

MEDIEVALISM IN ARABIA

The cruelty of the orient is proverbial. Every globe-trotter is revolted by the evidences of cruelty he sees all round him in the East: starving dogs provoking no one's compassion; lame horses staggering under far too heavy burdens; donkeys with sore backs grossly overladen; neglected children dying of dirt, of lack of food, of someone's laziness; tired women doing more, far more, than their share of the day's work;—these are the things which every tourist sees and generally feels.

In Arabia the picture is much as has been drawn above, only there are very few tourists to see, and, as elsewhere, the tale of cruelty goes far deeper than what one notices on the street and in the market place. There is, in fact, no phase of private or public life which does not contribute its share to the great total of useless and unnecessary suffering. In the last analysis, the predominant cause is selfishness, which, with its twin sister, apathy, are responsible for so much misery in this world. Now, selfishness is a primitive animal instinct, and we must be prepared to find it an outstanding characteristic of all backward races. It is almost synonymous with sin, for if there were no selfishness, there would be no sin. And this is why Christ summed up all righteousness as love of God and love of neighbor.

The Arab has yet to learn that love is the fulfilling of the law and that God is Love. When he does so learn, much of his social system will have to be radically altered.¹

Slavery would certainly have to go. Arabia has been the great slave trader of history, and the stories of the

¹ Slavery, punishment by mutilation and the immuring of women found guilty of crime, are in most cases based on the teaching of the Koran and orthodox Tradition. The following footnotes are not by the author of the article, but by the Editor.—*Ed.*

raiding of peaceful African villages and the transport of the captives to the slave markets of Arabia, are familiar to everyone. It took the forces of Christianity, aroused by a Livingstone, a Mackay, and a Wilberforce, to put an end to the nefarious traffic in the bodies of men. But in Arabia proper, the Arab is master in his own house, and the slaves are a part of the domestic order of things, while the natural increase of the slave population maintains the supply. It is easy enough to say that most slaves are well treated. This has always been the argument for the defence. The fact remains that for the ill-treated slave there is no redress. He is his master's property. Slavery carries deep within it the seeds of infinite cruelty. It cannot stand the test of Christ's New Commandment.

One sometimes wonders if the Arab has any real conception of what constitutes cruelty. If you have the patience to read this article through to the end, you will probably decide that he has none.

Think of the cruelty of woman's position in Arabia, with divorce and homelessness ever hanging over her head and with separation from her children always a possibility. For divorce almost always means separation of the children from the mother.

In the matter of the punishment of crime, cruelty marks nearly every phase of it. The Mosaic law of retribution, which Christ repealed and revised at every turn, must of necessity be cruel. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This is the law of the land. The classic punishment for burglary or theft is—to have the right hand chopped off (chopped off is literal).² The bleed-

² "The man thief and the woman thief, cut off the hands of both as a punishment, for that they have erred;—an example from God, for God is mighty, wise.

"But whoso turns again after his injustice and acts aright, verily, God will turn to him, for, verily, God is forgiving, merciful."—Sura 5: 42.

"With regard to the amount of the value which constitutes a theft, there is some difference of opinion. According to Abu Hanifah, it is ten *dirhams*; according to ash-Shafi'i, it is the fourth of a *dinar*, or twelve *dirhams*; whilst Malik holds that the sum is three *dirhams*.

"The freeman and the slave are on equal footing with respect to punishment for theft, and the hand of the slave is to be struck off in the same manner as the hand of a free Muslim.

"The hand is not to be struck off for stealing a free-born infant, although there be ornaments upon it, because a free person is not property; but amputation is incurred by stealing an infant slave, although the stealing of an adult slave does not incur amputation, as such an act does not come under the description of theft, being an usurpation or a fraud."

"The right hand of the thief is to be cut off at the joint of the wrist and the stump afterwards cauterised, and for the second theft the left foot, and for any theft beyond that he must suffer imprisonment."—Hughes, "A Dictionary of Islam," pp. 284-285.

ing is checked by the application of boiling pitch or red hot irons. In places where European influence counts for much, this practice is dying out, but it is still common where the Arab is a law unto himself. One of the first men I operated on, in Bahrain, more than twenty years ago, was a thief who had been punished as laid down by Arab law.

Many years ago, in Kuwait, when the great Mubarak was on the throne, certain men were suspected of treasonable activities. The leader was punished by having his eyes put out by the application of red hot nails.³ Later on, Dr. Harrison removed what was left of one of the eyes, and still later, I performed a similar operation on the remaining eye.

