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Neglected Arabia

Missionary News and Letters

Published Quarterly

for private circulation among the friends of

THE ARABIAN MISSION

Basrah, City of Sinbad

PROF. J. C. ARCHER

This article was sent us by Dr. James Cantine, from Prof. J. C. Archer of the Department of Missions of Yale. Prof. Archer is spending a year in Y. M. C. A. work among the troops in Mesopotamia. Dr. Cantine came in contact with Prof. Archer through his speaking in the Y. M. C. A. "huts." *The Editor.*

It was "Balsora" when we were boys, the port from which Sindbad the Sailor set out on his marvellous voyages in the days of "the good Harun ar-Rashid." But so strange were the adventures of the Baghdad merchant, I am sure we must have thought his port of sailing as much a fiction as the whale-island or the gigantic Roc.

Later we came to know it as "Bussorah," a real city, a Turkish port and an outpost of the English East India Company. In 1639 two agents of the Company came up from Surat and established a "factory" for the sale of pepper, rice, and Manchester cloth. Now it is Basrah,—as in reality it has always been—a city of the British Empire and the seaport of what is potentially a very valuable area. There have been already here in Mesopotamia large investments in irrigation works and lines of communication, and with a continuance of British control we may expect a development the area deserves, and Basrah will flourish.

The present Basrah is not Sindbad's city; that lay several miles further west, out in the desert. It is rather a pair of towns: Ashar, on the Shatt al-Arab, sixty-five miles from the Persian Gulf, and Basrah City, two miles west of Ashar and connected with it by dirt roads and Ashar Creek. With British occupation the City is rapidly becoming merely a suburb of the busier river-town.

Old Basrah was ten miles from the Shatt—called then the Blind Tigris—but connected with it by two great parallel canals, the Ma'gil to the north, and the Obollo to the south, the latter running into the Tigris by the site of an ancient Roman town named Obollo. Though so far back in the desert, the city's water-way to the sea was shorter than that of Ashar today, for the Gulf coast was then at Abadan which is now twenty-five miles inland. It was built as a garrison city rather than as a port; Arabia then had neither navy nor merchant marine. It was founded in 638 A.D. by order of the Arab Caliph Omar, the second