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Quarterly Letters from the Arabian Mission

July-September, 1899.

MUSCAT.

The words of sadness with which we chronicled the death of Mr. Stone in our last letter seem more properly to belong to this happening, as it did, at the end of the quarter, the full loss to our work has only been realized during the months just past. The touring and the definitely evangelistic part of our work, for which he was so well adapted and for which we had planned during the few days we were together, has not been done. The pleasure of noting his rapid progress in the language, in which he bade fair to surpass his associates, has been denied us, as has also the daily stimulus of his earnest Christian life. But our memories are not all sorrowful, and, please God, the lessons they would teach us will be learned and not forgotten.

The Freed Slave School.—Early in August, we had the pleasure of a two weeks' visit from Dr. Worrall. With this exception I have been alone, if the resident master of a lively boarding-school may ever so say. As may be inferred, the freed slaves still continue to claim the most of the time and care of the missionary in charge. In my last quarter's letter I referred to the accident which befell one of the younger of our boys. His skull was fractured by a fall from the roof at night and the poor fellow was unconscious until his death, some days later. It was the first death among the boys, and I trust the solemn thoughts of death and the hereafter were not thus vividly brought home to them in vain. There are no native Protestants here, but the Catholics very kindly gave us, at the request of the English Consul, a corner in their little burial ground. Like many an Eastern town, the dead
of Muscat a hundred-fold outnumber the living, and the countless graves filling every valley on all sides seem like an encompassing enemy pouring down from the hills and bent upon pushing all signs of life into the sea. Now that it has also given a resting-place to our dead may we not have a double claim upon its future, and with quickened faith look forward to the time when many shall with joy arise to meet their Lord.

I have found that it is unwise to leave the boys alone with their teacher for any length of time, and being thus compelled myself to remain in Muscat. I have thought best to take entire charge of the school, thus providing another man for colportage work. Although this is the first I have ever attempted to teach yet I do not doubt but that the change has been a good one for the school. We are at our books only in the morning; afternoons I try to give them work for their hands. The Sultan has kindly given me the use of some ground back of the house, and in clearing and leveling and building a wall I have managed to keep them pretty busy.

In my last report I believe I mentioned that one of the larger boys had found work in the English consulate; since then, four others have graduated (!)—one to the Mission at Bahrein, one to a new English agent, and two have been taken as cabin-boys on one of the English gunboats. How our boys would prosper on board a gunboat was somewhat of a question, but the circumstances were exceptionally favorable and I trust it was for their best interests. We have only twelve boys in the school now, and but little probability of bringing in new material as these gradually leave us. While slaves are still brought into Oman in considerable numbers, yet the international restrictions to their capture are such that there is little prospect of making a legal seizure.

Mission Press.—Our subscribers have heard nothing in a long time from the mission press here. Since the time of Peter Zwemer but little has been done upon it. When first purchased it was our plan to print such literature in Arabic as was prohibited elsewhere. But the English rule in Egypt has given religious liberty to a considerable extent, and we now find that we can purchase from the presses there much cheaper than we ourselves could produce. Our larger press has required a separate house for its shelter, and now we have decided to sell it, buy a much smaller one that will answer for blanks and other local work, and use the balance of the money in purchasing literature at its source and in paying for whatever we ourselves wish done in that line.
Touring.—During the summer but one tour was made by our colporter—a long sail by boat up the coast to Sohar and back by land, stopping at the various towns. He was quite successful, although the villages had sent a good part of their people into the date gardens. One very encouraging feature has been our sales at the sister town of Ulutra. It is less than an hour’s distance by rowboat and has been visited several times each week. The total sale of scriptures for the three months has been over two hundred copies, but tribal wars and epidemics make the future a very unstable one. Just now the Sultan, with a heavy specie chest, has made a tour of some of the most important towns and has insured their loyalty for a time at least. On the other hand, the absence of an effective quarantine has allowed the easy entrance of cholera from the Persian side, and as a result some parts of the country are very undesirable for touring, especially so in the estimation of our native helpers.

