

THE OASIS OF BISKRA.

LIFE AND NATURE IN THE PARIS OF THE SAHARA.

BISKRA, Desert of Sahara, April 12.—I am at Biskra, the Paris of the Sahara. This oasis lies 175 miles south of the Mediterranean sea, in the midst of the desert. At one side of it vast sand dunes roll on and on until they are lost in the yellow horizon. On the other are the well-worn stones of the Oued, or dry river, Biskra, which becomes a flood during the short rainy part of the year, but which is now so parched under this African sun that it would blister your bare feet to cross it.

Biskra is situated on a low plateau, a little more than 300 feet above the river. To the north of it is the night wall of the Atlas mountains, which here rise 1,000 feet higher than Mount Washington. In this African sun they are now of a pale yellow.

quant concerts and cafe chantants, while the casino steadily runs its roulette and rouge et noir tables, so that the place might be called the Monte Carlo of the Sahara as well.

HORSE AND CAMEL RACES.

The season begins in November and lasts until May. It is at its liveliest in February, at the time of the races, when horses, donkeys and camels are pitted against each other. At that time there are long distance camel races run by Arabs on Meharis or fast racing camels, which can make 12 or 15 miles in an hour. These camels are so tall and lean that they seem to be all legs. They have saddles with high supports in front and behind, and the rider hops up and down with a steady corresponding to the ticking of your watch. The starting point is supposed

The Social Capital of the Desert—Its Gambling Hell and Its Camel Races—A Rival of Roosevelt—With the French Soldiers—A Visit to the Holy Oasis of Sidi Okba in Old Biskra, and Its Odd Natives—Bible Characters, etc., etc.

York to Chicago. My cab rides cost me 30 cents a trip or 50 cents an hour, and if I prefer to move about on a camel the rate will be about \$1 per day.

When I take a Turkish bath in the United States I have to pay \$1, with 25 or 50 cents extra for fees. I had a Moorish bath here today for 20 cents in a bathing establishment which would be considered fine in any American city; and this included a thorough massage and a cup of delicious Turkish coffee at the close. The men who bathed me were brave Arab. They were as yellow as gold and naked to the waist; they spent something like an hour on the job. I do not by that mean to say that it took that much time to get off the dirt, but the hour was used up in massage and other extras. Biskra was a famous bathing place in the days of the Romans, and has a Roman name which means baths, and which probably referred to the hot sulphur springs outside the city.

WITH THE FRENCH SOLDIERS.

Biskra is under military government. It is the chief station of the eastern Sahara, and it is called the Terroir de Commandement. One sees French soldiers everywhere, and there are French officers at the hotels and on the streets. They are fine-looking fellows, far different from our ordinary idea of the French army. They are straight, broad-shouldered, bronzed-faced men who have seen fighting with these tribes of the desert, and show it. Some of the officers have the appearance of dudes, and they are noted for their politeness, but no one dares to presume upon their weakness.

The territory of Biskra is about as large as the state of Ohio, and it has a population of less than one hundred thousand, all told. The natives live in a number of oases scattered here and there over the desert. Biskra itself is commanded by a major, assisted by a captain, three lieutenants and a military interpreter. In the other oases there are captains, lieutenants and interpreters. The town has electric lights, and it has schools for both French and Arabs. It has a negro quarter as well.

The French city is made up of flat-roofed white houses of one or two stories. Many of the roofs have walls about the height of the children play on the roofs in the evening, and the people often sleep there at night.

I wish I could take a walk with you through one of these Sahara towns. Even in French Biskra the scenes would seem strange. There are Moors who sit right out in the street, or upon the sidewalks, upon mats which they have laid down for the purpose, and play dominoes. They have little tables about as high as a footstool, and thus sit, with their backs to the wall, and then they will move the blocks for an hour or more without saying a word. Many of the players are gray-bearded and gray-headed, but age does not seem to affect their love for the game.

SOME BIBLE CHARACTERS.

Everywhere I go here I meet the characters of the Scriptures. As I write these notes I can see in one group an old Abraham with the aged Sarah beside him and his buxom Hagar behind. The little baby in Hagar's arms might have been young Ishmael, and I observe that Abraham looks upon him with love. At the same time Sarah seems to be jealous, and glares at both baby and mother out of the tail of her eye.

