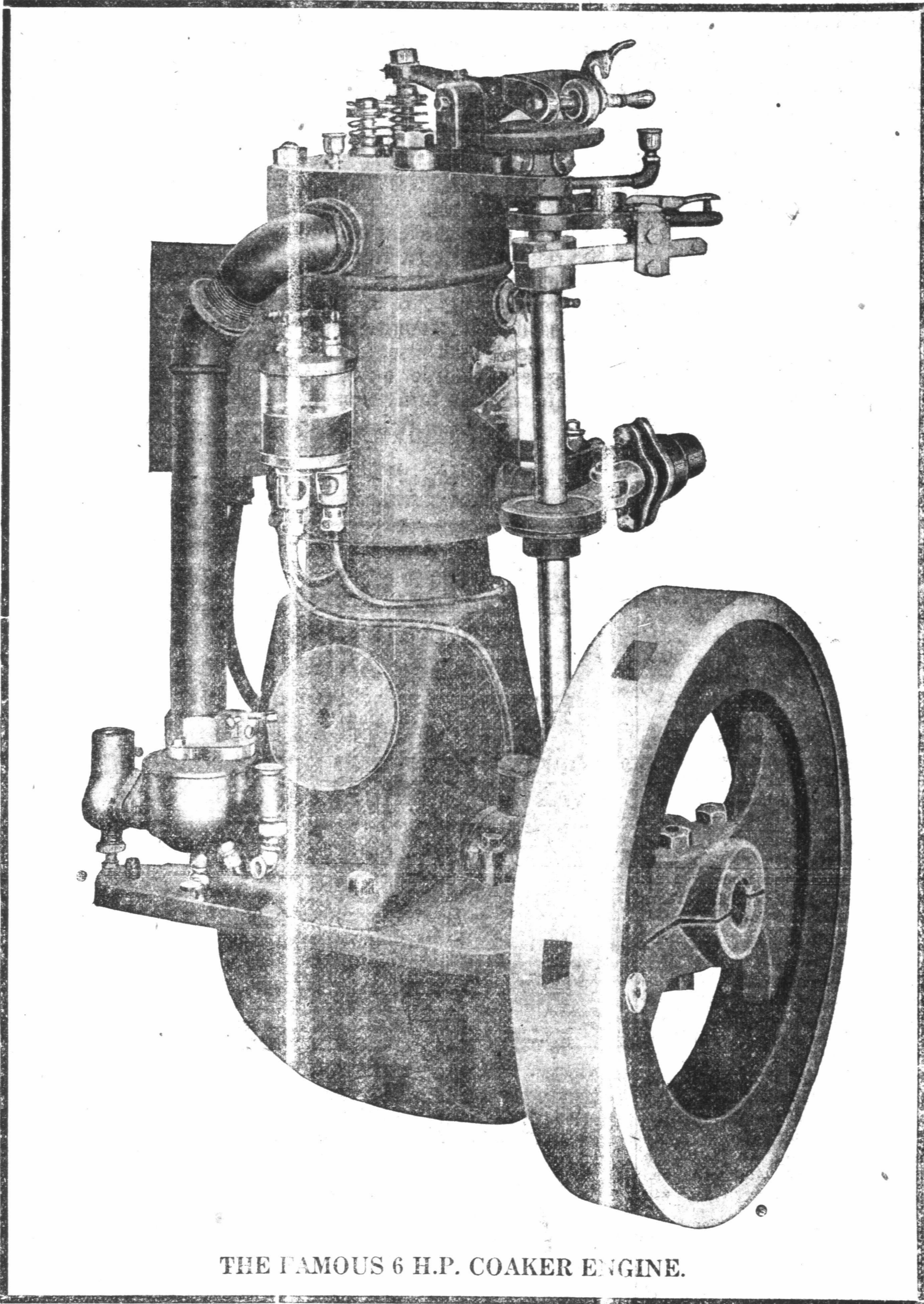


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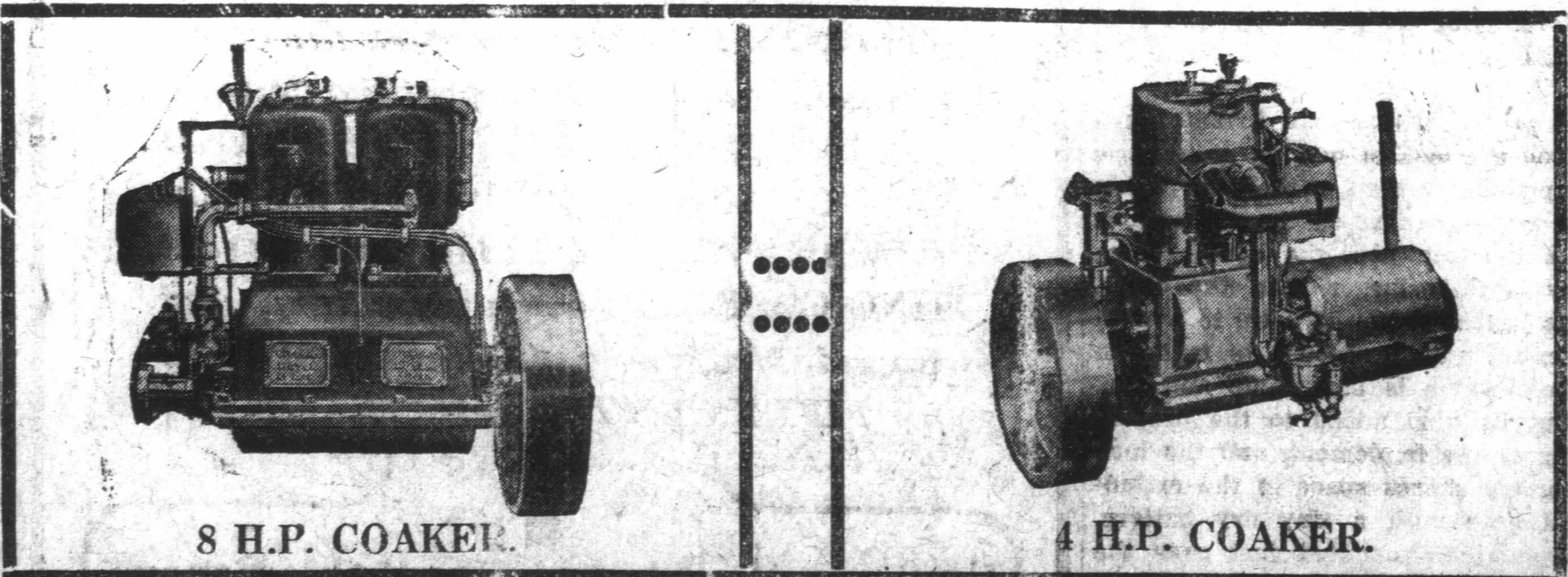
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Something About BAGDAD The City of the Kalifs

By WILLIAM WARFIELD,
in Harper's Magazine, November, 1915.

THERE are certain names of cities that are endowed with a rare poetic feeling that never fails to stir romantic sensations in our breasts. Whether it is by reason of the musical quality of their syllables, or merely the associations that have grouped around them in nursery tales or familiar poems, I hesitate to say. But it is certainly true that however tender the romance, however beautiful the poem, there are certain names so full of glamour and music that they cannot fail to add their fascination. Such a name is Mandalay, which I think would live for us with its sunshine, and its palm-trees, and its tinkling temple bells, even if Kipling had not used it to embellish one of his most popular poems. One of the most familiar of these names, one that is most intimately associated with mystic legend, is that of Bagdad. Such a mass of fable surrounds this name that it seems almost impossible that such a place should exist in fact. Like Xanadu, it seems an enchanted place, situated upon the banks of a fairy river that appears on earth only long enough to leave the palace walls. We think of it as the home of one man, Harun-al-Rashid. Its raison d'être to most of us is in a group of tales, in which lamps and jars and carpets play parts that were never intended for such articles. Such at least was my early impression of the city of the Kalifs, and it was with visions of the Arabian Nights that I set out to wander in the streets of Bagdad.

