

A New Beginning at Kuwait.

Our annual meeting here in Arabia comes to us as a stimulus to better work and larger vision, for we not only get the personal touch one with another which is so valuable, but we also learn from each other the great possibilities all over our field and so unite our energies in striving for the common cause of Christ in Arabia.

This year the annual meeting was held in Bahrein, where we were cordially entertained, and the spirit of good fellowship prevailed through all the meetings. Especially glad were we to see Dr. and Mrs. Cantine back among us after their long absence, and to see them looking so well.

To me each station report seemed to be pregnant with opportunities, and we from Busrah felt that our work too was taking big strides, inasmuch as real liberty seemed to be gaining ground in Turkey, and our long desired irade for the hospital had at last been procured. But greater than these and more important to us, was the invitation which the Sheik of Kuwait had given that we might come there and open work. The story of how this came about is a long one, but it is enough to say that I met him one day at Sheik Khazal's and there he gave us the invitation.

Mr. Van Ess and I were therefore appointed by the Mission to go to Kuwait and interview Sheik Molamak. We had the good fortune to get a Persian steamboat for this port, and after journeying about the Gulf for four days we landed at Kuwait.

As it happened the Sheik himself was not at home, but we were cordially received by his eldest son Gabbar, who gave us a room in the Sheik's guest house, and we began at once to make friends with him as well as with many of the influential men of Kuwait. Some of these men we had met previously at Busrah, and we were the guests of one of these men at dinner. It was a dinner typically Arab in style, and we enjoyed it, although we were obliged to eat with our fingers, which might have been hard work for a beginner, but we were accustomed to this kind of knife and fork, so we could enjoy the conversation and unconsciously get rid of a large share of rice and mutton. However, the food is really delicious and is always well cooked, so one can enjoy one's self and have no scruples.

We had been two days at Kuwait when the Sheik returned, and although Gabbar had treated us well, his father left nothing to be desired and ordered that we should occupy one of the finest and best furnished rooms of his palace. Here we found plush curtains draped over the windows and doors, a Brussels carpet on the floor, upholstered chairs, decorated ceilings, and servants at every turn to do our

bidding. We were told that a carriage or horses awaited us whenever we wished to use them, but we much preferred to walk about the place, and so did not need to accept all his kind offers.

Every morning we visited the Sheik in his reception room, and it was a most interesting study to watch the different types of Arabs coming in to salaam their Sheik. After they had kissed his hand or shoulder, according to their rank, they stepped back and took a seat among the others, some of them in an honored place near the Sheik, and others farther away. If a man whom the Sheik wished to honor sat too far away he was at once told to draw nearer, and others nearer the Sheik had to give place to him.

As we came into his presence we passed the ordinary salutations and took our places. Then we were supposed to remain quiet, according to Arab custom, until the Sheik opened the conversation with us. This he would rarely do until he had called for coffee and we had finished with it. One soon becomes accustomed to the dignified mien of an Arab mejulus (as a sitting like this is called), and comes to realize that anything frivolous is not acceptable, as it is not good form among the Arabs to laugh or even to smile at such a place.

There was a young Abyssinian appointed by the Sheik to go out with us on our walks about the city, and we learned from him that he was one of the fifty odd slaves of the Sheik. Besides these slaves there are a great many servants and retainers, so that each day the Sheik feeds several hundred men and women of his own household. Whenever the Sheik called for anything he would shout out and these black fellows would echo and re-echo his order at the door, in the hallways, and downstairs, until the furthest one, who perhaps has that order to carry out, would at once be ready to do his bidding. It is easier than a telephone to have servants like this, but I think a little more expensive. It may not be many years, however, before such a thing may be introduced, since the Sheik already possesses a fine steam yacht and an automobile. On the whole the slaves seem to be happy, and from what I heard and could see were very well treated.