For myself, I expect that the school will keep me inside of Muscat for some months to come, and give me but little time for any other work. It is a great pity, as we do not know when the doors now so open to evangelistic touring may be closed.

Expected Arrival of Mr. Wiersum.—Some time about November 1, I hope to see Mr. Wiersum, and then again for a time Muscat will have two missionaries. In a measure Mr. Wiersum will be taking Peter Zwemer’s place, and I trust Oman will soon have as large a place in his heart as it held in that of his predecessor.

I cannot close this letter without referring to the peace and comfort which have been ours because of the many prayers which we know were offered up for us and our work on our anniversary day, October 1. Surely the heart’s desire of many of those whom we feel the King delighted to honor will be filled speedily.

James Cantine.

BAHREIN.

The first day of this quarter was one we shall not soon forget at Bahrein. A Sabbath-day that began with praise and song, but ended in sorrow and tears.

Baptism of Lydia and her children.—Some time ago the wife of the persecuted Amara convert (the soldier of whom Mr. Cantine wrote) came to Bahrein. She and her three children had to
flee from Bagdad in order to escape being forcibly kept in the Moslem religion by the Turks. They threatened to remarry her to a Moslem and put the children into the Turkish Government School. Faithful to her husband and desirous herself to become a Christian, she forsook all and fled here, via Busrah. It was a wonder she escaped, as not only the government, but the Jesuits at Bagdad, laid snares for her. Since coming to us here she has received some instruction. On Saturday, June 30, the mother was examined as to her faith in Christ, and although she still needs further teaching we thought best to baptise them, especially since I had promised the father, who is still in exile, to care for the children as my own in case he never returned. One of our new colporters was received into full membership on confession. So that on that Sunday morning meeting together to baptise Lydia, Nejma, Razouki and Mejid, it was a time of praise. The mother renounced Islam with all its errors, professed faith in the Son of God and promised to teach her children in the truth of the Gospel. As she knelt to receive the sign of baptism all our hearts went up in prayer to God. At the afternoon service in our little sitting-room (which looks more elegant in Kamil's book than it really is), we remembered the death of Christ. It was only a small company, twelve all told, but God was with us. In the morning I spoke on "The Fruits of the Spirit," and in the afternoon on John 1:29, Even the children seemed to enjoy the day and joined in the hymns taught them.

Our Great Sorrow.

The day's services were only just over when the overwhelming news came by the mail-steamer from Muscat that our beloved brother, George Erwin Stone, had died of heat-apoplexy at Birka, near Muscat, on June 26. At that time we had no particulars. Now the short, sad story of how he went home, in a chariot of fire, is yours as well as ours. This great, sudden and severe loss to our mission is the one great overshadowing event this quarter. A voice of God so loud that other voices should be silent. We can scarcely think of it calmly yet; and we can think of nothing else so much. So unexpected, and following so closely after that of my other brother (nearer yet for Christ's sake not dearer), the sorrow holds a lesson in its bosom for us on the field and for you at home.
Some talk of a dark, mysterious Providence of God; the Bible tells us that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and that, although "clouds and darkness are about him," "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," for "He dwells in light inaccessible and full of glory." We mourn the loss of dear Stone not only, but we miss him. Given to the Mission in answer to prayer, he proved from the first day until his death his divine call to the work by a spirit of self-denial and utter disregard of his own plans and wishes where God's work was at stake. He was the man of our hopes during the months we lived together in the same cramped quarters at Bahrein. From the day he sailed with us from New York we loved him; even Katharina gave him a big place in her big heart. He had no romantic ideas of mission work, but took hold of grim realities with a grip that meant business. He set himself to battle, like a flint, against the strength of Islam and the intricacies of Arabic; though in both cases patient toil is generally first rewarded by hope deferred. Sturdy, manly, honest to the core, with common sense and uncommon judgment, he was willing to plod. His progress in Arabic, although he was not a linguist, was most promising. He made friends in his quiet way, readily, and on the voyage out witnessed oft for Christ. Although it was his lot to come to Bahrein where there are no Europeans and where no native life is perhaps more primitive than at any of our other stations, he fell in love with the new environment and laughed heartily at the idea that it was a sacrifice to live at Bahrein.