Woe to the culprit who is sentenced to be flogged! I remember once seeing a man who had been terribly beaten across the head and face being ridden through the bazaar on a donkey with his face toward the beast's tail. The man was quite unconscious. From the bazaar he was taken out to the open market place, and tied to a post, in the full blaze of the summer sun. I do not think he lived to see the sun set. This man had been convicted of drunkenness. It is seldom that a man survives a flogging in Arabia.⁴

Yet another incident which goes back to the days of Mubarak, nearly twenty years ago. I had, among my dispensary patients, two of Shaikh Mubarak's women. These women were always accompanied by a special slave. One morning the special slave was not with them; another slave acted as escort. On my asking where their regular attendant was, they said that he was dead. They said it so casually that I was startled. "Dead," I cried. "Why! Nonsense!" Presently I learned what had hap-

³ Mohammed himself gouged out the eyes of criminals who were apostates, with hot irons. Al-Bukhari 56: 152; 64, 36, etc. Muslim 28: 9-14. Cf. Wensinck's "Handbook of Early Mohammedan Tradition," pp. 198-199, and translation of some of the traditions in Zwemer's "Law of Apostasy," pp. 40-42.

⁴ "In the name of the merciful and compassionate God. . . . The whore and the whoremonger. Scourge each of them with a hundred stripes and do not let pity for them take hold of you in God's religion." Sura 24: 1-3. Cf. The references to Tradition in Wensinck. He refers to the various occasions and how it was carried out relentlessly.

pened. It appeared that the slave, in a fit of recklessness, due probably to a drink or two of whiskey, had been taking liberties with one of the above mentioned women; in fact, Shaikh Mubarak had surprised him in the act. Then followed a scene worthy of the Arabian Nights. The Shaikh flew into a towering rage and the poor slave was beaten to a pulp while the Shaikh looked on. The bleeding wretch was then thrown into prison and a general order was issued that no one was to give the man either food or, what was far more important, drink. The special prison, a deep dungeon, dark and stifling, must have added greatly to the man's sufferings, especially as it was midsummer. He did not live long, however, for that night his body was taken out to sea and sunk. This last part of the story I had from the man who carried out the order.

The public prison at Kuwait is a sad place. It consists of one room measuring about ten feet by twenty. There is one doorless opening and there are no windows. The doorless opening communicates with a courtyard not very much more spacious than the room. The wall of the courtyard is topped with a course of broken glass, to make escape as difficult as possible. There are no sanitary conveniences of any kind. In the hot weather, when the prison is full (and it is obvious that the accommodations are extremely limited), conditions are fearful beyond words. I shall never forget being asked to see a man who had died in prison. He had probably died of typhoid, though the family suspected poisoning, and, while in this case the prisoner had probably deserved severe punishment, one's soul went out in sympathy to the well-born, proud Arab lying dead in that awful place. The Shaikh had made the punishment as bitter as possible, even forbidding the man's relatives to take him either food or medicine. One was reminded of that pathetic verse in the 79th Psalm, and perhaps the Prayer Book version is a shade more beautiful than that in the authorized: "O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before

thee: according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die."

The punishment of girls suspected or convicted of adultery or infidelity, is either death or what is worse—walling up in a small room, a few feet square, the smaller the better.⁵ There she stays, in almost utter darkness until such time as the powers that be decree her release. Her meagre meals are passed in to her through a small hole in the wall and she has no contact with anyone. Within the past few years we have known directly of one girl who was shut up in this way for some eleven months. Legally there is a time limit of forty days for this sentence, but no one makes it his business to see that strict justice is done in these cases. In so far as the public knows anything about these cases its sympathy is generally against the woman.

In defense of all this medievalism, it must be remembered that, in a country where there is no organized police system, the only way to keep down crime is to punish it with remorseless severity and to make an example every time. It is significant that there is remarkably little crime in Kuwait or in Arabia generally. The game is not worth the candle.

So much for cruelty between man and man. I have merely given a few thumbnail sketches of a theme on which one might spend hours. This article would, however, be incomplete without some reference to the subject of cruelty to animals.

Generally speaking, the animal in Arabia gets no consideration whatever, unless it has a monetary value, which, of course, forces the owner to feed and, more or less, take care of the particular creature. In spite of all that has been written about the Arab's love for horses,

⁵ At the commencement of Mohammed's mission women found guilty of adultery or fornication were punished by being literally immured (Sura 4:19). "Shut them up within their houses till death release them or God make some way for them." Cf. the commentaries where examples are given. This law, however, was cancelled or abrogated and lapidation was substituted for adultery and one hundred stripes with banishment for a year in case of fornication.—Hughes, "A Dictionary of Islam," p. 11.

Cf. *Tafsir al Khazin* (Cairo edition), Vol. I, p. 358, from the top of the page: "It is related of 'Ali b. Abi Talib that he flogged Sherahat Al-hamdaniya on a Thursday and stoned her on the following Friday, saying, "I flogged her according to the word of God and then stoned her to death in accordance with the example of Mohammed" (lines 14-15).

the fact remains that most horses in Arabia are shockingly treated, and in the case of those that are beasts of burden, sore backs, broken knees and empty bellies are the order of the day. Even the pedigreed thoroughbred is shamefully neglected, and the stables of some of the Arab Shaikhs are a disgrace. The animals stand, day after day, with dirty coats. They get no regular exercise and more often than not their hoofs are all out of shape. I have yet to see a horse in Arabia, unless the animal's owner was a foreigner, turned out in that spickness and spanness which we Westerners insist on, and which, in all probability, the horse enjoys as much as we do.

