A PARADISE LOST

By WALTER J. KAHLER

The recent events in the Lebanon have again called attention to the Near East and its restless population. The following article takes us to Mesopotamia, the heart of this area.

The author is one of those travelers who spend their whole lives on the move from one place to another, and who, when one meets them in some remote corner of the earth, can tell one with the same matter-of-factness about their experiences in Tibet, on the Congo, or in the Cordilleras.

Aside from many other travels, he has made four great journeys during the last ten years: by car from Lapland through all the latitudes to South Africa, and from Berlin to India; on foot with native bearers through southeastern Asia; and on horseback across South America. The war has put a temporary stop to his travels, and he is now living in Tokyo.—K.M.

WHEN, coming from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, you have crossed the range of the Lebanon Mountains and climbed the Anti-Lebanons on the other side of the valley which is the continuation of the deep Jordan Depression, you see below you the Syrian Desert, an absolutely flat expanse spread out like a tablecloth thousands of miles eastward to the Persian Gulf.

This desolate piece of country, known as Mesopotamia, looks back upon an ancient history. Countless tribes and races have crossed it in the course of the centuries. Jews, Hittites and Ammonites, Persians and Greeks, fought on its soil; Romans, Egyptians, Tartars, and Saracens struggled for possession of this country to be used as a steppingstone for further conquests. All these peoples have left traces of their cultures. Assyria and Babylon are strewn with the remains of former cities, of temples, towers, and palaces. Babylon, where Nebuchadnezzar lived, the city of the hanging gardens; Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham's birthplace, where once stood the temple of the moon god; Kish, the first Babylonian capital after the Flood; Ashur, Erbil, Niniveh, and many other sites of the past, are now among the favorite hunting grounds of historians and archaeologists.

PALMYRA, ECHO OF THE PAST

Once upon a time, on the western edge of the Syrian Desert, there lay, like a port on the sea, Tadmor, also known as Palmyra, the capital of the Palmyrian Empire. It was a station on the ancient transcontinental trade road which carried the goods passing between the Roman Empire and the distant lands of the East. Long camel caravans came from Central Asia and crossed the desert in order to transport the wares of the Orient to the ports of the Mediterranean: slaves, perfumes and spices, cotton, hand-wrought products of copper and brass, tea, porcelain, paper, precious stones, carpets, and bales of silk.

In Tadmor the camels were watered and the caravans supplied with guides and mounted guards to protect them against predatory nomads, who from time immemorial regarded the plundering of travelers as their traditional business. Here agreements were made with the influential sheiks through whose territory the caravans had to pass. It was the same system that is still used here today and which is known as rifaq. Each tribe has its territory within which it demands tribute from all travelers. In the district of Deir ez Zor, for instance, one must pay about £1 per head not to be molested.

The high income from the duty exacted in Palmyra for the passage of goods enabled this town to develop into a splendid metropolis. Wide streets flanked by columns and statues were constructed, the most magnificent of which led directly to the temple of Baal.
Yet the history of the Palmyrian Empire is a short one. After the murder of King Odenathus, a vassal of Rome, who had expanded the empire to the borders of Egypt and had united all of Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia under his scepter, his ambitious wife Zenobia risked repudiating her allegiance to Rome. Fortune did not favor her. Tadmor was stormed in 272 A.D. by Emperor Aurelian's troops and burned down to its foundations. The beautiful queen was taken prisoner and led through Rome in a triumphal march. Since then the remains of the walls, houses, and columns of the town have been covered up by sand. Even the name was forgotten until in 1678 merchants from Aleppo rediscovered Palmyra. Today the place is nothing but a small, miserable, dusty cluster of mud huts and a passport office for the border traffic with Iraq. The actual border between Syria and Iraq is 200 kilometers further east in the desert and is simply marked by a signboard.

TRACKS IN THE DESERT

There are two bus lines crossing the desert between Damascus and Bagdad: a Syrian one and the Nairn Transportation Company, whose luxurious motor coaches are equipped with Pullman compartments, washrooms, telephone, and a refreshment buffet. They cover the distance of 870 kilometers in about twenty-four hours, with a short stop midway at Rutbah Wells.