That Moor coming down the street might be Joseph, the friend of King Pharaoh. Observe his costly raiment of fine silk and wool; he walks with a strut and is evidently a man of authority.

On that donkey trotting towards us is an old man whom one might easily imagine to be Balaam, and for the donkey stops and opens his mouth and brays. His message, however, we do not understand, for he has not the power of speech as had the ass of the Scriptures. And so I might go on, finding a character at every step which would correspond to one in the Bible. Some of the natives are of the same type as they were three or four or more thousand years since. They are all Mohammedans and believe only in Allah and the prophet.

But let us go out to the oasis and

visit the people who live under the palm trees. We drive along the Rue Bertha by walls of yellow mud inclosing date trees which rise high above them and are loaded with ripe yellow fruit. The walls are as high as my head, and on their top dried thorn bushes have been set in while the mud was still wet, protecting the fruit like so much broken glass.

The gates to these gardens are rude doors of palm wood, and the only openings are through drains seen here and there where the water flows in or out. This oasis is fed by springs from the River Biskra, which is dry the greater part of the year. Wells have tapped the springs, and there is a flow of several thousand gallons a minute. The water is somewhat alkaline, but it puts the sugar into the dates and the sun is so hot that the fruit is delicious. According to the Arabs to make good dates the head of the tree must be in the burning sun the greater part of the year. The thermometer here even in midwinter never falls below 60, and the climate seems just right, although it is not so at Kantara, which is 30 or 40 miles farther north. Biskra is annually producing something like 10,000,000 pounds of fruit, and it is enough to supply every boy in the United States and leave some to spare.

As we ride on into the oasis we can see men picking the dates, or rather cutting them off. They are in enormous bunches, and a good tree will produce on the average about 120 pounds annually. The fruit is not good until it is dark, and it is not until green dates today and they pucker my mouth like unfrosted persimmons.

IN OLD BISKRA.

I have already written of the oases of Figuig and Taria. Biskra is somewhat the same. Its area is about that of an Ohio township, and it is also divided up into six miles in length. It is divided up into little fields and garden patches, each of which is surrounded by these mud walls of sun-dried brick. There are no pavements. The streets are dirt roads, with here and there a wide irrigation stream running through them, and with bridges of palm wood crossing it at intervals of every few feet.

The houses of the oases are scattered throughout the oasis. Each of these is entered by a low gate made of mud bricks and palms and this gate is always closed at night. The houses are mostly mean and huts with flat roofs. There is some rain here, and the water runs from the roof through pipes which extend out into the street, giving one a douche on the turban or down the neck of one's gown.

I understand that the water supply is comparatively scanty; that water rights are sold in perpetuity and that there are also leases at so much per year, and even at so much per hour. Not long ago one paid \$200 for a perpetual stream half an inch wide and \$800 for a stream of four inches.

Where the water is let out by the hour so often per week an Arab watchman stands at the hole where it flows out with an hour glass, and when the sand has run through shuts off the supply.

A DREARY LIFE.

I cannot describe the dreariness of common everyday life in these Sahara oases. About the only green thing one sees in the streets is the palm leaves overhead. Inside a garden there may be patches of vegetables and grass with trees bearing various kinds of fruit; but in the villages themselves everything is as bare as the middle of the road, and that in a land which might be a tropical paradise. The houses have no garden in or about them. They are joined close together, and are more like a catamount than a place where people live, move and have their being. There are no windows facing the streets, and the only means of ventilation on that side of the house are little holes about the size of a paving brick up near the roof.

In villages like these the people look squalid and dirty, but the dirtiest of them are loaded with jewelry. I photographed one middle-aged dame of a swarthy complexion who had earrings as big as an after-dinner coffee-cup saucer, and as she turned around I noticed that she wore anklets of white metal as wide as a tin cup is high. Indeed, they looked like tin cups without bottoms or handles. Even the chil-

dren were loaded with jewelry. Some of them were not averse to being photographed, although both women and children held out their hands for money as soon as their pictures were taken.

As I walked through the town I passed several Moorish coffee houses with Arabs sitting on the floor, smoking and chatting, drinking coffee or playing dominoes. The coffee houses looked not unlike an American stable. Their only light comes in through the door and the people sit on the mud floor.

