

The Hajj

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"Proclaim to the peoples a pilgrimage. Let them come to thee on foot and on every fleet camel, arriving by every deep defile."

"The pilgrimage to the temple is a service due to God from those who are able to journey thither."—*The Koran*.

Upon every Moslem who would enter Paradise are laid four obligations, which he may not shirk. He must repeat, and the oftener the better, the Kelimah "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet." He must pray five times a day. He must give alms to the poor. He must fast between daybreak and sunset during the month of Ramadhan.

There is yet a fifth demand upon the zeal of the Moslem—it is not obligatory but is "a service due to God." Hence every true and devout Moslem cherishes the hope of being able some day to tread the sacred soil of Mecca and worship in the holy precincts of the Beit Allah. He longs to set foot in the place to which, all his life, he has turned his face at the hour of prayer. And so from all the world they come, from China and from Morocco, from Afghanistan and from Russia, from India and the Balkans, and lastly but not least from all over Arabia. Although Mecca is in Arabia and familiarity is said to breed contempt, Arabs yield to none in their reverence for the Holy City and in their eagerness to perform the pilgrimage. It is safe to say that most Arabs have either been to Mecca or intend to go there some day. Before the war the popular route for the dwellers in the Persian Gulf was by water to Jidda in the Red Sea and from Jidda the short camel journey to Mecca was comparatively easy. This was the route followed by most if not all of the Europeans who have schemed their way into the city of Mohammed, at one time or another. Since the war broke out, however, steamers have been too busy to carry pilgrims and the overland routes have once more become alive with travellers, and in the words of the Koran, the Hajjis have been arriving on foot and on fleet camels—not always fleet.

Now the Hajj must be performed in "the month of the pilgrimage," the last month of the year, and since the Mohammedan year is lunar, your travels may take you across the desert in midsummer! It was the 8th of August last year when the Kuwait party under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmed, the heir to the Kuwait throne, left for Mecca. I decided to get up early and watch the start from the open ground behind the town. The whole place was dotted with little groups of people making their final preparations and the air rang with the wailing of camels, protesting as is their wont against having anything put on their backs. I

accosted the first likely man I saw, "When is Sheikh Ahmed leaving?" "Tomorrow" was the unexpected reply. I tried a second party with the same question. "In half an hour" was the answer and on cross-examination he added "The Sheikh is even now setting out from the castle." I went up to yet a third gentleman and sought his opinion but he was utterly indifferent and merely stated phlegmatically, "By God, I haven't the least idea." It does not sound nearly so profane in Arabic as it does in English.

Somewhat disappointed at not seeing anything worth seeing, I rode across to another part of the maidan, where in the distance I had made out a large number of camels and found to my delight no less a person than Sheikh Ahmed himself sitting holding his court, as calm as a May morning and looking as though he had not the smallest intention of leaving for anywhere for an indefinite period. As I approached, two or three slaves ran up to hold my horse and at the same time the Sheikh, always the gentleman, rose to greet me. We sat down together and I once more started my enquiries, this time at the fountain head. I now learned that the Sheikh's party would start in the afternoon, only journeying a short distance the first day in order to get the caravan into working trim. From time to time, while we chatted, groups of camels were brought up for inspection and approval, and not far off, stuck in the ground, was the Sheikh's special pilgrim flag, a large crimson standard with "Kuweit" embroidered on it in white letters.

As we parted the Sheikh said he hoped to see me as he called at the Consul's house in the afternoon to make his final good-byes before setting out in real earnest. In the afternoon I accordingly turned up at the Consulate in plenty of time to see the splendid caravan ride up to the house. The camels were a perfect blaze of color and I longed for a "kinemato-color" or whatever it is they call the particular kind of "movie" that takes in colors. The Sheikh and his special suite, having dismounted, entered the house and while coffee, cigarettes and cold drinks were being handed round we discussed the prospects of the travellers. It was midsummer and terribly hot; there were certain sections of the road which were waterless for days and strict rationing would be necessary. However, as far as possible, they would travel by night, and thank God they had a waxing moon. One of the pilgrims, a wealthy Kuwait merchant, was the subject of a good deal of merriment and the butt of many jests. He was absolutely an arm-chair man and rather than face the fatigue of camel riding for a month, or the best part of a month, he had a special palanquin built. This was swung on a camel and our sybarite would recline at his ease. I did not actually see the machine as our friend had sent it on ahead, not having the courage to leave the town in it.

