

**EARLY CHRISTIANITY
IN ARABIA, A
HISTORICAL ESSAY**

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Early Christianity in Arabia, a historical essay by Thomas Wright

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PREFACE.

WHEN the following pages were written, the author, who was then very young, pursued with at least considerable zeal the study of the Oriental languages and literature, a study which, upon his entering the university, he laid aside, not again to be resumed. The historical essay now published was written in the belief that the events which it relates had received but little attention in this country, and had never been presented in a popular form to English readers; and at the same time he thought, as he is still inclined to think, that they form an interesting episode in the history of mankind, and that they are a necessary introduction to our knowledge of the origin of that religion which has exercised so mighty an influence on the whole world during the middle ages. He had preserved the manuscript without any determinate idea of publishing it, until the general interest in the affairs of the East which has been raised by the great events that are now taking place has led him to believe that his sketch of the

history of Christianity in Arabia before it was subverted by the arms of Muhammed and his followers might find a sufficient number of readers to justify its publication.

It seemed necessary to make this statement both as an explanation and as an apology ; and it is but right to add that the whole is here printed as it was written ; for, as the author's studies have for some years run in an entirely different direction, he has not ventured upon a revision of this slight memorial of former labours. He has not attempted to approach in any way the question of the orthography of Oriental names, which is one on which even Oriental scholars are not at all agreed, and in which many changes have taken place since these pages were written ; but he believes that his original desire was to adopt such forms as, without being vulgarly corrupt, would sound least harsh to those who were not acquainted with the languages to which they belong.

14, Sydney Street, Brompton,
January, 1855.

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EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN ARABIA.

SECTION I.

THE peninsula of Arabia was divided by the old geographers into three parts: the desert plains of the north-east, which bordered on the Euphrates and the Syrian frontier; the province of Petraea, at the northern extremity of the Red Sea; and the richer and more extensive tracts of Arabia Felix. This latter division is chiefly included by native writers under the general and comprehensive term of *Al Yaman*, which in signification coincides with its Roman epithet.¹ On the north the territories of Yaman extended into the mountain ranges of the interior, and were bounded perhaps by the extensive deserts that spread out towards the Persian Gulf; on the west and south it was separated from Africa by the

¹ *أيمن* from *يعن* *felicity*. We find the real Arabic name mentioned by several ancient authors. *Εισι δε και ενδοτεροι αυτων, μη οντες της φυλης αυτων, αλλα του Ιεκταν, οι λεγομενοι Αμανται, τουτ' εστιν Ομηριται.* Theophanes, Chronograph. in Bibl. Pat. Gr. tom. ii. p. 283, *οι λεγομενοι Ομηριται, τουτ' εστιν Αμανται.* Euthymius, in Mahometias, p. 308. See Constant. Porphyrogenn. p. 68. and the Saracenicæ, p. 57.—*Filia regis austri est regina Sabæ: nempe hoc regnum vocatur lingua Ismaelitica Aljeman.* Aben Ezra, in Dan. xi. 6.

Red Sea; and its eastern coasts were washed by the waves of the southern ocean.¹

In more ancient times, the land of Yaman was celebrated as the native country of myrrh and of frankincense. Its inhabitants, the Sabæi, formed the most powerful and extensive of all the nations of the Arabian peninsula. They were blessed with a redundance of the pleasures and conveniences of life. The earth was fertile and fruitful, and with little labour produced all that was required for the necessities or luxuries of mankind. The plains were covered with innumerable flocks. Extensive and numerous forests of myrrh, cinnamon, and frankincense, mixed with the sweeping palm and the tall and slender reed, breathed their perfumes to the breeze which carried them far out on the neighbouring seas.² The people excelled all other nations in

¹ The knowledge which the ancient geographers possessed of the shape of Africa was very confused. They supposed that after turning Cape Guardafui, the African coast ran almost direct to the pillars of Hercules, and consequently they considered the ocean which lay to the south of Arabia Felix as the Atlantic. Ὑπερ ἔς ταυτων ἡ Εὐδαίμων ἐστίν, ἐπὶ μυρίας καὶ δισχιλίους ἐκκειμένη πρὸς νότον, μέχρι τοῦ Ἀτλαντικοῦ πελάγους. Strabo, lib. xvi. c. 4. p. 384.

² Agatharchides, *Peripl. Rubr. Maris*, ap. *Geogr. Gr. Min.* tom. i. p. 63. Diodorus Siculus. Strabo. Solinus, c. 33. Pliny gives the following estimate of the extent of the spice woods.—*Sylvarum longitudo est schœnorum xx. latitudo dimidium ejus. Schœnus patet Eratosthenis ratione stadia xl. hoc est pass. quinque D. Aliqui xxxii. stadia singulis schœnis dedere.* lib. xii. c. 14.