

A Letter From Bahrein

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Bahrein is a group of islands of which the largest is about twenty-six miles long by twelve miles wide, and the total population is about seventy-five thousand. These live in about one hundred and sixty-five villages and towns, most of which are in the northern half of the island. There are two other islands in the group, of rather large size. The one is called Moharrek, and it is here that the ruling sheikh lives. Sitra is the other island and is situated to the southeast of the largest one, and on it is the summer home of the brother of the ruling sheikh. It has several good springs and is covered with gardens. Wherever there are fresh water springs, there good gardens are to be found.



OLD CASTLE ON MOHARREK ISLAND

The agriculturists are of the class called Baharanes. These are of unknown origin but it is generally supposed that they are of Arabic and Persian extraction, and they are the original inhabitants of the islands and are therefore called Baharanes. They are all of the Shiah sect. There is a race and sect hatred between them and the Arabs, who are Sunnis, which fully equals the hatred of the Jews for the Samaritans. The Arab does not take kindly to hard work and so the Baharanes have become the tillers of the soil. Besides being agriculturists they also are found in all other trades such as merchants, divers, pearl-brokers, fishermen, boatmen and blacksmiths. In the larger places like Menameh, the men of both classes mingle a little bit in business but there is but little,

if any, intermingling in visiting, and none in marrying, religious services and burying, not even in their cemeteries. The Baharanes are more fanatical and suspicious, more faithful and exacting in all religious practices, and much more aloof in all their dealings with Christians and Christian teaching. In the villages this aloofness is intensified. Even here in Menama, where we have been stationed so many years, there are pitifully few houses of this class open to us. In none of the towns and villages of this class can an Arab family be found, and for all that the Mission has been on this island almost thirty years, these places are about as much closed to the Gospel and its messengers as in the first year of our occupation. The only means of entrance seems to be medical and even that seems to be little desired. Most of the one hundred and sixty-five villages on the islands are Baharanes and, as original inhabitants of the island, they come under the jurisdiction of the ruling sheikh. Most of the Arab villages are on the sea coast.

There are two ways of transportation in touring the island, by donkey and by sail-boat. The donkey is the easier and the quicker, for then one is independent of tide and wind. The villages we have been able to visit, where we have been received, with one or two exceptions, are all Sunnis. Most of them are eight or more miles distant. When we go on a trip we try to get an early start so as to meet the people during the forenoon. This is of special importance for the work of the men. The women are usually at home and, since they see so little of the world they are glad to see a visitor from outside. But the men are more independent and unless they are encountered at the right time, are not to be seen. Just at present Mr. Dykstra and I are making some trips to these various towns. We come with no medicines to recommend us to their favor and goodwill. The question is often asked, "What are you doing here?" "Why did you come?" and when we go to some well known place or person the question is easily answered, but when we are just going about it is not so satisfactorily answered. It is not difficult to secure a following or an audience in any place, our foreign dress will do that for us, but usually such a crowd is not of the desirable kind. In one village whenever they see the "kapoose," or hat, coming near, it is the signal for all the boys, large and small, to gather around, and they are not sparing in their remarks and criticisms. Even inside the women's apartments there is no refuge from this rabble of onlookers. The children respect and obey the men but the women command no respect and obedience from these youngsters, and remonstrating with them avails nothing. In B—— it is accepted as a matter of course that wherever we are the place will be overrun by this crowd of spectators. Literally, there is no room, "no, not so much as about the door." I often feel that the women who entertain us must weary of us if for no other reason than because of the crowds we attract. It is not pleasant to be so much like the monkey in a cage at a managerie. Neither is it inspiring to be so stared at and followed, and to be conscious of the sly and secret jeers and scoffings that are passed around, but we are thankful to say that

in every place there have always been some of the more honorable women who rebuked and kept in check any tendency to open rudeness or boisterous action.

The Arab is essentially a proud being. When we go to them on tours and are entertained by them they take us right into the daily routine of their lives and we say, "how lovely, how commendable," but it is not because of their thoughtfulness for their guests that they do so. On one trip I sat down with some women to eat the noonday meal. There was a platter of rice and some dates and a shrimp and a half on top of the rice for seven women! And this was in the household of the ruling sheikh. One day some of us were breakfasting with some Arabs, and while we were seated around the tray and eating, a rabbit jumped right into the middle of the dish! No apologies were offered, the dish was not removed, and everyone was expected to go on eating. That same meal was two hours late in being served, while the guests, who had other engagements to attend to, were kept waiting. These things do not confuse or abash the Arab host or hostess. These are the kind of people whom we met. In every phase of life one can feel the sentiment, "We are the people." Touring among them and bringing them the message of life is not a favor shown to them, rather, they are doing us a favor in receiving us. Dear readers, and you who pray for us in our work, do not forget this when you remember us in your prayers. It does not take any particular amount of physical courage to go to these villages where we are not wanted, but it does take a large amount of moral courage to face them, and to continue our efforts with often so little apparent results. In one village where the Mission is well known and has done much good medically, while I was calling upon a certain family, the hostess offered me coffee before she offered it to the other women present, and only two out of the number present would drink out of the cups after that. they would not drink after a *kafir*. Two of the women, all during the visit, sat with muffled faces, only their eyes showing, thus protecting themselves against any smell from the *kafir* which might injure them. Smells, by the way, form a large part of the Arab's theory of cause and effect. The missionary in Arabia has plenty of opportunity to eat "fanatic-pie" when he meets a fanatic Moslem!

As we go about to bring the Gospel in these totally strange and un-frequented places, it is not difficult to picture Paul in Athens, being marched about by the populace, and to hear them say, "We will hear what this babbler has to say." But we thank God that in this field, in these villages, God too, hath His own, and that here, too, we may find a Dionysius and a Damaris.

