suddenly at about four in the afternoon the bugles from the barracks in the next street sounded "Cease firing." One of the men in the house peeped over the wall and shouted that the Arabs were leaving the town and that Yusuf Pasha had raised the white flag. In a few minutes a neighbor came in and announced that Yusuf Pasha had requested a three days' truce to bury the dead and to endeavor to make terms with the tribes. Since the government had been worsted the condition promised to become worse as the days went by, so I determined to leave Shattrah at once. I dared not notify the government of my departure, fearing they would forbid it. Only one way lay open, namely, to obtain a guide from the nearest tribe. The Arabs have a custom that so long as you have a guide from a certain tribe, you are safe to go and come within the borders of that tribe. Even if the guide be an infant or an unarmed child, the honor of the tribe compels them to ensure you safe conduct.

Early on the morning of Tuesday I found a dare-devil Arab, gave him some back-sheesh and a letter to a sheikh who lived about

two hours away. I explained to the sheikh that I was an American who was desirous of going on to Nasiriyeh but for the present was delayed in Shattrah, and asked him for a guide through his territory. At noon the Arab came back, said he had delivered the letter and that a guide was waiting in a ditch outside the town. We loaded our mules and against the protests of every one started out. We had hardly gone half a mile out of the town when suddenly ten Arabs sprang up out of a ditch, surrounded us and ordered us to dismount. I said "Andi tisyar," which means "I am conducted." They demanded to know where the guide was, and I said he was waiting in a ditch beyond. To tell the truth, I was not sure whether the sheikh had sent a guide or not, but it satisfied the Arabs for a moment and we rode on together. When we reached the ditch I had designated there was no guide! The Arabs at once leveled their rifles, said grimly that they admired our nerve but not our sense in daring to come into their territory without a guide, and fell to discussing whether to shoot us or simply to rob us and let us go. They had decided to kill the two evangelists and were discussing my sentence, when an Arab sprang from behind a hillock, waving his rifle, and bounded before us. He was a mere boy, of perhaps 17 and was our promised guide. He was dressed in a military jacket and armed with a rifle, both of which he had stripped from a dead soldier in the trench the day before. For a minute or two the Arabs fingered their triggers, disappointed at having been cheated of their prey. At a signal from the boy we rode on, while with

loaded rifle he backed away until we were safely out of range, when he came running up and joined us. We proceeded to the camp of the sheikh and the boy conducted us to the edge of their territory and then left us, fearing to enter the territory of the Khafaja, who were at war with them.

We rode on and at the first tent secured another guide who was to see us to the borders of the Azeirij, the meanest of all the tribes in the province. It was by this time nearly sunset and so we decided to turn aside and seek shelter with Sheikh Tarboosh, one of the Khafaja chiefs. We spent a comfortable night and at daybreak were off again. At about eight in the morning we reached the limit of the Khafaja, and then the guide balked. He said he was afraid of the Azeirij Arabs, that they had a feud with them, and that I must seek a guide for myself. So we unloaded our mules by a well and held a consultation. At last I gave the muleteer some backsheesh, and sent him with a note to Fleih, one of the Azeirij sheikhs, whose camp was about five miles distant, explaining my predicament and asking him for a guide. Then we sat down to wait.

Among Hostile Arabs

After about an hour three Arabs, armed to the teeth, emerged from the tall grass and made toward us. They greeted us and said Fleih had heard of my approach and had sent them to guide me on my way. But I feared a trick and said I would wait for the muleteer to return. It was no doubt their purpose to lure us away from the Khafaja territory. Finally their leader said, "How much will you give

us if we take you to Nasiriyeh?" I replied "I don't carry any money, if I did I wouldn't be coming this way, but if you will take me to Nasiriyeh, I will go into the town, borrow the money from the Turks and pay you handsomely." They asked me what guarantee I could give, so I took off my little riding cap and said, "If I break my word, you may take my cap which I will leave with you, and tear it to pieces and say that the white man has lied." The answer seemed to satisfy them and we reloaded the mules and pushed on. We had scarcely gone half a mile when Arabs began coming out of the brush, here one and there another till the three had grown to a party of ten. They made me ride before them, and I noticed with some misgivings that they fingered their cartridge belts rather nervously, but God restrained them and we moved on.

At last we reached the camp of Fleih. The Arabs were for passing by but we insisted on dismounting, the idea being to demand a guide or impose ourselves on their hospitality until our safe conduct could be assured, it being a sacred custom among the Arabs that a guest is safe so long as he is in the tent. As we drew up about a hundred Arabs rushed out and surrounded us. We unloaded the mules and the two evangelists and myself entered a small hut. At once my boxes were seized and hefted, and I learned much to my surprise that they contained gold and silver. The hospitality I expected was not so cordial as it might have been. They said they had no barley for my mules, that food was scarce, that Fleih had been gone since yesterday and I could not wait for his return.