The authorities at Damascus are very strict about not allowing single cars to start out alone into the desert, for there have been several cases of lonely drivers losing their direction and getting lost in the desert. But as we were asked to pay £5 for the privilege of swallowing the dust of other cars, we chose the route via Palmyra. Here, too, there is no actual road, but one cannot get lost as long as one follows the telephone lines. Moreover, there are several stations of the Iraq Petroleum Company interspersed at distances of about a hundred kilometers along this route where one could find help in case of need.

Early in the afternoon we reached "T 3," the first of these pumping stations, whose round, aluminum-painted oil tanks we had seen shining from afar. As everywhere else where Europeans live in solitude, the people here were very glad to have visitors. It meant a break in the constant monotony and provided an excuse for an extensive dinner and countless glasses of whisky. The guest room to which we were shown was furnished like a first-class hotel room with a private bathroom, electric light, radio, telephone, and several electric fans. The quarters of all the employees were furnished with the same comforts. Besides a correspondingly high salary, this is the only means of keeping the employees at the stations, which lie like little islands in the vastness of the desert.

MODERN HERMITS

The considerations determining the construction of the living quarters were heat in summer, cold in winter, and flies all the year round. For these reasons the rooms face north and south, the roofs are almost as thick as the walls, and all windows are screened. Everything is done to make the occupants' stay as agreeable as possible. The wide avenues connecting the whitewashed houses with the pumping plant are tarred to keep off dust and are planted with young acacias and casuarinas, which in a few years will provide welcome shade. There are ice-making, mineral-water, cold-storage, and central-heating plants; a laundry, bakery, canteen, and a well-equipped hospital, which has mostly to deal with trachoma and other diseases of the eye. There are even vegetable gardens, chicken, geese, pigeons, and rabbits. The artesian well supplying the water needed for the whole station is 200 meters deep.

The technical equipment of the stations consists of an engine room containing three five-hundred horse-power motors which supply the power for three large pumps. Each of these sets in turn runs day and night without stopping for three weeks. Then it is cleaned and prepared
for its next turn. The pump house in which the oil is forced on under great pressure into the main pipeline is separated from the engine room by a gas-and waterproof wall.

These costly and strategically important plants supply the fuel for the entire British Mediterranean fleet. In order to protect them from sabotage and damage, each station, consisting of about a hundred acres, is surrounded by a high wire fence. The staff of some seventy native workers and their families live outside. In addition to this, the plants are protected by a small fort, in which the employees can find refuge with their families in case of disturbances. These small fortresses, some 75 by 55 meters in size, have bastions at two of their corners; they are equipped with a wireless station, telephone, water tanks, an electric generator, as well as food, weapons, and ammunition for two weeks. Company police patrols equipped with planes and machine guns are on the move day and night to keep a constant watch on the entire line with its length of about a thousand kilometers. A number of emergency landing fields along the line serve the same purpose.

WHERE NOAH BUILT HIS ARK

Troublesome swarms of flies and a disagreeable alkaline odor announce that you are approaching Hitt. The odor comes from the asphalt beds found here, as well as near Qaiyarah, sixty kilometers south of Mosul. The presence of pitch always indicates the vicinity of oil deposits, and at Qaiyarah German oil experts had discovered oil even before the Great War. The asphalt is to be found in these beds in a semiliquid state.

The presence of salt and asphalt in the environment of Hitt was known as long ago as in Biblical times. The ancient Babylonians already used pitch to impregnate their bricks to make them more durable. People from Ur and Babylon went on foot to Hitt, where they built boats, loaded them with salt and pitch, and made their way home in them on the Euphrates.

The history of Hitt is closely connected with the story of the Flood and Noah’s ark. Tales of a great deluge that covered almost every country are to be found in the legends of many races, even among those that had nothing whatever to do with Mesopotamia. Hence it is a moot question, whether the event mentioned in the Scriptures was limited to the great valley between the Euphrates and the Tigris. However, it is not impossible, since in those days Mesopotamia was the center of the inhabited world.

Noah, too, had come to Hitt to fetch pitch. The Bible tells us that it poured for forty days and forty nights. This may be somewhat exaggerated; but it is quite possible that exceptionally heavy rains fell in the Kurdish-Armenian mountains which caused the Euphrates and the Tigris to overflow their banks and flood all Mesopotamia, drowning the greater part of the population. Noah had probably just completed his ark. He salvaged his domestic animals and waited till the Deluge subsided.

