

Northern Leaders in Thought and Action

WHEN OMAR KHAYYAM, the tent-maker, was writing rubaiyats of inverted bowls, of loaves of bread and jugs of wine and Paradise in the wilderness, his fellow countrymen who more keenly felt the need of divine guidance and blessing were journeying to the Shrine of the Everlasting Fires on the shore of the Caspian sea near where is now situated the city of Baku, a point of more than passing importance during the world war, and even at the present time, because of it being the center of the great petroleum region of Russia.

For thousands of years—as far back as the most persistent of the peering historians have been able to pierce the misty past, and probably for centuries still further back—the Persians came to worship at the shrine of grace known as the Everlasting Fires, at Baku.

This Mecca of the Fireworshippers was the petroleum, or naphtha springs, which existed there, and which had in some manner become ignited and burned constantly. The surface of the earth for some distance possessed the surprising property that fires could readily be lighted in small, shallow excavations of a few inches. By confining one end of a tube in the earth, the other might be lighted, very much in the manner of a gas jet, and a gentle, constant flame would result. The oil-steeped earth scrapings were prized for various purposes—for fuel and light, for lubrication and for the healing of wounds and diseases.

Through many centuries, the Fireworshippers, as they were called, made pilgrimages to this shrine. Many temples were no doubt built while time's cycles ran, but ultimately one which endured until toward the close of the last century. This was a rectangular structure of brick, with a dome characteristic of the architecture of the time and place. At the corners were conduits, or chimneys, through which was ingeniously carried the natural gas from the oil springs, and four bright flames were constantly maintained. About the temple was a court enclosed by a high wall for the accommodation of pilgrims. The gateway was monumental. Above it rose a square tower some fifty feet in height at the corners of which were conduits similar to those of the central structure through which gas was conveyed in the same manner as at the temple, and the bright light emanating could be seen for many miles in every direction.

In later times came Parsee pilgrims from India, descendants of the Fireworshippers, who were driven from Persia in the middle ages by the persecution of the Mohammedans. The Parsee merchants of Bombay, famous for their wealth and enterprise, provided the funds to maintain the fires and to entertain the pilgrims who had journeyed the long and weary road to this mysterious manifestation of Providence. But finally the temple fires were allowed to die and praying pilgrims came no more. Whether from a waning of the religious zeal of the disciples of the faith, or because of restrictions by the Russian government when the territory came under the dominion of the czar, can only be conjectured, in the absence of more intimate knowledge of the circumstances, but with the shifting of possession the neglected fires became extinguished and the temple deserted.

MEN WHO HAVE LED THE WAY AND BLAZED THE TRAIL FOR THE WORLD'S PROGRESS.

ALFRED NOBEL AT THE SHRINE OF EVERLASTING FIRES AND HIS WORK FOR THE WORLD.

TO THIS dead shrine in the year 1878, as near as material at hand can establish the date—only four decades since, a little more than a generation and within the memory of the middle aged of today—came a trio of pilgrims. They were not from the land of Omar, nor from the mystic Indies. They were not from the East but from the North. They were the forerunners of a new epoch, the disciples of a wider knowledge and leaders of universal progress. They lighted new fires—the fires of science and industry which developed the great oil fields of Russia. These pilgrims came from Scandinavia. They were Alfred Nobel and his brothers, Robert and Ludwig, sons of Emanuel Nobel, eminent scientist and engineer, whose genius had, in years gone before, been devoted in a large measure, to the manufacture of explosives for the Russian government. In a few years the new fires at Baku brought forth things surpassing the miraculous to the pilgrims from Persia—things utterly inconceivable to the simple and superstitious minds of the disciples of Zoroaster who for centuries had followed the mentally beaten path as well as physical footway. The fires which had fed the flames of so-called grace were made by the Nobel brothers to serve humanity in a greater measure and higher degree. They were made to serve, not only for fuel and light, and lubrication and healing, but as a force propelling ships of the sea, conveyances on land and equipages through the air, driving the implements of husbandry, turning the wheels of manufacturing machinery and industrial economy and contributing in almost innumerable ways to the arts and sciences and the pleasure and profit of the human family generally.

The oil fields of Russia were the first to be developed and it was the Northmen who led the way. American developments have left the Russian fields far in the background, but that is a chapter for the history of the development of the petroleum industry and we must return to our subject, which is of pioneers.

When a young man Alfred Nobel was

sent to the United States by his father to study under John Ericsson, the famous engineer, also from Sweden, inventor of the universally used screw propeller and of the Monitor, that marvel of its day which at a critical time turned the fortunes of war in the civil strife of the sixties and undoubtedly preserved the union of these great states. On completing his course and returning to Europe he joined his father in the manufacture of explosives. They produced an explosive composed of nitroglycerin and ordinary blasting powder, invented dynamite, gelatinous nitroglycerin and ballastite which led the way to the invention of smokeless powder. Nobel returned to the United States to establish munition factories for this government and the first factory on the Pacific coast was established by him near San Francisco in 1868. This factory is still in existence and operation as the Giant Powder Company and its aid to the allied cause in the Armageddon was by no means insignificant. How wonderfully entwined are the threads of Human destiny!

IN THE CENTURIES to come the fires lighted at Baku by the pilgrims from the Northlands may also subside and the temples reared to science and industry be levelled by ruthless hands and progress of the juggernaut of time. The hours of the wise, however, are lengthened by their thoughts. Alfred Nobel planned a stimulus of progress and development. On his death in 1896, the Nobel Institute was established in perpetuity by his bequests to encourage and stimulate thought and endeavor along five different lines by offering prizes or awards as follows:

- 1st. For the most important discovery or invention in the domain of physics.
- 2d. For the most important discovery or invention in the domain of chemistry.
- 3d. For the most important discovery or invention in the domain of physiology and medicine.
- 4th. For the production in the fields of literature the most distinguished work of an idealistic tendency.
- 5th. For the promotion of the fraternity of nations, the abolishment or diminution of standing armies and the formation of peace congresses.

Nobel's fortune amounted to about ten million dollars and the prizes or awards amount to about \$40,000 each, annually. It is remarkable that he should devote his accumulations in the production of engines of war to promote perpetual peace, and that along the very lines which the nations of the world are now groping after the most stupendous struggle of all history.

The Golden Age is not in the past, but in the future and Alfred Nobel's efforts toward hastening the knowledge of things to come, with their joys and blessings of the more perfect order of the higher civilization, will continue to project the transformed lights of the ancient shrine of Everlasting Fires to illumine the crests of many tomorrows as they roll into the vast sea of yesterdays.

HOW TO LIVE.

Instead of so living that you "can look any man in the face and tell him to go to hell," so live that you can look any man in the face without an inclination to do anything of the kind.

FEATURES SOON TO APPEAR IN THE NORTHMAN.

Who Brought the Catholic Religion to America?

Series—A Chapter of American History.

Series—A Chapter of Scandinavian History.

Series—Sagas of the Orkneys.

Series—Northmen who Have led the World in Thought and Action.

World Events of the Week.

Does the Jew Become an American?

The Greek In America.