

not even be able to revisit Sharka as at this time the Dispensary at Bahrein was not closed without harm to the work and when we have a hospital it will be quite out of the question to leave even though these tours are so important.

We have been encouraged this quarter by several inquirers coming out quite openly as Christians and we have been surprised that there was not more persecution than there seems to be. Of course there is persecution, which at home would seem very severe, but their lives do not seem to be threatened although the most open one of them does not think it safe to drink coffee at the coffee shop for fear of being poisoned. These men say that many more are nearly convinced of the truth of the Gospel and are only Mohammedans in name. The harvest may be nearer than we think. Will you pray with us that many of these may become, not only almost but altogether persuaded, and that we may be ready for the harvest when it comes.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN OMAN.

BY JAMES CANTINE.

The missionary in Oriental lands is often sensible of a feeling of regret and shame when he considers the remains of a former Christian civilization or dominion which arose, ran its course and fell before the attacks of the then more virile and aggressive faith of Islam. Here on the eastern Arabian coast Christianity had a very transient rule and left nothing behind but crumbling fortresses and defaced inscriptions. Just about four centuries ago the first Europeans appeared with their opportunity for making or marring the reputation of the cross and for proving or disapproving the vague criticisms and reproaches of that one source of authority in Arabia, the Koran. It is a matter of conjecture what might have been the course of another nation, but it is certain that the Portuguese, under their renowned captain D'Albuquerque, as with fire and sword they ravaged the coast, did nothing to commend the teaching of Him whose crucified form was doubtless ever before their eyes. For one hundred and fifty years a Christian government ruled supreme on the Oman coast, only to enrich the rulers at the expense of others, to shed blood unceasingly and to

build forts and castles whose guns were finally turned upon the flag they first owned and saluted.

Muscat was for a century a most important port of the Portuguese, and after they were driven from the island of Hormuz by the English in 1622, their strongest. Here with gradually weakening influence they held on until they were expelled the entire country by a national uprising of the Arabs in 1650. The Portuguese did not colonize in Arabia as they did in India, and their sole object seems to have been to control the routes of trade. This they did at Muscat by building two lofty and imposing cas-



PORTUGUESE CASTLE.

tles on opposite sides of the long and narrow harbor, commanding as well the town stretching along the beach between them. With a few repairs made from time to time these castles stand as they were built more than three centuries ago, and many old brass and iron guns still serve on occasion to throw uncertain shot against invading tribes.

But more interesting to us is a little room in the western fort which evidently was used as a chapel and still contains a font for holy water under an *Ave Maria* cut into the stone. In the town

the Portuguese built an immense building, now partially in ruins and used as the Sultan's stables, which served them as Governor's residence, warehouse, barracks, etc. It probably also contained a chapel, as it is called by the Arabs el Jereza, a corruption of Igrezia (church). On an old wall in another part of the town, doubtless belonging to one of the two churches mentioned by early writers, is a cross in relief, much defaced by the Arabs but still recognizable.

I have not met with any other signs of Christian occupation, and Arab stories confine themselves to chronicling their forays upon the unbelievers and their final expulsion. Although there were several Augustine friars located here from time to time, yet the few original documents at the disposal of the historian say nothing of any attempt to preach among the surrounding Mohammedan tribes. Perhaps later investigations in the archives of Madras and Lisbon may bring to light many interesting details of their century and a half of occupation.

The whole story is a sad and humiliating one for us, and the thought will arise—what assurance have we that this latter day contact between the Gospel and the Koran will be any more favorable to the former? One believes that among these early invaders were some devout men, priests and soldiers, who heartily labored for the glory of God, but the hope for a greater result from *our* lives is in our belief in the greater efficiency of the methods we employ. It is suggestive that while the form of the cross and the name of Mary have thus fruitlessly appealed to generation after generation yet the name of Christ was unrecorded on stone or paper. If the story of the cross, instead of the cross itself had been left behind—if Jesus instead of the mother of Jesus, had been thus openly worshipped, may we not believe that the God above would have been pleased to honor this attempt to bring him to the knowledge of the children of Arabia. Surely the thousands of copies of the scripture which we circulate, and the friendly intercourse which we constantly hold will prove more effectual to break down error and to win to Christ than the crumbling stone and rusting iron of the militant priests of Portugal.