Of the ancient history of the towns that preceded Bagdad upon the same site we know practically nothing. Babylonian bricks have been discovered far beneath the level of the modern city, and in the days of Chosroes there was a market town of some local importance in the same place. But Bagdad itself was founded in the eighth century of our era by Mansur, who made it his capital assuming to himself the dignity of Kalif, the successor of the Prophet and head of the religion of Islam.

It will be remembered that Mohammed provided that he should be succeeded by a duly elected Kalif from the tribe of the Koreish, the hitherto unimportant tribe from which the quondam camel-driver sprang. The first selections were made from his companions, or disciples, and they lived in the holy city of Mecca until two of them, Omar and Ali, disputed the succession. The former found his support in Syria, where at Damascus, he practically had made his home. Thence he conducted military operations against his rival, whose supporters were the people of Mesopotamia. There Omar succeeded in throwing him, and he fled to Persia, where he set up as the lawful successor of the Prophet with the title of Imam, which he handed down to his descendants by Fatimah, daughter of Mohammed himself. He was succeeded by eleven Imams, who are the chief saints, with Ali, of the Shia sect which now comprises practically all the Persians.

Omar made Damascus his capital founding there the hereditary Omayyad Kalifate. His followers formed the Sunni sect, which is the orthodox sect of Islam, and includes most of the Arabs, the Turks, and the Moslems of India and China. The Omayyads were twelve in number, and ruled most of the Moslem world for a century, spreading their empire across north Africa to Spain. The last of them was overthrown by the Abbasid Mansur, who established his dynasty in his new city of Bagdad. This dynasty was essentially Asiatic, and the western conquests gradually fell away. Fire an Omayyad set up an independent Kalifate in Spain, with Cordova as his capital, and a century later Egypt became the center of another dynasty, the Fatimids of Cairo, and Syria soon fell to them. But the Abbasids retained, nevertheless, a very large empire stretching from Syria and western Asia Minor to Central Asia, the Afghan Mountains, and the western frontiers of India. For nearly five centuries they ruled with Bagdad as their capital, when the royal residence was moved up the Tigris a short distance to Samarra. During all that period of time they had no serious enemies except the Byzantine emperors, with whom they were a constant war. Their overthrow was finally accomplished by the Mongols under Hulagu Khan, who took Bagdad in 1258. In the sack that followed, the last of the line was killed, and the city was reduced for a time to almost nothing but a heap of ruins.

In the sixteenth century Bagdad was taken by the Sultan Suleiman, the Magnificent, ally of the emperor Charles V., who marched eastward after his unsuccessful siege of Vienna and had himself proclaimed Kalif in the city of the Abbasids. From him the Sultan of Turkey has claimed the lawful succession to the Kalifate, and is recognized to-day as the successor of the Prophet by the orthodox, or Sunni Moslems. This is in direct opposition to the provision of Mohammed himself that none but a member of the tribe of Koreish might succeed him, which furnishes the shahs with their reason for denying his authority. The Sunnis overcome this difficulty with characteristic Oriental sophistry.

The model of Bagdad was the old Persian capital of Ctesiphon, situated only a few miles away. Doubtless also most of the builders employed by Mansur were Persians, for his desert Arabs were not versed in that art. Persian influence was conspicuous from the first, and the chief advisers of the Abbasids were all Persians until the time of Harun-al-Rashid. They belonged to the famous Harmeid family whose power began with Khalid, Mansur's vizier, and ended with Jaffar, who used to accompany his master Harun in his incognito excursions through the streets of his capital in search of adventures that are familiar to every child. Despite his romantic picturesqueness, Harun was a weakening, and like many another Oriental tyrant his last days were marked with shocking cruelties, one of the worst of which, was the slaughter of the whole Harmeid family at a feast that has become a proverb with us to-day.

This influence has made Bagdad essentially Persian in appearance. Especially is this true of the sacred edifices, in which the domes and minarets are quite like those of Isaphan and Meshed, and bear no resemblance to the more familiar types of western Islam to be seen at Cairo and Constantinople. This is true despite the fact that of Mansur's original "Round City" no vestige remains above ground, and of buildings that date back to the days of the Abbasids we have but few.

