

The Log of the *Barala*

(Concluded from previous issue)

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Oct. 7.—As the voyage from Debai to Bahrein takes twenty-six hours we spent the entire day at sea, with nothing especially eventful to record. We had a cool night at Debai but it got hot enough during the day and the night of the 7th was melting.

Oct. 8.—We reached Bahrein about eleven in the morning. The air was so hazy that we could not see the coast until we were nearly there. The name Bahrein means "The two seas" and it was originally applied to a considerable section of Arabia but is now restricted to this little group of islands. The largest, on which our missionaries are located, is about thirty miles long by twelve wide. Separated from it by a shallow channel about three miles wide is the island of Moharrekk, where the ruling sheikh and many of the aristocracy live. There are several other small islands inhabited, some of them separated from their neighbors only at high tide.

It was to Bahrein that S. M. Zwemer came in the early days of the Arabian Mission. He found it hard to get a footing, being repulsed from the island several times before he was finally allowed to stay. The British agent in those days was a Persian, who was unfriendly, and there were then no Europeans living in Bahrein. Zwemer became the subject of international correspondence between Lord Salisbury and Richard Olney in the course of which Olney uttered his famous dictum: "We ask no greater privileges for missionaries than for merchants, but at the same time we insist that they shall have no less."

The anchorage is about five miles out from the shore for the harbor is very shallow. Before we dropped anchor we sighted a sailboat coming out to meet us in which we recognized Pennings, Miss Van Pelt and Dr. Dame. They came on board and had tiffin with us before we went ashore. Chamberlain and Harrison did not wait, however, as they were anxious to get started for Hassa today, if possible. The rest of us waited until the luggage of those of our party who were to stay in Bahrein could be collected and transhipped. The missionaries have to travel with a good deal of luggage, as indeed nearly everybody does in India and the Near East. You carry your own bedding with you and when the Arabian missionaries are in India on holiday they stock up with the amount of certain classes of supplies which will be required for two years' use. The Harrisons, for example, had thirty-one packages but some of them were housekeeping stuff for the Pennings and additional articles for Dame. The last time the Van Ess's came from America they had one large trunk which contained nothing but articles they had been asked to bring out to their fellow-missionaries.

We had quite an easy trip in with a good breeze and made the distance in fifty minutes. Sometimes when there is no breeze and they have to row it takes three hours or even longer. The harbor is very shallow. You can see bottom most of the way and for considerable distances the boat must be propelled by poling. In former times it was necessary to land on the backs of donkeys but now a good pier has been built so we escaped the donkey. Bahrein has recently been visited by one of the Standard Oil Company's fine new boats "The Tiger" and we saw lying on the pier a quantity of boxes bearing the familiar inscription "The Standard Oil Company of New York." It looked good.

The walk from the pier to the Mission property took us through the city along little winding streets alternating with large open spaces. The houses were many of them large, yet with no pretensions to external beauty; most not more than two stories in height, white and made out of some sort of plaster cement. There were also numerous houses of a poorer type built from the leaves of the date palm. The streets were quite clean and there were few smells. We were told that this is due to the fact that through the influence of the British Political Agent a municipality has been organized and its first activity has been a thorough cleaning up, so radical that missionaries in our party from other stations declared that Bahrein was scarcely recognizable. Bahrein has one great advantage: the alkaline character of its soil and dust makes fleas impossible.

Our walk took us past the first home of our missionaries and the building where they once conducted a school. It is now used for a Moslem school. We passed also the home of another recent comer to Bahrein—a branch of the Eastern Bank. The first of the Mission buildings which we saw was the church with its square clock tower. The figures on the clock dial are Arabic but the clock keeps time according to the Western fashion. (The Arabs count sunset as twelve o'clock.) In the same compound with the church is the Harrisons' house. Next to the church on the other side and in the same general compound, though with a separate entrance, stands the Mason Memorial Hospital. We went through it—that is we went through the men's side, the woman's side is not entered by men. It is a two-story building with the patients in the rooms and on the veranda of the second floor. They are handicapped in keeping it clean by the fact that water cannot be used on the floors and they must be cleansed by sweeping. Still it is in as good condition as is practical and is doing a lot of sound and helpful work. We found it rather full and Dame, whose job is language study, has had to do a good deal of operating. The patients I saw were there for leg sores, gun shot wounds and a number of cases of hernia. About one-half of the major operations performed in the hospital last year were for hernia, not because that trouble is so abnormally prevalent but because the hospital has acquired so wide spread a reputation for its treatment and care. Patients come from long distances, a great many of them from Persia. The warmth of

the welcome the patients gave Harrison as they saw him for the first time in nearly four months told its own story.

