

The period of Portuguese influence was followed by that of the two East India Companies (The Dutch and the English), of which two the Dutch was by far the stronger till shortly before the time the company left the Gulf.

The English gained the balance of power by the suppression of piracy (1808-1865), which has finally ended in a state of affairs strongly resembling a protectorate.

During the last year the affairs of the Gulf have been the subject much political discussion, seeing Russia is supposed at times to cast a longing eye towards the Gulf of Persia. On the other hand, the English would hardly be expected to welcome such a rival here owing to the proximity of India. Indeed should any other foreign power attempt to take forcible control of any place in the Gulf, the result would most likely be a war.

The Gulf is growing in importance these days because of the Baghdad Railway which promises to become a reality at last. The railroad which has been the subject of talk for so many years is at last to be built. The importation of railway material from this side has begun, so that we can expect the completion of this road in the relatively near future. The significance of the Persian Gulf will then be still further increased, for it is possible that it will then again become what it once was, a highway for a vast volume of traffic between the East and the West.

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The Pearl Divers.

BY DR. PAUL W. HARRISON.

A sort of odor of romance, the faint perfume of The Arabian Nights, clings to the idea of pearl diving, but, like many other things in this sordid world, closer acquaintance dispels the romance and the odor that is left is not so inviting. Poets have written about it, but it is to be feared that they never saw the real process.

It is really astonishing to see how many of our fellow human beings earn their livelihood in thus ministering to the vanities of their more fortunate brothers. Kuwait is a city of perhaps fifty thousand inhabitants. Nearly the whole population is supported by pearl diving. No one has any statistics of the exact number of divers leaving Kuwait each year for the pearl banks, but the British Consul estimates it at twenty thousand. A larger number than that, possibly twice as many, make the Bahrein Islands their home. And when is

added to this large number many more, nobody knows how many, from the Persian Coast, and we realize that this represents only the northern divers, so to speak, and that south of El Katar there is a diving center at Debai perhaps as large, possibly larger, one stands really astonished at the size of the industry. It appears to be the main reliance of the coast dwellers for the whole gulf.

The division of profits is an interesting economic study. The owner of the boat (for all diving is done from boats, of course), gets 20 per cent. This is from the gross catch before any expenses have been deducted. Next the expenses of the season are paid. This includes everything that has been spent for food, repairs or anything else connected with the work. What remains is then divided up in strict equality, each diver sharing alike. The captain, who does little or no diving, but who superintends the whole season's campaign, receives simply one share along with the rest, and one share goes to the Sheikh as his tax on the industry. Rope pullers sometimes receive half a share, and sometimes two-thirds. The provision that makes the Sheikh a partner in the season's profits is a good piece of legislation. It provides revenue for him and protection for the diver. As a matter of fact the arrangement of things is not as equitable as the theory because both the purchase of supplies and the sale of pearls is in the captain's hands and he has great opportunities for profit, which are not wasted, if reports are to be trusted.

With the large element of chance entering into the final profits of a season—one boat coming back, each diver rejoicing in a thousand rupees addition to his wealth, and another making nothing—it is easy to see how such an industry will be popular. The instinct that makes men love to gamble plays a large part in making the Arab love pearl diving. Indeed, when the season comes on it is hard to find workmen for anything. The British Consul himself this past year has had to get along without a boat crew during the diving season. The missionary's cook and the hospital servant went on the same quest, so the popularity of pearl diving was impressed on our minds quite strongly. It, however, is dangerous and very hard work. The men dive from a small boat, all day long, in water which may be as much as seventy-five feet deep. They eat practically nothing during the day except two or three dates and a little very strong coffee. At night after the day's work is done they eat a little more, but never much. Then through the night they sleep huddled together in their small quarters, to begin over again the next morning. Scurvy is a disease hardly known at home any longer, but after the diving season there is no lack of it in Arabia. Besides, there are the numbers bitten by sharks, and those who are not able to stand the deep diving. We were told in one

place of four men that had died during the season because they had not come up quickly enough. It is altogether a dangerous business, but the people like the money it brings, so it grows in popularity every year.

