





BUSRAH PIONEERS — ESTHER AND FRED BARNY.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

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I suppose first impressions of a place are nearly always different from what one has anticipated. One reads a book, or an article, or sees a few photographs and, unconsciously perhaps, but none the less surely, he fills in the mental picture till he has quite a complex idea of the whole.

My information had led me to think of Bahrein principally as a great pearl center—where the bulk of the population dealt in pearls—a place which, without the pearl industry, would not exist. As a matter of fact, all of the pearl industry that I have come in contact with, after a residence in the island of some four months, is a few heaps of very evil smelling (mother-of-pearl) oyster shells. Of course, the season is only just beginning, which perhaps accounts for a good deal. Then,

again, the pearl boats go so far away that it is a case of "out of sight, out of mind," while I had pictured myself sitting on the beach watching the divers at work.

But, in truth, Bahrein does a great deal more than hunt the precious pearl. It is a distributing center of considerable importance, and as one wanders about the various custom houses and freight yards, and sees the enormous piles of merchandise stacked up, this is borne in upon one quite forcibly. The trader, at any rate, considers the trade of Arabia worth going after. God grant that more Christian people may be led to think the souls of Arabia worth going after.

It was late on a Saturday evening when we finally reached Bahrein after various wanderings. The steamer drops anchor some miles away from shore, the number of miles depending upon the size of the ship and the temerity of its skipper. From the steamer, therefore, one descends into a sailboat which takes you as close in shore as the coral reefs will allow. From this point the journey is completed on the backs of great big donkeys which, with the boys in charge, come splashing out to meet you. There is the usual haggling with donkey boys and porters, and one is free to start for home. This method of landing does very well for passengers, but it is terribly hard on freight, which gets both wet and damaged. Perhaps not the least of one's trials here is the arrival of one's goods in a more or less battered condition, with no means of redress. At this time let me sound the oft-repeated warning that packing for Bahrein cannot be too well done.

It was Sunday when we were able to view Bahrein by daylight. I had not expected to be chilly, but had a hard time keeping warm—it rained too—in Arabia! For the first fortnight it rained off and on, not very heavily perhaps, measured in inches, but amply sufficient to make everything very damp and muggy, and make you even long for a nice, warm fire. The streets of the bazaar were muddy, slimy and deserted, and none seemed anxious to do much business. Gradually, however, the rain disappeared and sunshine took its place, and now the dreaded hot weather draws nearer every day.

Some weeks ago we were informed that the rainy season was over and that there would be no more rain for many a long day. But the weather has its vagaries here as elsewhere. Last week we had a storm which, they say, is unprecedented in Bahrein. For some nights previous we had displays of lightning and an occasional dust storm, but no one expected them to come to anything much. "These storms never break over Bahrein," was the general verdict. But one night it did break over Bahrein in more senses than one. The wind blew a hurricane. Our stairs leading up to the roof were picked up bodily and hurled into the yard, windows and doors were burst in, and we had



INTERIOR OF BAHREIN BOYS' SCHOOL.

a busy time keeping the rain (which was now falling in sheets) from spoiling our rooms. Almost every ceiling was leaking like mad. Presently one of the matting verandahs collapsed, taking with it a large piece of wall, which fell over into the yard of our Arabic teacher. Luckily no one was underneath. Above the fury of the storm could be heard the wail of the unfortunate hut dwellers who had their homes wrecked. In the lulls we could hear from the Mosques the voices of the Imams calling on Allah. The rain fell for nearly an hour, but the wind, though somewhat abated in fury, kept up on and off all night. The rainfall measured half an inch, or above one-sixth of the average annual rainfall in Bahrein.

The next morning revealed a scene of wreckage everywhere. Hardly a hut was standing straight, and large numbers were absolutely ruined. Luckily, they are home-made affairs, but even then there is a certain amount of outlay for materials. The damage had not only extended to the huts—a good many walls had also collapsed. The sheikh's proud flag-staff had gone down before the storm and lay on the beach in several pieces. Inasmuch as the British flag-staff still stands, those of a superstitious turn of mind had many suggestions to

offer. Quite a number of native boats were wrecked, and some six or seven bodies were washed ashore. There was a British India steamer riding at anchor, and I am told she was instrumental in saving some twenty-five men with her lifeboats. Much anxiety was felt for the safety of the pearl fleet, but it turned out afterwards that it was out of the path of the storm.

But the storm is not the only enemy Bahrein is fighting—the plague is here, carrying off its victims to the number of 15 or 20 daily. Large numbers of Persians have deserted the island and gone to Persia, saying that if they must die, they would rather die at home. All our masons and carpenters have gone, with the result that the work on the new Mission House is at a standstill, and we probably will be unable to move in before the autumn. A great many of us have been inoculated against the plague and some of us have had sore arms, but it is well worth a little discomfort to be assured of comparative immunity for some months. Hardly a house but is mourning the loss of a member, and every one is more or less depressed and frightened. Most of the people never call a doctor and, when they do, only half carry out his instructions, complaining that the medicine is bitter or some such equally silly excuse.

Medically and spiritually, this is the day of small things, and one must not forget that only a few years ago it was hardly safe to live on this island. God will yet open the eyes of the blind. My wife and I are toiling along the dreary road to a knowledge of Arabic, but we are encouraged in that we are beginning to talk a little. Howbeit, the teacher does not allow us to become conceited, but says, "Wait until the day of examination comes."