



## Opening of the Hedjaz Railway.

The Hedjaz Railway is already completed as far as Medina, and is being rapidly extended to Mecca, the capital, not only of Arabia, but of Islam. In September last the special correspondent of the London *Times* reported the impressive ceremonies which were held at Medina to celebrate the opening of the railway to the Holy City.

"After performing early morning prayers at the Prophet's Tomb, the Imperial Mission wended its way to the station outside the town, and there, before sunrise, found assembled a dense crowd of Mussulmen from all quarters of the globe. Field Marshal Miazim Pasha made a short speech, in which he declared himself extremely satisfied with the work of all who had been engaged in the making of the railway. Other notables followed him, and a striking speech was delivered by an Egyptian, Ali Kiamil, who, amid enthusiastic cheers, expressed his rejoicing that the Prophet had not permitted the railway to reach the Holy City before the Khalif had granted a constitution to the people. Djevad Pasha conveyed to the troops and engineers an official message from the Sultan, expressing his majesty's satisfaction at the success which had crowned their work, and then officially declared the line open."

The railway station has been built some distance from the sacred mosque which contains the Tomb of Mohammed, and the electric power that is used to light the station also illuminates the Tomb of the Prophet every night. The latest products of Western civilization have forced their way into the most secluded part of patriarchal Arabia.

---

## Across Arabia in a Motor Car.

Not only are they building the railway to Mecca in Arabia, and has the Baghdad Railway project more and more become an accomplished fact, but a recent writer in the London *Times* gives an account of a startling journey which has just been made across Arabia in a motor car. Surely God is preparing a highway in the desert, and natural obstacles will soon be overcome toward the real penetration of Arabia. When the friends of the Arabian Mission read this article some of them may be led to think of the possibility of an automobile as a missionary asset. We quote from the London *Times* of May 14:

"Arabia has for the first time been traversed by a motor car. Starting from Alexandretta on November 14, Mr. David Forbes

drove to Baghdad in nine days, of which only sixty hours were spent in actual traveling. One day had to be devoted to business in Aleppo, and two days were lost in the construction of an improvised ferry at Anah, where the Euphrates was crossed. The ordinary traveler, be it noted, drives from Alexandretta to Aleppo in three days, and from Aleppo rides with the caravan to Baghdad in twenty-one days, with luck, making a journey of twenty-four days in all. Faster than the caravan he cannot go with any reasonable hope of completing the journey alive. The Arab tribes, however, appear to be interested in the progress of science, for this is the second occasion within one month on which they have permitted unescorted and unarmed foreigners to pass scatheless through their midst. Only the week before a young officer of the British Royal Artillery followed more or less the same route on a bicycle, covering the portion between Aleppo and Baghdad in the astonishingly short space of seven days. His haste, however, is explainable in that on more than one occasion he had to ride for his life.

"Mr. Forbes's party consisted of himself, his English driver, an Assyrian mechanic, a Baghdad cook, and an Arab guide—total, five. The party possessed no maps—none worth possessing exists—and were entirely at the mercy of the Arab guide, whose previous knowledge of the capacities of wheeled vehicles of any type was nil.

"Mr. Forbes tells me that the principal obstacles en route were the 'wadis,' or small ravines, met with in the most unexpected places: the irrigation channels along the banks of the Euphrates, occasional spells of soft sand, the roads, and, of course, the Euphrates itself. To any one who has traveled in Turkey the inclusion of the roads in this list will cause no surprise. Once well away from the valley of the river and the road, the going, as a rule, was splendid, and the baked crust of the actual desert itself can only be compared to the Brooklands racing track. The river was crossed by forming a raft of two of the local box-shaped boats known as shaktoors, and by running the car on to it from an earthen ramp—not an easy engineering feat for amateurs—and complicated by the fact that half-way across the river, here about 250 yards wide, one of the shaktoors inconsiderately began to sink.

"From Anah, where the Euphrates was crossed, the valley was left and a bee-line taken straight across the desert to Baghdad. It would probably have been better to have steered a straighter course through the desert between Aleppo and Anah, or even to have made the original plunge from Damascus, instead of attempting to follow, more or less, the ordinary Euphrates valley trade route. In desert countries the selection of a route for ordinary traffic depends almost

entirely upon the water supply, and it is only natural that a river line is followed whenever possible rather than the alternative, a series of wells, on which one can never rely. For a motor car, however, the choice is less restricted, for the car itself does not require water, nor is sitting in it such thirsty work as driving camels—or even riding them, when they trot. The camel, it is true, has a world-wide reputation for being able to subsist for many days without a drink, and in Somaliland they sometimes really do. But in Arabia the breed appears to have deteriorated, for here they will thirst perhaps for three days, after which they die, protesting—as they do in Hindustan.

“To the Arabs the spectacle was unique. Of the comments of the Bedouin unfortunately no record remains—the car was always out of range before they had time to recover from their surprise. In the very rare villages where halts were made for the night the usual greeting was, ‘Mash-alla! Shemeen de fer!’—‘Good God! The (Baghdad) Railway!’ All were invariably friendly, and in their childish delight ready to render every possible assistance to the crew. Their intense curiosity, however, or desire, perhaps, to convince both themselves and their friends that the car was a reality and not a dream, led to petty thefts of anything detachable, such as nuts or screws—a point which future motorists in Arabia would be wise to bear in mind.

“Local government authorities are much impressed with Mr. Forbes’s journey, and a scheme is already being mooted for a motor postal service between Baghdad and Damascus or Aleppo. Under existing conditions the posts are distinctly erratic, and quite a large proportion fail to get through at all. News arrived, for instance, only two days ago that the last to leave Baghdad had been looted on the way. It would, at any rate, be interesting to see how long the defensive value of surprise endured, and what system the Bedouin would adopt for laying motor traps.”

S. M. Z.