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ANCIENT ARABIA.[1]

IF there is any country which has seemed to lie completely outside the stream of ancient history, it is Arabia. In spite of its vast extent; in spite, too, of its position in the very centre of the civilized empires of the ancient East, midway between Egypt and Babylon, Palestine and India, — its history has seemed almost a blank. For a brief moment, indeed, it played a conspicuous part in human affairs, inspiring the Koran of Mohammed, and forging the swords of his followers; then the veil was drawn over it again, which had previously covered it for untold centuries. We think of Arabia only as a country of dreary deserts and uncultured nomads, whose momentary influence on the history of the world was a strange and exceptional phenomenon.

But the restless spirit of modern research is beginning to discover that such a conception is wide of the truth. The advent of Mohammed had long been prepared for. Arabia had long had a history, though the records of it were lost or forgotten. The explorer and decipherer have been at work during the last few years; and the results they have obtained, fragmentary though they still may be, are yet sufficiently surprising. Not only has Arabia taken its place among the historical nations of antiquity, its monuments turn out to be among the earliest relics of alphabetic writing which we possess.

Arab legend told of the mysterious races of 'Ad and Thamud, who, in the plenitude of their pride and power, refused to listen to the warnings of the prophets of God, and were overwhelmed by divine vengeance. In the south the magnificent palaces of 'Ad might still be seen in vision by the belated traveller, while the rock-cut dwellings of Thamud were pointed out among the cliffs of the north; but the first authentic information about the interior of Arabia came to Europe from the ill-fated expedition of Ælius Gallus, the Roman governor of Egypt, in B.C. 24. The spice-bearing regions of southern Arabia had long carried on an active trade with East and West, and the wealth their commerce had poured into them for centuries had made them the seats of powerful kingdoms. Their ports commanded the trade with India and the further East. Already in the tenth chapter of Genesis we learn that Ophir, the emporium of the products of India, was a brother of Hazarmaveth or Hadramaut. Western merchants carried back exaggerated reports of the riches of "Araby the Blest," and Augustus coveted the possession of a country which commanded the trade with India as well as being itself a land of gold and spicery. Accordingly, with the help of the Nabatheans of Petra, a Roman army was landed on the western coast of Arabia, and marched inland as far as the kingdom of Sheba or the Sabæans. But disease decimated the invaders, their guides proved treacherous, and Ælius Gallus had to retreat under a burning sun and through a waterless land. The wrecks of his army found their way with difficulty to Egypt, and the disaster made such an impression at Rome that the conquest of Arabia was abandoned forever. From that time forward to the rise of Mohammedanism, the Roman and Byzantine courts contented themselves with supporting the native enemies of the Sabæan kings, or using Christianity as a means for weakening their power.

As far back as 1810, Seetzen, while travelling in southern Arabia, discovered and copied certain inscriptions written in characters previously unknown; later travellers brought to light other inscriptions of the same kind; and eventually, with the help of an Arabic manuscript, the inscriptions were deciphered, first by Gesenius, and then by Roediger (1841). They received the name of "Himyaritic" from that of the district in which they were found, — Himyar, the country of the Homerites of classical geography. The language disclosed by them was Semitic, while their alphabet was closely related to the so called Ethiopic or Geez. In certain dialects still spoken on the southern Arabian coast, notably that of Mahrah, between Hadramaut and Oman, the peculiarities of the old Himyaritic language are still to be detected.

In 1841 Arnaud succeeded, for the first time, in penetrating inland to the ancient seat of the Sabæans, and in bringing back with him a large spoil of important inscriptions. Later, in 1869, another adventurous jonrney was made by M. Halévy, on behalf of the French Academy, who was rewarded by the discovery of more than 800 texts. But it is to Dr. Glaser that we owe the better part of our present knowledge of the geography and ancient history of southern Arabia. Three times, at the risk of his life, he has explored a country of which our modern geographers still know so little, and, almost alone among Europeans, has stood among the ruins of Mârib, or Mariaba, called by Strabo the Metropolis of the Sabæans. He has collected no less than 1,031 inscriptions, many of them of the highest historical interest. The first-fruits of his discoveries have been published in his "Skizze der Geschichte Arabiens," of which the first part has just appeared at Munich.

