

## QUAKER ARABS

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THE TERMS "Arab" and "Quaker" are known to everybody and yet are understood by comparatively few. We are venturing upon what will appear to many as an audacious joinder when we couple the names in this title. What would Mohammed say, or George Fox? Mohammed, true Arab as he was, reared in a nomadic tribe, preceded the Englishman by a thousand years. He was pacific enough, at first, and a spiritually minded prophet in his early evangelism. His staunchest converts were those who yielded to his moral suasion during the humbler years. First in time, and fine in quality, was his wife Khadijah. As for George Fox, he was and always remained a pacifist, but what a fiery one! He was head of a line of believers, sufferers, who were impelled to give their testimony before any person or audience, and who have gone with their truth to potentates and peoples, oriental as well as western. Nowhere have they suffered more cruelly than in the West as witness their experiences in England and in New England.

Let us not be misunderstood when we say that, in certain important respects, the intense zeal of the two founders was not dissimilar in degree, or in sweeping effect. The psychological natures and experiences of the men reveal certain traits in common. Historical and racial backgrounds account for the greater differences.

A profound sense of communication from God came upon both of these ardent dispositions and their response was prophetic. Mohammed, however, was the leader of a race, a unifier, a political genius. George Fox was consistently a religious genius. Mohammed was a thorough Arab with instincts for war and raiding quite in accord with the economics of his day and region. George Fox, an Englishman of a millennium later, was the fruit of the teaching that began by saying that the church and the world are different and continued by believing that the course of the Christian disciple is to eschew both and take the way of Him who counted not His life dear. The continental and British mystics had fashioned a persuasion of the spirit which helped to make much mental history between Mecca and Swarthmore. The sword was offered to both leaders. Moslems went to war. Quakers went to prison.

With their characteristic romantic idealism, the Quakers have

pressed in, where life and limb were endangered, to speak their message, as for instance, in New England in Colonial times. Surely they would have been safer in Constantinople, Damascus, or Baghdad. Many are the stories gathered in devout Quaker families of England and America of strange leadings to go here, or there, over the world, in order to bear testimony. This was an instinctive missionary impulse of the spirit, with no proselyting motive. Indeed, until recent decades, Quakerism repressed the tendencies to organize anything like formal missionary effort, and when they did so organize, it was more often with the intention of spreading education, or to give medical relief.

The characteristic position of "Friends" (Quakers) has always been that The Spirit of God is not limited in His choice of vehicles or audiences. A gentle woman might be thrust forth to stand and give the message of truth before an august assembly, or a feared ruler, anywhere on earth.

Islam, the faith and practice of Mohammed, was instinctively missionary from the beginning and with how great a compulsion of the spirit. We shall not dwell upon the logic of the great change when Mohammed the prophet decided to take up the sword in addition to his other remarkable powers of preaching and conference. Up to that point in his experiences there are suggestive parallels between him and the humble English prophet.

High culture of Arabian groups has been known, at least since the rise of the Nabatean Arabs of glorious Petra, several hundred years B.C. and perhaps much earlier, for the Bible tells us of the visit of a Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem which brought an Arabian power into relation with Solomon's Kingdom.

Need one be reminded that in the wide conquests of the Saracens, so brilliantly summarized by the late E. A. Freeman, the historian, in his four lectures now but little known, need one be reminded that many different races and countries were subdued and that the soldiers of the peninsula went far and wide in the eastern hemisphere spreading a newly inspired culture, the Arab tongue, language of the holy reading book, the Koran, and the name "Arab"? Of course the Persians did not thus become Arab in blood, nor did the Syrians, Palestinians, Spaniards, Sicilians, etc., etc. But all of these went either wholly or partially Arabic in language. Syrians and Palestinians being Semites yielded more completely to the language and the faith of Arabia. But even in Syria and Palestine the

fairly liberal terms of the greater rulers in Islam permitted many Christians to accept the role of a subjugated people and to give tribute to their conquerors in lieu of adherence to the new faith. Of great historical significance was the extension of Arabian ideas through the conquests which began within the lifetime of Mohammed in the seventh century of our Era and which spread eventually around much of the Mediterranean basin and then went eastward to penetrate farther than the conquests of Alexander and Hellenism. The murkiness which settled over Europe in the Dark Ages has all but eclipsed for us of the West the light that was streaming through the Near East in those centuries. A brilliant renaissance of mental life followed the Arabian conquests. Besides Moslem leaders of thought, there were many Christian and Jewish scholars who spoke and wrote in Arabic. All of the greater teachers were equally revered as they opened new vistas in the sciences, medicine, philosophy, and the arts. Not alone at the courts of the great liberal rulers and in the famous schools of the times, but in the humbler walks of life thinkers and poets were found. Europeans of culture came in later times to discover these intellectual treasures of the East and to learn the Arabic language in which they were published in order that the numerous books might be translated into the Latin of European scholarship.

