



# The Story of Möhammed

EDITH HOLLAND



# THE STORY OF MOHAMMED

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# THE STORY OF MOHAMMED

## Forewords

A FEW YEARS AFTER St. Augustine landed on the Isle of Thanet to preach Christianity to the people of Britain, Mohammed, the Prophet of Arabia, began to preach against the idolatry of his native land, exhorting his country-men to the worship of the True God. He met with much opposition, but succeeded in the end in overthrowing idolatry and establishing the faith of Islam throughout the greater part of Arabia. The wandering tribes of the desert, united by the ties of a common faith, became a great nation, and spread themselves over many of the countries of Asia and Northern Africa. They even crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and founded a kingdom in Spain. During several hundred years the followers of Mohammed were the chief promoters of art, science, and literature. More than once a Mohammedan race threatened to overrun Europe, an event which would have changed the whole course of history; it was about a thousand years before such a possibility disappeared. At the present day many millions of the inhabitants of India, Persia, Afghanistan, Turkey, Egypt, and various parts of Africa are Moslems, or followers of the Prophet Mohammed; it is but right that we should know something of the founder of so wide-spread a faith, and of the beliefs professed by so many of our fellow-men.



## Yussouf

A stranger came one night to Yussouf's tent,  
Saying, "Behold one outcast and in dread,  
Against whose life the bow of power is bent,  
Who flies, and hath not where to lay his head;  
I come to thee for shelter and for food,  
To Yussouf, called through all our tribes the Good."

"This tent is mine," said Yussouf, "but no more  
Than it is God's; come in, and be at peace;  
Freely shalt thou partake of all my store,  
As I of His who buildeth over these  
Our tents his glorious roof of night and day,  
And at whose door none ever yet heard Nay."

So Yussouf entertained his guest that night,  
And, waking him ere day, said: "Here is gold;  
My swiftest horse is saddled for thy flight;  
Depart before the prying day grows bold."  
As one lamp lights another, nor grows less,  
So nobleness enkindled nobleness.

That inward light the stranger's face made grand  
Which shines from all self-conquest.  
Kneeling low, He bowed his forehead upon Yussouf's hand,  
Sobbing, "O Sheik, I cannot leave thee so;  
I will repay thee; all this thou hast done  
Unto that Ibrahim who slew thy son!"

“Take thrice the gold,” said Yussouf, “for with thee  
Into the desert, never to return,  
My one black thought shall ride away from me.  
First-born, for whom by day and night I yearn,  
Balanced and just are all of God’s decrees;  
Thou art avenged, my first-born, sleep in peace!”

J. R. LOWELL



## Arabia and Its Tribes

**I**F YOU LOOK at the map of Asia you will find, in the southwest, the largest peninsula in the world. This is Arabia; its shape is an irregular oblong, bounded on the west by the Red Sea, on the south by the Indian Ocean, on the east by the Persian Gulf and the river Euphrates, and on the north by Syria.

Arabia is a very hot and dry country; in some parts it scarcely ever rains, and a great deal of it is desert. Except in the southwest, there are no rivers that flow the whole year round, they rush in torrents from the mountains in springtime, but soon lose themselves in the sand, leaving dry river-beds, which are called wadys. The Arabs are a very ancient people, having possessed their land from the earliest days of which we have any records, and they have never been wholly conquered by any foreign invader.

The Arab nation is divided into tribes; in olden days there was no king or ruler over the whole of Arabia, but each tribe was independent, and governed by its chief. This chief was usually chosen because he was the bravest or the wisest man, and the one best fitted to lead. Some of the tribes lived in towns and villages and had settled occupations, whilst others were Bedouins, or wanderers, and lived in tents, moving their camps from place to place when they wanted fresh pasture for their flocks and herds. In their wanderings they often had to cross wide tracts of desert, and their most useful beast of burden was the camel. No animal is better fitted for travelling in the desert than the camel; he is very hardy and able to go without water for several days together, and his feet, being large and flat, are specially adapted for walking on the soft sand. The camel has been well named the ship of the desert.

