

**MAHOMETISM: AN HISTORICAL
SKETCH OF ITS ORIGIN AND
PROGRESS AND THE ATTEMPT
MADE BY THE SARACENS**

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G. L. STRAUSS

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AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF ITS ORIGIN AND PROGRESS, AND THE ATTEMPT MADE
BY THE

SARACENS

TO IMPLANT IT IN EUROPE, UNTIL THE FINAL ESTABLISHMENT, BY THE
FRANKS, OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

UNDER

CHARLES MARTEL,

AT THE BATTLE OF TOURS, ANNO DOMINI 732.

BY G. L. STRAUSS, PH. D.

SECOND EDITION.

ILLUSTRATED BY A FRONTISPIECE,

From a fine Picture in the Imperial Gallery of Versailles.

CAMBRIDGE;
ST. MARY'S;
JOHN WEALE.

1858.

110. d. 332

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE revolting cruelties of the Mahometans of Bengal to the Christian race, has rendered a second issue of this Work imminently of the greatest interest at the present moment. The first issue of this volume was made in 1854, under a title that ill described its value and the concise diffusion of its historical contents. The Mahometan, like the modern Mormon faith, lacks of every principle of virtue in Christian rule, and is opposed to liberty, truth, and justice. The Mahometans of India have had extended to them by British sovereignty, the advancement and social improvement of civilized England; liberty of thought and action; the dictates of their own faith, and the administration of it preserved to them inviolable. Recent events are a warning for the Christian community against Mahometans generally. Western Europe has by her policy given a tone and importance to a nation of this faith, dangerous to Christendom, by the squander of its blood and treasure, to uphold a power which in her day of opportunity will basely betray. One instance shall be given: The trial at Constantinople of the murderer of Sir Lawrence Jones, Bart., at Smyrna, the former a Moslem, the latter a Christian; the relatives of the victim were denied justice, their faith placing them without the pale of Mahometan law. Bede, in his English Church History, relates of the Saracen invasion

of France as far as Sens in 731: Charles Martel firmly established Christianity by his defeat of Abderrhaman at the battle of Tours, in 732.* Continue to uphold Mahometans as we have done, and the day may come when we shall have similar attempts as were made eleven hundred years ago, should the followers of the Saviour slumber at their posts.

The following is not an inapt quotation from the present work :

“It must be admitted that the religion of Islam, calmly and dispassionately examined by the light of reason, contains by the side of the grossest absurdities, the most palpable falsehoods, and the veriest rubbish, much also that is true and of sterling worth; and that it has exercised a certain civilizing influence over the barbarous nations to whom it was first preached: yet few only will venture to deny that it lacks altogether the higher and most essential qualities of a universal faith. Even the basis whereon it rests, the great eternal truth of a sole Deity, is tarnished and clouded in it by the companionship which it is forced to bear to a miserable fiction placed by the side of it, and with equal attributes. There are some few, strange though it may appear, who almost regret that the victorious career of the Moslems should have been checked by LEO THE ISAURIAN and by CHARLES MARTEL. What would have become of Europe—what of civilization, had the Moslems conquered? Let the admirers of Islam look at the state of the Mussulman nations of the present day: the fruit shows the quality of the tree. It is also a favorite argument with historians and others, to point to the *numbers* of believers in Islam, and to the twelve centuries that the Mahomedan faith has endured, as convincing proofs of the *truth* of that creed, or, at all events, of a preponderating amount of truth in it. If arguments of this kind are to apply, the Mormon faith also may claim admission among the ‘received’ creeds; and the names of Joe Smith and Brigham Young may be expected, in the course of fifty years or so, to figure among the ‘prophets and apostles of religion.’” Page 52.

J. W.

October 15th, 1857.

* Hallam's *Middle Ages*. Vol. I.—1819, p. 8.

PART I.
THE MOSLEMIN.

CHAPTER I.

ARABIA AND ITS INHABITANTS.—LIFE AND DOCTRINE
OF MOHAMMED.

THE Arabian peninsula, called by the natives *JESRA-AL-ARAB*, by the Persians and Turks *ARABISTAN*, forms the south-westernmost part of Asia. It is bounded on the north by Syria and the river Euphrates, on the east by the Persian Gulf, on the south by the Indian Ocean, on the west by the Red Sea, or Arabian Gulf. Including the north-eastern desert, it occupies an area ten times the extent of that of Great Britain and Ireland. The connecting link between Asia and Africa, to which latter continent it is joined by the Isthmus of Suez, it presents in its natural features, a faithful copy of its colossal tropical neighbour, modified, however, by the imprint of a strongly marked individual character, the result of its peculiar isolated position. The attempted derivation of the name of the country from *EBER**, the common progenitor of the Joctanites and Ismaelites—the two races which are assumed to constitute the great-bulk of the native population of Arabia—is, at the best, but very problematical; that from the word *ARABA*, the

* See Genesis, x. 25. *EBER* signifies a nomadic shepherd, one leading a roving pastoral life; it signifies, also, in Hebrew, *beyond, yon-side, the other side*: hence the name *HEBREW*, or *EBREW*, has been supposed also to be intended to designate immigrants into Canaan or Palestine from beyond the Euphrates.

