

A Visit to Kateef

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Not having seen Kateef before I was happy to accept Dr. Harrison's invitation to accompany him on a visit to Kateef whither he was going to pay his respects to the Ameer and make arrangements for a longer stay in the future to do medical work. Kateef is on the mainland about 45 miles northwest of Bahrein, and the only way of communication between the two is by means of the smaller types of coasting sailboats which constantly ply between the two places. These boats are about 30 feet long with a ten foot beam, and draw about two feet of water when empty. The main body of such a boat is open and the only deck extends for over only the last eight feet in the stern. This place is protected from sun and wind by a canvas covering, and here sits the helmsman with such of the passengers as may be able to find accommodation.

Our boat was to leave at ten in the forenoon. The time of departure of these boats is notoriously uncertain and upon embarking the would be passenger often finds, to his surprise, that the time has been postponed for several hours or even days. For once there was an exception to this rule, for no sooner were we on board but the sail was raised and we were off.

It is well enough to wish a traveler by steamer calm seas, but for the traveler by sail calm weather is about the most undesirable condition imaginable. At sea a contrary wind is even to be preferred to an absolute calm. The foregoing truth we discovered by experience the first day of our voyage out. The wind was hardly sufficient to fill the sail when we started and as the day wore on it became even less. All day long we raced along at almost imperceptible speed so that when evening closed we had not covered more than 15 miles and were hardly out of sight of Bahrein. As soon as it became too dark for the captain to see the landmarks by which he was steering, he gave orders to drop the anchor. We two, together with three or four other passengers, spread our travelling mattresses on the little deck while the crew slept under the open sky in the body of the boat.

The sound that awoke us early the next morning was the stern voice of the captain saying "Abdullah." No answer. Then in a louder voice "Abdullah! gum, sully," Abdullah, stand up and pray! And thus one by one the members of the crew were aroused from their pleasant slumbers to the stern realities of their religious duties. None displayed much alacrity to perform his morning ablutions in the cold sea-water preparatory to reciting his prayers. But finally all were awake and performing their prayers in various parts of the boat wherever they could find sufficient place to go through their prostrations. Some went about it with an air as though they were performing a rather arduous and distasteful, though necessary, duty. According to Mohammedan tradition neglect of the prayers is almost equal to being an unbelieving Kafir. This doubtless explains why Mohammedans constantly exhort one another to the performance of this part of their religious duties.

After the prayers had been said sail was hoisted. Again there followed a day of light wind, though slightly better than the day before, so that we reached Darein at about 3 P.M. To get to Kateef about three miles farther, the boat had to wait about an hour for the tide to rise, which gave us the opportunity of going ashore to pay our respects to sheikh Jassin of Darein. We met with a most cordial reception. This same sheikh, who refused to allow Dr. Harrison admission when he first applied, entertained him and Mrs. Harrison for six weeks last summer while he was doing medical work among the divers.

A half hour's sail brought us to Kateef for the breeze had now become quite brisk. The water in front of Kateef is very shallow. At low tide the bottom is uncovered for a distance of at least a quarter of a mile in some places, and at high tide boats drawing two feet of water cannot get nearer than about 1000 feet from the nearest land. Dr. Harrison ventured to wade ashore from the boat but I waited for a smaller row-boat hoping that it would take me to land. But after going about a half of the distance it also grounded, so that I also had to remove shoes and socks to wade ashore. Removing one's footwear and wading ashore presents no special difficulty: to draw it on again over wet feet on a sandy beach is another story. However we got to Kateef at about sun-down, where the Ameer gave us a hearty welcome. This Ameer does not rule in his own right but is the personal representative of Abel Aziz bin Saoud, the ruler of Nejd, and rules the place for him. His treatment of Dr. Harrison was most cordial, and he showed me also no little kindness even though I was a minister of what was to him a false religion. In him we had another example of the benefits of medical work. This man who first gave the doctor a scant welcome and tried once to forbid all religious work in connection with the medical work, now received us both most heartily and himself provided most suitable quarters for doing medical work next summer without making any restrictions whatsoever in regard to religious work.

The name Kateef applies in general to the whole settlement and more particularly to the main city. The settlement owes its existence to a large number of tepid springs, some say more than two hundred, which water the date-gardens. Some of these springs are large and constantly pour forth a stream of considerable size. Naturally the water is carefully husbanded so as to water as large an area as possible. The date-gardens extend along the shore for about 15 miles to a depth varying from a few hundred yards to about four miles at the broadest.

