

The Hinterland of Muscat.



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Except for a glimpse of Aden harbor at midnight and the lights on shore, we did not see anything of Arabia on our way from New York until, sailing from Bombay on the Steamship Kola, we sighted Muscat on October 24th. The familiar approach to this picturesque harbor, lined by the dark, frowning hills, forcibly reminded us of the old missionary hymn:

“O’er the gloomy hills of darkness,
Cheered by no celestial ray,
Sun of Righteousness arising,
Bring, Oh, bring the glorious day.”

If Muscat were the only place of importance in Oman and typical of its general condition, this part of Arabia would indeed offer few attractions to offset its proverbially trying heat and its mixed population of Hindu, Baluchi, African, and nondescript Arab. But the present capital is not the whole country, and its few thousands of inhabitants are only a small fraction of the estimated population of a province with at least a million souls. Muscat, like each of our other stations, was wisely and we believe providentially chosen as a strategic center to occupy the interior. Together with Mattra, where medical work was so auspiciously opened by Dr. Thoms before his return to America, it commands every route into the great interior. By the wise efforts, and patient persistence, as well as tactful intercourse with the Arabs, the roads have been opened literally to a thousand villages along the Batinah, westward to Jebel Akhdar and southward to Ibrah. The importance of Muscat grows with our increasing knowledge of the interior of Oman. When we remember that a coast line of over five hundred miles, dotted with villages, is accessible from Muscat as a base and that wadies as natural highways to the number of at least a dozen lead from this coast up into the hinterland, it is easy to prophecy the time when Oman by itself will be a mission field of large proportions and promise.

It was my privilege during the week’s visit which our party on its way to Bahrein made with Dr. and Mrs. Cantine to accompany Dr. Bennett on a short journey inland, and once more study this part of Arabia. We had hoped to go as far as Someil, one of the most important inland cities, but the time was short and

place has often been visited by Dr. Cantine, and the people were most friendly. It is named from a hot water spring which gushes from the rocks at a temperature nearly boiling, and is then led along channels to irrigate a large district. The oasis stands out in vivid green like an island surrounded by a sea of rocks and sand. The water seems to be charged with sulphur and Dr. Bennett thinks it may have traces of lithium. The people naturally value this gift of Allah, and it was most interesting on the morning after our arrival to attend an auction sale of this irrigation spring. The Arabs all sat around the mejlis while a burly negro, the servant of the sheik of the place, sold the use of the irrigation canal for so many rupees per hour for the ensuing month. Each bargained for his garden or plot, and was then allowed to turn the water at a certain hour in the day or night into his own field. Throughout the whole of Arabia nothing impresses one more than the value of water. "It is a dry and thirsty land where no water is," and when wells and springs are dug or discovered their value is inestimable.

At Hamamah I met one of the learned men of the Abadhi Sect, to which nearly all the Omanese Arabs belong, and was interested to learn the peculiar tenets of this part of the Moslem World. The Abadhi are an offshoot of the Khawariji and are allied in many ways to the Shiahs, but also differ from them in many important particulars. They are as a class very accessible and not intolerant like other sects, although they observe many superstitious practices.

Dr. Bennett had an interesting clinic and we were able to preach to the crowd and even got them all to stand in reverent attitude when we prayed.

The following morning we dismissed the camel men and proceeded on donkeys to Boshier. On the way I took a snapshot of Dr. Bennett, as you see him in the picture (cover). We also secured a very good likeness of Ibrahim Muskof who, with his brother Saeed, has covered a large part of the Oman field in faithful colporteur effort. Saeed died some years ago, and his mantle seems to have fallen on Ibrahim. I have never traveled with a native helper who has shown more tact, wisdom and fearlessness in work for Moslems. The two Arabs standing by him are men from Hamamah who led us out on our departure.

After spending part of the night at Boshier, the guests of an Omanese princess (at least she was related to the royal family at Muscat and exercised hospitality with great dignity and self-



IBRAHIM MUSKOF, WITH TWO NATIVES OF HAMAMAH.

assertion), we returned to Mattra in time for the morning clinic where a crowd of patients were already awaiting the doctor.

It was very interesting to note the wonderful development of the work in the Oman field on medical lines since the arrival of Dr. Thoms; and Muscat station is to be congratulated that during his furlough Dr. Paul W. Harrison has been assigned to do work at Mattra and to tour inland. At none of our stations have the Arab chiefs from the interior become so closely related to the work of the mission on the coast as at Muscat. Since the days of Peter J. Zwemer, Dr. Cantine and the others who have been in charge of the station have extended Arab hospitality to all visiting chiefs, and with a guest house specially arranged for their reception, the mission is enabled to return the favor of hospitality which they receive so liberally on all their journeys in the interior and along the coast.

If any one doubts the importance of the Oman field and desires a glimpse of the great unoccupied regions beyond the furthest tours of the missionaries, let him read the two papers which recently appeared in the **Geographical Journal** (August and October numbers, 1910). They are by Lieut.-Colonel S. B. Miles, and although the journeys described were made some years ago,

the papers give important addition to our knowledge of this little known part of Arabia, including the borders of the great mysterious desert. The climate of this hill country should certainly prove an attraction when we remember that in Jebel Akhdar there are peaks 4,000 and 5,000 feet high. Colonel Miles describes the climate of Nezwa as very salubrious, with fresh exhilarating breezes by day and chilly cold nights in the cold season, always dry and healthy." The elevation of Nezwa is 1,450 feet. The illustrations given in his article of the castle and sheik's house at Rostak, the former capital of Oman, certainly show that this part of Arabia is not a desert. In regard to one of these cities in the hill country he writes: "The city is unwalled, and the space it covers is a medley of walled quarters, intermingled with groves of graceful palms, fruit orchards, odorous gardens and running streams, which, backed and sheltered by the grand mountains above them, present a remarkable picture of wild, natural scenery combined with luxuriant fertility and every evidence of human prosperity."

With the recent additions to our forces, the time is not distant when the hill country of Oman will be permanently occupied and the missionaries may find retreat and refreshment from the scorching heat of Muscat at Nezwa, Someil, or in the Jebel Akhdar.

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