



## A Story of Beginnings.

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It is somewhat of a distinction to be an Arabian missionary of twenty years' standing, and it may emphasize the late date of the beginning of mission work in Arabia to say that, to the writer's knowledge, no other can yet look back over twenty years of continuous service in the land of the Arabs. There were other missions which entered Arabia before 1889, notably the Church of England at Bagdad, in the northeast (1882), and the Free Church of Scotland at Aden, in the southwest (1885), but none of their first missionaries are still on the field.

In those first years, we scarcely dared to hope for a long residence in this, "a land that devoureth the inhabitants thereof." Again and again, heat and fever took workers from our ranks, until, at the end of ten years, scarcely more than half the number of men sent out remained. Some in the home land called on us to halt, but the fact that our organization was semi-independent made it possible for us to appeal widely and directly for re-enforcements. Those whom no danger could deter came in increasing numbers, so that we soon passed beyond that deadly zone of isolation and overwork which hems in so many small organizations. Years have also brought experience, and increasing income has made possible more healthful surroundings, until now our missionaries can reasonably expect far more than two decades of service.

These twenty years may be divided into three periods—those of locating, establishing, and developing our work. The first period represents the time and effort spent in deciding upon our field. Its importance is not likely to be overestimated. Many a colonizing enterprise, and missions are surely that, has been doomed to failure because of a wrong location. The Arabian Mission was fortunate in having as its founder one who knew the "Nearer East" and could introduce us to many of the workers there. Our first year was spent in language study and investigation among the missionaries of the Syria Mission of the Presbyterian Church. The knowledge we carried away, not only of the Arabic, but of their tried and proved methods of meeting the general problems of Christian work in a Moslem country, was invaluable, and probably saved us from many disastrous mistakes. Our first native associate and helper, Kamil Abdul Messiah, was a convert from Beirut, and from the mission press of that city we took and are still taking our most effective weapon, the printed word of God.

Within two years, we had seen almost the entire circumference of the Arabian peninsula. We had considered the possibility of Aleppo at the northwest corner, of the Hauran south of Damascus, and of Moab east of the Dead Sea. At Aden, we spent a few months. The ports of the Red Sea on the west were visited, and those of the Arabian Sea on the south, together with the inland towns of Yemen. Finally, we sailed along the eastern shore from Muscat to Bagdad—a total distance of nearly five thousand miles.

Our faith in the future growth of this work led us to wish for an unstricted field. Our call to do pioneer work for Mohammedans led us to seek a population wholly such. The eastern coast of Arabia seemed best to fulfil these conditions, and there no mission had ever located, or seemed likely to locate, its men. Communication from the outside world was excellent, and the preponderance of British influence in the Persian Gulf gave promise of safety and a settled government. The repressive Turkish rule extended but a short way south along the eastern coast, so that it was possible to have much uninterrupted access to the interior.

From the few large towns, Busrah was chosen as our first station. The liberal character, wealth and enterprise of its large population; its strategic position, where trade routes from north, east and west meet at the tidal waters of the mighty "River of the Arabs"; its proximity measured in long eastern units of days' travel, to the older mission fields of Bagdad, Mosul and Mardin, at the north, whence our native Christian helpers have largely been drawn—these all combined to determine our choice.

Our second year in eastern Arabia was signaled by the beginning of work at the islands of Bahrein, midway down the Persian Gulf, and the third year by the opening of Muscat, well toward the southeast corner. Thus the Mission had in this short time outlined its entire field, and this when its working force consisted of but three or four men. To so isolate them in stations distant one from the other three or more days' journey by water, and this possible only at intervals of two weeks, seemed extremely hazardous. But we felt that to rapidly increase our mission force at one point, was to still more rapidly increase suspicion and opposition, while it would also alarm the native rulers at the other two places we wished to hold. And one man, living quietly and alone, can often, before hostile forces think it worth while to combine against him, have remained long enough to establish a right of residence in those Eastern lands, where "whatever is" is taken as something that "must be." The subsequent history of our mission has justified the risks we ran.



THE MISSION HOUSE AT MUTTRA, AN OUT-STATION OF MUSCAT.

#### ESTABLISHING THE WORK.

The next period was that of *establishing* our work, or, as one might almost say, of defending our claim. Like many a pioneer, we faced and resisted more than one attempt to drive us off. All of our resistance was passive—it could hardly be otherwise at Busrah, where our opponent was the Turkish Government—but though passive, it was fairly intense! We have been scratched up a bit in being dragged by the Turkish police before a Turkish tribunal, and have seen the inside of a Turkish guard-house from behind a locked door. We have had a guard of soldiers before our house for days, searching us each time we came out, and only awaiting, so they said, orders from headquarters to bundle us out of the country bag and baggage—or more likely, without the baggage. With no American consul at that time near enough to be of much dependence, and not knowing how our Minister at Constantinople would balance our simple assertions of orderliness against the vivid and highly-colored complaints of the local authorities backed by petitions forced upon the different communities of the city asking that, as evil-doers and insurrectionists, we be deported, we were led to place our great trust in prayer, and in belief that He who brought us to Arabia would keep us there. Fortunately, our friends among the American missionaries in Constantinople interested themselves actively in our behalf, and our representative there would not lend himself to the misrepresentation of the Turkish Government, though he did casually send word by a passing traveler that we were causing him more trouble than all the other missionaries in Turkey. Not be-

ing able to force us out of the country, they next sought to establish a sort of boycott, especially against our renting a dwelling-house. Here providence opened a way for us through the only man in Busrah able to oppose the wish of the authorities, the Persian Consul, who gave us one of his houses to live in. This respite gave time for a bargain with a wealthy native to build for us in a very desirable part of the town. How he ever managed to have the contract and permit authorized is difficult to say, but once we were in our own house, we had some "face," and our main troubles were over.

