

Large Features of Life in the Libyan Desert

Farming, Business and Social Life in the Oases of Tripolitana, as Seen by Frank G. Carpenter

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

HAVE just returned from Mechis, the great oasis which lies on the edge of the Libyan desert, east of Tripoli. It faces the Mediterranean and is an island of green on the edge of this mighty ocean. One of the oases contains more than a million date palms, fully as many olive trees, and vast groves of oranges and lemons. The oases is cut up by roads, much like the streets of a city. Each little farm has walls six or eight feet high and everywhere are to be seen the tall frameworks of the wells by which the ground is irrigated. The motive power for raising the water is cows, camels, donkeys and women. In many places tunnels or long inclined ditches, beginning at the wells and sloping downward for several hundred feet, have been dug, and in these tracks, the cow, donkey, camel or woman trots up and down, dragging the rope, running over a wheel on the top of the framework, which raises the water. At the end of the rope is a huge bag of skin open at both ends. This is dropped into the well, and when it fills, the lower end is pulled up, thus forming a closed bottom, and the whole is dragged high up into the air. The bottom is now released, and the water pours out into a trough, which carries it off into a reservoir. One of these buckets will hold about thirty gallons; and, as the work goes on all day, the supply raised is enormous.

An Oasis Farm.

During my stay I visited some of the oases. They are of all sizes and are beautifully kept. One I remember was cut up by cement conduits, running along on the top of the ground, so arranged that every little tract could be irrigated at will. Under the rich orange groves beds of beautiful flowers were to be seen here and there, and in most places there were flowers growing on the same soil. Over the whole rose date palms, with their rugged trunks, their wide-branched fan-like leaves quivering in the breeze and their yellow fruit shining like gold under the sun. The trees below were loaded with oranges, pale yellow lemons, flaming pomegranates and even with peaches and pears. On the ground itself vegetables were growing, and I saw even alfalfa and grain of different kinds. This garden was in the charge of Bedouins and several of his wives. The women were boiling dates in a pot, about the size of an apple butter kettle, over a fire, out in the open. I don't know whether they were making date butter or date honey, or whether they were merely cooking dates, for sale in the markets. The women were loaded with jewelry. I bribed one with a franc, and she let me take her photograph. The others were more bashful, and they wrapped themselves up in their headscarves when ever the camera was pointed their way.

The Oases of Barbary.

The oases of Tripolitana, or Barbary, as it is often called, contain practically its whole population. They are scattered over a territory one-ninth as large as the United States, and they have altogether about one million people. A large number of these, such as Mechis, are found along the shores of the Mediterranean; others are further south in the desert. In a great depression known as the Fezzan, and in addition there are others in the beds of the dry rivers, where the water supply comes from springs or artesian wells. There are caravan routes leading from Tripoli to all of these oases, and also routes crossing the desert to the Sudan from oasis to oasis. Tripoli is, in fact, the commercial metropolis of the eastern Sahara. It lies almost directly north of Lake Chad, and its routes across the desert are the shortest, although by no means the safest. The routes of the Sahara lead not only to Lake Chad, but also to Tuat and Timbuktu, so that Tripoli gets much of the trade of the French Sahara as well. The French decidedly object to this, and they are now making special inducements for the caravans to land their wares at Ghabes in southern Tunisia. They have policed the Sahara with their camel soldiers and are now sending escorts with such of the caravans as pass that way. So far they have not created the regular markets at Ghabes, and within the past few months the reputation of that port has been greatly injured, because it has no merchants at hand ready to buy out a large caravan when it arrives. The caravans often carry goods to the value of tens of thousands of dollars, and a big capital is required to handle their trade. The last caravan which called at Ghabes had to put its wares upon the steamers there and ship them to Tripoli.



A MOZABITE FAMILY

the oases of Ghat, which lies in the bed of a dry river, and a third is Ghadames. In another dry river some distance away. Ghadames is famous for its great fair, which is held once a year, bringing together traders from all parts of the Sahara. In ordinary times the town has only about 4,000 population, and the fair has to be held on a great plain outside. The city is surrounded by walls and entered only by gates. Its streets are dark passages, with houses built over them, so that going through it is like traveling through the tunnels of a mine.

Gha-dames—I hesitate to write the word, it sounds so much like swearing—is another oasis center of about the same character as Ghat. It has been a trading place since the days of the Romans, and the caravans of the Fezzan, Tuat, Timbuktu and Lake Chad all pass through it. Ghadames is twice as big as Ghat. It is surrounded by a wall three miles in length, but the people live in only one corner of the enclosure. The houses are box-shaped and are so laid out that the women can walk from one to another on the roofs, which are reserved for their use.

