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### **Travels and adventures in Egypt, Arabia and Persia**

**Fogg, William Perry**

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Chapter X. On the red sea

## CHAPTER X.

### ON THE RED SEA.

Dangerous Navigation—The Gateway of Tears—The Wind Always Ahead—Our Steamer Named after a Hindoo Goddess—Mount Sinai in Sight—"Dolce Far Niente"—Jeddah, the Port of Mecca—Yusef Effendi—The Sacred Banner—Mohamet Benaji—Pilgrimage to Mecca—We Visit the Governor and the Prince of Zanzibar—Elaborate Speeches—The Tomb of Eve—A Moslem Tradition—The Prince and his Harem come on board—Not Visible to Outsiders—The Persian Pearl Merchant—Pearls of Great Price—The Prince's Treasures—"Right, Left, and Ace"—I Decline an Invitation to Zanzibar—Mocha, the "Coffee City"—How the English Acquired Perim, the Key to the Gateway.



WHEN the new route to India was opened across the Isthmus of Suez, it was supposed that sailing ships would no longer plod their weary way round the Cape of Good Hope; but five years' experience has shown that only ships propelled by steam can navigate with any degree of safety, the treacherous current and dangerous reefs of the Red Sea. There are but few lighthouses, and many

valuable ships are lost every year upon the sunken reefs, in spite of the utmost care of officers and pilots.

The native Arabs never start out on a voyage across the Red Sea in their trading boats or *bugalahs*, without

putting up a prayer to Allah for safety. They call the narrow straits at its foot, Bab-el-Mandeb—"The Gateway of Tears." It is fourteen hundred miles from Suez to Aden, which is situated ninety miles beyond the Gateway opening into the Arabian Gulf. Its greatest width is two hundred miles, and the shores everywhere seem lined with sandy deserts or sterile rocky mountains. No rivers empty into this vast caldron, and very little rain falls upon its parched and desolate shores.

The wind blows in from the north through the Gulf of Suez, and from the south through the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, but near the middle of the Red Sea it is generally calm. Here the heated air seems to rise into an immense funnel, and the temperature is almost intolerable.

That the navigation of the Red Sea is both difficult and dangerous, is testified by the many wrecks scattered along its coasts, from Suez to the Indian Ocean.

As we pass a high volcanic island called Jubaltare, we are shown where a magnificent steamer of the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company, from Bombay, with over two hundred passengers, was lost with all on board. The channel is not wide, and near the shores are many dangerous rocks and treacherous currents. They say the wind on the Red Sea is always ahead, whether the vessel is bound up or down. The shores, which are either barren, sandy deserts, or sparsely inhabited by hostile tribes of Arabs, offer no hospitable reception to the shipwrecked sailor.

Our steamer bears the name of a Hindoo goddess whose home is on the Ganges. She is of iron, strong and swift, English built and manned. Our captain is a jolly sea-dog, a thorough John Bull, a careful navigator, and on the bridge night and day, almost sleepless in his anxiety for the safety of his ship. As the "Gunga" is to be our home

for a month or more, we came on board with no little solicitude as to our accommodation and comforts for so long a voyage. We find ourselves the only cabin passengers, and in very pleasant quarters. But our bright prospects are somewhat clouded by the announcement that the steamer is to stop at Jeddah, the port of Mecca, about half way down the Red Sea, and take on board three hundred pilgrims on their way home to the several ports in Arabia and Persia. But an old traveler will never borrow trouble. So we enjoy to the utmost the few days that we have the ship all to ourselves. The Hindoo goddess glides steadily and rapidly through the smooth water, the weather being perfect, and the Red Sea seems inclined to redeem its bad name—or perhaps is lulling us on, to show its teeth by-and-by.

On our second day from Suez, Mount Sinai was seen far away on our left, its summit wreathed in fleecy clouds; but between us and its base is a long stretch of sand hills and barren desert.

To pass away the time, we read a little, write a little, smoke a little, and sleep a good deal. We lie on deck under the awning and gaze for hours over the smooth, dark blue water, where it meets the lighter blue of the sky in a clear, sharply-defined horizon. It is a *dolce far niente*, only to be matched on the Nile. Tired of gazing and dreaming, we read aloud from the only two books we could find in Cairo that seemed adapted to our proposed journey—"The Arabian Nights" and "The Koran."