For some time past it has been known that the Himyaritic inscriptions fall into two groups, distinguished from one another by phonological and grammatical differences. One of the dialects is philologically older than the other, containing fuller and more primitive grammatical forms. The inscriptions in this dialect belong to a kingdom the capital of which was at Ma'in, and which represents the country of the Minæans of the ancients. The inscriptions in the other dialect were engraved by the princes and people of Sabâ, the Sheba of the Old Testament, the Sabæans of classical geography. The Sabæan kingdom lasted to the time of Mohammed, when it was destroyed by the advancing forces of Islam. Its rulers for several generations had been converts to Judaism, and had been engaged in almost constant warfare with the Ethiopic kingdom of Axum, which was backed by the influence and subsidies of Rome and Byzantium. Dr. Glaser seeks to show that the founders of this Ethiopic kingdom were the Habâsa, or

[1] From the Contemporary Review for December.

Abyssinians, who migrated from Himyar to Africa in the second or first century B.C. When we first hear of them in the inscriptions, they are still the inhabitants of northern Yemen and Mahrah. More than once the Axumites made themselves masters of southern Arabia. About A.D. 300 they occupied its ports and islands, and from 350 to 378 even the Sabæan kingdom was tributary to them. Their last successes were gained in 525, when, with Byzantine help, they conquered the whole of Yemen. But the Sabæan kingdom, in spite of its temporary subjection to Ethiopia, had long been a formidable state. Jewish colonies settled in it, and one of its princes became a convert to the Jewish faith. His successors gradually extended their dominion as far as Ormuz, and, after the successful revolt from Axum in 378, brought not only the whole of the southern coast under their sway, but the western coast as well, as far north as Mecca. Jewish influence made itself felt in the future birthplace of Mohammed, and thus introduced those ideas and beliefs which subsequently had so profound an effect upon the birth of Islam. The Byzantines and Axumites endeavored to counteract the influence of Judaism by means of Christian colonies and proselytism. The result was a conflict between Sabâ and its assailants, which took the form of a conflict between the members of the two religions. A violent persecution was directed against the Christians of Yemen, avenged by the Ethiopian conquest of the country and the removal of its capital to San'a. The intervention of Persia in the struggle was soon followed by the appearance of Mohammedanism upon the scene, and Jew, Christian, and Parsi were alike overwhelmed by the flowing tide of the new creed.

The epigraphic evidence makes it clear that the origin of the kingdom of Sabâ went back to a distant date. Dr. Glaser traces its history from the time when its princes were still but *Makârib*, or "priests," like Jethro the priest of Midian, through the ages when they were "kings of Sabâ," and later still "kings of Sabâ and Raidân," to the days when they claimed imperial supremacy over all the principalities of southern Arabia. It was in this later period that they dated their inscriptions by an era, which, as Halévy first discovered, corresponds to 115 B.C. One of the kings of Sabâ is mentioned in an inscription of the Assyrian king Sargon (B.C. 715), and Dr. Glaser believes that he has found his name in a "Himyaritic" text. When the last priest, Samah'alî Darrahh, became king of Sabâ, we do not yet know; but the age must be sufficiently remote, if the kingdom of Sabâ already existed when the Queen of Sheba came from Ophir to visit Solomon.

The visit need no longer cause astonishment, notwithstanding the long journey by land which lay between Palestine and the south of Arabia. One of the Minæan inscriptions discovered by Dr. Glaser mentions Gaza; and we now have abundant evidence, as we shall see, that the power and culture of the Sabæans extended to the frontiers of Edom. From the earliest times the caravans of Dedan and Tema had traversed the highways which led from Syria to the spice-bearing regions of Yemen. Three thousand years ago it was easier to travel through the length of Arabia than it is to-day. A culture and civilization existed there of which only echoes remain in Mohammedan tradition.