The fact that a deluge of extraordinary proportions once took place in Mesopotamia has been proved by archaeologists. In the course of the excavations of the ancient Chaldean city of Ur, north of Basra, a shaft was sunk nineteen meters into the earth. The individual layers through which this shaft passes clearly show the sequence of the cultural periods. In the uppermost nine meters, eight different periods are discernible. Then comes a layer of sand, two to three meters thick, in which no traces whatever of human activity have been discovered. This layer obviously represents the sediment of the Deluge. Under it there are again several layers which, like the topmost eight layers, contain the remains of houses, fragments of pottery, and other objects of daily use.

During the excavations in Niniveh, the capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire, a large library of some twenty thousand earthenware tablets was discovered under the ruins of Assurbanipal’s palace. In deciphering them, some were found which told of a great flood disaster.
These tablets with their cuneiform writing, the majority of which are now in the British Museum, are among the oldest documents of literature ever to have been found. The rudiments of this form of writing were invented as early as about 4500 B.C. by the Sumerians, a non-Semitic race which had immigrated from the east, apparently from the regions north of the Indus, into Mesopotamia. The characters were engraved with a flat style on soft clay tablets, which were then hardened by baking in an oven.

CRADLE OF MANKIND?

The Biblical theory, according to which Mesopotamia, "the country of two rivers," is the cradle of the human race, has found some support through neolithic finds, which archaeologists estimate at being twenty thousand years old. The early history of the country saw three different races: the Semitic Akkadians, who ruled Mesopotamia from Babylon; the Sumerians in the southern alluvial plain of the Euphrates and the Tigris, whose oldest capital, excavated by German archaeologists, was Uruk, the Erech of the Bible; and the Elamites in the eastern mountain country, whose capital was Susa. These three peoples fought for two thousand years for supremacy until Hammurabi mounted the throne of Babylon about 2000 B.C. This was the beginning of the Babylonian-Hittite-Elamite period, which lasted until about 600 B.C., to be followed by the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. After that, Parthians, Romans, Arabs, and Turks ruled the country. But the struggle for this hotly disputed region continues to this day.

THE CURSE OF OIL

The presence of coal, iron ore, copper, and other important ores is always a misfortune for countries which are not strong enough to defend themselves. But the greatest misfortune to such a country is oil. It is the liquid gold toward which all the great powers of the world turn their eyes.

The soil of Iraq, Arabia, and Iran is especially rich in deposits of this coveted substance. Indeed, the subterranean mineral-oil deposits of these countries are among the richest in the world. Thus
it is not surprising that the interests of the three allied powers, Russia, England, and America, clash in this territory. Within the last seven years, the Standard Oil Company of California has built highly modern refineries on the pearlfishing island of Bahrein in the Persian Gulf which produce about a million tons of oil every year. Slightly to the north of this island, too, in the small independent state of Kuwait, oil has been discovered, as well as in Saudi Arabia, where an American oil company made the first drillings in 1936. Among the richest wells are the oil fields near Dizful in southern Iran, 250 kilometers northeast of Basra. One of the most modern refineries is to be found here. The oil is carried by a pipe line to the port of Abadan on the Persian Gulf, where it is loaded into tankers.

These rich fields, so far in British hands, at present form the focal point of American interests. The United States, upon whose abundant oil production motorized war has already made such great demands that private consumption has had to be curtailed even in the oil-producing states, is now trying to force England out of this territory on the pretense that she urgently requires these wells for the supplying of her motorized troops in the Near East and North Africa, since the overseas supply by tanker has become too risky on account of the German U-boats. Once American interests have obtained a foothold in the Iranian oil territory, they will not let themselves be forced out again by England when the war is over.

THE FIRES OF GEHENNA

The high mountain walls of the Taurus and Zagros, whose snow-covered peaks provide a dramatic background in winter to the monotonous plains of Mesopotamia, form the natural borders of Iraq toward the north and the east. At the foot of these rugged mountains lie the two old towns of Erbil and Kerkuk, both surrounded by high walls. Like all historical sites in Iraq, they too stand on hills consisting of the foundations and remains of long-vanished cities.