THE CHATEAU LONDON.

In "The Garden of Allah," the novel to which I referred at the beginning of this letter, some vivid descriptions are made of the Chateau London, a wonderful date plantation belonging to a wealthy French nobleman. If one would know just how much water means in the desert he may learn by visiting this place. It contains about 15 acres, and is a wonderful botanical garden right here on the edge of the desert. It is a date forest interspersed with all sorts of tropical and temperate fruit trees and shrubs. There are green hedges 15 feet high, as carefully trimmed as those in the botanical gardens of Algiers, or in that of Buitenzorg, Java. About 20 Arab gardeners are always busy keeping the plantation in order, and the leaves are not allowed to lie on the paths or walks. Here and there through the garden are houses of Arab architecture, the homes of the owner and in one place there is a great circle cut out under the trees where dances may be held in the open.

SIDI OKBA AND HIS OASIS.

Have you ever heard of Sidi Okba? He was a famous Arab general who conquered the whole of North Africa from the Nile to the Atlantic, about 1,300 odd years ago. All whom he conquered he converted by telling them that they must die if they did not espouse the Mohammedan religion; and it is said that when he reached the western ocean he rode into it exclaiming that if it were not for this barrier he would make every people of the lands beyond worship Allah or die. This man was one of the great Mo-

hammedan heroes. The people look upon him as a saint, and they have named towns, oases and other places after him. One of the most important of these is Sidi Okba, which lies 12 miles from here, in the heart of the desert. It is the shrine of the saint, and the mosque containing it is said to be the oldest Mohammedan building in Africa. The town is the religious capital of this part of the world, so holy that the people make pilgrimages to it as they do to Kairouan, in Tunisia, and to Mecca and Medina, in Arabia, and to I rode across the desert this afternoon and visited it. The way is over a country covered with a scanty vegetation of thorny scrub, through sandy and stony wastes, and by the oases of El-Jilach and Chetma. Sidi Okba itself has 60,000 palm trees, and the town has several thousand people. The plantations are surrounded by mud walls like those of Biskra, but the houses are better and some of the streets are so wide that one can drive through them. On our way there we passed some caravans of camels and donkeys. We saw many tent villages and great flocks of black goats watched by shepherds.

THE BUSINESS OF AN OASIS.

Entering the gate we rode between the mud walls to the public square, which is surrounded by petty stores or bazars. Every store is a box-like room no wider than the door which leads into it, and so low that the merchant can hardly stand upright within it. The stores are lighted from the front, and the customers stand in the street as they bargain.

There was considerable industry going on. Here men were weaving, there they were making plows and fether no saddles. In the street of the tailor I saw several men using American sewing machines, but nowhere did I see any American goods. On the sides of the streets were mud ledges built out from the mud wall. These ledges were filled with white-gowned men chatting or sleeping. Some were reeling cotton and some sewing. At night the ledges are filled with sleepers.

Many of these poorer Arabs have no homes. They eat at the cafes and sleep in the streets. This is especially so in the cities. The men always sleep with their heads covered, and, in fact, with every bit of bare skin hidden. One reason for this is on account of the flies. They fairly swarm in all the oases, making one pray for the Caliph Adhame, the father of flies to breathe upon them and drive them away. This caliph had breath so fatal to flies that every one dropped dead that flew over his mouth.

During my stay I visited the famous mosque. It is an ordinary building with perhaps a half dozen rooms, including the place of worship. It was filled with Mohammedans when I entered it this afternoon, and I heard the Mohammedan youths sing out verses from the Koran in the school.

rooms on each side. I spent a while watching the men at their prayers, and although I was known to be a Christian I was not molested.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

His Grip Loosened.

She plucked the petals from a rose. "I am in love—"

With passionate warmth he drew her closer. "Don't I know it?" he murmured fondly. "With my new motor car," she said. "Is the Gremlin, or can men being displaced by machinery?" he queried, slightly loosening his grip.

CONFERENCE PAMPHLET NOW READY

The full proceedings of the Seventy-seventh Annual Conference held in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, April 5, 6 and 7. Each discourse is reported in full. Added to these interesting proceedings is "An Address to the World," by the Church.

This is an excellent work to mail to friends abroad. Order now as the edition is limited.

