

time have told less unfavorably, from the Christian point of view, upon the Arabs of Arabia than upon the scattered but probably equally numerous portions of the race in North Africa. Romanism with its idolatry, on the one hand, and the scepticism and atheism which are the reaction from it, on the other, are the only forms of religious opinion, under the general name of Christianity, which the Arabs of North Africa have been acquainted with. The one they contemptuously reject, but the other is secretly spreading among the more cultured classes, especially in Algeria and Tunis, where French education is rapidly extending, and the state of mind it produces is even more unfavorable to the reception of the truth than the most fanatical forms of Mohammedanism.

The isolation of Arabia has to a great extent preserved it from these forms of error, while there has been nothing within the borders of the peninsula itself to strengthen or resuscitate faith, or effectually to counteract the disintegrating forces of sectarian division, Persian speculative thought, and, more perhaps than either, the indifference to all religious questions, which seems, according to some authorities, to be a characteristic of the race, and which in the case of the Bedouin is said to have led even Mohammed to despair of their conversion. In point of fact, Islam from the very first seems to have taken far less hold upon the Arabs than might be supposed. Immediately after the death of its founder a general revolt from his teachings took place, and for centuries the popular religion seems to have been little more than semi-paganism. Wahabecism, which was an attempt to reinstate the religion of the prophet by his favorite weapon, the sword, has failed egregiously, and is now in the last stage of decay. The Arabs remain Mohammedans simply because they know of nothing better; fanatical in some parts, doubtful and bewildered in others, not because they have rejected the Gospel, but because they have never heard it. The Bedouin, constituting perhaps a fourth or fifth of the population, are for the most part Mohammedan only in name, observing the prescribed forms in the neighborhood of towns, but speedily casting them aside on regaining the desert. Yet there are men among them not without reverent thoughts of the Creator, derived from the contemplation of His works, thoughts which, according to Palmer, take sometimes the form of solemn but simple prayer. A missionary who some years ago spent more than two months with one of these tribes, living with the Sheikh, and accompanying them in their wanderings from pasturage to pasturage, found them willing though not particularly interested listeners, and singularly amenable to the Word of God as the one authority in matters of faith. The Sheikh, seeing that the missionary disliked travelling on the Sunday, inquired the reason, and willingly accepted the word of the Book as decisive upon the point, and indeed upon every other point, and from that time the tribe never marched upon the Sabbath. How sad it seems that so few of the race have as yet come under the sound of the Gospel!

In the cities and towns there is, of course, a more rigorous observance