In view of the number of Arabs engaged in diving, and the amount of disease that develops among them, it was decided to take a trip among them while at work and see whether it might be possible to minister to their physical needs and also, while so doing, find opportunity for direct evangelistic work as well. So we took a fair supply of medicines and instruments and a colporteur with his books and one fine Monday morning toward the end of the season we hoisted a big sail and were off. It was really a fine sort of picnic as well as a missionary trip. For a vacation trip we vote for a boat, and preferably a sailboat. We found, however, that the missionary, and especially the medical work, was a little disappointing. Everybody was too busy seeking the Arabian pearl to want even to hear of "The Pearl of Great Price" and even the alluring prospect of medical treatment was only sufficient to gain a few minutes. However, we persisted and visited something over one hundred diving boats in the nine days we were among them. We extracted quite a number of aching teeth and presumably contributed considerably to the bodily comfort of that many people at least. At the end of the eighth day we came to Darin, which is the center of the whole pearl trade north of Katar, and here we terminated our direct visitation of the boats.

The sea is free, but Darin is under the Turkish government, as we speedily discovered. We wanted to investigate the place, for we had already found out that the best way to reach the divers was not by visitation of the boats, but would presumably be by location for the season at some center. So I sent the pharmacist ashore to see what sort of place it was and to ask as to the number of boats visiting the harbor during the season. We were able to see that the place was a real center, for there were over 150 diving boats in the harbors at the time. Among the people that the pharmacist met was one of the Turkish garrison of the place, who seemed fully as much interested in the pharmacist as the pharmacist was in Darin. However, the investigation was pursued in all good conscience in accordance with orders we had given, and toward sundown we were all together again in the boat getting ready to enjoy supper with a real picnicker's appetite. This pleasure was, however, to be temporarily denied us, for who should appear at the side of the boat but the Wazir of the Sheikh, accompanied by two Turkish soldiers. The party brought us a rather peremptory invitation to accompany them to the presence of the Sheikh. So, in accordance with their orders, the doctor and the cap-

tain of the boat left to see what was desired. The soldier, who was the same one who had seen the compounder during the afternoon, was considerably exercised in his mind to know what we desired in so spying out the land. He professed to fear a British invasion of the place, of whom we might be in some sort the advance guard. The Sheikh, however, was courtesy itself. Our mission explained, we tried with no great success to extract some additional information from him, and a little later returned to the supper that we had left. We were, however, requested to report the next morning and go on an hour's march inland to interview the Turkish Governor of Katif. We promised with great joy, for nothing suited our purpose better than a chance to see him about the opportunity to come and open medical work in Darin during the coming diving season. The next morning, though, the Sheikh's mind had changed and we were not able to do anything of the sort. It was quite a disappointment, but I have no doubt it was the fault of the Governor rather than the Sheikh. He probably did not care to see any "Ingleeze" missionary.

The trip was valuable chiefly for the better view of a great opportunity that it gave, and also because it showed how another year we can in some measure meet that opportunity. What ought to be done is to have one of the doctors locate in Darin during the latter two-thirds of the diving season. He would have a large number of sick people to treat and some of them desperately sick. He would have a disagreeable place to live in, but not much worse than Bahrein except that it would be quite a problem to get his mail. He would have, beyond all that, the evangelistic opportunity that always goes with medical work, which is meeting a great need, and, finally, it is not at all impossible that in the good Providence of God he might be able to work in from even such a small start to the closed land of El Hassa.

The attention of our readers is called to the fact that the Arabian Mission has recently decided to follow the system of the Royal Geographical Society in the spelling of Arabic proper nouns. The broad features of this system are that vowels are pronounced as in Italian and consonants as in English. This new decision will necessitate a change in the way of spelling some of our familiar words and special attention is called to Maskat and Matrah.