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Sheikh Ahmed Goes To London

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SOME time ago an article appeared in "Neglected Arabia" entitled "The Hajj." The central figure in that article was the heir to the Kuwait throne, Sheikh Ahmed bin Jabr, who in the summer of 1918 showed his devotion as one of the leading men of this side of Arabia, by visiting the Holy City of Mecca. In Mecca, however, he not only came into contact with the past, but also with the very recent present, in the person of Hussein, King of Hejaz, the most powerful man in Arabia today, and whose son, the Emir Feisul, was a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles, besides being a fairly familiar figure in London. Hussein's knowledge of the world must have made no little impression on our simple-minded stay-at-home Arab. In any case it was Ahmed's preparation for a second journey, which was to be a political and not a religious pilgrimage, for in the early summer of 1919 he received an invitation to visit King George V. and to enjoy for a few weeks the hospitality of the British Isles. October, 1919, found Ahmed residing in London.

It is a bad time of the year for an Oriental to see London for the first time. The days are short, it rains three days out of four, and those thick, pea-soup fogs for which London is famous in the winter, are apt to descend with unwelcome frequency. The sun is scarcely ever seen and it is probable that Sheikh Ahmed and his suite were never able to see the horizon at sunset, in order to set their watches. As everyone knows the Arab's day begins at sunset, when it is twelve o'clock. Ahmed thought the English houses were lovely inside, but outside "they are so black and gloomy." Anyone picturing a large London house on a wet, foggy day, will agree with him. He was much impressed with the fact that no matter how much it rained, the streets were never really dirty. "Their roads are iron," he declares. He never went out except in a car, principally because he did not enjoy being stared at—he probably appreciates now what the white people went through during the first year or so that they settled in Kuwait. When asked why he did not affect European dress and thus avoid the

conspicuousness of his Arab costume, he replied, "If I had worn English clothes, people would have taken it for granted that I spoke English, and I should have had the humiliating experience of explaining every little while that I was an Arab, and did not know English."

Selfridge's, that huge Anglo-American department store in Oxford Street, was a popular haunt of Ahmed's, and he was much amused by the sales-girls to whom he refers as "Madams," all being demurely dressed in black. "You can't just go in and buy a thing," he explains, "for they first write down your purchase on a slip of paper and then you have to wait while the paper and your money, together with your



DR. MYLREA AND BEDOUIN PATIENT.

purchase, are sent away somewhere or other. Presently, when you have become interested in something else, back comes your purchase neatly wrapped up, and at the same time the receipted bill and your change are handed to you." Then there was the gunsmith's. He was shown a weapon he particularly admired, and promptly wished to buy several of the same pattern, but was told that owing to the late war, there was still a great shortage of these things and they could only let him have the one. This astonished him. Altogether the young Sheikh spent some seven hundred pounds shopping in London, in addition to another five hundred which he afterwards spent in the same way in Cairo.

The underground railways were a source of real wonder, especially the superimposed tunnels under the Thames. "One tunnel on top

of another," he tells his admiring audience. Part of the time that he was in London, he lived at "The Carlton" and that splendid hotel was a revelation to him. He did not dine in public, however, but in his own apartments. As I said before, he does not like to be stared at. From the 27th of October on, Sheikh Ahmed and his suite were under the personal care and guidance of Captain D. V. McCollum, our present Kuwait Political Agent, and it was a happy coincidence that Captain McCollum should have been on leave during Ahmed's stay in England. They were old friends and Captain McCollum spoke his language and this made all the difference.

Sheikh Ahmed was of course taken to see the principal sights of London, including Greenwich Observatory, Westminster Abbey and The Houses of Parliament, which latter were fortunately in session, and the visitor was able to observe how the Mother of all Parliaments does its work, including the taking of a vote on some measure before the house. He was also driven out to Hampton Court, that ancient palace built by Cardinal Wolsey and presented by him to Henry VIII. Of course he went to the Zoological Gardens, and it must have tickled his Arab heart to see camels on view as curiosities. Ordinary theatres he did not care for, but a performance at Maskelyne & Cook's Theatre of Mysteries, where they claim to be able to equal if not surpass all the traditional marvels of Indian magic, left him profoundly and perhaps somewhat unpleasantly stirred. He admits that he has not the faintest idea how the tricks and illusions were done. But after all, who has? Ahmed took a decided fancy to "movies" and patronized one of the picture-palaces almost every night.