Christ even "learned obedience by the things which he suffered." There is no doubt our Mission has suffered, and that God meant we should suffer. Shall we, too, learn obedience? If the death of two American missionaries for Muscat does not awaken men to the needs of dark Eastern Arabia, what will? It is the voice of God, not calling us back from the fight for Oman, but urging to greater sacrifice and larger devotion and more fervent prayer. Being dead, our brothers still speak. You know what their message would be if they spoke it to-morrow from your pulpit or in your parlor. A message like that of Krapf from East Africa: "Our God bids us first build a cemetery before we build a church or dwelling-house, showing that the resurrection of East Africa must be effected by our own destruction. Our sanguine expectations and hopes of immediate success may be laid in the grave like
Lazarus, yet they shall have a resurrection and our eyes shall see the glory of the Lord at last.”

“‘Where Muscat fronts the Orient sun
'Twixt heaving sea and rocky steep,
His work of mercy scarce begun,
A saintly soul has fallen asleep:
Who comes to lift the Cross instead?
Who takes the standard from the dead?’”*

S. M. Zwemer.

**BUSRAH.**

**Busrah Temperatures.**—It is with a feeling of relief that one sits down to write a report of the third quarter. When the mercury has been making daily excursions over the one hundred mark, for more than three months there surely is reason for such a feeling. The summer does not seem to be over yet, for the last ten days have been as trying as ever, but we now live in hopes of cooler breezes that cannot delay much longer.

This year has been remarkable for its high temperatures, 110° F. was common, while 118° F. was one day recorded. However, it is not so much the extremeness of the heat that we mind as its long continuance. It is that which drains the strength and, alas, also the desire for work. Thus, while one is glad that the three months are past, it is not with a feeling of satisfaction that he looks back over it. Of course, even with our best service, we must confess to the Master that we are unprofitable servants. But the best service has not been possible, hence the feeling of dissatisfaction.

**The Date Season.**—For the last month the date season has been upon us and all Busrah has been at its busiest. The river is full of steamers and sailing craft, and we have quite forgotten that we really live in an out-of-the-way place. There has been a remarkably large crop and thousands of tons will be shipped from here. For us only it is not a good time. The bazaars are practically all shut, the shop-keepers themselves being away date-packing. The colporter has few visitors at the shop and if he tries to follow the crowds at the packing stations, he is told to let the people alone and not interfere with the work. Harbor work is

* Lines from the poem written on the death of Bishop French by Archdeacon A. E. Montle, in the *C. M. S. Intelligencer*, July, 1891.
also impracticable, every one is busy seven days in the week, and there have not been any services. Arabic service has been held every Sunday, but it has not been possible to hold the English one, first because of the heat and now because of the date business. With thus much said as to difficulties, we can go on safely and say what has been done.

Witnessing in the Bible Shop.—The Bible-shop and bazaar work during July and August were kept going as usual with two colporters, and in September by one, who divided his time between the shop and the bazaars. The last time I gave an account of the work in Amara, quoting from one of the shop-keeper's letters. This time I will give a specimen of the kind of conversation that may often be heard in the Busrah shop. Especially I wish to tell you about one visit I received. There came two men and began a conversation on various subjects, such as the alleged corruption of the Bible, the Sonship of Christ, and His incarnation and death. They asked: "If Esa [Jesus] was God, how could He have died, for surely God cannot die?" I asked if it is not necessary that every one should die that is born of woman. They said: "No doubt." I asked: "If Esa was born of Mary and thus became incarnate, was He not a perfect man?" When they admitted that, I said, "We Christians believe in the Holy Books which God sent down to the Jews and Christians, and these Books teach that Esa is perfect God and perfect man, and your Koran testifies to that as you well know. So that it was the body which was born of Mary which died, but the divinity of Christ was not in any way affected or corrupted." They said, "Prove us that." I said, "If the sun shines on a wall you can destroy that wall and in no way affect the shining of the sun's light, and thus the death of Christ's body did not affect His divinity." They then said, "Yes, it is hard to understand the rank of Esa. He is greater than all the prophets." I asked, "Greater than the prophet Mohammed?" They said, "Yes. Our prophet did not understand the rank of Esa. The rank which God gave to Esa is greater than human understanding." This from Moslems! A confession like this seems strange, but we must remember that while Moslems may recognize the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, Mohammed is still for them "the seal of the prophets," whose dictum sets aside whatever does not agree with his Koran.