name of a district of the province of Tehama, and which signifies a *level desert*, would seem to rest on a safer and more rational foundation, the far greater part of the country being indeed a dreary waste, a boundless level of sand, destitute of rivers, intersected by naked mountains, and barely relieved here and there by a shady grove or a green sward of aromatic herbs. The date-palm is often the solitary representative of vegetable life in these sterile tracts, which are scorched by a tropical sun, and hardly ever refreshed by a grateful shower. There are, however, some more favored districts, where the fertile soil produces dates and other palms, tamarinds, vines, rice, sugar, figs, tobacco, indigo, cotton, durra,* coffee, gum, benzoin, frankincense, manna, balsam, aloe, myrrh, spices, &c. The high lands in the south-west, that border on the Indian Ocean, are distinguished in this respect, above all other parts of Arabia, by a more temperate air, superior fertility, and comparative abundance of wood and water. No wonder, then, that the appellation *happy*, bestowed upon this blessed region by PROLEMY, should have been generally adopted, although originating in a mistranslation of the word YEMEN, the Arabian name of this part of the peninsula, and which does not signify happy, but is simply meant to designate the land lying, with respect to the East, to the right of MECCA, just as AL-SHAM (Syria) means the land to the left of that city. PROLEMY's division of the country into the *sandy*, the *petraic*, and the *happy* (*Arabia Deserta, Pêtræa, and Felix*), is, however, unknown to the Arabians themselves, who speak only of high land and low land. The epithet *stony*, so generally applied by geographers to the *petraic* division, is founded in error: PROLEMY derived the word from PETRA, the name of the then flourishing capital of the Nabathæans, and not from the Greek word *petra*, a rock or stone. Ptolemy's Arabia Pêtræa forms now part of the province of HEJAZ, along the coast of the Red Sea. YEMEN, as we have seen, occupies the south-western coast. On the south-eastern coast lies the maritime district of OMAN; on the

* A species of millet, which compensates to some extent the scarcity of European grains.

Persian Gulf, the district of LAHSA: the inland space bears the name of NEGED, or NAGED.

Arabia is the true native country of the horse, and remains even at the present time the seat of the purest and noblest races of that generous animal. Asses, oxen, sheep, goats, and the swift gazelle, are also indigenous; and so is the *camel*, the "ship of the desert," nature's most precious gift in the sands of Africa and Arabia. Monkeys, pheasants, and pigeons inhabit the fertile districts. The lion, the panther, the hyena, the jackal, lurk in the desert. Ostriches and pelicans are among the birds of Arabia; locusts, that "plague of the fields," are among its insects. The coasts abound in fishes and tortoises; and the pearl-fishery flourishes more especially in the Persian Gulf.

Among the mineral products may be mentioned iron, copper, lead, coals, asphaltum; and precious stones, as the agate, the onyx, the carnelion, &c. Some of the ancient geographers speak also of the soil of Arabia as being impregnated with gold; and though no mines of that precious metal are at present known in the peninsula, who can say but that the treasures of another California lie hidden there?

The inhabitants of Arabia, whose present number may be estimated at about fifteen millions, are supposed to derive their origin partly from JOCTAN (in the Arabian language KAHTAN), one of the sons of EBER; and partly from ISMAEL, the son of Abraham and Hagar. The Joctanites, as the supposed original inhabitants of the country, have been called also true Arabians; the Ismaelites, as later immigrants, *mixed* Arabians. The ISMAELITES are the BEDOWRENS, or BEDOUINS, of our time, who to the present day continue to rove through the interior and the north of Arabia, as they did in the remote times of Job and Scaostis, depending partly on their flocks, partly on the transit trade of the caravans, but chiefly on plunder;* which latter is by these wild sons of the desert looked upon in the light of an honorable profession rather than of a disgraceful and

* "The Arabian tribes are equally addicted to commerce and rapine," as Pliny has it.

criminal pursuit. They are a fine race of men, of middle size, but well proportioned, vigorous, and active; they have regular features; their complexion is mostly dark, rarely of a lighter tint; their eyes sparkle with a fire and lustre unknown among us. They are brave, temperate, generous, and hospitable; enthusiastically addicted to eloquence and poetry. Rapine and revenge are the only dark spots in the national character of the Bedoween.

The JOCTANITES are the HADDNESIES, or *settled* Arabians, who from the earliest times have been collected into towns and villages, more especially in the maritime districts of the peninsula, employed in the labors of agriculture, trade, and commerce. Though the Arabian house-dwellers cannot be said to possess all the noble qualities of their brethren of the desert, still the description given above of the physical and moral character of the latter applies in a great measure equally to them; they are lively, intelligent, eloquent, and witty; and, with all their habitual haughty demeanour, more particularly to strangers, affable and agreeable in their manners and conversation.

The principal nations of Arabia mentioned by the ancients, are, besides the SKENITES (*tent-dwellers*, or wandering tribes), the NABATHÆANS, in Arabia Petræa (Hejaz); the THAMUDITES and MINÆANS in Hejaz; the SABÆANS and HOMERITES, in Yemen; the HADHRAMITES, in Hadhramaut on the southern coast; the OMANITES, DACHABENIANS, and GERRILEANS, in Oman and Ul-Ahss, or Lahsa; the SARANIANS, in Neged; and the SARACENS, an obscure tribe on the borders of Egypt, and remarkable only from the circumstance that, perhaps from a fallacious* interpretation of the meaning of the word,—viz: as intended to indicate an Oriental situation—the application of the name has been gradually extended, first to the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula generally, afterwards to all Mohammedans.

* True, in the Arabic tongue the meaning of the words, of which the name *Saracens* may be compounded, will bear out the signification of an *Oriental situation*. But the *western* position of the Saracen tribe mentioned by Ptolemy, negatives the assumption of the Arabic origin of the word as applied in this sense. As Gibbon sagaciously remarks, the appellation being imposed by strangers, its meaning must be sought, not in the Arabic, but in a foreign language.