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When the Race is Run.

Will the great God choose, when the race is run, to crown the victor with a laurel wreath? Light carts safe moored in a harbor? Will He smile on flowers born to the sun And trained to sheltered arbors? Or will He choose lives tempest-tossed, Which His winds and His waves have And gathered the buds which the sunshine lost, To bloom in the fields of heaven —By Marie Conway Penier.

If you desire to buy or sell real estate in any part of the city or state, it will be to your interest to communicate with the Geo. O. Cannon Association, 24 East South Temple St. Both phones 910.

CALIFORNIA EXCURSIONS.

April 26th to May 10th, inclusive.

Via Oregon Short Line and Southern Pacific. Following rates from Salt Lake:

To San Francisco and return, via Ogden and S. P., both ways \$31.50
To San Francisco and return via Portland one way..... 44.00
To Los Angeles and return via Ogden and S. P., both ways. 40.00
To Los Angeles and return via Portland, one way..... 53.40
Tickets limited to July 31st. Proportionately low rates from other stations. City Ticket Office, 201 Main Street.



AN ARABIAN ROUGH RIDER.

Called by Mr. Carpenter a Rival for Roosevelt.

the color of the limestone of which they are made. A little later they will turn to a hazy blue, changing as the sun drops to primrose and gold, and then dying out through a dark purple into the night.

Biskra is one island in this mighty sea of the Sahara. The mountain wall is a part of the shore of that sea, and the great cliffs rise almost straight up over it. If one had a glass, and would cast his eye along those mountains he would find a break at the right, known as the Gorge of Kantara. It is there that a river has burst through the wall, forming the golden gate to this greatest desert on earth. One comes right out of the mountains into the desert, and as he does so goes through the little oasis of Kantara, which serves, as it were, as the green key to that great golden door.

THE GARDEN OF ALLAH.

Biskra has been rather voluptuously described in the novel called "The Garden of Allah." Under another name it is made the chief scene of that story, and all of its surroundings are painted in more or less glowing colors. They are, as a rule, greatly overdrawn, and the tale itself has a mawkish, sensual sentimentality which leaves a bad taste in one's mouth. According to it, the Desert of Sahara is the Garden of Allah, Biskra its capital. It is the European capital in reality. It is the only part of this wild waste of sand which can be safely and comfortably reached by Europeans, and every winter tourists and health seekers by the thousands come here over the railroad which the French have built. Large hotels have been erected for them, and one can live here comfortably at from \$2 to \$5 per day. There are altogether a half dozen hotels and, in addition, a casino and theater. There are fre-

to be the oasis of Tougourt, which is 210 miles away, and a fairly good camel ought to cover the ground in less than a day.

The horse races are with Arabian stock, and the riders are Arabs, who in their skill might even rival President Roosevelt, and who delight in cross country going, jumping everything on the way.

IN FRENCH BISKRA.

The city of Biskra is composed of two towns. One is known as French Biskra and the other Old Biskra. The former contains about 900 Europeans and two or three times that many natives, while the latter is altogether native and is numbered more by the number of palm trees it owns than by the number of its inhabitants. It is comprised in six little mud villages scattered throughout plantations which support about 150,000 date trees.

The French town is surrounded by walls and entered by gates. It has several wide streets, the chief of which is the Rue Bertha, which runs from the railroad station past the public gardens and on toward the oasis of Tougourt. It goes by the oasis of Old Biskra, which is two miles off; and upon it is a street car line over which one can ride the whole of that distance for 2 cents. Another car line will take him to the hot springs three and a half miles away for the same money, and this is far down in the Desert of Sahara, in the very backwoods of the globe. The 2 cent rate is made without tickets, and it is less than half the nickel which we pay at home.

I shall send this letter to the United States for a 5 cent postage stamp, and I can telegraph from here across the Mediterranean to Paris for less than you can send a message from New



IN THE CORINTHIAN CANAL.

Colonel Edwin F. Holmes of Salt Lake Standing in the Deep Deities of Famous Old World Waterway.

Salt Lakers will readily recognize the above picture of Colonel Edwin F. Holmes. He was standing on the banks of the Corinthian canal, at Corinth, Greece, when the snap-shot was taken. The canal joins the Ionian sea, through the gulf of Corinth with the Aegean sea, through the Bay of Salamis.