Have you any idea what a desert is like? Imagine a land from which all life has disappeared—where there are no hedges, nor trees and flowers; no birds, no insects. The hills are barren, the valleys dry beds of forgot-

ten rivers; there is no sound nor sign of life—a world of nothingness! Think how far away the horizon appears when you stand on the beach, looking out to sea; if you were in the desert this far horizon would be round you on all sides, smoky blue in the dim distance, and you would feel lost in the boundless expanse.

In some parts of the desert there are sand dunes—hillocks and mounds of sand as soft as down cushions, blown by the wind into ridges that are like the waves of the sea. Sometimes the wind blows fiercely across the open waste, and the loose sand rises up like a tall pillar and overspreads the sky, blotting out the sun. Any camels that may be on the march lie down and bury their noses in the sand, and their riders lie beside them, covering up their mouths and noses until the sandstorm has swept by. Can you wonder that the people who live on the borders of the great desert should think of Paradise as a garden with flowing rivers?

The Arabs are the children of the desert, and many of their special qualities can be traced to its influence. What people have a greater love of freedom than the wandering Arabs who roam over these vast solitudes, knowing no limit or boundary, for the desert is free to all? The wiry strength and endurance of the Arab, his quickness of perception, are the outcome of his desert life, for to the wayfarer of the sandy waste “voyaging is victory,” and he must use all his resourcefulness, all his powers of endurance, to defeat the dangers that beset him on his way. Perhaps it is these pitiless regions which have inspired the fierce revengefulness of the Arab, for he is slow to forgive an injury, and a blood feud may sometimes last for generations. On the other hand, no people in the world are so famed for their hospitality as these wanderers of the desert. The weary traveller need never appeal in vain for food and shelter; his Arab host will entertain him with the best he has, often killing his last sheep or goat to do honour to his guest. So highly does an Arab regard the duty of hospitality that if a stranger has once broken bread or eaten salt with him he considers him ever afterward entitled to his protection, even though he should turn out to be his worst enemy.

Three men were once having a discussion as to who was the most generous of all the Arabs they knew. Each claimed that distinction for his

own particular friend, quoting instances of his wonderful liberality. The discussion became heated, and at length some one suggested that each of the three men should go to his friend, asking for help, and the one who responded most liberally to the appeal would be considered the first among the Arabs for generosity. This was agreed to, and the first man went in search of his friend, Abdallah, whom he found mounted on his camel, and just about to start on a journey. But when Abdallah heard that his friend was travelling and in need of help he immediately dismounted and told him to take the camel and all that was on her; the only thing he asked to have back was a sword he greatly valued, which hung on the saddle. The saddle-bags on the camel were found to contain four thousand pieces of gold and some silk vests, but the most valuable article was the sword.

The second of the two men now went to test the generosity of his friend, whose name was Kais. When he arrived at his house Kais was asleep, and his slave did not like to wake him, but hearing that a friend of his master was in need of help he gave him all the money he could find in the house, amounting to several thousand pieces of gold, and told him to go to the man in charge of the camels and take a camel and a slave. When Kais awoke he commended his servant for what he had done, and, as a reward, gave him his freedom, but said that if he had seen his friend himself he would have given him still more.

It now remained for the third man to try if his friend Arabah could surpass the other two in acts of generosity. Arabah was infirm and nearly blind; he was on his way to prayers, leaning on the arms of two slaves, when he met his friend, who appealed to him for help. "Alas! I have no money," cried Arabah, deeply distressed, "but take these slaves, for they are all I have." His friend refused, but Arabah insisted, and, dismissing his two slaves, he groped his way as best he could along the walls of the houses.

When the three men met to discuss the merits of their friends, all who were present were of the same opinion—that Arabah had proved himself the most generous, for he had given all he possessed.

There were three things on which the ancient Arabs specially prid-

ed themselves—eloquence, with a thorough knowledge of their own beautiful language, horsemanship, including the use of arms, and the practice of hospitality. Without these no Arab was considered to be fully educated.

The Arabs have a great love of poetry. In the olden days their only historical records were contained in the verses of their poets. So highly did they value this art that when a new poet arose, his tribe was publicly congratulated. A festival was held in his honour, and the women danced and sang to the sound of timbrels. Only two other occasions were considered worthy of public rejoicing that of the birth of a son and of a purebred Arab foal, for the Arabs are very proud of their breed of horses, which are famous all the world over.