The fourth day we slacken speed, as we are approaching the port of Jeddah. For twenty miles out, the charts show long series of coral reefs, and the channel between them is very intricate. There is no light-house, and a ship would not venture to approach the coast by night; but on some of the most prominent reefs, the Turkish government

has erected beacons of white-washed stones. The Arab pilot directs our zig-zag course, making several very sharp turns, sometimes so near that we can toss a biscuit into the seething water that breaks in long lines over these treacherous sharp points of coral, that would punch through our iron plates like pasteboard. We drop anchor in front of the town, near a dozen other steamers, English, Turkish, and Egyptian, and one an "Austrian Lloyd," from Trieste. In the inner harbor, protected by a long, sandy spit of land, we see a fleet of Arab *bugalahs*, with high poop decks and lateen sails, like Chinese junks. These native craft are from fifty to two hundred tons burden, and run boldly in and out among the reefs along the whole coast of the Red Sea. Several hundreds are engaged in transporting pilgrims, more than twenty thousand of whom come every year to Jeddah from the African coast alone. The city has an imposing effect from the sea; its tall, clean-looking, white buildings, extending for a mile or more along the beach, with a background of high mountains, beyond which, fifty miles inland, lies the sacred city of Mecca. A high wall encloses the town, with towers at intervals, and two strong forts at the angles towards the sea. Gates on three sides are open to all, but to the east is the Mecca gate, through which none but Mahometans are allowed to pass.

A boat with a Turkish flag comes alongside, and the health officer holds up a tin fumigating box, into which our ship's papers are dropped. These being found satisfactory he comes on board, followed by the ship's agent, Yusef Effendi, who tells our captain that he has three hundred pilgrims, or *Hadjis* waiting passage, among them the Prince of Zanzibar, Sayd Hammoud, who has engaged all the vacant first-class cabins for himself and his harem. The prospect of entertaining a live prince and an uncer-

tain number of princesses, stirs the loyal blood of our skipper, and the stewards are at once set at work to prepare the rooms for the royal party. My friend F. and myself are put into one state-room, which we do not grumble at, as His Royal Highness will go with us no further than Aden, where he takes another steamer to Zanzibar.

Yusef Effendi, though an Arab, speaks very good English, as well as French, Italian, and Turkish, and politely invites us to go on shore in his boat. This afternoon the silken screen which for the past year has hung before the sacred *Caaba* in the Temple at Mecca, and which is renewed every year, a present from the Sultan of Turkey, is to be taken with great ceremony on board a Turkish man-of-war, to be transported to Constantinople, where it will be cut up into small pieces and distributed as a most precious relic among the faithful.

We reach the shore just in time to see the procession pass through the streets, headed by the Turkish Governor or Pasha, and escorted by a large body of troops. A hundred camels, gaily decked with rich trappings, on which the "crescent and star" are embroidered in red and gold, are followed by a long cavalcade of horsemen, and behind them are thousand of *Hadjis* on foot. All business is suspended in the bazaars, and as the camel which bears the sacred banner passes, the head of every Mussulman bows to the ground. A few years ago an occasion like this was the scene of a fearful outbreak of fanaticism on the part of the pilgrims, and several hundreds of Christians were massacred. But we witnessed the show from an upper window in Yusef Effendi's house, and were in no danger of being molested. At the shore the banner, or carpet, as it is sometimes called, was placed on a barge covered with Turkish flags, which was towed by the man-of-war's boats to the ship, where it was received with a salvo of cannon.

After being served with *chibouks* and coffee, Yusef conducted us to the warehouse of his firm, and introduced us to his senior partner, Mohamet Benaji. I doubt whether any great London or New York merchant prince could have received us with more dignified ease and grace of manner. With true Oriental politeness, he places at our disposal his house and all it contains. Yusef says his word is "good as the Bank of England." He is a very fine-looking old gentleman, and is evidently held in great respect by all about the place. Every one who approaches him bows very low and kisses his hand. His rich turban, long, gray beard, and loose flowing robe of costly materials, give him a patriarchal appearance, while the urbane and dignified expression of his face would make him a model for a painter. Seated on the divan beside the patriarch, we are once more regaled with fragrant mocha and *narghilehs*, served on silver trays by black slaves. Yusef then shows us through large warehouses where are piled whole cargoes of coffee, rice, dates, and sesame or millet, packages of mother-of-pearl and tortoise shells, gum (arabic), and other products of this country, of which over \$5,000,000 in value are shipped yearly from the port of Jeddah.

The streets and bazaars through which we pass, are the cleanest of any Arabian city I have ever seen; the buildings are mostly of stone, some four and five stories in height. There is no glass, but each window has a projecting lattice work of elaborately carved wood, which admits a free circulation of air, but hides from view the faces of the inmates. The business of Jeddah is largely dependent upon the pilgrims, of whom over one hundred thousand arrive and depart annually. The Koran enjoins upon every true believer, if his circumstances and health will permit, to make at least once during his lifetime, the pil-

grimage to Mecca, and all who comply are promised certain immunities in this world, and a higher seat in paradise hereafter. The faithful come from every Mahometan country on the globe—from Persia and India in the far East, from the South coast of the Mediterranean and the Western shores of Africa, often accompanied by their wives and children. The thousands who cross the deserts in caravans suffer incredible hardships, and many perish by the way, but they believe that to die on a pilgrimage insures immediate entry to Heaven. The Koran permits them to do a little trading by the way, towards defraying the expense of these long journeys, but not so much as to distract their minds from their devotional duties, which must be most scrupulously observed. The opening of the Suez Canal has greatly increased the facility of reaching Mecca by water, and the English steamers engaged in this traffic find it very profitable. The sacred season at Mecca occurs usually in December or January, but the Arabian months being lunar, it varies from year to year.