The great and central occasion of the visit came on October 30th when escorted by Captain McCollum, Sheikh Ahmed and his suite were presented to the King at Buckingham Palace. The audience lasted 17 minutes and Ahmed congratulated the King on the successful termination of the most devastating war in history, at the same time thanking him for his hospitality and presented him with a gold-mounted Arab dagger and also a very fine old gold-mounted sword, which had once belonged to a Shah of Persia. There was also a gift of an Arab stallion, but this for obvious reasons was not personally tendered in the audience chamber. The King, who was in undress naval uniform, welcomed Ahmed very kindly, especially as he was a grandson of the great Mubarek, assured him that he was ready to go thoroughly into any question that Ahmed might care to raise with reference to Kuwait and ended up by giving him a photograph of himself duly autographed and framed in solid silver. On the border of the frame were the royal monogram and crown in enamel. Captain McCollum acted throughout as interpreter.

Before they left London, Ahmed was able to meet the Shah of Persia, and it is delightful to hear him describe the drive to the railway station, "the roads lined with the finest troops in the world, and the policemen in perfect control of the crowds." The reception at the rail-

way station, where in honor of the Shah, the floor was carpeted and the walls were hung with flags, while palms and floral decorations transformed the ugly trainshed into a veritable garden, made a scene no detail of which was lost on the young man from Arabia. He tells the story with extraordinary accuracy, considering that he was seeing everything through the eyes of the unknowing foreigner.

On November 3rd the party went to Glasgow, where on the 5th they were entertained to luncheon by the Lord Provost, Aldermen and friends. Later they inspected the University and the Art Galleries. The following day they saw the Forth Bridge, that marvellous cantilever structure, with its total length of 5,330 feet and its two main spans of 1,710 feet each. One of the party took notes of the particulars of the bridge. The next wonder was a submarine.

It was a long motor drive from the Forth Bridge to the submarine base and when they arrived, it was past sunset. Our Arab friends, with one exception, had only one idea in their heads at that time, and that was, the sunset prayer. So no sooner had they boarded the submarine than the commanding officer was begged to find them a corner in the cramped accommodations of the submarine, where they might turn their faces Meccawards and testify that there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is His Prophet. The one exception, however, and he was the same gentleman who had been so busy at the Forth Bridge, was too keen on the matter in hand to let the demands of religion interfere. Notebook in hand he went the rounds, demanding information down to the minutest detail, and industriously writing everything down. The war is over or he would have left the submarine with blank pages as far as that vessel's particulars were concerned. Sheikh Ahmed had his own troubles examining the submarine—he is a big man, and well! submarines are not built for big men. He had to walk sideways most of the time, and some of the manholes had to be left unpenetrated.

The day before they sailed, the party were shown some of the Glasgow shipbuilding yards and also visited the aerodrome at Renfrew, where they saw aeroplanes by the score. All of the party except the Sheikh himself made a flight, but for some reason or other, Ahmed got "cold feet" and contented himself with merely putting on flying kit, entering one of the planes, and being photographed in situ.



SHEIKH'S CAR AND GUARD.

On November 8th the party sailed from Glasgow for home. The weather was rough and as Ahmed is a poor sailor, he got little fun out of this part of the show. In fact there was hardly a calm day between Glasgow and Kuwait. On November 21st, Alexandria was reached and the mission was duly met by representatives of the Government who showed the visitors what there is to see in that city. Cairo was next visited and there they were received by Lord Allenby, who, like the King, presented Sheikh Ahmed with a signed photograph. The party lodged at the famous Shepherd's Hotel. Excursions in Cairo included the Pyramids and the Sphinx, which curiously enough, did not impress the visitors, but the museum with its collection of mummies of age-long departed Egyptians could not but make the Arab stop and think, for an Arab grave is one of the least permanent things of its kind in the world. The mosque of Mohammed Ali and the Citadel were visited and of course El Azhar University. There was a special audience with the Sultan of Egypt besides a reception given in Ahmed's honor by the Arab Bureau.

On November 27th everyone left for Suez where the mission was to rejoin its ship. But the ship was late and our Arab friends had one more night in a hotel. It was not until December 15th when the little launch, which had met Sheikh Ahmed at the Basrah bar, entered Kuwait harbor, to the salute of five guns from Sheikh Salim's battery. The town was decorated as was also the launch, and the beach was crowded. There is no doubt of Ahmed's popularity, his welcome after an absence of some months was a sure test. Without question his travels have taught him much, and it is to be hoped that what he has learned may make him one more influence for good in this part of the world. He now knows a little English and it remains to be seen whether he is sufficiently energetic to learn some more, and sufficiently progressive to insist that his young sons shall learn English too. Perhaps the photograph of George V., as it hangs in his house, its silver frame steadily tarnishing, and with the dust settling on it for evermore, will be to him what Kipling's poem is to us, "Lest we forget."



PEARLING BOATS ON THE BEACH, KUWAIT.