Products of the Sahara. The products of the desert are much larger than are generally supposed. The caravans which are now coming here bring quantities of ostrich feathers and also cotton, dates, tobacco and grain, as well as ivory and gold dust, of the Sudan. The output of the oases themselves is greater than that of any similar area on earth. As I have already said,



"AMONG THE QUEER WOMEN OF THE SAHARA ARE THE OULED NAILS"

these desert islands comprise altogether a tract about twice as big as the State of Virginia, and they produce almost every

kind of grain. Outside of them there are vast tracts which are used for the grazing of millions of camels, sheep and

goats, as well as horses and cattle. And of late years a new crop has been found which is bringing fortunes into the Sahara. This last is alfalfa grass. It grows wild along the edges of the desert and upon the pataunas where there is only a slight rainfall. A few years ago this crop went to waste, but now the Arabs are gathering it and it is brought in from everywhere by car and caravan. I saw it stacked up along the railroad in the deserts of Algeria and Tunisia; the trains were loaded with it, and there were mountains of it on the wharves of every port I visited.

Here in Tripoli the alfalfa grass is brought in upon camels. It is picked by the Bedouins, Arabs and Berbers, every blade of it being pulled from the ground. It is packed in bags about four feet wide and eight feet in length. Two of these bags are slung over the hump of a camel, and are thus carried for miles over the desert. When the grass arrives at Tripoli it is weighed upon steelyards and paid for at about \$15 a ton. It is then shipped up like hay and shipped on the steamers to England, where it is used for making the best of book and writing paper. Some of the great newspaper companies of England have put up factories in Algeria for the handling of alfalfa grass; and it is said that its value was originally discovered by the Lloyd's of Lloyd's Register. It makes a much better paper than wood pulp; but it is more costly, and there is no possibility that it will displace the latter.

A large part of the caravan business at the ports is handled by Greeks and Italians. The alfalfa grass is bought by Italians, who act for the English, shipping this stuff to Liverpool and London, and bringing back hardware and Manchester cottons. The date exports also are in the hands of Italians; although the bringing of the alfalfa is largely through native tribes, who make a specialty of merchandising. Have you ever heard of the Mozabites? They are sometimes called the Jews of the Sahara. The Arabs say that while it takes five of their people to beat a Jew at a bargain, it requires at least five racers to get the better of one Mozabite. Indeed, many believe that the Mozabites are of Jewish origin. They are the descendants of the old Carthaginians, who were superior to the Jews in their trading ability, and they have monopolized certain kinds of trade in the desert.

They have seven cities, far down below Algiers in the middle of the Sahara, at just where the caravan tracks cross. They are engaged in commerce there, and also in Algiers, in Tunis and in nearly every trading center of North Africa. These men stay away from home only for two years at a time. Their wives require that they come back every so often, and their wives can claim a divorce if they remain longer. If a man absents himself more than two years, his wife has not one the right to marry again, but she can take possession of all the property belonging to the family and keep it.

I am told that the Mozabite women are true to their husbands. They wear black while their husbands are absent, and make great feasts when they come home. Among the viands served, on such occasions are barbecued camels and sheep. At the same time a dinner is given to the poor, and this, strange to say, takes place at the cemetery. Here the wife plays the Lady Bountiful, sitting on the tomb of her parents, while she hands out the soup and dispenses her alms.

I have seen many of the Mozabites during my travels. They are short, stout and high-complexioned, with features Jewish in cast. They are noted for their singleness. Most of them sleep in their shops, where they sometimes do their own cooking, saving every cent to take home. Love and Marriage in the Sahara. All the women of the Sahara marry young. A girl is often betrothed at 8 or 9; she is married at 12 or 13, and is an old woman at 30. At 20 she begins to primp and look at the men, and something is supposed to be wrong with her if she is not married at 17 or 18. As to the age of the husband, that matters not. He may be 15 or 60, and he may have several wives. The marriage is usually arranged by a female matchmaker, employed by the groom, who is supposed to find out all the details as to the character and wealth of the bride. She goes with her to the bath and investigates her beauty; she makes such inquiries at home about her cooking and housekeeping ability as are expected to furnish a full description. The groom is supposed to pay a certain sum for the bride, and she is expected to bring him a small fortune in jewelry and household effects. Preparatory to the wedding the bride is put through a course of training. She is bathed and greased from head and again, and her skin is coated with powder. On the wedding day she is

wrapped up in so many veils that she looks more like a bundle than a woman, and in this shape she is carried on a camel or donkey to the home of the groom.