We now went on to the other Mission compound near at hand. We found at the gate a small house built as a mejlis (meeting place) and within the large Mission House were accommodations for two missionary families and the Zenana workers. We took tiffin with the Pennings. Their dining-room was still gay with some of the wedding finery, including a Punkah prettily decorated with tissue paper in white and gold. Our food included the large yellow mellons, Arab bread in large well browned disks, pomegranates and fresh dates.

About five o'clock I set out with Pennings to call on Major Dixon, the Political Agent. The Consular office is down on the seashore, the wireless close at hand. The house is large and as comfortable as may be. At the side is a tennis court where the foreign community are invited for tennis on Friday afternoons. Major Dixon is a fine specimen of British Political Agent, a class of men for whom I have conceived a great admiration. He was born in the East and has passed most of his life here, but is a graduate of Oxford. He has seen service in India. He is a member of a family in which the British Civil Service is a tradition. Major Dixon was present at a conference held about a week ago between Sir Percy Cox, who was on his way up the Gulf, and Ibn Saud. Dixon and Sir Percy crossed to Ojeir in a government launch to meet the famous Arab chief. The two great powers in central Arabia for centuries have been those of Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid. The former has his capital in Riadh; the latter's sphere of influence is back of Kuwait. At the interview of which I speak Major Dixon secured from Ibn Saud and Sir Percy permission for Chamberlain and Harrison to make their trip to Hassa.

We stayed at the Consulate until dark and then walked back to the Mission House and had dinner with the Dames. After dinner Pennings took me over to the mejlis which he holds once a week. Because of the heat it was held out doors, rugs and cushions being spread on the ground. There were about twenty Arabs present. I was seated next a young Arab named Mohammed Yateem, who has a fluent knowledge of English and with whom I could talk easily. He was a Bahrein boy in whom the Calverley's were much interested when they were here and he seems devoted to them. He is a well built and handsome young fellow with pleasing features, but I suspect that he is not very industrious. He has interesting and amazing stories to tell of his war experiences. He was in Baghdad when Turkey entered the war and was arrested on charge of being a British spy. He was tortured, burned in the hand and flogged to make him confess. He was then sent as a prisoner to various parts of the country, among others to Beirut where he had been a student in pre-war days. He escaped but was recaptured, tried twice by court martial and sentenced to death, but was spared through the intervention of friends. On the armistice he was released and joined the British army, taking a Christian name and living as a Christian. He was in Salonika for a

time and then in London. He has been back in Bahrein, where his father and brother are in business, for about six months. He is not an active Moslem and does not go to mosque. Says that he would like to be a Christian but that in this place it is impossible. I did not see much evidence of Christianity in him but clearly he has no Moslem faith. I talked for about an hour with him and promised to come and see pearls at the family shop tomorrow.

Oct. 9.—About half past six Major Dixon came round with his Essex motor car to take me out to Ali to see the famous tombs of Bahrein, one of the great archeological mysteries of the world. Calverley, Pennings and Van Ess were of the party. The drive was a novel and interesting one. The whole of Bahrein is a sandy plain



THE WEEKLY MARKET. RUINS OF THE MOSQUE IN BACKGROUND

except where it is watered by the flowing wells that are in themselves a good deal of a geological mystery. Naturally there were few roads and the drives where it is possible to take a motor car are limited. This particular road was built through the activity of a former British Political Agent who used prisoners for the labor. The present Sultan has two cars and is therefore interested in getting more roads.

About three miles out we came on two high minarets, all that is left of a great Persian mosque which stood on this site some seven centuries ago. The city was then located at this point and Arab conservatism is seen in the fact that the great weekly market is still

held here although there is not a human habitation in sight. The two most interesting sights of the ride were the flowing wells and the date gardens. These latter are very large and must furnish a refreshing shade from the sun. The date palms have to be pollenized by hand in order to secure a satisfactory crop. Many of the gardens in Bahrein have been much neglected because of the centering of interest upon the pearl fishery.

