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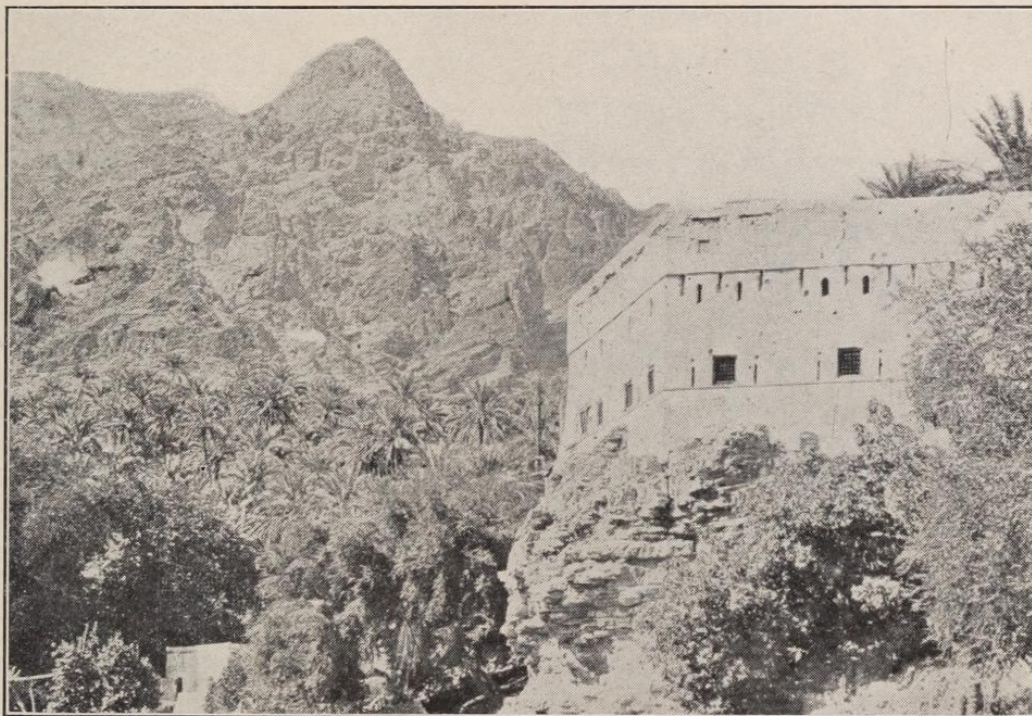
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NEGLECTED ARABIA.

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The Oman Arab and the Gospel.

The following brief paragraphs are not written from the standpoint of the Mohammedan, nor from that of the so-called "neutral" who likes to confess to the "let them alone" policy; but from the standpoint of the missionary who almost constantly lives near and with the natives of the country and cannot close his eyes nor shut his ears to what he sees and hears, and does not seek anything they have but in obedience to the command seeks to tell them of the Way and the Life—the best there is for their present and lasting future.



A MOUNTAIN OASIS IN OMAN.

By natural boundaries of seas, mountains, and desert, Oman, altho part of the great Arabian Peninsula, is quite a province by itself. Perhaps for the same reasons excepting some on the old Pirate Coast, the inhabitants seem very much sufficient unto themselves, exclusive to those of other parts of Arabia. By far the larger part of their business and association is with the outside world across the seas. The people, with their ruler and members of that family, like to tell of and talk about the country of Zanzibar and its people until some-

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times one would think there was their ideal. Like their language, which is Arabic—and good Arabic—but has foreign words and many words and expressions quite their own, so the people, who are surely of good Arabic stock, have some good and bad characteristics exaggerated, which other Arabics do not always approve of nor understand. Here is the home of the old slaves, all of whom have not yet died, and the present generation only desist from raiding, because foreign governments have made it almost altogether if not quite impossible. The old spirit of slavery is still here. One does not like to say the Arab is lazy, because he can at times be exceedingly active, but he certainly is indolent in the extreme. When slavery was at its best, there was much more cultivation, and the slaves are still sufficient in numbers with a little cheap hired help to make life easy for my lord, who is easily satisfied. Large tracks of the country are perfectly barren because of the want of water and impossible of cultivation, but even their fertile spots can boast of little more than the everlasting date-tree and a little grain (whereas they might easily increase this fertility and cultivation, if they had the ambition and perseverance to lead off for irrigation the water which now runs waste. Slavery has fostered and perfected the spirit of cruelty and revenge even though the careless but loyal slave may not suffer much except in extreme cases. The man and the youth will spend thirty or forty dollars (Maria Theresa) for his rifle and belt of cartridges and dagger, whereas all the rest of his clothing costs no more than three or four dollars. He will never leave his own immediate neighborhood without this imposing suit of arms. Tribal wars are frequent and personal and family quarrels and feuds always obtain. They give their sons and daughters in marriage if the price of the dowry is in sight, but never lay aside the spirit of revenge and murder. The son takes the father's part and ever remains an enemy to the father-in-law and that family. Untruthfulness and falsehood has become an expected virtue. No man thinks of living with his fellow on the "yes" and "no" plan in business, nor in any kind of association whatever. With few exceptions, there must always be much haggling back and forth and much false swearing before he is capable to judge of the truth of a statement. There is no such thing as safety and trust in the sense that we know it. Their lives are licentious and adulterous. True, there is some law about it, but this only makes it different in degree and not in kind. Together with all this bad, there is a real "good heart" and courtesy with gentleness about the people, and their exceeding hospitality is noted. But both these good qualities are rather dangerous, because there is no principle about them, and the only apparent reason for them seems to be that of a means to an end, viz., to get something