The canal was commenced in 1881 and finished in 1893, at a cost of \$12,000,000. It is only four miles long, but

is quite deep, at places being more than 200 feet below the surrounding country. The comparatively small size of the waterway, 75 feet wide by 25 feet deep, makes the canal inadequate for modern heavy shipping. A dividend has not yet been paid to the stockholders. The tonnage rate is very high, but the receipts barely pay the operating expenses.

The "News" is indebted to Lorenzo L. Snow, a son of President and Mrs.

Minnie F. Snow, for the snapshot of Colonel Holmes. Young Snow accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Holmes on their trip abroad, and the party was at Constantinople when the letter containing the picture was mailed. They had just returned from a journey through the Bosphorus to the Black sea, and were about to leave for Budapest. It is the design of the tourists to revisit Constantinople next fall, on their way to India.

BARTON'S Great Spring Sale

Continues Monday and All Week

The First Week of our Sale has been a Great Success. Heavy sales are recorded in every department of our Big Store.

Bargains!

Men's 15c Hose at	..... \$ 4.30
Men's 35c Hose at	..... 1.90
Men's 50c Suspenders at	..... 1.90
Men's 25c Suspenders at	..... 1.90
Men's 75c Neckwear at	..... 50c
Men's 50c Neckwear at	..... 30c
Men's 25c Neckwear at	..... 15c
10c Canvas Gloves at	..... 40c
10c Work Gloves at	..... 40c
Men's Underwear, worth \$1.25 suit at	..... 85c
Etc., Etc., Etc.	

A Boys' Clothing Sale You Can't Afford to Miss

\$2.50 Suits at	..... \$1.45
\$3.00 Suits at	..... \$1.95
\$3.50 Suits at	..... \$2.10
\$4.00 Suits at	..... \$2.40
\$4.50 Suits at	..... \$2.60
\$5.00 Suits at	..... \$2.95
\$5.50 Suits at	..... \$3.30
\$6.00 Suits at	..... \$3.60
\$6.50 Suits at	..... \$4.25
\$7.00 Suits at	..... \$4.75
\$8.00 Suits at	..... \$5.10

Hundreds of Buyers have been benefitted. WE SHALL CONTINUE TO POUR BARGAINS AND BARGAINS UPON OUR PATRONS. MEN'S AND BOYS' CLOTHING, HATS AND FURNISHINGS ARE MARKED AT MONEY SAVING PRICES. WE ADVISE COMING EARLY, AS IT IS CERTAIN THERE WILL BE A TREMENDOUS DEMAND.

MEN'S AND YOUNG MEN'S HIGH-CLASS SUITS

Newest in cut and fabric. Best in quality and tailoring. Every suit fairly blossoms with Spring freshness and the variety to choose from is large. Don't wait for you can't get here too soon.

\$10.00 Suits at	..... \$ 7.75
\$12.50 Suits at	..... \$ 9.75
\$15.00 Suits at	..... \$11.75
\$18.00 Suits at	..... \$14.75
\$20.00 Suits at	..... \$15.75
\$22.50 Suits at	..... \$17.75
\$25.00 Suits at	..... \$19.75
\$27.50 Suits at	..... \$21.75
\$30.00 Suits at	..... \$23.75
\$35.00 Suits at	..... \$27.75

White and Fancy VESTS.

\$1.50 Vests, at	..... \$1.15
\$2.00 Vests, at	..... \$1.45
\$3.00 Vests, at	..... \$2.25
\$4.00 Vests, at	..... \$2.85

Mexican Hats - 19c

35c Stockings - 19c

HATS

last of lots, broken lines, odds and ends in new spring styles. Hats worth \$2.50, \$3, \$3.50, your choice at..... \$1.00

\$1.35 will buy a hat from our regular \$2.50 lines.

\$1.85 will buy a hat from our regular \$3.50 lines.

\$2.65 will buy a hat from our regular \$5.00 lines.

A SHIRT SALE

Shirt values that will induce you to buy all the shirts you can possibly use.

\$2.00 Shirts at \$1.65
\$1.50 Shirts at \$1.15
\$1.25 Shirts at 95c
\$1.00 Shirts at 60c
75c Shirts at 40c

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