The first home of the desert bride is with her husband's family; but only when she is the first wife. If he has other wives she goes to the common tent, and there takes her place as boss of the establishment. She holds this position for a year or so, but after that comes-down to everyday life and does her share of the work. She aids in the cooking, in gathering fuel and in weaving the cloth for tents and the family clothing.

Have you ever heard of the Ouled Nails? They are to be found in every oasis, and there is a whole street given up to them in Biakra, the so-called Paris of the Sahara. They are noted for their beauty and are professional entertainers, much like the Nautch girls of India, the Ghawast of Egypt and the dancers of the East. The Ouled Nails sing and dance for money in the Moorish cafes. Any one who will pay for a cup of coffee can see them, and they are very attractive, but, unfortunately, long-bearded Arabs will sit and watch them for hours. The girls are paid by the owners of the establishments, and they are very well-to-do. Contributions from the foreigners present, coming to them and kneeling down at the close of each dance. Thereupon the foreigners either give or perhaps take the girl's hand and press it upon the forehead of the dancer. The coin sticks and the girl rises and goes through the wild abandon of another dance, moving her head so gently that the coin remains where it was placed.

The dance of the Ouled Nails is the well-known stomach dance, in vogue throughout the Orient. It consists of a series of contortions of the hips and abdomen, while the rest of the body remains stationary, or perhaps sways back and forth. The girls are fully dressed; there is no exposure of person, and they lack the ballet flights of our wicked stage. Nevertheless, their actions are more demoralizing than those of the worst of our dance halls. Their profession is considered respectable, and after a time they take the money they have thus made and go home to marry their lovers. Tripoli, June 19.

Croker's Castle on the Shore of Dublin Bay

RICHARD CROKER displayed a distinct appreciation of the beautiful when he selected his Tudor castle on the slope of the hills that encircle Dublin Bay. Mr. Croker is a man who wants to get things done promptly, and always goes right ahead. I wanted to linger over some of the beautiful things he had brought to his beautiful house, but as we passed through the rooms he was always most unconsciously marching on. Indeed, proud as he is of his fine mansion, and of all the valuable things that are in its many rooms, Mr. Croker is far prouder of his stud. That was what he wanted me to see all the time. But before we came to the stables I was able to get a good general impression of Glencaine itself, says the New York World. The entrance gate, in solid cut granite, seems rather strange to an Irish eye, and looks like the gate to a house in an old English town like Brugha. The lawns and flower beds are laid out with great taste, and today are a perfect riot of green and color. There are few beauties in Ireland like Glencaine in this country were erected in the eighteenth century, when domestic architecture was conceived in somewhat commonplace vein. Glencaine is not unique, but is certainly exceptional in Ireland. It is a noble pile, crowned with an Irish tower in the center and a beautiful classical Italian portico running from the hall door on the west, round the building to the south, and so to the gardens. The house is built of cut granite, and part of the wall of the original building, once the residence of a well-known Irish judge, is incorporated in it. The Japanese room is indeed a gem. There are no corners in it as in an ordinary room. The "coriethers" are all circular, and they are covered with charming and quaint Japanese tapestry. The ceiling is Japanese, with a perfect array of Japanese birds painted with excellent taste, full of life and movement. At the other side of the hall is Mr. Croker's own study. Here on the wall is an address from the Democratic Club of New York, of which the ex-leader is obviously proud. Here, too, are some books, many of them relating to Ameri-

can affairs, one by his friend, W. J. Bryan. And here, above all, are two large photographs of Mr. Croker's two dead sons. He shows the pictures to you without any apparent emotion, because he is a man who has mastered emotion. Presently, as you go through the house, you will see, off the large and handsome corridor upstairs, a very beautiful little oratory, the stained glass windows of which he has erected to the memory of these two boys. The grand hall, however, to which we retired from the study is the principal feature of the house. It is a large apartment in dark mahogany, with an elaborately carved and massive old Irish mantelpiece. Around are tables and writing materials, chairs, etc., as in a sitting room, and on the walls are portraits in oils of Mr. Croker's favorite horses and photographs of some of their famous relatives. All the chief rooms of the house radiate off this central hall, including the two I have already named, and the dining room and drawing room. In fact, standing in the grand hall you feel that you are in touch with the whole house, for the main staircase rises out of the hall also and so brings you at once to the upper part of the mansion. But before going upstairs note the stained glass ceiling illustrating the king of birds and the little wren soaring toward the sun on the back of an eagle. Mr. Croker is especially fond of this design, for the eagle is the one dear to Americans. This stained glass ceiling can be seen by night as well as by day, as the electric lights shine through when darkness falls. And, by the way, I noted as I entered the grounds that Glencaine makes its own illuminant, as the steady thump-thump of the engine-house indicates.

