

# Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXVI., No. 21

MONTREAL, MAY 24, 1901.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

## Bedawin Women.

(By M. Jennie Street.)

Not the least interesting among the peoples of Bible lands are the Bedawin—wandering Arabs who dwell in the deserts around Palestine, and often pitch their black tents or 'houses of hair' on the sunny plains of Galilee or in the valley of the Jordan. There are many distinct tribes of these remarkable people, and some of them are large and powerful, possessing as many

there are mongrel, low-type nomads, who are little better than thievish gipsies, and who live in a state of dirt and squalor.

Perhaps it is a libel, but some people who know them say that the Bedawin never wash; but, whether from lack of soap and water, or through long exposure to the hot sun of the desert, their skins are unusually swarthy, so that their finger-nails gleam white by contrast. The men are often handsome, always picturesque, and though the older women are anything but attrac-

and convenient for its wearers, the Bedawin woman's attire is hardly likely to win the approbation of civilized eyes.

It invariably consists of a big loose blouse of cotton stuff dyed dark indigo blue, with immense pointed sleeves. When it is new this garment trails on the ground, and its owner looks almost dignified; but hard wear soon reduces it to such a state of dilapidation that it is surprising its wearer can contrive to keep it together.

The ladies in the photograph are quite respectably dressed—for Bedawin women. In many cases, as Dr. Selah Merrill says, a Bedawin woman's costume can only be truthfully described as a bundle of blue rags, patched and stained and faded.

Generally speaking, the women of the Bedawin have a happier lot than their sisters among the settled Arabs. Polygamy is not common in the tents of the wilderness, and it is said that a Bedawin man regards his wife 'as a precious jewel confided to his care.' Certainly many Bedawin matrons appear to receive a good deal of respect, and they have a much more free and dignified bearing than the over-worked, ill-used 'fellahât,' or women of the villages. They do not wear face-veils, and though they will sometimes cover their faces while talking to a male stranger, their intercourse with the opposite sex is not nearly so restricted as it would be in a town or a village. But they have to work—in some ways—harder than their husbands. Tasks that the men disdain, such as collecting firewood and fetching water, fall to them; and they have to mend the tents, cook the meals—not very elaborate ones—look after the children, help in the care of the flocks, and assist in the queer, haphazard sort of packing that is undertaken when the tribe moves from one encampment to another.

Unlikely as it seems when we look at such typical women as those in the photograph, one of the greatest delights of the Bedawin women is the adornment of their persons. Of course they have their own ideas about it. Their faces and hands are tattooed with more or less elaborate designs in blue; their hair is frequently dyed red or some other inappropriate color; while they are intensely fond of jewellery, and wear as much of it as they are able to get. Their taste in ornaments may be guessed at from a story told by Dr. Merrill, in his 'East of the Jordan.' He says that some Bedawin women once visited a friend of his, and with their usual inquisitiveness asked a great number of questions about her belongings. At last one of them took up a button-hook, and inquired if it was not an earring!

Like other Eastern women, Bedawin mothers are passionately attached to their children, especially to their sons, and nothing is considered too good for a Bedawin boy. It is a common and very pretty sight to see a naked urchin sitting on his mother's shoulder and holding fast to her head with his strong little hands; and the Rev. J. Neill has pointed out that this ancient fashion of carrying children has one great advantage—it prepares them for the riding that forms such a frequent experience in their later life. They are bright-eyed, quick-witted little creatures, these small Ishmaelites of to-day; and it is



BEDAWIN WOMEN WITH THEIR CHILDREN,

as ten thousand camels, besides sheep, goats, and horses, and owning thousands of tents—it is a curious fact that the Bedawin always estimate the size of a tribe by the number of its tents—a rough-and-ready sort of census that is not of much use to statisticians.

Other tribes are small and poor, hardly more than large families; and besides these

tive, many of the younger ones are as 'comely' as the sunburned Shulamite. They have dark eyes and glossy black hair, and they are generally short, slight, and wonderfully erect. Perhaps that is because their dress is much more rational than the garments of a fashionable English lady! Still, although it is rational in many respects, and—we must suppose—comfortable