As we have seen, the inscriptions of Ma'in set before us a dialect of more primitive character than that of Sabâ. Hitherto it has been supposed, however, that the two dialects were spoken contemporaneously, and that the Minæan and Sabæan kingdoms existed side by side. But geography offered difficulties in the way of such a belief, since the seats of Minæan power were embedded in the midst of the Sabæan kingdom, much as the fragments of Cromarty are embedded in the midst of other counties. Dr. Glaser has now made it clear that the old supposition was incorrect, and that the Minæan kingdom preceded the rise of Sabâ. We can now understand why it is that neither in the Old Testament nor in the Assyrian inscriptions do we hear of any princes of Ma'in; and that, though the classical writers are acquainted with the Minæan people, they know nothing of a Minæan kingdom.[1] The Minæn kingdom, in fact, with its culture and monuments, the relics of which still survive, must have flourished in the gray dawn of history, at an epoch at which, as we have hitherto imagined, Arabia was the home only of nomad barbarism; and yet in this remote age alphabetic writing was already known and practised, the alphabet being a modification of the Phœnician written vertically and not horizontally. To what an early date are we referred for the origin of the Phœnician alphabet itself!

The Minæan kingdom must have had a long existence. The names of thirty-three of its kings are already known to us, three of them occurring not only on monuments of southern Arabia, but on those of northern Arabia as well.

Northern Arabia has been as much a *terra incognita* to Europeans as the fertile fields and ruins of Arabia Felix. But here, too, the veil has been lifted by recent exploration. First, Mr. Doughty made his way to the ruins of Teima, the Tema of the Bible (Isa. xxi. 14; Jer. xxv. 23; Job vi. 19), and the rock-cut tombs of Medain Salihh, wandering in Bedouin dress, at the risk of his life, through a large part of central Arabia. He brought back with him a number of inscriptions, which proved that this part of the Arabian continent had once been in the hands of Nabatheans who spoke an Aramaic language, and that the Ishmaelites of Scripture, instead of being the ancestors of the tribe of Koreish, as Mohammedan writers imagine, were an Aramæan population, whose language was that of Aram, and not of Arabia. The Sinaitic inscriptions had already shown that in the Sinaitic peninsula Arabic is as much an imported language as it is in Egypt and Syria. There, too, in pre-Christian times, inscriptions were engraved upon the rocks in the Nabathean characters and language of Petra, — inscriptions in which a fertile imagination once discovered a record of the miracles wrought by Moses in the wilderness.

Since Mr. Doughty's adventurous wanderings, Teima and its neighborhood have been explored by the famous German epigraphist, Professor Euting, in company with a Frenchman, M. Huber. M. Huber's life was sacrificed to Arab fanaticism, but Professor Euting returned with a valuable stock of inscriptions. Some of these are in Aramaic Nabathean, the most important being on a stêlê discovered at Teima, which is now in the Museum of the Louvre. About 750 are in an alphabet and language which have been termed "Proto-arabic," and are still for the most part unpublished. Others are in a closely allied language and alphabet, called "Lihhyanian" by Professor D. H. Müller, since the kings by whose reigns the inscriptions are dated are entitled kings of Lihhyân, though it is more than probable that Lihhyân represents the Thamud of the Arabic genealogists. The rest are in the language and alphabet of Ma'in, and mention Minæan sovereigns, whose names are fouud on the monuments of southern Arabia.[1]

The Minæan and Lihhyanian texts have been mainly discovered in El-Ola and El-Higr, between Teima and El-Wej, — a port that until recently belonged to Egypt, — on the line of the pilgrims' road to Mecca. The Proto-arabic inscriptions, on the other hand, are met with in all parts of the country, and, according to Professor Müller, form the intermediate link between the Phœnician and Minæan alphabets. Like the Lihhyanian, the language they embody is distinctly Arabic, though presenting curious points of contact with the Semitic languages of the north; as, for example, in the possession of an article *ha*. The antiquity of Lihhyanian writing may be judged from the fact that Professor Müller has detected a Lihhyanian inscription on a Babylonian cylinder in the British Museum, the age of which is approximately given as 1000 B.C.