The modern city is situated below it and mainly on the east bank, while the older city was on the west. The western quarter is small and almost entirely Shia, a great stopping-place for the thousands of Persian pilgrims that pass through every year on their way to and from their sacred city of Kerbela. There are also many permanent Persian residents, whose chief business is with the pilgrims, and who look after the graves of their seventh and ninth Imams, which are just outside the city of Kazimein.

The east bank is essentially Arab and contains the principal bazaars, the great mosque, and all the Sunni mosques and tombs. It originally grew up around the palaces of some of the later Kalifs, and was surrounded by a semicircular wall. This is now practically in ruins, only a series of mounds remaining with a depression where the moat was. A few gates remain that date from the days of the Kalifate, but others have been built in Turkish times. Of interest to the antiquary are two relics of the Kalif Mustansir dating from 1223 and 1236. The first of these was originally a college, and is now used as a custom-house; the latter is a minaret in an outlying part of the city which is in a most unfortunate state of disrepair. Even older is the Khan Orthma, which dates from the twelfth century and contains some beautiful carvings. These buildings were all built for strength, all of brick laid in mortar of the best possible quality, but used sparingly because of its scarcity. There are many ruined mosques and tombs in and about the city which are generally octagonal in shape, roofed with shallow domes set on squinch arches. The latter, however, are often covered with a dome resembling a pineapple, composed of a series of alveolate niches, or squinches, set in converging course, one above the other. The best example of this is the reputed tomb of Stt Zobeida, wife of Harun-al-Rashid, situated near west Bagdad.

But the most interesting thing to the casual visitor is the street life, which is to be observed most easily in the bazaars or market-places. Like those of Cairo and Constantinople, these are the main streets of the business section, covered with a vaulted roof, formed generally of squinch arches, with shops bordering on either side, arranged like the chapels on

either side of the nave of a Gothic cathedral. Light is furnished only by occasional openings in the vaulting, and so the scene is always dim, but often rendered beautiful by long sunbeams that come in at a sharp angle through the little windows, and lie diagonally across the passage. The best way to describe these busy marts is to ask the reader to come with me for a stroll through the city and point them out as we go along.

We step out of the door of the Tigris Hotel and turn to the left in the crowded street. Look out for those donkeys! They will run over you rough-shod if you do not. Look at them as they go by. Big, white fellows they are, as strong as horses. Notice the blue beads that they wear around their necks to avert the evil eye, and the embroidered halters hung with charms against spavin. They are carrying bricks to be used in rebuilding these dilapidated houses, for now you can see that the front walls of all the buildings for a hundred yards have been torn down. This was done by Nazim Pasha when he was vail, pursuant to a plan he had formed to build a splendid boulevard through the heart of the city. Unfortunately, he chose a line through the gardens of the British residency and set his engineers to undermine the wall. The resident protested and offered to co-operate on another route, but in vain. So he remembered how Wellington placed a British battery on the Pont de Jena in Paris when Blucher wished to blow up that offensively named structure, and went and did likewise. When the road-builders saw the scarlet-clad sepoy on the wall they soon ceased undermining it, for, though the governor-general might have the right to undermine a wall, serious complications might follow the knocking down of a British battery. So the boulevard was abandoned.

But we must be moving on. These shops on either side are kept by Jews that by a firm of Parsees from Bombay. The shop with the green uniformed officers standing before the door is the government dispensary. Now we are getting into the old business section. See that whitewashed building with a balcony all around the second story; it is a typical coffee house where many of the prominent merchants gather. Let us pause here a moment and notice some of the passers-by.

This tall, sharp-faced man is a wealthy rug merchant. Notice his flowing cloak made of softest camel's wool with a beautiful silky lustre. His vest and belted robe, worn under the cloak reaching to the ankles, are of fine gray broadcloth. His green turban proclaims him a descendant of the Prophet. The man besides him is a mollah, or priest. His undergarments are of the same soft gray as his companion's, but his cloak is harsher in appearance. As he brushes by, you can see it is of very tightly twisted, closely woven camel's hair without the gold embroidery the other shows. His turban is pure white, the priestly color.

These other men now passing are of a poorer class. Their cloaks are less handsome, made of wool or goat's hair dyed in various shades of brown or striped brown and white. Their undergarments are of brightly colored cotton cloth. Instead of the aristocratic turban, they wear a kerchief of cotton folded diagonally and held in place on the head by a double circlet of woolen yarn.