The staircase is a noble one, six feet wide, also in carved dark mahogany. At the top there is a stained glass window, with the arms of the various branches of the Croker family given in Burke. Setting aside the oratory and the fine corridor, there is nothing upstairs that Mr. Croker seems to be anxious to show you, except an old-fashioned bed in one of the rooms, which once, it appears, belonged to Daniel O'Connell. After this substantial piece of domestic comfort, the thing that seemed to excite Mr. Croker's interest most was an oil and quaint engraving of a meeting of the pugilists, Heenan and Sayers, hanging among other things of the kind, in a passage leading to the billiard-room. I mentioned the billiard-room. Like the large strong room, with the Croker archives, it is off Mr. Croker's study, and is a noble apartment, containing two tables especially made for Mr. Croker in the United States. This room can be entered not only from Mr. Croker's own room, but also from the hall and again from the grounds; and, finally, there is communication with the kitchen, to facilitate the attendance of servants. The walls are oak paneled, and decorated with oil paintings in chocolate tints, of many of the chief streets and buildings of New York, including Wall street, Tammany Hall, the Postoffice, the City Hall, Central Park, Fifty-ninth street, Fifth avenue and the Democratic Club. The bedrooms are in the Adam style, and are a noble apartment, containing two tables especially made for Mr. Croker in the United States. This room can be entered not only from Mr. Croker's own room, but also from the hall and again from the grounds; and, finally, there is communication with the kitchen, to facilitate the attendance of servants. The walls are oak paneled, and decorated with oil paintings in chocolate tints, of many of the chief streets and buildings of New York, including Wall street, Tammany Hall, the Postoffice, the City Hall, Central Park, Fifty-ninth street, Fifth avenue and the Democratic Club. The bedrooms are in the Adam style, and are a noble apartment, containing two tables especially made for Mr. Croker in the United States. This room can be entered not only from Mr. Croker's own room, but also from the hall and again from the grounds; and, finally, there is communication with the kitchen, to facilitate the attendance of servants. The walls are oak paneled, and decorated with oil paintings in chocolate tints, of many of the chief streets and buildings of New York, including Wall street, Tammany Hall, the Postoffice, the City Hall, Central Park, Fifty-ninth street, Fifth avenue and the Democratic Club.

Stingless Bees Are a Failure

ONE of the most fascinating experiments ever attempted in apiculture, according to Discovery, was begun last Summer at the American Museum of Natural History, New York city, and making themselves familiar with the city and its parks and the surrounding country. Hard by, at another window, was a colony of stingless bees—probably the honey bee—made up of a regular, jagged mountain, of a very dark chocolate color. The box was placed at a sunny window, in the lower frame of which small apertures connecting with the box afforded egress and ingress to and from the outside world. The little foreigners when installed immediately set to work, and in a few days they had built the queerest nest imaginable. Rising to a peak, it resembled nothing so much as an irregular, jagged mountain, of a very dark chocolate color. The box was placed at a sunny window, in the lower frame of which small apertures connecting with the box afforded egress and ingress to and from the outside world. The little foreigners when installed immediately set to work, and in a few days they had built the queerest nest imaginable. Rising to a peak, it resembled nothing so much as an irregular, jagged mountain, of a very dark chocolate color. The box was placed at a sunny window, in the lower frame of which small apertures connecting with the box afforded egress and ingress to and from the outside world. The little foreigners when installed immediately set to work, and in a few days they had built the queerest nest imaginable. Rising to a peak, it resembled nothing so much as an irregular, jagged mountain, of a very dark chocolate color.

Memory From Other Days

Nineteenth Century. As I walk along a dark lonely road, my ears are on the alert, I shudder to right and left, I look over my shoulder. Who is there? I have often noticed that when people use the word "offensive" it is accompanied by a quiver of the nostrils and an involuntary movement of the nose. The imagination is still haunted by that piece of very offensive cannon which my primitive ancestor or with a prejudice so strong that his nose rejected it at once.

Boy Finds \$15,000 and Gets \$200

Copenhagen, Denmark, Cables Dispatch in New York Sun. A messenger boy found a bag containing jewelry and American notes to the value of \$15,000 in the principal square. Cards in the bag bore the name of George Hamfeldt and gave his residence as the United States. Found Hamfeldt, and received a reward of \$200.

Through the long warm days of Summer the British government, involved in expenditure of only \$73,530 last year, with a net profit of \$801,882.