It is a revelation to many that there are native Christians now in Arab lands, lands where the Arabic language prevails and where close cultural connections are felt with Arabic civilization. The term "Arab" is so loosely and widely used that confusion results much as with the use of the younger term "English." It may be used to mean the population of the great peninsula of Arabia, partly citizen, partly nomadic. Or it may be applied to the native population of Syria and Palestine which speaks dialects of the Arabian language and bases much of its history on Arabian civilization. These natives are largely Moslem in faith although a considerable minority has always professed Christianity. Lastly, "Arab" is more loosely used to cover the Moslem portion of any population of a Near Eastern country once conquered by Islam.

At the center of the Arabian world during Europe's Dark Ages lay Palestine and Syria with population largely descended from the ancient Canaanites. When Mohammed was a young man most of them were Christians under the care of Constantinople and the Greek Orthodox Church. But the reform in Arabia which was led

by this zealous Meccan was to affect profoundly the politics and religion of the northern countries. Today in Palestine, seven hundred thousand of the million population are Moslem natives and one hundred thousand are Christians. The ancestors of the latter are traced back to the beginnings of Christianity. They represent those who through thirteen centuries never succumbed to the missionary influence of Islam but persisted with almost incredible tenacity in their Christian loyalties. Their ancestors were brought over from Judaism and other faiths by the early Evangelists. They spoke Aramaic, Greek or Arabic according to the centuries in which they lived. Sword, tribute, humiliation—none of these moved them from their allegiance though hundreds of thousands of their racial kindred were converted to the newer faith during the centuries from the seventh to the tenth. And the pressure to convert has never ceased. It would be well for anyone who estimates slightly the quality and practices of these humble, native Christians of Palestine, if such an one would try to imagine and appraise their heroism of thirteen long centuries of subjugation with all the social and economic implications, with the unspeakable personal suffering and loss. Under the heavy burden of their disadvantages, political and economic, these native Palestinian farmers have been cut off almost entirely from the knowledge of western Christianity but have held on to their profession albeit with diminished standards of living, catching the brunt of world changes whenever these changes involved their country. Hospitable, keen in appreciation, part of a great fellowship, and steeped in memories of the past, they send many of their youth to America and to Europe to trade, to study, and to observe. Meanwhile, their own home fortunes have dwindled, being usually at the mercy of the fickle remembrance of the West. They belong to the oldest race of occupants of the land and are members of a very ancient Christian communion. Western Christianity has seldom if ever realized any effective fellowship with eastern Christians. The hostility between Rome and Constantinople was for a long time a contributing initial cause of this unsympathetic attitude.

Friends have no ecclesiastical orders. They are as essentially a lay fellowship as are the Moslems. Two simple Quakers from the state of Maine, Eli and Sibyl Jones went to Syria and Palestine on a "concern" shortly after the middle of the last Century. They had before that followed the divine leadings to many parts of America, Europe, Africa, and finally this journey to hither Asia. As with so

many religious devotees, that confluence of the world's faiths, the birthland of Christianity, attracted them. Theirs was a mission of mercy and illumination in answer to divine impressions, but it had no converting propaganda. On the other hand, certain natives over there have always called themselves disciples of the Americans. The mission of the Friends was mainly to Christians, but Christians who had lived in the shadows of poverty and neglect. While the Friends were in the Christian village of Ramallah, one day a native girl of fifteen asked them to open a school for girls. Such schools were rare in the country districts where the peasant farmers live in closely huddled villages surrounded by the fields which they till. "Who would teach such a school?" was the natural enquiry. "I would," was the answer of the child. Her name was Miriam (Mary). She knew very little English and had been under the care of a German missionary school in Jerusalem. Since most schools of the country were for boys, she felt the urge to increase the number of opportunities for girls. At Ramallah, ten miles north of Jerusalem, then, a small school was begun. That village became an exception among the farmer populations of Palestine, and greatly has it prospered in the years since. Female education was scoffed at by the hard-headed peasantry. But times have changed, and women have been increasingly honored. Before long other schools for girls were introduced in the villages and the great discrepancy between city and village folk was reduced. Indeed one difficulty today is that the city families, who naturally have better incomes, tend to crowd these excellent country schools with their children. Those former days were rude in social organization and there were frequent conflicts between the villages. Poverty and the heavy hand of the tax farmer oppressed the country folk and drove the standard of living very low.