Kerkuk is one of Kurdistan's chief market places. Within its walls there stands an ancient mosque said to contain the grave of the prophet Daniel. Not far from the town there is a field, about an acre in extent and called "Jehennum" by the natives, in which, since the memory of man, tongues of flame have leaped up from the ground. This field is the "Gehenna" of the Bible, where, according to legend, Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the eternal fire, the "fiery furnace." Today this region presents a fantastic spectacle, especially at night, for here burn like giant torches the gases escaping from the smokestacks and water coolers of the oil plants.

The first experimental drillings, which led to the discovery of one of the most productive oil fields in the world, were made here in October 1927. The first drilling had just been started and the surface of the earth hardly pierced when a mighty jet of the coveted liquid spurted high up into the air. This happened so unexpectedly that hundreds of barrels of oil were lost before the gusher could be brought under control. Ten years later, thirty-two wells were already being worked. In the years 1937/39 the total annual oil production of Iraq averaged 4½ million tons.

In Kerkuk the oil undergoes a preliminary refining and is then pumped through two pipe lines to the ports of the Mediterranean. For 255 kilometers these two pipe lines run side by side; after crossing the Euphrates they separate. The northern arm leads for 650 kilometers via Palmyra to the Syrian port of Tripoli. The French used to get a quarter of the total yield, but after the collapse of France the British blocked this pipe line. The other arm goes via Rutbah Wells and through Transjordania to the port of Haifa in Palestine, 800 kilometers away. Through this arm, 900 tons of oil an hour are pumped to Haifa, where it is refined and loaded into tankers.

Work was begun on these pipe lines in 1931. Huge trench-digging machines laid a trench seventy centimeters wide
Temple columns, and gates bear witness to the past glory of Palmyra, which in Roman times held the key to the trade route between Europe and Asia.

Camel and donkey skeletons with their necks bent backwards with thirst are a grim reminder of the dangers of desert travel.

High walls and barbed wire surround the pumping stations of the Iraq Petroleum Company. The author's car has been stopped at the entrance while he is being questioned by the guards.
The vast throne room of the ruined palace at Ctesiphon. Built only of brick, it has withstood the ravages of many centuries.

Entrance to the holy grave-mosque of Kadhmuin near Baghdad. It is covered with designs executed in colored glazed tiles, and the great dome over the main prayer hall is plated with pure gold. Infidels are strictly prohibited from entering the mosque.

A troop of Arab desert cavalry enjoying themselves over a cup of coffee and a pull of the narghale.
and two meters deep across the desert and the Lebanon range. The pipe line required no less than 150,000 lengths of pipe; 12,000 Bedouin laborers were employed on this job for four years; and the total costs amounted to some ten million pounds sterling.

**THE BIRTH OF IRAQ**

When, after the Great War, the old Ottoman Empire burst into fragments, one of which was Mesopotamia with its oil areas of Mosul and Kerkuk, England saw to it that the League of Nations handed over the mandate of this strategically highly important bit of country to her. The newborn political child that had been brought into the world by Versailles was baptized Iraq according to an ancient geographical term. The country covers approximately 350,000 square kilometers—the borders with Saudi Arabia and Transjordania have not yet been definitely fixed—and feeds a population of 3½ millions. In compensation for this loss, Turkey was granted a royalty on the oil production for the next thirty years.

With the birth of Iraq, England started a new game of "divide and rule" on the chessboard of her Near East policy. There was one man above all whose increasing power and popularity among the Arabs was a thorn in the side of England: ibn-Saud.

**KING OF THE WAHABITES**

Abdul-Aziz ibn-Saud was the ruler of Nejd and the head of the independent tribe of the Wahabites. The Wahabites are the Puritans among the Mohammedans who look down disdainfully on the less orthodox Moslems and on the coastal Arabs who have been softened by European influence. Fanatical champions of their faith, they adhere strictly to the laws of the Koran, eschewing alcohol and even tobacco, to which all other Arabs are addicted. They permit no infringement of their dogma, are wholly intolerant of other faiths, and abhor deceit, lies, and adultery.

Ibn-Saud rules this fanatical tribe of desert dwellers with great skill. In spite of his sixty years of age he shows a surprising youthfulness. Before him, Arabia was a land of constant insecurity. Attacks on caravans and pilgrims, theft and murder, were the traditional right of all Bedouins. Ibn-Saud has done away with all this. He has suppressed tribal feuds and punishes vendettas as murder. He is fighting corruption and controls prices. Indeed, he has even succeeded in settling nomads who have been accustomed to moving around all their lives from country to country. Crime has become rare since ibn-Saud rules in Nejd, and believers can now make pilgrimages to Mecca unmolested.