See that group of dirty, shabby men in baggy trousers, felt hats, and flapping vests of the same material. They are hamals, the burden-bearers of the bazaars. They come from the hills north of the desert or from Persia, and are of the Kurdish race. They can carry enormous weights on their backs. There goes one now with a load of fire-wood. Yes, it is a man! Look under the load and you will find him.

Notice the man in the tall, black-felt hat with a black scarf around it. He is a Persian merchant and wears under his cloak, as you see, a jacket and baggy trousers. He is a very jolly sort and exchanges much banter with his friends in the balcony.

Around the corner we enter a bazaar. Most of the Bagdad bazaars are of this type. The narrow street is covered by a vaulted roof. On either side are stalls in which the vender sits across-legged behind his wares, which are displayed on the floor before him or hung on the fingered shutters that close his shop at night. Each trade has a bazaar in a street, or group of streets, of its own.

Come this way and let us stroll down the clothing market. Everything is serene and quiet. Neatly folded cloaks are displayed upon either side. Gaily colored kerchiefs hang upon open shutters. Manchester piece-goods are temptingly unrolled before the unwary wanderer. Here a group of men are embroidering the brilliant, native-silk cloaks mosque of Abdul Kadir. The main part of the building is covered by a huge, low whitewashed dome, beside which, in curious contrast, is the most beautifully decorated dome in the Mohammedan world. It is covered with

tiles making a design like a beautiful Persian rug, both in tasteful treatment and subdued coloring. The cylindrical wall below is similarly decorated. Below a ring of arabesque is the most exquisite tile-work in the world. The minarets are of almost equal beauty, while the gardens about the mosque are among the most lovely in Bagdad.

This shrine is a great resort for pilgrims, especially from India, where the Kadriyah dervishes—an order founded by Abdul Kadir himself—are very strong. It was built soon after death of the Shiek in 1253, and so must have been quite new in the year of the Mongol invasion that witnessed the fall of the Abbasids. To this the present successor of Abdul Kadir, the Nakib, as he is called, owes his pre-eminence in the religious world of Bagdad. The Kalifs had jealously protected their religious hegemony lest rivals rise against them, but they had not had time to fear the successors of ever so holy a man as Abdul Kadir, and so the Nakib had no great difficulty in stepping into their shoes and establishing no little local prestige. The present Nakib is a quiet but progressive man whose influence is generally considered to be very good.

Near the mosque is a tekiyah, a place for the entertainment of pilgrims. Several broad courts are surrounded by storied arcades that provide lodging for thousands of pilgrims. Men of all the moslem nations are there to be seen, washing at the fountain and walking in the shade of the gardens. This is one of the great meeting-places of Islam, where all races and peoples that follow the Prophet come together and realize the widespread and singular unity of their religion. Pilgrimage is the great bond that unites all Moslems, whether they dwell by the holy sites in Hejaz, in the confines of Europe, or in distant Hindustan, or still more remote China.

From this great shrine it is only a short drive to the American consulate, where we may dismiss our carriage and pay our respects to the consul. The consulate is in the southern part of the city, not far from the river. Near by is the British residency, where we were received by the acting resident, to whom we were provided with letters. This official, though called a resident, is really only a consul. He owes his title to the fact that he is under the India office, and not the foreign office, and so ranks as a representative in a native state in which the government

(Continued on page 7)



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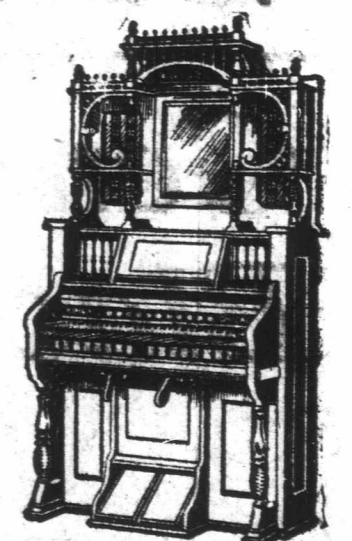
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