The next day we were again invited on shore by Yusef Effendi and taken to the house of the Turkish Pasha, to whom we were duly presented. We were received with great politeness, but as he spoke only Turkish, our conversation had to be carried on through an interpreter. Arabic and Turkish are quite distinct languages; the latter being the dialect of the *Court*, is spoken only by the officials, who are all Turks; the former is the commonly spoken language of Arabia, and universally written and printed. I was introduced to the Governor as an "American Pasha and a great Traveler," and I know not with how many other titles Yusef magnified my importance. He was exceedingly civil, made room for me beside himself on the divan, ceremoniously presented to me some of his officers,



and ordered the inevitable "hubble-bubble" and coffee. He then addressed me in some very complimentary speeches, which I tried to answer in the same vein.

"A great traveler like yourself," he said, "who has been all over the world and seen the wonders of China and India as well as of Europe, must be a very wise and learned man." I bowed, stroked my beard, and assuming a modest air replied, that "Allah grants wisdom to whom it pleases him, sometimes more to those who stay at home" (here another bow to his excellency,) "than to those who seek knowledge in far countries."

I was obliged to decline his invitation to dine the next day, on the plea that our ship was to sail in the morning. The prospect of a few more such elaborate speeches was too much for me, and with an apology for occupying so much of his valuable time, we took a ceremonious leave.

Our next call was on the Prince, who was to be our fellow passenger to Aden. We found him with his legs curled up on a pile of soft Persian carpets, in the courtyard of a large house, and surrounded by a dozen or more attendants. It is said that when the Queen's Ambassador, Sir Bartle Frere, was lately presented to the Sultan of Zanzibar, he was received by that shady monarch without rising. But H. R. H. the Prince, pulled his bare feet from under him, slipped them into richly embroidered sandals and rose to shake hands as cordially as if I had been accredited from President Grant. Then motioning me to be seated, he called a very black negro, whom we came afterwards to know as Mauritio, to act as interpreter. Prince Hammoud is a pleasant looking fellow of about twenty-two years old, with large, lustrous and beautiful eyes, (probably from his mother) clear cut Asiatic features, and light coffee colored complexion. He is quite fat, and looks lazy and good natured. His turban was of the gayest colors, his vest of

embroidered silk, and his *bernous* of blue cloth ornamented with gold braid. An elegant silver mounted sword, of the Damascus pattern, lay beside him on the divan. When it was explained to him who we were, he seemed much



INTERVIEW WITH PRINCE HAMMOUD.

pleased, and we at once entered into conversation. As he glanced at my guard chain rather curiously I took out my watch, which he examined very carefully, then handed me his own for my inspection. But nothing pleased him so much as the half dozen card photographs which I call my "family picture gallery," especially those of a very important little personage whom we know at home under the familiar name of "Dumpling," and his mother. He called his attendants around him to show these pictures, and seemed incredulous of the relationship I claimed to young D., although I pointed to my gray hair as proof.

I asked him by pantomime whether he had any children,

but he shook his head, and a shade of disappointment passed over his face. I then ventured to ask through the interpreter, how many wives he had. Mauritio looked shocked and declined to put the question. So my search for knowledge in that direction came to naught. A polite enquiry after the welfare of his harem would give mortal offense to a Mussulman, although he may be as proud and vain of his children as any Christian parent.

Leaving the Prince, after a pleasant interview, we went just outside the walls to see the Tomb of Eve, who, according to tradition, is buried here. When our first parents were cast out of paradise (which was located in the seventh Heaven,) they fell, Adam in the Island of Ceylon, and Eve in Arabia, near Jeddah. In stature they equalled the tallest palm tree, and the tomb of our great mother, which we see here, is sixty cubits long and twelve in width. They believe that after a separation of over two hundred years, Adam was, on his repentance, conducted by the angel Gabriel to a mountain near Mecca where he found his wife. The mountain is known to this day as *Arafat* ("Adam's Home,") and here they lived for many years as happily as could be expected under the circumstances.