We gather, therefore, that, as far back as the time of Solomon, a rich and cultured Sabæan kingdom flourished in the south of Arabia, the influence of which, if not its authority, extended to the borders of Palestine, and between which and Syria an active commercial intercourse was carried on by land as well as by sea. The kingdom of Sabâ had been preceded by the kingdom of Ma'in, equally civilized and equally powerful, whose garrisons and colonies were stationed on the high-road which led past Mecca to the countries of the Mediterranean. Throughout this vast extent of territory alphabetic writing in various forms was known and practised, the Phœnician alphabet being the source from which it was

[1] It is possible that a Minæan population is meant by the Maonites of Judges x. 12, the "Mehunims" of 2 Chron. xxvi. 7.

[1] The Minæan and Lihhyanian texts have been edited and translated, with an important introduction, by Professor D. H. Müller: "Epigraphische Denkmäler aus Arabien," in the "Denkschriften d. K. Akademie d. Wissenschaften zu Wien," vol. xxxvii., 1889.

derived. The belief, accordingly, that pre-Mohammedan Arabia was a land of illiterate nomads, must be abandoned: it was not Islam that introduced writing into it, but the princes and merchants of Ma'in and Thamud, centuries upon centuries before. If Mohammedan Arabia knew nothing of its past, it was not because the past had left no records behind it.

A power which reached to the borders of Palestine must necessarily have come into contact with the great monarchies of the ancient world. The army of Ælius Gallus was doubtless not the first which had sought to gain possession of the cities and spice-gardens of the south. One such invasion is alluded to in an inscription which was copied by M. Halévy. The inscription belongs to the closing days of the Minæan kingdom, and after describing how the gods had delivered its dedicators from a raiding attack on the part of the tribes of Sabâ and Khaulân, or Havilah, goes on to speak of their further deliverance from danger in "the midst of Misr," or Egypt, when there was war between the latter country and the land of Mazi, which Dr. Glaser would identify with the Edomite tribe of Mizzah (Gen. xxxvi. 13). There was yet a third occasion, however, on which the dedicators had been rescued by their deities 'Athtar, Wadd, and Nikrâhh: this was when war had broken out between the rulers of the south and of the north. If the rulers of the south were the princes of Ma'in, whose power extended to Gaza, the rulers of the north ought to be found in Egypt or Palestine. Future research may tell us who they were and when they lived.

But the epigraphy of ancient Arabia is still in its infancy. The inscriptions already known to us represent but a small proportion of those that are yet to be discovered. Vast tracts have never yet been traversed by the foot of an explorer, and there are ancient ruins which have never yet been seen by the eye of the European. What has been accomplished already with the scanty means still at our disposal is an earnest of what remains to be done. The dark past of the Arabian peninsula has been suddenly lighted up; and we find that long before the days of Mohammed it was a land of culture and literature, a seat of powerful kingdoms and wealthy commerce, which cannot fail to have exercised an influence upon the general history of the world. A. H. SAYCE.

MR. MACKINDER ON GEOGRAPHY-TEACHING.

THE reader in geography in the University of Oxford has been delivering a course of four lectures at the English College of Preceptors. The introductory lecture was given on Nov. 8, before a crowded audience, consisting mainly of women teachers.

We must first settle, said Mr. Mackinder (as given in the London *Journal of Education* of recent date), what are our aims in geographical teaching, else we shall be like men blindfold, trying to find their way out of a field with but one gate. If we succeed, it will be by a *θεία τύχη*. All teaching aims at discipline, or information, or both. Geography, as hitherto taught, has aimed solely at information. Even the leading authorities have supported this view. Thus a general, a distinguished member of the Geographical Society, lately complained to the lecturer of the brutal ignorance displayed by society in general, because at a large dinner-party his wife was the only guest who knew where Nassau, New Providence, was. Such geographical lore the lecturer said he heartily despised. It might have been of use before the invention of gazetteers: now it is utterly useless. Yet some geographical information is worth having, though discipline is the main thing, Thus the question turns up, "Where is Allahabad?" A reference to the gazetteer will tell us, "Allahabad is the capital of the North-West Provinces of India, situate at the junction of the Jumna and the Ganges." To the uneducated person these statements will convey nothing more than the vague impression that Allahabad is somewhere in the north of India. One who has been trained in geography will at once picture to himself the centre of a great and populous province, standing in the great plain which lies at the foot of the Himalayas. If the teacher has thus given a skeleton into which details may be fitted, he has not merely supplied information, but also developed capacity. Acquaintance with great facts, vividly and familiarly known, so that they are part and parcel of the mind's furniture, is indeed discipline; for it involves the grasping of contrasts, analysis, learning to deal with ideas.

