



THE BEDOUIN OF THE DESERT.

THE Arab is a living evidence of the fulfilment of prophecy, for he has been in very truth "a wild man," his hand has been against every man, and every man's hand against his, and, though he has "dwelt in the presence of his brethren," Ishmael has been blessed, and made fruitful, and multiplied exceedingly, according to the promise made to Abraham, and he has become a great nation. Tradition has great weight with the Arab, and tradition asserts that the ancient Arabians derived their religion from Abraham and Ishmael, that the Kaaba, the sacred temple at Mecca, originally descended from heaven in answer to Adam's prayer after his fall, that it was then a tabernacle shut in by curtains of light, and an exact copy of the temple round which the angels went in paradise.

When Adam died, the legend goes on to say that Seth built a representation of the holy shrine, of stone and clay, on the same site that had been occupied by the miraculous edifice, this latter having disappeared at the death of him to whose prayers it was granted. Then came the deluge, and swept away the temple of Seth, which was rebuilt afterwards by Abraham and Ishmael, and it is to the successor of this patriarchal edifice (which is said still to occupy the exact situation of the heavenly tabernacle) that the Arab makes his pilgrimage, and to

which, wherever he may be, he turns his face when he prays.

As regards the performance of the prayers enjoined by the prophet, the Arab is somewhat remiss. His errors, however, are rather those of omission than of commission. As to food and drink, he obeys as strictly the injunction of his creed as did Jonadab, the son of Rechab, and his brethren the commands of their ancestor, and nothing would induce him to taste wine or spirits, or eat of forbidden food.

In other matters of conscience too, the poor ignorant Arab sets an example which may with advantage be followed by those who profess a purer creed. There is a trusting simplicity in his faith, an unselfish earnestness in his zeal, that puts to shame the carelessness of many a Christian. He does not search for excuses to enable him to evade the rules laid down by his religion, or to make his faith suit his desires.

The Arab is extremely superstitious, and while the unity of God is the very basis of his belief, he pays a kind of homage to other supernatural beings. He has also the most implicit trust in the virtue of charms and amulets, and almost invariably wears one or more about him. The Arabs who follow the caravans are poor and patient, and never seem to grow weary. They walk along lightly and cheerfully by their camels, in whose well-being most of their thoughts seem to be absorbed, for very often one single camel is all the worldly wealth possessed by the man who trudges at its side.

Their dress consists of a kind of shirt fastened round the waist with a leather girdle, ornamented with tassels, and of an *abbayah* of camel's hair and cotton, in broad perpendicular stripes of brown and white, thrown over their shoulders. This garment falls in heavy graceful folds, and gives an air of dignity to the meanest figure. The head-dress is a cotton cap that was white years ago, and over this is spread a thick bright-coloured kind of handkerchief, or more probably, a piece of cotton stuff that has seen better days, which is tied round the head with a rope of camel's hair, so that over the forehead, and at the side of the face, the stuff projects so as to shade the physiognomy from the burning sun. On the feet are rude sandals made of hide or the skin of fish, and, in some places, of plaited grass.

As for weapons, the Bedouin is generally armed with a long spear, or with a rude matchlock having a very long barrel, and he considers the latter arm to add greatly to his importance.

The short stick which our Arab carries in his turban has been perpetuated for nearly four thousand years, upon granite, and basalt, and marble, and is identical with that carried by almost every Arab in our days from the Euphrates to the Nile. Their sandals, too, have as high an antiquity; and there is every probability that when Joseph guided his wife and the infant Saviour of the world across the shorter desert separating Egypt from the land over which Herod tyrannised, that he met with many such wanderers, and may himself have carried such a stick, and worn such sandals.