Touring.—Notwithstanding the summer's heat, something was
done in this branch of the work. It was my hope to make the semi-annual trip to the two out-stations when the weather was more suitable for such a trip, and when there would have been more time at my disposal. A visit to Nasariyeh became necessary at the beginning of September as the colporter in charge had not been heard from for a long time. Dr. Thoms accompanied me. When we arrived I wished that I had come up sooner. Nasariyeh is a promising post but it is hard for the missionary to keep a good over-sight of it. The Turkish mail is a very uncertain thing, not only as to its schedule but also as to whether it will deliver a letter committed to its care. The journey hither is no light undertaking, and it is not easy to make more than the two trips recommended, yet a great deal may happen in six months. We found the colporter not doing well and were compelled to dismiss him. Anticipating this, we had taken one of our Busrah men with us whom we put in charge. We hope to hear a good report from him. After taking stock of the books in the shop and making and receiving the necessary calls that one must make on visiting these inland towns, we returned, having been absent eleven days.

I hope that in your prayers for our work you will not forget the native helpers, the colporters. The success of the work depends a good deal on the character of these men. A man, for instance, in a place like Nasariyeh is the sole representative of a living Christianity almost the whole year round. And he has a hard and trying position, and he needs the keeping power of God's grace in order to keep his light shining.

Another tour was made also to Nasariyeh by Colporter Murad of Amara, going overland and returning by way of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. I have not heard from him yet, so can do nothing more than mention it.

Fred. J. Barny.

The quarter last past has been an eventful and busy quarter. On the news of Mr. Stone's death reaching Bahrein it seemed wise that we should again look over Muscat station from a medical standpoint. We started July 4, on steamer "Kilwa" for Muscat. Reaching Muscat harbor we found ten full days quarantine to be spent on the rocks in native huts, or with no protection from the sun. The days being hot it seemed unwise that we should risk the danger for such a length of time on the rocks. So we continued
the journey to Bombay, intending to return to Bahrein on next steamer to that port.

On reaching Muscat by returning steamer we found quarantine removed against first and second class passengers and their servants. We landed and decided to stay two weeks, or for the next Bahrein boat. We left Muscat August 9, reaching Bahrein in good health August 13.

After due consideration it was decided we return to Busrah via Quoit. The latter place is found on maps as Crane. The road from Quoit to Busrah is across the desert two days journey due north. Finding the road reputed dangerous from robbers and wandering tribes of Arabs we decided to return light to Busrah, and so sent our boxes by boat. After two days of very hard and trying experiences we reached Busrah September 13.

We were soon settled in our old rooms, which we are fully enjoying after seven and one-half months. Since leaving Busrah we have travelled over 3,700 miles by sea and land. Through gardens beautiful and deserts wild, and still we live to Praise His Name.

**Patients Treated.**—The patients treated during the quarter at Bahrein dispensary, and those seen on the road and tours, numbered over 1,000, but are not classified.

**An Incident in Bombay.**—As an indication of how closely the Mohammedans cling to the letter of the law with no attention to the spirit or understanding, I would relate the following:

While in Bombay, observing a man reading the Koran in the doorway of one of the stores, we inquired whether he read Arabic. Reply was in affirmative. Taking the part of an inquirer we asked in Arabic. As you acknowledge Christ as living and Mahommed dead, why is it you worship a dead rather than a living prophet? His reply was that he read Arabic in which language Mohammed—"God Bless His Name"—wrote the Koran, but he did not understand the meaning. If I spoke to him in Urdu he would talk about the Koran, but Arabic and English he did not know. We did not talk Urdu. So he did not see how we could talk religion.