The wells are clear pools of beautiful water bubbling up in the sand. The water is transparent but with a slight greenish cast like the waters of the Jade Fountain near Pekin. From each well there flows a stream of the same clear character. Many of the wells are brackish but the best of them furnish the water supply for the island. We passed a number of camels bringing in full water skins. This water carried in from the desert was formerly used by our missionaries, but has become so expensive that they are now using water from wells in the sea which are exposed at low tide. The donkeys and camels that we met as we drove along were considerably agitated at the sight of an automobile. The camels galloped out into the desert while the donkeys' drivers descended and held them by main strength until we were safely by.

The tombs at Ali are about seven miles out. We could see them for some distance situated along a ridge in the centre of the island. One of their greatest marvels is their number. They occupy a rectangle of land about ten miles by four. They have never been counted but estimates of their number vary from two hundred thousand to four hundred thousand. Only a very few of them have ever been opened. They are circular or oval mound-like structures about twenty feet in height. We went into three of them. One we entered laterally from the ground and another from a hole that had been opened rather more than half way up. The interior of the tombs is a vault of stone masonry with niches in the walls, from three to five in each, for the reception of bodies. Above these niches there were holes in the wall apparently designed to support some canopy or covering for the dead. Some of the stones of which these vaults are constructed are very large and it must have taken considerable engineering skill to get them in place. There are no circular arches; all the masonry is on straight lines. Surrounding and covering the vault on all sides is, first masonry in which small stones are embedded, and then above and around this a covering three or four feet thick of very small bits of stone, apparently chipped by human agency. This stone is a hard flint none of which is to be found in the immediate neighborhood, though a somewhat similar stone is said to enter into the structure of the highest hill on the island (altitude about seven hundred feet). No evidence of any extensive quarrying has, however, been discovered in that vicinity. The work in making one of these tombs must have been tremendous. I do not believe a hundred men could do it in less than three months and when one remembers that there are several hundred thousand of them the puzzle is very great. And more than this, the building of these tombs must have been expensive. They could only have been prepared for

the rich and powerful. Where a sufficient number of such to occupy them could be found in this vicinity is an equally hard nut to crack. Archeologists are agreed that they date from at least three thousand years before the Christian era and are consequently pre-Semitic. The Bahrein islands lie on the main track from Mesopotamia and Syria to India. Were these islands once a sacred place to which citizens of a pre-Babylonian civilization brought their dead? I do not suppose that archeological remains of so great an extent remain practically unexplored anywhere else in the world. Doubtless some day they will be thoroughly studied and the result may be to push the history of the world an age further back than has been done by the explorations in the Euphrates valley.

Returning, I had breakfast at the Pennings and afterward went to see the church and school, which are in one building, the church on the second floor and the two-roomed school on the first. The church auditorium is plain but dignified. They hold an Arabic service Sunday morning, an English service in the afternoon and a song service in Arabic in the evening. The school is rather small. They use only one room and one teacher who also serves as language teacher for the new missionaries. The old and very competent language teacher who had been with the Mission almost since its beginning recently died and it is an open question whether the language students should continue to reside in Bahrein where we have more ample housing accommodations or in Kuwait where the health conditions are better.

Then we went down to the bazaars. They are very large and covered with dried date palm leaves to keep out the sun; have narrow and completely covered streets running at right angles. The vegetable and food bazaars were especially interesting as are also the coffee shops. On the way down we stopped at the Bahrein Bible Shop, which is near, but not in, the bazaar district. While walking through the bazaars we fell in with Mohammed Yateem who accompanied us to the shop of his father, a fine bluff old Arab who was very cordial. The store is principally a drug store but they also deal in pearls of which we saw a great many. One handful was valued at a lac of rupees. On the way out we passed a number of itinerant pearl vendors, also several men who were filing pearls to remove irregularities and improve their beauty. This is a rather risky process, for it is easily possible in this way to spoil a pearl altogether.

Had tiffin with the Dames and started back to the Barala. We were scheduled to sail at half past two but did not do so until six hours later.

(This concludes the extracts from the log of the Barala. The writer hopes at some later time to give some recollections of his very interesting visits to Kuwait and Basrah.)