During the Great War England began all kinds of dangerous experiments in the Near East without apparently taking future consequences into account.

Colonel Lawrence had succeeded through skillful diplomacy and by means of his personal popularity among the Bedouins in obtaining for the Allies the support of King Hussein ibn-Ali of the Hejaz against the Turks. England thereupon spread propaganda among the various Arab tribes for the purpose of setting up her protégé King Hussein as a second caliph to replace the Sultan of Turkey. By this means England hoped to split the supporters of Islam into two camps. She furthered the Pan-Arabian movement and was greatly surprised when in 1920 this movement turned into a large-scale revolt in Iraq, which cost hundreds of Tommies their lives. The British garrison in Bagdad was seriously imperiled by the nationalist rebels, and it was only through the support of the pro-English Nakib of Bagdad and of
Sayid Talib, the most influential man in Basra, that England was able to master the situation. In giving their support, these two men assumed that the Nakib would become the head of the new Iraqi national state, while Sayid Talib would receive the post of Minister of the Interior; for England had promised that the Iraqi people would be allowed to choose its rulers from among its own ranks.

However, when Winston Churchill became England’s Minister for the Colonies, the British policy toward Iraq was suddenly reversed. In spite of all the warnings on the part of Sir Percy Cox, then High Commissioner for Iraq, Churchill declared at the Cairo Conference in March 1921 that England had decided to make Faisal, Hussein’s son who had fled from Syria, king of Iraq. No one can maintain that this choice was a particularly happy one, for Faisal was for the Iraqians not only a foreigner but, being a Sunnite, belonged to the orthodox branch of Islam, while the majority of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia were Shiites and, as such, his declared enemies. (See “Islam and Society,” page 388, December 1942 issue of this magazine.)

The rumor soon spread in Iraq that England intended to frustrate the coming national election; and Sayid Talib declared openly in an after-dinner speech that the people would never recognize Faisal as their ruler. Sayid Talib was promptly arrested and exiled to Ceylon. A sham election was held among the various sheiks at which no one, not even the Nakib, dared to vote against Faisal. A few weeks later Faisal landed in Basra; his reception among the population was a very cool one.

The Iraqi people have never forgotten this fraud. King Faisal died a mysterious death in Bern on September 8, 1933, on his return home from England.

The administration of Iraq has provided Great Britain with many a headache. On several occasions there were revolts lasting for many months. After much fruitless negotiation, England had no choice but to bribe the independent Bedouin sheiks by considerable sums of cash to keep their tribes quiet. This is an expensive method if one recalls that in 1921 the British control of Mesopotamia cost English taxpayers ten million pounds in subsidies and in the following year eight million pounds.

In 1932 the efforts at independence on the part of the population were at last crowned with success. On October 3 of that year Iraq was accepted in the League of Nations and recognized as an independent state. England withdrew her High Commissioner but reserved the right of maintaining military bases in Bagdad and Basra for the protection of her air line Cairo/Karachi. Naturally London also supervises the Iraqi Government’s foreign policy, so that de facto there has been little change from the country’s former status as a protectorate.

EX-PARADISE

Mesopotamia is known to us from the Bible as the Garden of Eden. I find it difficult to understand that Adam and Eve could discover no better place in the world to spend their honeymoon; for, apart from the Kurdish Mountains and the Zagros range in the north, which forms the border to Iran, Iraq is the flattest, most monotonous, and most desolate land one can imagine. Through this wilderness flow the two rivers Euphrates and Tigris with their brown, muddy waters, till they unite in a delta in the swampy alluvial plain of Shatt el Arab. Their banks are lined with reeds and dusty date palms, which serve as a hiding place for the scanty wild life such as jackals, wolves, hyenas, partridges, and waterfowl.