The schools which were opened by the joint effort of the British and American Quakers for the poorer people in both Syria and Palestine were accompanied usually by the services of doctors, nurses, and dispensers to relieve the simple distresses of those poor peasants for whom the expensive journey to the city hospitals might be too difficult. Thus, the schools and other social aids flourished in what is now known as the Ramallah district and also in the northern Syrian villages, of rather more advanced character, such as Bru-mana and Ras el Metn, in the Lebanon Mountains, now under the French Mandate. Hundreds of graduates of such schools are scattered today in various employments throughout the Near East. Their

influence is generally beneficent. Friends encourage them to remain with their own church communions, wherever possible, in order that they may help to vitalize the native communities. Notwithstanding this policy and the traditional Quaker expectation that membership with Friends shall be by birth within the Society, there have been those who pressed for Quaker membership. After years of waiting, a Monthly Meeting was organized, and in still more recent times the meetings, north and south, have come together in a Yearly Meeting which meets in the Spring, alternating between Syria and Palestine.

For long, British and American Friends were united in this service to the poorer natives of the two countries, seeking by cultural, pacific measures to lift the standards for women and the respect felt for them, and to assuage the inter-village feuds. These last were peculiarly devastating, socially, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. It will be readily understood that there were many occasions for emphasizing the teaching of Peace. In 1887, the responsibility for the work was divided, the British assuming the Syrian stations and the American Quakers taking sole responsibility for those in Palestine.

In 1889, several leaders from Maine, Timothy and Anna M. Hussey and Charles M. Jones went to Palestine to inaugurate a new turn for the Mission, to wit, a residential training-home for girls where continuous effort might be made with selected pupils to fit them to become home-makers. Such boy-training as had accrued in the educational field up to that time was laid by for a dozen years when a similar training-home for boys was established, but not until what Friends felt to be the prior need, the uplift of the womanhood of the country, had been well recognized.

For the new effort, a native Syrian woman of fine culture and personality, Katby Jabriel (Katie Gabriel) was brought from her post in Beirut and she has given her life service to this calling. More of those devoted people from Maine came to assist, Huldah Leighton and Henrietta Johnston. A peace society was organized with these children who said among themselves, "I promise by the help of God to live as peacefully as possible with everybody and to try to induce others to do the same." Does this create something akin to nostalgia in us as we remember that this was in the "nineties" and in the Holy Land?

The fame of this Girls School went throughout the Levant. Ap-

plications for admission were made from Armenia, Crete, Smyrna, Beirut, and Trans-Jordan. Wives, mothers, teachers, hundreds of them have carried the impressions of the School over the Near East, and an especial result of its lessons has been the improved status of marriage relations. A direct sequel to the opening of these American schools has been the opening of many other schools for boys and girls by the native church authorities so that a revolution in the care of the young and the dignity of homes has taken place. Within the neighborhoods affected by these cultural changes, the pervasive quality of the Friends' service has been absorbed by other agencies but not wholly obscured. The first village boy who was admitted to the newly opened Boys' School in 1901 is now head of the greatly expanded school system in his native village of Ramallah. He is a graduate of Clark College in Worcester, of Teachers' College in New York City, and is a Doctor of Philosophy of Columbia University.

There are thousands of Semitic Christians from Syria and Palestine in the United States. Among them are many who were pupils of the American Schools in their homeland. A few of them are members of the Society of Friends. More of them know of the pacifist Arabs at home. But Christian, or Moslem, there is a growing body of Syrian and Palestinian-Americans. They are keen in business, assiduous in toil, even successful in the professions. The mellow Arabic language interwoven with the wisdom and whimsicalities of the East marks them as does also their newly-acquired English tongue and their zest for American ways. All these newcomers cling loyally to the name "Arab" as denoting the origin of their early culture. Another group represents those in the second and third generation, born in this country, noticeable only in their names and by their physical characteristics. Among all these, Christians are far in the majority and they run the entire gamut from high-church to Quaker.