The people of Kuweit are more friendly and polite than any I have met in other places of the Gulf. On the Pirate Coast the people, especially the women and children, follow after a white man and are rather impudent in their curiosity. No such lack of propriety was to be seen here at Kuweit, and I suppose we can look for the reason in the fine and capable man who is their ruler. Not only are the people well behaved, but the town is kept the cleanest of any in the Gulf, and the houses built on a rising slope of sandy gravel are naturally drained, and one is not surprised to learn that here there is no malaria and other diseases are scarce as well.

The town is built on the only good harbor in the Persian Gulf, and extends from southeast to northwest about two miles along the water front. From the sea the buildings extend backward in two wings for over half a mile on each side. In the center the town is not as wide because the desert extends into it and forms a market place for the Arabs. Here is where the great mass of people congregate during the day. It is the hub of the town, and from here the bazaar extends down several streets leading down to the water front, while on the other side scores of Bedouin tents are pitched indiscriminately out into the desert.

Coming here in the morning we found several thousand Arabs bartering their wares in the market place. Some had brought camel loads of desert greens for sale, which seemed to be mostly docks and



A BEDOUIN TENT.

dandelions, others had large bundles of dried brushwood, while some of the Bedouins sold sour milk or wild desert vegetables. These latter, called chimah or fuggali, are rather tasty and have much the appearance of potatoes. Here and there was a flock of black goats and sheep, and in another place fresh sea fish had been brought in to tempt the greedy Bedouin. Daily we walked along this most interesting bazaar and were never tired looking at the great sea of passing faces, always seeing in vision the time when these people would hear the gospel of our Lord. One never tires of watching and listening to the bartering of these hardy sons of the desert, especially when one understands their language. Hard, thin and sunburnt, dried, as it were, to resist the heat and toughened to withstand the fatigue which attends their long desert journeys, they represent a truly virile race. They are keen and sharp at a bargain, but simple and uncontrollable in

their desires as children. Again an Arab would haggle all day to save a few coppers, but would probably slaughter his last sheep for you if you came to his camp on a journey.

At times we would watch a caravan wending its way out of the city, and how we longed to be among the riders, as they turned their faces toward the west and began their journey into that vast unknown country. If God wills it will not be long before some of us too will be mounted on camels trekking our way into the secrets of unknown Arabia and planting the Gospel where it has a right to be.

We did not remain long at Kuwait; a week sufficed to arrange with the Sheik what was satisfactory to all of us, and we hope that in a short time we will have good reports to give about this place. The Sheik expressed pleasure in looking forward to our coming to Kuwait, and I hope that the future will not disappoint him or us.

On the day appointed for our homeward journey the Sheik came to our room to bid us farewell, and about noon we set out for Jahara, five hours' ride away. We reached this place about sundown and found that it consisted of about a hundred mud houses built close together, and the whole surrounded by green fields of wheat and alfalfa. We had expected that our first night on the desert would be rather disagreeable, but fortunately we met an old friend of ours and we were invited to his house for a supper of roast lamb and rice (à l'arab). Later we betook ourselves to the inn and found that it was a low-roofed house with mud floor and walls, no window and only one door. Camels and horses were tethered just outside, but Mr. Van Ess and I were too weary to complain, so rolled up in our blankets and were soon off to sleep. We were roughly awakened at 1.30 A. M., and, as it was full moon, we were off at once for a long march. Five weary hours were passed on horseback, and when it became light we walked for a good two hours to give our horses rest and to stretch our legs a bit. During the day we halted for only two and a half hours, and it was nearing nightfall again when we saw date trees in the distance, which our guide told us was Sofwan, our next halting place. We arrived about two hours after sunset and were warmly welcomed by the Turkish soldiers who are stationed on guard here. A bit of tea refreshed us, and after supper with the soldiers we were off to bed, only to be routed out again at four o'clock. Five hours' hard riding brought us to Zobeir, where we were able to hire a carriage. In an hour and a half the remaining eight miles between Zobeir and Busrah were left behind and before we realized it we were walking down the streets of Busrah to the Mission House, our journey and undertaking successfully accomplished.