**At Muscat.**—Arriving in Muscat after a very stormy passage between Bombay and Karachi, and a near shipwreck on entering the latter place, we found Mr. Cantine in very good health. The weather much better than on our journey down, the monsoon breeze having arrived two or three days before. The boys were happy
and under very good control, loving and respecting their beloved master. Here we spent a pleasant two weeks, occasionally treating a boil and fever.

**At Bahrein.**—Reaching Bahrein after a stormy passage, we found Mr. and Mrs. Zwemer alive, but Mr. Zwemer just recovering from furunculosis and Mrs. Zwemer suffering with conjunctivitis. With advent of cooler and more bearable weather, Mr. Zwemer fully recovered and Mrs. Zwemer's eyes were in a few days very comfortable. The little ones, Katharina and Bessie, had had a trying time, but picked up considerably during August. Patients came to the dispensary, but not in the numbers we had before we left for Muscat. The cases entailed suffering, but of a commonness of no interest to anyone excepting the patient, consisting principally of ulcers and fevers.

**An interesting case.**—On the night of August 23, 1899, we were called out to see a patient. Found it to be a case of stabbing and spearing. A poor Arab woman had been accused of traveling the evil road, and her brother, in order to punish her, took a spear and ran it through her body from back of her chest to just below the heart in front. Then taking a dagger he stabbed her once in front and once in back. The brother went free. The judgment by the judge of the island was: "He did perfectly right." A man may commit adultery and go scot free, but a woman must needs be only accused in order to be killed by her nearest relative.

Leaving Bahrein for Busrah, September 3, we reached Quoit the Friday following. Here we spent three days and saw a number of patients. The place, however, was very healthy. Comparatively very little sickness. Here we were asked if we had come to corrupt the faith (Mohammedanism) like that one who came last year? We replied we had no idea of corrupting the true faith.

**At Busrah.**—We left Quoit for Busrah Monday morning, September 10, and had a very trying and difficult journey. Two nights and two days we traveled the burning sands. Only towards morning did the air become anywise comfortable. After six or eight hours the water we carried became the color of port wine, but of the odor of straw and barnyards. We were overjoyed when we reached clean pure water. Upon our arrival in Busrah, September 13, we found that Mr. Barny and Dr. Thoms had gone to Nasariyeh for a trip. They returned in good health and condition, having stood the sun and fatigue well.
return patients began to come, so that we are now having clinics each day.

H. R. L. Worrall, M. D.

When I wrote my last quarterly report we were looking forward to the hot season to come, with some apprehension, but now we can look back upon it and feel thankful for many blessings and for a fair degree of health all through the excessive heat, which reached a maximum of 114 degrees in the shade of the Mission-house, and of 118 degrees at one of the English houses.

Touring.—I recently had my first experience in touring. Mr. Barny and I went with a colporter to Nasariyeh, our most remote out-station, about two hundred miles up the Euphrates.

On our way there we picked flowers in the Garden of Eden, and while at Nasariyeh saw "Ur of the Chaldees," the birth-place of Abraham.

We tried very hard to see the buried city, where extensive excavations were made a few years ago by French excavators, but the Governor of the province would not allow us to do so. The Turks are very jealous of all antiquities in their dominion and are very suspicious of all foreigners who express a desire to see any of the old buried cities.

A Fish Story.—A little incident occurred on our way up which created a good deal of astonishment, which I will relate. It is a fish story, although not unlike many stories told on that subject in America, for this one is true. As we were moving slowly along, a large fish, about twenty inches in length, jumped from the river into the middle of our boat and was caught in a fold of our sail, which was down at the time. The distance of the jump was fully eight feet. The sailors, or bellumgees as they are called, said: "Wonderful! it is from God! agieb min Allah."