At the great fairs, which were held yearly at certain places in Arabia, poetical competitions used to take place. The poets came and recited their verses before all the people, and those which were judged to be the best were written on silk in letters of gold and hung up in the ancient temple of Mecca, where all might see them. It may seem strange to you that this wild and lawless people should have had such a passion for poetry; but the free and wandering life of the desert is more likely to foster the true spirit of poetry than the atmosphere of civilized towns. When guarding his flocks from the wild beasts that infest the borders of the desert, the Arab would often spend his nights under the “stars which are the poetry of heaven”—shining in those clear skies with a brilliancy we have no idea of in our misty northern climes. The cold light of dawn, touching the summits of the grey hills, giving them a grim and haggard look, the mirage shimmering in the noon-day heat, the crimson sunset lighting the rocks with a radiance like the glow of a fiery furnace—these airings lent wings to the imagination of the lonely watcher, and quickened his insight into the world of mystery and romance. Was not one of the greatest poets of all time an Arab for the *Book of Job* contains some of the finest poetry that was ever written?

There is yet another side to the teaching of the desert; in the loneliness of this vast and empty land, man realizes his helpless dependence, and his faith in a merciful and compassionate God who cares for his needs,

becomes stronger and more vivid. It was in the desert that Abraham, journeying by the guidance of the stars, came to the knowledge of an all-powerful God, far above the vain idols of man's imaginings. Moses, during his long sojourn in the wilderness, never doubted the near presence of a mighty God, a sure help in time of trouble. In later years the Prophet of Arabia, wandering among the barren hills of his native land, saw in the wonders of nature sure signs of the greatness of the Creator, and there came upon him the conviction that "God is One, the Eternal," that "there is none like unto Him." In the desolation of the desert man looks to a Paradise in the unknown land beyond the stars—there will he find a haven of rest, a heavenly city, "gardens neath which rivers flow."

The desert is an all-conquering force which man has no power to overcome, and where it seeks to extend its boundaries its advance is irresistible. The sand, lashed by the cutting winds, is for ever driven against the solid rocks; gradually their outline is effaced, until, in the long course of ages, they too crumble away into particles of sand. The work of destruction never ceases. Step by step the desolation advances, spreading over all a veil of sand, like a mantle of forgetfulness.

# The Year of the Elephant

ON THE WESTERN side of Arabia, in the province of Hijaz, and about fifty miles from the Red Sea coast, is the city of Meccah. It is one of the oldest cities in the world and one of the most interesting. As long ago as the days of Jacob it was an important centre for the caravans bringing their rich merchandise from the south, and through the desert into Syria. You read in the Psalms, "The kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts." Saba was a city on the southwest coast of Arabia, in the province of Yemen, which is much more fertile than other parts of the country. In the olden days there must have been many stately towns along that coast, and it was from this part of Arabia that the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon.

Gold and precious stones and many sweet-smelling spices were brought to Yemen from the shores of Africa, and even from India. All this valuable merchandise was loaded on the backs of camels to be conveyed to the markets of Syria and other important centres of trade, sometimes even to Egypt and the ports of the Mediterranean. The merchants travelled in companies or caravans, for the sake of safety, for there were many dangers to be faced before they could reach the end of their journey. A great part of the route lay through the desert, and here were often plunderers who might fall on the caravans, robbing them of all their treasures. A caravan may be large or small, a large one sometimes numbering over a thousand camels.

At certain places in the desert there are fertile spots called oases. A spring of water coming to the surface causes grass and palm-trees to grow, and the latter are much prized and carefully cultivated for the sake of their dates. A well is usually built to prevent the precious spring from being choked up with sand. An oasis may consist of a single well and a few palms, or it may be very large, containing thousands of date palms and villages with many inhabitants. At these fruitful islands the

caravans halted, while the weary travellers enjoyed a well-earned rest and replenished their store of water, which they carried in goatskin bags. On the road from Yemen to Syria there are about seventy halting-places, Meccah lying about half-way.