After a while the fleet of desert ships weighed anchor and rocked off into the horizon and out of sight. There must have been about two hundred camels and some thirty of the pilgrims were women who were accommodated in special roofed-in, covered-up boxes, so that the fair occu-

pants were quite invisible. We heard of their progress from time to time from men of the road, and finally, wonder of wonders (to the Arab), came the wire that all had reached Mecca and were being royally entertained by King Hussein. Later on a second wire came to the effect that the Kuwait party had celebrated the great festival, the Id-el-Atha, which is held on the 10th day of the month of the Pilgrimage. The message reached here on what was regarded in Kuwait as the 9th day and a good deal of adverse criticism arose, for the real orthodox Moslem holds that a new month does not commence until the moon is actually seen in the sky. It was obvious, however, that the more civilized Meccans were following the infidel's calendar and had begun the month of the Hajj before they saw the moon.

On October 29th the Hajjis returned and were feted by all. We learned many amusing things. First, they had been held up by a party of raiders outside Mecca and a large sum of money besides their best clothes had been taken from them. This was very hard on the nerves of some and our friend of the palanquin was said to have beaten a very ignominious retreat, for bullets were whistling in every direction from the rocky sides of the deep defile through which they were passing and the locality was anything but healthy. Arrived in Mecca, the matter was reported to King Hussein who forthwith sent for the chiefs of the offending tribes and made them disgorge to the last handkerchief and dollar. On the quiet, however, Sheikh Ahmed sent the money back to the robbers, who probably still think him a first-class fellow. Our friend of the palanquin had had enough of cross country riding, his nerve was gone, and he went down to Jidda, took a steamer for Bombay and so returned to Kuwait by the safer and simpler pathway of the sea.

There was great excitement here when it was known that the Hajjis' caravan was nearing home. One day two special messengers arrived with word from Sheikh Ahmed that he would reach Jahreh, a small town some fifteen miles from Kuwait, at a given time and it was not long before the road to Jahreh was crowded with people going out to welcome the wanderers. In addition a large boat was got ready and loaded with a ten-course dinner for all. (I suppose the Sheikh of Kuwait paid for this.) This boat reached Jahreh safely and I understand there was a very merry time at the banquet. The day after the arrival at Jahreh there was a leisurely entry into Kuwait and thus came to an end one of the most noteworthy pilgrimages in the history of this city.

Moslem Funeral Customs

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Bahrein, like all other places in the Gulf, has been visited by the epidemic, Spanish influenza, and the number of deaths daily, though very much less than in some other towns, has been considerable. At times such as these we learn a great deal about their customs connected with death and burial and their belief about the future. It is difficult to get a definite idea about it all; in fact, that is not possible, for most of their practices and statements are based on traditions of which there are no end, and there are many different sects, divisions and nationalities in Islam, each of which adds its own interpretations to these traditions and alters them to suit its own particular bent or persuasion. Locally our information comes from Shiah and Sunni sources and of these the Shiahs, in this as in all things, are much more superstitious and spectacular. This article does not claim to give all the information there is to be had on this subject, some of it may not agree with the practices in other Moslem fields, perhaps not even with those in the other stations in our field, and some of the statements may seem contradictory, but that is not uncommon in the teaching and traditions of Islam.

When it is apparent that a sick person is about to die, if it is at all possible he is made to give the testimony, or "shehadeh," as it is called, which is, "There is no God but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God." Those Moslems who are at all seriously minded are very careful and faithful in the observance of this practice, and they do not hesitate to strike or pull the dying one so as to arouse the departing spirit sufficiently to repeat this creed. If anyone dies unattended the central thought of regret is that no one took the "witness" from the dead. Another thing that is done to the dying is to pour water into the mouth, which is the dying one's sustenance on his journey to the other world. Sometimes large quantities are administered so that choking results. Then before life is extinct they begin to straighten out the limbs and to stretch them, tying the two big toes together. Moslem etiquette demands that when people meet each other and stop to speak, the feet should be placed side by side with the toes in a straight line. And so at death Moslems prepare the corpse in such a way that when the departed meets his Lord his feet will be in the correct position. When death has finally come, the women at once begin to wail and to cry out in high shrill voices.

The Moslems believe that a corpse must be brought to the grave as quickly as possible in order to speed the spirit on its way to the other world, and so all preparations for a funeral are made at once and quickly. This belief that a spirit must be speeded on its way makes it a meritorious and praiseworthy act to hurry things and with all the funerals we see the bearers are always going very fast, sometimes running. A sad result of