Taking Pictures.—At one place we were taken for spies. We went ashore and about the city to see what was to be seen, and I took some pictures. After returning to the boat a man was sent in great haste from the serai, or government headquarters, to see who we were and why we had not called at the serai and explained our business and asked permission to take pictures. The colporter explained to him that we were not familiar with Turkish customs, and did not know that we were expected to get permission to take pictures. After much talking and explaining we were allowed to go in peace.
A Sail and a Dinner.—One day we had a very high north wind, and it became very difficult to push the boat along with the poles, and we were creeping along very slowly, and the bellumgees began to chant a song, as they often do while they work. With some difficulty we picked the words out after a time and translated them. It ran like this; “In our going we go rapidly, for God makes it easy for us.” The wind blew harder and harder, and they fastened a long rope to the mast and pulled the boat along from the shore, but as the wind increased even this failed, and they tied up to the shore, and we went with our soldier guards into the date garden, where we came upon an enclosure of native houses. We were invited to have coffee, and we found we were in the house of the sheikh of that district. He ordered dinner to be prepared for us, which was served in the following manner: A large round mat was brought in and placed on the floor (ground), then a lot of flat cakes of black native bread were placed on the mat, a large dish of the finest dates I ever tasted, just from the tree, and placed in the middle of the mat, and a large bowl of buttermilk was placed for each of us, in which was floating large pieces of butter. The sheikh said “please,” and we took our places around the mat in any position suggesting most comfort, tore off a piece of bread (this seems the best word, for we neither cut nor broke it), fished out with our fingers or the bread, a piece of butter, and then taking a date from the common dish, ate the bread, butter and dates together, and drank the buttermilk from the bowl. One of the soldiers told the sheikh we ate with knives and forks, even cutting eggs with knives. They laughed at the trouble I had in getting the butter from the milk on to my bread, and one of them showed me the most approved Arabic manner of accomplishing the feat. After eating coffee was again made for us, and we had an opportunity of seeing the whole process of preparation while we waited, from the green berry to the typical strong black coffee as it is served Arabic fashion, in small cups, without milk or sugar.

Mr. Barny gave the sheikh an Arabic Bible and we bade him good-bye, and as the wind had abated we moved on again.

The next day after our arrival at Nasariyeh the sheikh came with some of his subjects who needed treatment. Patients came for treatment before I could get my breakfast, some of them said they heard we were coming and had been two or three days on the road.
Use of the Name of God.—Many think the Mohammedans are very devout because of their frequent calling upon God and their prophet, but by observation you see their expressions are often made thoughtlessly and even jokingly; for example, as we were returning, another boat with a better sail passed us, at which they asked jestingly if they should give us a rope and told us to pray to the prophet. When we call upon them in their house and knock on the door for entrance, they sing out from within, “Bismillah,” which means, “Enter, in the name of God;” but it is said as we would carelessly say, “Come in.”

The Native Plow.—From the picture I send you will see the kind of plow used here. The picture was taken in the “land of the Chaldees,” and is Arabia’s most improved make. It consists of a bough of a tree sharpened so that it digs up the soft earth. The soil being alluvial, the upper end of the trunk is a substitute for handles, and to a branch is yoked a couple of oxen.

The Date Season.—The date packing season, which is now on, is the busy season of the year for Busrah. We have as many as fourteen vessels in the river at one time, including one Turkish and one English man-of-war. Then there are as many as one hundred sailing vessels in the river from the Gulf coast, India, the Red Sea, and the east coast of Africa. These resemble the boats used by Columbus, both in size and appearance, the models of which many of you probably saw in the lagoon at the World’s Fair at Chicago.

Our American consular agent, Mr. Hamilton, has been away for several weeks, having gone to a hospital in Bombay for treatment, but has returned greatly improved, and is now doing quarantine with his wife, who, having spent the summer in Europe, joined him in Bombay. We like to have one of Uncle Sam’s representatives here, even though he is an English subject.

Sharon J. Thoms, M.D.
N. B.—The Arabian Mission depends for its support and the extension of its work, not on the treasury of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, though under its care and administration, but upon contributions specifically made for this purpose. The churches, societies and individuals subscribing are not confined to the Reformed Church. Members of other denominations are among its supporters and its missionaries. Regular gifts and special donations are invited from all who are interested in Mission work in Arabia. Regular contributors will receive quarterly letters and annual reports, without application. All contributions, or applications for literature or information, should be sent to "THE ARABIAN MISSION," 25 East 22d Street, New York.