



# The First Lady of the Land

MISS RUTH JACKSON

AS the jolly boat was poled up to the rough stone dock at the Island of Moharrek a large group of Arabs gathered to watch the white ladies land. As we walked through the dark covered streets of the bazaar we were closely scanned by all the little shop keepers squatting among their wares and by all the customers who stood bargaining in the street. Beyond the bazaar was a large white building, hardly a palace yet surely more than an ordinary house for here dwells the head lady of the islands of Bahrein. Likely her husband, the ruling sheikh, dwells also within the walls but he is old now and the government is in the hands of a son. The house was distinguished from its neighbors only by the numerous retainers sitting in rows against the walls.

We passed between them through the gate into an open bare courtyard, no trees or grass or flowers or even ornamentation of any kind. Women received us and unbolted a door and bid us enter. The room had no windows and the walls were bare and rough. The floor was covered with rugs but there was no furniture except a fancy wooden chest which had several very dusty dishes under it. In one corner was a pile of baskets and bags of dates. Yet this was the reception room for special visitors of "Her Honor, the Sheikha." A hush fell upon the group of women welcoming us as a stately figure slowly approached, surveyed the room from the doorway, then advanced and with expressionless face went through the formal greetings to each guest, "Peace upon you"—"And upon you peace." This ruling lady is a very dignified woman with an imperative manner and a strong face that is sometimes impassive and sometimes flashing. As she seated herself and threw back her black abba, a loose dress of deep green, heavily embroidered with gold and spangles, was displayed. She gestured constantly and thus showed to advantage much heavy gold jewelry on her arms and large rings upon three fingers of each hand. The women of the household treated her with great respect, waited always for a sign of permission before approaching her and obeyed her least command instantly.

The smoke from a clay jar of incense soon perfumed the room and then a tray of Arab sweets and nuts was placed before us, followed by coffee and ginger tea. Lastly rose water was poured upon our hands and we settled back against the wall to sew and visit more informally. Bits of the conversation were translated to us and we watched our hostess' face as she told of her pilgrimage to Mecca and spoke of the slaves carried to the holy city to be sold. She mourned the loss of the good old days when slaves were bought for forty, sixty, a hundred rupees and made faithful servants. But now they are mostly worthless and say, "Let us go to the balliose (British official) and be freed." Medina, a black woman who serves the mission, spoke up and said it was not so nice for the slaves who like herself were stolen from their homes and carried into bondage in a strange land. We were surprised at the freedom with which a slave woman addressed the head lady of the land and was listened to by her. For Medina is

still legally a slave though not claimed by her master for fear of the balliose.

The Sheikha complained of the modern improvements such as the good roads in Bahrein but she laughed as she told about seeing a train on the western coast of Arabia. She desired to see the train work so she paid the railroad baksheesh and stood on the platform watching it but would not ride.

At noon the meal was brought and our hostess sat with us around the big mat and herself pulled the sheep's head to pieces, throwing tender pieces of it to us. She had the skull cracked open that she might serve us the brains. The special treat, in our opinion, was the bowl of delicious honey with lumps of fresh butter upon it. Near the end of the meal the Sheikha, with a gleam in her eye, called to several women outside the door, "Come and eat with the Christians." They all obeyed except an old Bedou who stalked off angrily muttering, "Shame." But the next time she passed she was forced to join us. The Sheikha inquired if she would like medicine for her head from the khatoons and she instantly said, "Yes." The Sheikha responded, "If you are not too good to take their medicine you are not too good to eat with them." And the laugh which followed did not please the Bedou but she enjoyed the feast after starting upon it. After a bowl of buttermilk had made the rounds we were left alone to eat fruit and enjoy a rest before "Her Honor" returned to have coffee again after her noon prayers. She requested that we visit her daughter-in-law who had been sick for two weeks. At the suggestion that perhaps only one, not all of us, should go since the girl was quite ill, she said it was their custom to receive just the same.

A servant took us to the house and Lulua rose from her bed to greet us, showing much pleasure at our visit. She is young and pretty with a very sweet face and gentle responsive manner. She asked us to sing a few favorite hymns for her and after refreshments were served she was asked if she would like to have the nurse come to treat her. "O, yes," she replied, "But did the Sheikha say the nurse might come? I would have had her long ago if I had my wish. But I am only as the ring upon her finger which she turns as she pleases." And later the Sheikha emphatically refused to allow the nurse.

We returned to bid farewell to our honorable hostess and she insisted that we enter and drink coffee again. Through the doorway we watched the activities in the courtyard. A camel loaded with water skins was relieved of his burden and a donkey walked off with a black kettle on his back so enormous that one of us could easily have sat within it.

When we said our farewells the Sheikha told us not to neglect her house but to return again. She had Medina and a servant of her own laden with gifts for us, large baskets of fruit and eggs which they balanced on their heads. Out past the retainers and through the bazaar we made our way to the jolly boat where we counted seventy-five people lined up to watch our departure.

# The Call of Mesopotamia

DR. PAUL W. HARRISON

**W**HAT is the call of Mesopotamia? It is the call of a country with enormous possibilities, capable of being one of the richest and most productive areas of the world. It was so in the past.

Please God it will be so again. It is the call of the first Mohammedan state to be brought to the threshold of scientific truth, industrial organization, and modern civilization, an experience that waits inevitably for every backward state in the world. It is God's call to bring the promise and the blessing of Abraham to his present fellow countrymen and with God's blessing a call to set up the Church of Christ as a light that shall illuminate that whole country, and serve as a beacon for the whole Mohammedan world.

It is the call of a nation in transition. The war changed many countries. It transformed Mesopotamia. The political, social and



MESOPOTAMIAN WOMEN CARRYING FUEL

mental institutions of the Arab were pulverized. New ones of strange architecture are taking their place. There is no lack of political sagacity to guide the transition. The directing minds in the creation of this new state are British administrators, the best minds for that purpose that the world has to offer. There is no lack of earnest desire for progress on the part of the people themselves. Many of their ideas are crude and ill-digested, but their faces are set in the right direction. There is a thirst for Western education and a demand for schools which means that their feet are on the road of progress.

But what is it that makes real progress possible? Why is it that so many nations which long for the heights of modern civilization find themselves unable to make the ascent. Why is Persia still in the twilight of semi-barbarism. Why is India still a poor, illiterate, and