But in olden days this may have all been different. The soil itself is very fertile and offers all that is needed for luxuriant growth. The only thing lacking is regular irrigation to turn Iraq once more into a flowering garden. But since the Mongols destroyed the ancient irrigation system during their invasion in the thirteenth century, the greater part of Mesopotamia has, as a result of its
subsequent rulers' neglect, remained a desert. Each of the ancient Babylonian dynasties had contributed its share toward improving the irrigation systems. The largest of these was the Nahrawan Canal, whose trenches watered more than 340 kilometers of the land. Today one can hardly recognize this canal in the narrow depression in the earth.

Now the only means of irrigation are the ancient Persian naouras, huge water wheels of about ten meters in diameter, to which are fastened a number of earthenware jugs. At every turn of the wheel these jugs fill with water which they discharge into ditches that distribute the precious moisture to the thirsty fields. Day and night these heavy wheels turn on the banks of the rivers and fill the air with squeaking and creaking.

The population is distributed according to the fertility of the soil in the different areas. In the northern zone there are about seven inhabitants to the square kilometer; in the central desert zone hardly two; while the greatest density of population—about fourteen to the square kilometer—is to be found in the delta area of the Euphrates and Tigris.

DATES AND THE WEATHER

The most important plant, which is the main source of food for the entire population, is the date palm. There are over 30 million of these throughout the country, more than half of which grow in huge plantations in the delta region of Shatt el Arab. Cultivated with the utmost care, there are about sixty different species of date palm in Iraq. The tree reaches a height of 25 meters, and the fruits grow in great bunches weighing from 20 to 25 pounds. Male and female blossoms do not grow on the same tree. Hence the fertilization of the blossoms is done during April by hand and, moreover, still in exactly the same way as is depicted on the ancient Babylonian relief sculptures of Niniveh. While the bunches of fruit are growing, they are protected by little bags from wasps and other insects. The harvest takes place in October. For home consumption the dates are dried for a month in the sun. For export—Iraq supplies about eighty percent of the world's requirements in dates—they are packed while still fresh or pressed into large square blocks.

In addition to the cultivation of dates, there is also agriculture on the lower reaches of the Euphrates and the Tigris. The main products are wheat and barley, also rice, which thrives in the hot, damp atmosphere of the Persian Gulf; other products are cotton, some flax, jute, Japanese peanuts, and maize. Tobacco, tomatoes, onions, melons, pumpkins, and many varieties of fruit are also grown. There are two harvests a year, in April and in the autumn.

Iraq's climate shows great contrasts. During the winter months the thermometer sometimes drops below freezing point, while in summer the temperature often rises to over 50 degrees centigrade in the shade. Spring and autumn are short. The rainy season, with an average annual rainfall of 170 millimeters at Baghdad and 420 millimeters in the Mosul area, lasts from December to April. From time to time very sudden cyclone-like hailstorms sweep across Mesopotamia, representing a serious danger to navigation on the Euphrates and the Tigris.

SONS OF THE DESERT

The sparse vegetation which in spring covers the steppes with friendly green before the scorching heat of summer dries up every living plant, as well as tamarisks and shrubs on the river banks, provide fodder for the herds of the Bedouins and seminomads who go to make up a large part of the population of Iraq.

The life of these tanned sons of the desert, their customs and their clothes, are the same today as in the days of Abraham. There are only two implements of civilization for which they show an irresistible craving: modern military rifles, for which they willingly pay several camels apiece, and luxurious, high-powered American automobiles, which every rich self-respecting sheik possesses.

The wealth of the nomads is counted according to their cattle: sheep, goats,
horses and, above all, camels, with which they move around the country as the pasture varies. What is most important to them is the watering places in the desert. Disputes over the use or possession of such wells have often led to bloody feuds between the various tribes. Around the watering places there is always lively traffic, for they are the goal of all caravans. Sometimes there are more than a hundred camels waiting there for a drink, and the little Bedouin girls with their herds of goat must often wait a long time for their turn, for camels are always given preference.

The home of the Bedouin is the “house of hair.” This tent is composed of hand-woven rugs made of black goat hair and camel wool which are held together by rope and pegs. Similar rugs serve as walls. An ordinary tent is about ten meters long and is set up with its back wall to the wind. In winter the heavy fabric keeps out the wind; in summer the side walls are dispensed with, thus providing plenty of air while the roof gives protection against the hot rays of the sun. A curtain decorated with geometrical designs or stripes of brown camel hair and gray or black goat hair on a white ground of sheep’s wool divides the tent into two parts. The mahram is used by the women and the family, and cooking utensils as well as bedding and saddles are kept there. The more open es shiyg is the “parlor,” in which the husband receives his guests. The home of a sheik corresponds to his wealth in that it is longer and has several “rooms.” In the tent of state there is room for several hundred visitors.