To-day the pilgrims are coming on board in the native boats, bringing large quantities of baggage, and great rope-bound chests and bundles strew the deck like an emigrant ship from Holland. As they pass up the gangway ladder, the first officer takes possession of all their arms, consisting mostly of antique silver mounted swords and daggers, more for show than service, which some yield up with a bad grace. But this precaution is necessary to prevent trouble, and it is explained to them that their weapons will be returned when they leave the ship. We stand on the quarter deck watching the arrival of a large boat, in which are ten or twelve ladies, closely followed by another filled with

luggage and servants. This is the Prince's family, and there is great curiosity to catch a glimpse of their faces. But their heads and forms are completely enveloped in folds of white cloth, and as they climb up the gangway and waddle across the deck to the ladies' cabin, we can see nothing to indicate whether they are beautiful as Houris or black as Erebus. But we notice as they shuffle along in clattering sandals, that their bare feet are guiltless of "balbriggans."

A row of sailors and firemen are curiously peeping over the ship's bulwarks. The captain scatters them with an angry (perhaps disappointed) growl,—“Get away there! didn't ye ever see a woman before?”

The Prince himself with his grand vizier, who seems to be the Mentor in charge of the whole party, did not come on board until the next morning, just before we got under way. Besides the Zanzibar party, which consists of over sixty persons, including slaves and attendants, we have taken a wealthy pearl merchant with four ladies. They are bound to Busheer in Persia, and claim first class accommodations. A thick green curtain has been stretched across the after part of the main cabin, behind which they are to be located. But Abdul Azziz seems hard to please. The captain and Yusef assure him again and again, that his ladies will be quite secure from intrusion behind this screen. It is evident that he thinks his Persian “Lu-lus” to be “pearls of great price.” In person Abdul is not attractive, having lost one eye, and in complexion he is quite dark. The curtains are carefully pinned together and secured, and at last he seems satisfied and immensely relieved when he has deposited behind them his precious parcels. It will hardly be safe for either of us to venture within ten feet of the curtain, unless we dare brave the scowl of that male dragon of a

Cyclops. So we leave him. "They may be young or old, dark or fair, we do not know nor do we care."

For three days we have now been quietly steaming down the Red Sea, since leaving Jeddah. The pilgrims, from prince to slave, have all become settled in their places. Most of the time is passed on deck, and the prince and I have become very good friends. He reads and writes Arabic, and has shown me his Koran elegantly bound in red morocco with clasps of gold, which he took from its silken case and touched reverently to his lips and forehead. But he would not permit me to handle it. He opened his trunks and displayed his treasures of jewelry, amber and pearl bracelets, etc., and boxes of perfumes of which all Orientals are very fond. He is quick to learn, and I have taught him to speak and write the numerals and several English words. Having seen Mr. F—— and myself play euchre, nothing would satisfy him until initiated into the mysteries of that fascinating American game. Last night at sunset when the *muezzin* called the faithful to prayers, Sayd Hammoud was playing his favorite game. At that moment a new deal had given him a "lone hand," right, left, and ace, so the line formed on deck with the *cadi* in front, facing towards Mecca, had to wait until the prince finished his game. I was showing him one day a small silk American flag. He took it and very deftly twisting it around my fez in the shape of a turban, exclaimed, "You Arab Americaine, go Zanzibar." But his invitation, afterwards several times renewed, I must decline. Familiarity has bred its proverbial result. It is of no use for him to urge that at Zanzibar I shall eat six times a day and soon grow as fat as himself. I have given him the photographs he admires so much, on which he has written his name and mine in Arabic, and with some beautiful coral ornaments as souvenirs, I shall have to say

farewell to-morrow at Aden, to the good natured young Prince of Zanzibar.

Fifty miles above the entrance to the Indian Ocean, on the east coast, we pass within sight of the half deserted coffee city of Mocha. Its minarets glitter in the morning sun, and a few small native craft can be seen in the harbor, but it is no longer a place of commercial importance, the trade in its principal staple having been transferred to Aden.

The little British island of Perim, lies in the middle of the gateway at the entrance of the Red Sea. Here is a lighthouse and a fort, where a regiment of troops is stationed. This key which commands the gates is a rocky island some acres in extent, situated in mid channel, and we pass so near that a biscuit might be tossed from the high rock on board our steamer. The Suez canal being a French work, and Egypt under French influence, the seizure of Perim by the English was especially annoying to their neighbors. It happened in this wise: The French emperor had determined to take possession of the little island, and despatched a fleet for that purpose, which put into Aden for coal. The governor of course invited the French admiral and his officers to dinner, and regaled them with unexceptionable champagne. In the course of the evening some of the junior officers "let on" that they were bound to Perim. The shrewd old governor penciled a note to the harbor-master to delay the coaling of the French ships; and the same night two British men-of-war left Aden and started up the coast. The next day after a ceremonious leave-taking and courteous farewell to their British hosts, the French fleet sailed for Perim. But when they arrived, to their great mortification and chagrin they found the British flag flying, and a great show of guns in position. Whether they put into Aden on their return, history does not say.