in return. A man may be courteous and kind and the next moment become a most bitter enemy, because of some mistake or petty offense on the part of the other party. Hospitality brings with it popularity and a big name; and it encourages indolence. Why should the poorer man be ambitious and toil, when he can have much by imposing on the richer man at the mere cost of a courtesy or word of praise. Their religion, of course, is Islam. There is evidence of long forgotten Christian antecedents on the part of some. One tribe at least are certainly descendants of Christians in Asia Minor. In a few localities the Arabs tell of monks that used to live in the mountains and caves. It would be interesting to study exactly and correctly, how much of the good in conditions and character is traced to this early Christian influence. But by far the majority of the people have always been Mohammedans from the first settlement in the land. The sect which predominates, might be called the "seceders" and dates back to the early secession, when seven of the leaders brought their people here to settle. There is a happy absence of that extreme fanaticism and many of the customs which in other districts are real hindrances in approaching and mingling with the people. A degree of superstition, however, seems to have been imported from Zanzibar from the African. They are very zealous in observing the forms of their religion and are very boastful of this. But here of all places is evident the divorce in Islam between religion and morals. There is no real theory nor example in Islam which is an incentive to better living, and there certainly is no power in Islam to help the man who is down and out. Many a



A TYPICAL OMAN FACE.

man in conversation sees and confesses to the wrong, but possesses no thought of reform nor the desire for something better, and he excuses it all and himself before man and God with the stereotyped "God is merciful."

The reminder and plea is not necessary that Christ and Christ-life is the only help and remedy for the gross evils above referred to, and for the numerous by them called minor evils, which exist. From the humanitarian standpoint and of civilization, Christianity is the one thing needed, but the better reason is that God wants this people for their own good and to be glorified in them. The Church of God

through their missionaries can not of themselves change this people nor do them any good, but the Christ whom they preach and the Holy Spirit who ever worketh, will do it all. God can without men and in no time make them His own, but He willeth to do it through the Church and after the measure of time. Are the Christians who have professedly made themselves responsible for the evangelization of this Province, sufficiently zealous and are they following in the best possible way the will of Him, who calls and sends? Up to date there is only one station—Muscat-Muttrah—in all this Province, and the outstation written as such, is not because it is not manned. The force of men and women in the station is encouraged by instructions and support from those at home, and they are doing good work. But it surely is not reasonable to expect to accomplish the whole task by touching those dwelling here and meeting the visitors who come in occasionally from inland. What is wanted, is the personal association with them in the multitudes of towns and homes through-out the length and breadth of the district. “How then, shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?” applies to the inland as well as to one coast-town. The virtues of “good heart” and hospitality make this quite possible. Except when they are fighting, a welcome is always ready for the “sight-seer,” as they please to name the visitor. Never mind their motive or their name, for here is the opportunity. I believe, that if the Church is honest with the Master, they will not be satisfied until they make the best of this opportunity. I have seen it written, that the Church does not realize the rapid growth and progress of the mission in the field, and for this reason is short in the support now needed. Well, pray and tell everyone of the need, and the opportune time. Will you not trust the men, whom you have sent, in their report that this one-station and short-appropriation way of working is playing at the task? There is opposition and at times there will be a shut-out. Why not? But it is from the “scribes and Pharisees” and the common people do not refuse to listen. I believe in the Church and that they say: “Here, go ahead. We will not have it that you go too fast for us. We shall stand by you and back of you with larger means. Send in your men and helpers, and plant and man stations and outstations until all Oman has heard and believes.”

JAS. E. MOERDYK.