THEIR CLOTHES AND THEIR FOOD

The garments of the Bedouins consist of a white cotton shirt reaching down to below the knees. Over this comes the kibr, a white or striped robe of wool or silk that is open in front. It is held together by a wide leather belt and a shoulder strap. The most important garment, however, is the aba, a dark cloak made of camel or sheep’s wool. It is rainproof and keeps the wearer warm.

At night the nomad rolls himself up in it. A square piece of cloth folded into a triangle protects head, eyes, and mouth from cold, sand, and the sun. A double cord of black goat hair keeps it in place. Sandals made of untanned camel hide complete the apparel.

The women also wear a shirt like the men, but in their case it is dyed a simple indigo blue. They take pride in loading their heads and chests with coins, clips, brooches, beads, and other ornaments, and their arms and legs are also often decorated with numerous silver bracelets.

The Bedouins usually marry within their tribes. The women are bought for a number of camels or goats or a certain quantity of silver. The price is fixed according to the looks of the girl, her working capacity, and her skill in weaving.

The laws of the Bedouins are as old as the Bible. They recognize no borders and no authority, acknowledging only the laws of their own tribe. Each tribe is headed by a sheik, whose word must be obeyed by all. Physical labor and agriculture as carried on by the villagers and fellahs are looked upon with disdain. Instead, the nomads regard it as their sacred right to waylay caravans and pilgrims crossing their territory or to grant them safe conduct against a corresponding toll.

Their food consists mainly of camel’s milk, mutton, rice, and dried dates. All this is fished out of a large common bowl with the fingers and, formed by the hands into little balls, pushed into the mouth.

BY ROAD OR RAIL

Iraq’s means of communications are hardly developed at all. The desert is crossed only by caravan trails. Toward the south there is something like a motor road between Baghdad and Basra on the Persian Gulf; another such road leads via Khanaquin to Kermanshah in Iran. A single shower of rain, however, is enough to turn the dusty mud roads into such a morass that they may become impassable for weeks. The two roads
leading to the oil territories of Kerkuk and Mosul are in a better condition.

Until recently, the railways consisted of the lines Bagdad/Basra, Bagdad/Khanaquin, Bagdad/Kerkuk, and Bagdad/Baiji. The final link of 350 kilometers from Baiji via Mosul to Nisibin, connecting up with the Turkish Taurus Railway, was completed in the autumn of 1940, so that one can now travel on the "Bagdad Railway" from Berlin to Basra with two changes, at the Bosporus and in Bagdad. Another project that is to connect Mosul and Kerkuk with Tabriz via Erbil/Rowaduz is under construction.

FAIRY-TALE PALACE

Not far from Bagdad there is one of the most famous monuments of vanished culture: Ctesiphon. At a distance one can already see the vast hall of the old palace rising above the plain, a miracle of architecture from the days of the Sassanids, the Persian kings who ruled before the advent of the Moslems. The mighty vault of the roof reaches up to a height of thirty-three meters above the ground. Built of brick, with no supports or groins, it has withstood the storms of sixteen centuries. According to legend, the façade of the palace was richly decorated with gems. In the center of the hall, resplendent in the light of golden lamps and candelabra, stood the jewel-studded throne, on which King Chosroes sat in audience, surrounded by his ministers and soldiers. Behind him a magnificent carpet hung down from the ceiling, a treasure of incalculable worth, depicting a landscape. On a golden background, the paths were woven in silver; the meadows were done in emeralds, the rivers in pearls and flowers, trees, and fruit in other colored gems. When the Arabs looted Ctesiphon, this gorgeous specimen fell into their hands. Nothing has ever been heard of it since.

The brilliance of the days of fairy tale has long vanished. Pigeons and bats now live in the nooks and crannies of the old ruin. But the monumental construction of the throne room still arouses the awe of present generations.