The basis of geography-teaching must undoubtedly be *Heimatskunde* ("knowledge of the pupil's home and surroundings"); but this sound pedagogic principle has of late been pressed to the verge of absurdity. Professor Geikie, in "The Teaching of Geography," went so far as to leave all the geography out, and teach every thing else under the sun. We are told that the professor must teach his class the homologies of the limbs of animals, and the various styles of architecture. Such general knowledge is most valuable, but there is a danger of not seeing the wood for the trees. In the same way, if the reform advocated for elementary schools to combine geography and natural science were carried, geography would be pretty certain to go to the wall. True, geography, with one exception, is a late subject, and must be based on physiography; but it is best to keep the two names separate. "Physiography" is an old term, brought into fashion again by Professor Huxley. The Science and Art Department has just given it a more extended meaning than it bears in Professor Huxley's book with that title, and includes under its astronomical phenomena the laws of gravitation, etc. Such physiography we do not need as a preparation for geography. All a child need know is the meaning of the common world around him, the air he breathes, the water he drinks, ice, snow, rain, clouds. These facts of common life might be imparted at a very early age, and were best imparted by parents. At present parents are too ignorant to teach them, and they must be taught first at school. The exception above referred to is the instilling of those rudimentary facts which are to geography what the multiplication-table is to arithmetic. Without these facts, such as the outlines of continents and oceans, which cannot be taught inductively, no comparison, no generalization, is possible; and if they are to be indelibly impressed on the mind, and form part of the groundwork, they must be learned very early. The *why* of geography cannot come till considerable portions of history and science have been answered. These outlines, our multiplication-table, must be taught by maps: they are purely a question of eye-memory. We want neither maps full of details (the old error), nor a single map of a country with only twenty names in it (the modern error), but a number of maps, each one accentuating some single feature, and showing the country in some new connection. Such maps could be produced very cheaply, and we might have a whole series of them. Even grown-up people rarely know the look of a country except in one connection, and are unable, in turning over an atlas, to recognize a map at a glance without the help of the name in the corner. So, in map-drawing, we require far too great elaboration. What we want is, to enable a child to reproduce from memory a rapid outline of Italy as a peninsula of south-western Europe, again as part of the Mediterranean coast-line, and so on. The old school of teachers, who insist on lists of names by heart, argue that "we are bound to train the memory," and that "the memory is strongest in the young." They do not perceive that they are arguing in a vicious circle. If the memory is strong, what need to cultivate it specially? What is needed is to supply it with facts worth remembering. "Give plenty of facts, and some are sure to stick." "Granted," replied the lecturer, "but these are likely to be the least important. From my school lessons on the geography of Italy, I retain the one fact that twelve miles north of Milan there is a village famous for its cheese-making."

Text-books are useful as a guide to the teacher, and as a record of what has been taught to the pupil. The old way of using them — "Get up the next three pages; now shut your books; name the departments of France and their capitals" — is a parody of teaching. Nor is the modern fashion of lecturing, by itself, much better. A lecturer can stimulate and direct study: he cannot supply accurate information; he cannot educe knowledge or test its soundness.

Teachers, by blindly following text-books, fall into the vicious method of taking one country at a time. They should go over the same ground again and again, each time in a new connection, showing the physical, commercial, political connection of one country with other countries. For this we need variety of apparatus, — maps, sections, models, views, magic-lantern slides, and, above all,