Kateef city is rather small and very compact. It is surrounded by a heavy wall in fairly good repair, which is pierced by gates at only three points. The interior is rather disappointing. The streets are narrow, dirty and irregular beyond the average, and the interior of the houses were dingy to say the least. Large sections lie in ruins and testify to a greater glory of former days. Some walls still standing and marks on the walls of adjacent houses indicate that many of these buildings were three stories high. Scattered through the gardens are walled villages of varying size, though none, to be sure, have walls as thick as those of Kateef city itself. Till about five years ago when

Bin Saoud took the place from the Turks and all raids stopped, these walls were of very practical and immediate importance. Kateef settlement with its abundant date-gardens was to the hungry Bedouins of the desert a rich prize, a very garden of Eden, which they were never tired of looting. Sometimes during the date season especially, the Bedouins would besiege a village for months at a time while they helped themselves to the date-crop. Many a wounded man caught unawares by the Bedouins in their raids has been brought to the Bahrein hospital in times past. But the bitter retribution that Bin Saoud now meets out to all transgressors has made raiding too dangerous a pastime even for Bedouins, some of whom sigh for the good old times when the strongest and nimblest helped himself. But the people of Kateef now breathe more freely, and many now build their homes outside the village walls. Among the gardens there are many beautiful scenes along paths skirted by rivulets of running water from some nearby spring. Among the date-trees grows a variety of other fruit trees, while much of the ground under the trees is devoted to alfalfa and vegetables. Next to each large spring is usually a small mosque, placed there doubtlessly because of the abundance of pure water to perform the necessary ablutions. On the second day of our stay we made a visit to Tarutan island about two miles from Keteeff and opposite it. The two places are connected at low tide, so that it was possible for us to ride over on donkeys by choosing the right time. The special point of interest is the huge ruined castle near the large spring that supplies most of the water for the gardens. This castle, which was built some hundreds of years ago, is now a complete ruin and is no longer used, but from its elevated tower one gets a magnificent view of the surrounding gardens and Kateef in the distance.

Could these old ruins relate their history we would hear many a strange and romantic story of the distant past when Portugese and Dutch successively captured, controlled and lost the Gulf till the last was finally displaced by the growing power of the British who till the present day retain the balance of power. The Arabs lack the historic sense. The ideas of the past are of the vaguest. To our question as to how long the castle had stood we get such enlightening answers as "Since ancient times" or still more exact "God knows." Of what practical importance can it be for a man to peer curiously into the dead past!

Having finished our business we were ready to return by the evening of the second day of our stay. A boat loaded with bundles of date-branches was to sail for Bahrein that very evening at about ten o'clock. When we got on board, after some difficulty, for again we had to wade out some distance, we found that some 20 more passengers had preceded us on board and had occupied the small deck to its full capacity. So we had to spread our mattresses on the date branches, where we spent a somewhat restless night because the thicker parts of the branches insisted on making their presence felt through the rather thin traveling-mattresses. This time we were not as fortunate as to the time of our departure. The captain did not arrive till the receding tide had grounded the boat and leaving was impossible till the next tide

12 hours later. At last the "gum, sully" informed us that morning was near and with it the tide to carry us out into the open. The wind was favorable and by sunrise we were well under way. At the speed we were going we hoped to be in Bahrein at least by sundown. But the wind died down slowly so that at last it came to a dead calm. Chips thrown into the water floated ahead of the boat. By sundown we had just gotten in sight of Bahrein and the sailors not knowing their exact position decided to cast anchor. So we prepared ourselves for another night on the date-branches. Happily for us we availed ourselves of the kind offer of the sailors to spread some sail cloth over us, for without it the two or three small showers during the night would have made us decidedly uncomfortable. As it was the water soaked through in only a few spots and we remained comparatively dry.

The morning dawned with clear skies and a favoring wind so that we reached the shore at about ten o'clock. Here we met the rest of our fellow-missionaries in Bahrein just ready to embark to meet the new missionaries Rev. and Mrs. Bilkert and Miss Van Pelt. A stiff breeze and a good boat soon brought us to the steamer where we were most happy to welcome the new recruits to our forces in Arabia.

A Madina Man Baptized

(Sent by Miss Gertrud Schafheitlin from "Missionaries to Muslims League")

A missionary of the Egypt General Mission writes from Belbeis to his mission paper:

"Concerning our Arabian friend, Hanna: He is a pure Arab from Madina, one of the sacred cities of Islam, a place in which it is, humanely speaking, impossible for a Christian to live. He was brought to the Lord through another convert from Islam in a town on the Persian Gulf (Bahrein). On returning to Madina to fetch his wife and children he was terribly ill-treated, and sentenced to be hanged by the Muslim Court. In the mercy of God he escaped and came to Egypt. After a long search for work he turned up in Belbeis, and we found something for him to do in our compound. Since coming to us he has been set upon twice, the first time being found unconscious on the ground. He is possessed of a bulldog obstinacy, which makes him rather difficult to deal with at times, and he is quite fearless, and is ready to suffer further if need be. But with all his faults he is very sensitive to the Spirit's working, and one can watch him getting victory. We had the joy last November of seeing him confess Christ in baptism—perhaps the first man from Madina who has ever taken this step. He is longing to become an evangelist, and is seeking to prepare himself with all his heart for this work. So we pray for him that the obstinacy and fearlessness of his natural character may, under the power of the Holy Ghost, be mellowed into strong resolution and wise tactfulness until he becomes a mighty firebrand for God."