SACRED SITES OF ISLAM

Today Iraq, with its black, white, and green flag with a red trapezium and two white stars in it, is an avowedly Moslem country and possesses several Shiite sanctuaries such as Najaf (30,000 inhabitants), which contains the grave of Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law, and Kerbala (65,000 inhabitants) with the grave of Hussein, Ali's son. During such religious festivals as, for instance, that of Muharram on June 8, the day on which Hussein fell in battle at Kerbala in 680 A.D., thousands of pious pilgrims from Persia, Afghanistan, and even India flock to these sacred places of Islam. Old people and invalids do not shrink from the most arduous journey in order to die in the holy city. Many people bring the bodies of deceased members of their family there, for paradise is assured to all those who lie buried in sacred earth.

In contrast to the mosques of North Africa and Arabia, those of Iraq and Iran are gorgeously decorated. The minarets and domes are covered with light blue, yellow, and green glazed porcelain tiles, while the interior of the buildings is decorated with mosaics and mirrors, with gold, silver, and precious stones. The domes of the sacred grave-mosques of Najaf, Kerbala, and Kadhimain, however, like those of Meshad and Qum in Iran, are plated with pure gold. The golden cupolas shine far across the country in the rays of the sun and transplant the onlooker into the fairy-tale atmosphere of the Arabian Nights. Infidels are strictly prohibited from entering these holy places, and caution is also advised in taking photographs.

Other important cities in Iraq are Samarra (30,000 inhabitants), Kadhimain near Bagdad (65,000), the lagoon city of Basra, five kilometers from the Persian Gulf (80,000), Mosul (85,000) and, last but not least, the capital Bagdad with its 300,000 inhabitants.

HARUN-AL-RASHID'S RESIDENCE

Bagdad was founded in 762 by Abdallah-al-Mansur, the "Victorious." Under
the government of his splendor-loving nephew Harun-al-Rashid (786 to 809) the city developed into a metropolis of world renown. Arts and literature flourished, and Bagdad soon outshone Babylon and the former capitals of Mesopotamia. In the following centuries, however, its influence declined again. During the Middle Ages, Mongol hordes descended twice upon Bagdad (1258 and 1401). Tamerlane indulged in his favorite pastime here too by erecting before the gates of the city a tower made of the heads of 90,000 massacred citizens. In later times the population was decimated by disease and floods; and when in the spring of 1917 British troops under General Maude marched into Bagdad nothing was left of the glamour of its past but dusty alleyways, swarms of flies, and the "Arabian nights," for during the summer months the heat in the capital of Iraq is so oppressive that life on the streets does not begin until evening.

Then all the alleys are filled with a colorful mixture of races, with Armenians, Arabs, Persians, Jews, Indians, Afghans, Levantines, Negroes, Kurds, and Bedouins, some of whom can be distinguished by their headgear. Then all the cafés on the roofs of the houses overflow with people smoking narghiles, drinking tea, and playing dominoes.

There is a single wide road that crosses Bagdad from one end to the other. Rashid Street was cut straight through the middle of the city by the Turks during the Great War in order to provide a route of transport for the trucks and heavy weapons of their army. But aside from this Bagdad has remained purely Oriental. On the banks of the Tigris the old-fashioned Persian water wheels still squeak day and night; and on the dirty brown water of the river, queer circular tubs float which are typical of the traffic on the Euphrates and the Tigris. These guffas measure about six meters across. They are made of willow and woven reeds, covered with hides, and calked with pitch. Together with sailing vessels with a forward-slanting mast, they represent the most popular means of transport for people, domestic animals, and the produce of the country.

The dominating colors of the celebrated city are dusty gray and muddy brown. The majority of its two-storied houses are built of adobe bricks. Gray dust lies on the flat roofs and covers the streets and the dry palm fronds which are moved by no breath of air. Against this monotonous background even the myriads of flies seem quite decorative. The only touches of color are provided by the slender columns of the minarets and the domes of the mosques which, with their pleasing designs of glazed colored tiles, look like huge cloisonné bowls turned upside down.

When evening falls and the slanting rays of the sun are reflected from the brilliant mosaic of the mosque cupolas, turning the gray of the houses to rust and crimson; when the moon rises and pours its silver light over the blackness of the Tigris—that is the atmosphere which revives in many a visitor the stories of the life of splendor at the court of Harun-al-Rashid, stories into which Scheherazade, the Arabian teller of tales, wove all the colors of her Oriental imagination. But in the morning everything is gray again.