The islands of Bahrem, where our second station is located, are governed by an Arab Sheik, himself bound by elastic but unbreakable treaty ties to the English Government. Here, for a long time, our missionary's was the only white face. By living among the Arabs in an Arab manner, with some measure of medical knowledge made full use of, by familiarizing himself with the literary and religious authorities of Islam, he was able to anchor his venture before the zealots awoke to the fact of what it meant. There was some rough work—our house was fired into at night, and threats of murder were repeatedly made. The English political resident was approached and asked if he would stand aside and allow the Americans to be driven into the sea. He replied, so he told us, that while he was not responsible for the Americans, yet the ties of kinship were pretty strong; that *our* ruler's son might marry *his* ruler's daughter, etc., and that before they did anything rash, they should take these things into account! Very vague words, and yet quite effectual! The representatives of the English Government in Arabia have, however, officially observed a strictly neutral attitude to us and our work, even going so far as to convey to Washington the information that they would not be responsible for our safety. Yet we have accounted many of them as our personal friends who have here and there, unofficially and perhaps unknowingly, been of great assistance to us.

At Muscat, the third station, our right to remain was not so keenly contested as at our other two stations. Here we found the only American consulate in all our field, and it may be for this reason that the Sultan of Muscat, an independent ruler, was never actively hostile. But it must also be remembered that the Arabs of Oman, from the Sultan down, are probably the most polite and cordial to accredited strangers of all the dwellers of Arabia. The main thing our Consul here has yet done for us, is to collect reimbursement for personal and mission property looted during an incursion of the inland tribes; a repayment, which the Mission wished to forego, but which the Consul insisted upon for the sake of the honor and prestige of the country he represented. Here at Muscat, just within the tropics, the

Arab character is perhaps more indolent and more ready to accept the inevitable, to cast the responsibility for evil conditions on the divine decree that may not be changed. One of their Koranic sayings is often used in this connection, "I take refuge with God from Satan the accurst." On one occasion, years ago, as the missionary was passing out of the audience room of the Sultan after having gained, through importunity, some little concession, his Highness was heard to use a little adaptation of the old proverb in the words, "I take refuge with God from a country that has missionaries in it!" Not very complimentary to our personnel, but very reassuring when we think of pitting our Western persistence against the Oriental inertia.

The third period of these twenty years was that of *development*. We had reached the field; we had proved that we could stay there; now what could we accomplish there? As regards the direction of our development, we held to our first intention—"Arabia and Islam." An early invitation from Bagdad at the north to take over the work of the English Mission there, would probably, if accepted, have absorbed all our efforts in that great city with its thousands of native Christians. An opportunity to assume responsibility for the Jews of Arabia, though very inviting, was refused as not being that nearest our hearts. Another to enter into the work of one of the great Bible societies was not accepted because it was deemed easier for them to get men than for us. Work among the heathen slaves brought to Arabia from Africa, though embraced and faithfully carried out, was limited through the decline of the slave-trade. Our society seemed definitely held to its first purpose of pioneer work among Moslems looking toward the interior of Arabia as its ultimate goal. This development toward the interior, though necessarily following our occupation of the coast, has been steadily carried out. Our first out-stations were a couple of hundred miles from Busrah, one on the Tigris and one on the Euphrates, and in the mountains of Oman, westward from Muscat, there is another Christian outpost. We have always prayerfully and longingly looked at the open roads inland, but only this year has our force on the coast been strong enough to justify setting aside one of our number, a doctor, for definite work among the tribes inland.

If one takes a comprehensive look back over these twenty years, it is easy to see that some things have been accomplished. Converts are enduring reproach, suffering shame, loss of property and liberty, groping after the higher ideals of Christianity, slipping backward at times, but realizing more and more the power of Christ to forgive and to save. Of as much or more promise to the future is the perceptible leavening of the whole mass of Islam with Christian principles and its uplift to a plane where future effort will meet with a more quick and

sure return. In all eastern Arabia, the dense ignorance regarding Christianity has been enlightened, inborn and traditional prejudices have been dispelled, and indifference is slowly giving place to interest and acceptance.

The indirect results of our occupation are also worth a thought. As would have been the case with Mackay, of Uganda, had he seen the answer to his plea for a strong mission in Arabia, so have the hearts of other workers in Mohammedan countries been gladdened by the knowledge of this successful assault on the very citadel of Islam. Is it hard to believe that many a thinking adherent of Islam finds his heart assailed with doubt and dismay, as he sees this land of the holy cities, the cradle of his faith, slowly being encircled by the standards of the Cross?