The camel, on the whole, fares pretty well, partly, perhaps, because when it has made up its mind that it can do no more, it just sits down and dies. The Arab, characteristically, lights a fire or applies a red hot iron under the animal's tail, but even this often fails to bring the sick camel to its feet.

The children of Arabia grow up in an atmosphere of cruelty and are allowed to do all sorts of things, simply because the older ones do not know what cruelty is. In the spring, when the birds are passing through the country in the course of their migrations, thousands of them are trapped in large nets and eaten as great delicacies. This is a perfectly useless waste of beautiful life and any lover of birds just wrings his hands in despair. But the worst part of the little bird question is their use as toys by all the children of Kuwait. In the height of the season the most charming little birds can be bought for about a cent apiece. A string is put on one or both legs, and one or both wings are cleverly dislocated to prevent escape. If the bird is of a combative disposition, a small feather is thrust through the beak at the nostrils. This seems to prevent it from pecking. And then the sad last hours of the bird begin. Upwards and forwards it is thrown into the air, only to be pulled ever back again, or else it dangles pitifully at the end of its string while its owner tramps along utterly unmindful. I have seen a little boy throw

his bird into a drawer, shut the drawer tight and then come and sit down to lunch. No comment from anyone at the table. He had done the ordinary thing. There is never a thought for the little creatures and, fortunately, most of them do not long survive the treatment. Twenty-four hours is a generous average.

Every Arab house has its proportion of cats,—lean, staring, mangy, evil-eyed, hungry, wistful. No one feeds them, so that they are ever on the watch for a chance to steal, which, of course, brings persecution in its train. How any kitten ever survives to maturity is a problem which might reward the research worker. The average kitten is quickly seized on by the nearest child; a string, probably very tight, is fastened round its neck, and the child then drags it about or swings it in the air until it dies. I think, in all my twenty-five years in Arabia, I have never seen an act of kindness to a cat or a kitten, at the hands of an Arab child.

My wife and I have owned cats through most of the time we have lived out here, and they are always fat, prosperous, contented, aristocratic looking animals. We remember particularly two thoroughbred white Persian cats with long silky hair and turquoise blue eyes, two of the handsomest cats that ever were seen. It was the common talk of the town that we washed these cats with soap and sweet water, which shows how much the Arab has learned about cats during his thousands of years of association with them. It is almost impossible to make the Arab believe that if you feed a cat regularly and properly, nature will do the rest, and you will have the magnificent creature that so many Westerners love and admire. And as for giving a cat milk to drink! Why! Whoever heard of such a thing! It is amusing to see an Arab watch our cats. They do not know what to make of them and they haven't the least idea how to pick them up. It is ludicrous to see them try.

The dog comes in for a full share of ill treatment and cruelty. A very popular sport among the boys is to set

on a pack of street dogs against a sick or injured one. The boys run alongside the pack shouting and yelling and urging them on until they pull the weak one to bits. Perhaps the cruelest thing that the boys do to dogs here is to knead up broken glass into dough or rice, give it to the dogs to eat and then watch them die in agony, or at all events rejoice in the fact that they will die in agony later on.

The Arab is a great hunter, but no sportsman. Most of his birds he shoots sitting, and the phrase "sporting chance" has no meaning for an Arab. With the advent of the motor car, gazelle hunting has taken on an aspect which, to all lovers of sport and animals, is revolting. In the old days, that is, up to a few years ago, gazelle hunting took skill, perseverance, endurance, and the hunter got his game, one by one. Now the Ford goes out and simply runs the game down. What chance has a gazelle against a twenty-five horse power engine, in the open desert! And so the Fords come back, reeking with blood and bulging with gazelles. One car is said to have brought in forty in one day this season. We do what we can to rouse public opinion, but it looks as though the slaughter will go on until Nature revenges herself by making the gazelle as extinct as the dodo. Not the least important feature of this horrible butchery is that probably as many animals die of fright as die of rifle and gunshot wounds. Anyone who knows the shyness and timidity of the gazelle will realize what it must suffer when a horde of these modern fire chariots comes thundering after them. Then, too, it is the calving season, and even the Arabs admit that to chase a gazelle heavy with young is certain death both to the mother and to her unborn progeny.

The reader may be interested to know that I learned a few days ago that for all practical purposes there are no more gazelles to be found in this part of Arabia. The desert of today is not the desert of yore. The motor car

penetrates almost everywhere, and the extinction of the gazelle has been very nearly accomplished.

And so, as I have said above, the Arab child grows up with cruelty all round him, cruelty between man and man, and cruelty between man and animal.

It is a strange thing that cruelty is about the last primitive instinct to yield to civilization. One has only to go back a hundred years, or for the matter of that, to read Dickens to realize that modern humanity is a new conception entirely.

In this respect, the present age is undoubtedly in advance of any age that has preceded it. Even the Bible is comparatively silent on the subject of cruelty to animals, and Paul's "Doth God take care for oxen?" is just what any Oriental would say today. And yet, love of animals is the logical outcome of the application of the principles of the teachings of Jesus Christ. The pity is that it has taken the world so long to find it out.

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