

power behind the throne at Constantinople. The tribes near Aden, and the entire South Coast, including Oman with Muscat, are in one way or another under subsidy or 'protection' by the English, who rule the Gulf, and have a voice at Busrah and Bagdad. Wide, wild Nejd bends to the iron sceptre of the greatest Arab of our day, Ibn Rasheed, the Ameer of Jebel Shommar. For the rest, nomads roam the free desert, acknowledging no Sultan save the sword; they hold the parliament of war or peace in the black tents of Kedar. Thus, within the last fifty years have the schisms of Islam, the turmoil of Arab rebellion, and the diplomacy of English commerce, burst the barriers of the land of Ishmael for the All-conquering Son of Isaac; the very cradle of Islam is almost unveiled for the heralds of the Cross." To which I may add that Bahrein, the name given to two islands which lie just off the coast of El Hasa, and are the centre of the pearl fishery, has in a remarkable manner been preserved from Turkish aggression, and is ruled by an Arab Sheikh under the control of the British Resident at Bushire. The islands have a large population, are the nearest point along the coast to Nejd and all Central Arabia, and are therefore of the utmost importance as a mission station for an advance in that direction. In all these political arrangements we clearly trace the overruling hand of God, curbing Turkish aggression, suppressing Wahabee fanaticism, and so preparing the way for His Gospel. There is not room to dwell here upon other influences which have told in the same direction, such as the extension of commerce and intercourse with India, and the spectacle of the beneficent results of the British Government in that country, in Aden, and in Egypt.

But of yet greater interest is the question of the present religious condition of the Arab races. Does Islam retain its hold upon them as firmly as ever? How does their present mental attitude toward it, and toward the Christianity which it once supplanted, compare with that of the past ages and with that of the Arabs of North Africa? The question can only be lightly touched upon here. To treat of it at all satisfactorily would need a wider and fuller acquaintance than we yet possess, not only with the extent to which the outward forms of their religion are observed, but also with the inner thoughts and life of the people. Arabia is an immense country, about three fourths the size of India. Vast portions of it have as yet been unvisited except by a chance traveller passing hastily through, and having little real intercourse with the inhabitants. There may be lying, deep below the surface, phases of religious thought in parts of it with which we are wholly unacquainted. Has Christianity quite died out in the course of ages, or are there still faint memories and traditions of it which have influenced the religious ideas of the present day? We know not. It is certain, however, that in another country which might be named such a survival of as remote a past has actually taken place, and may yet prove a powerful factor in the conversion of its inhabitants. In general terms, however, it may perhaps be said that the influences of