The sacred city of Meccah is situated in a long, narrow valley, almost entirely surrounded by steep mountains, on which there is hardly a trace of vegetation. There are no green fields to be seen, and this spot, so revered by the Arabs and all Mohammedans, is one of the most grim and barren places of the earth. There are many legends connected with its early history. It is said that, after their wanderings in the wilderness, Hagar and Ishmael came into the valley of Meccah; Hagar, unable to find water for her son, left him lying on the ground, and ran distractedly between the hills of Safa and Marwah, seeking a well or a spring. When she returned to her child there was a stream of clear water gushing from the ground at his feet! This spring was afterward known as Zem-Zem, the sacred well which is to this day visited by pilgrims. Near this spot the city of Meccah was founded; in course of time Ishmael married the daughter of one of the ruling chiefs, and he is revered as the forefather of many of the tribes of Arabia.

In the midst of the city stands a very ancient temple. Its shape is that of a perfectly plain four-sided figure, the height being rather greater than the length and breadth; the sides of the building are entirely covered with a drapery, usually of black. The Kaabah, or Cube House, as this temple is called, is regarded by the Mohammedans as the most sacred place on earth. It is in no way beautiful, yet its severe simplicity makes it one of the most impressive sights in the world. At the southeast corner of the building, near the only door, is inserted a mysterious Black Stone, which has been held in reverence by countless generations. A legend tells that it once fell from heaven, and was originally white, until the sins of the world changed it to its present colour. Very little is known about the early history of the Kaabah. The Arabs say that the first Kaabah was built by the angels for Adam in Paradise, and that the earthly Kaabah was an exact copy of this first model. It was many times destroyed, and was supposed to have been rebuilt by the Patriarch Abraham with the



help of his son Ishmael. The Arabs say that it was Abraham who first taught them the worship of the true God and instituted some of the ceremonies of pilgrimage to the Holy House.

For a time the Arab tribes followed the religion of Abraham, but by degrees they fell away from their ancient faith and became idolaters. At the time at which our story begins, the whole of Arabia was given over to idolatry. Some of the tribes worshipped the stars and planets, the beautiful Sirius, or Dog Star, being an object of special devotion; some made idols of stones and rocks, and a few were fire-worshippers, like the early Persians. Thus the Kaabah, which had first been devoted to the service of God, became a shrine of idolatry. In the sixth century there were 360 idols, one for each day of the Arab year, around and within the Kaabah. These idols were of various forms, one being in the shape of an eagle, another of a horse, and among them stood a rude statue of the Patriarch Abraham. One of the most honoured was Hubal, the gigantic figure of a man, carved in red stone, and holding in his hand seven wingless arrows. The ancient Arabs often drew lots to decide any important question, and for this purpose they used wingless arrows. Hubal was the oracle who presided over the drawing of lots.

The care of the Kaabah, with the duty of feeding the many pilgrims who came to worship at the holy shrine, was entrusted to the members of the tribe which had most power and influence; these also claimed the right of raising the banner and declaring war.

During the fifth and sixth centuries the ruling tribe at Meccah was the Kuraysh. This name is derived from a word which means "to trade," many of the leading members of the tribe having been great traders. The chief of the tribe of Kuraysh was the most important and influential man in Meccah. One of the most renowned of these chiefs was Hashim, who was born in A.D. 464; he was very rich, having gained great wealth by trading, and he did much to increase the prosperity of his native town. He instituted a regular caravan service between Meccah and the most important markets of the East; every winter a caravan set out for Yemen, and every summer for Syria. During the pilgrimage season, Hashim entertained the pilgrims with princely liberality, providing

them with bread and meat, butter, barley, and dates. The ancient well Zem-Zem having long ago become choked up and the site forgotten, Hashim had large tanks made in which all the available water could be stored, thus giving Meccah a sufficient water-supply.

During the time that Hashim was chief of Meccah, there was a year of great scarcity, and the city was threatened with a serious famine. Hashim spent a great part of his wealth in relieving the wants of his fellow-countrymen; he travelled to Syria, and bought all the corn that could be collected; this was loaded on the backs of numerous camels and conveyed to Meccah to be distributed among the people. After this the camels were slaughtered and roasted, and plenty reigned in place of want and starvation.

Late in life Hashim married a noble lady of the town of Yathrib, and had a son who was named Shayba. While Shayba was yet but a child, Hashim died in Syria, where he had gone on a trading expedition. His younger brother, Muttalib, acted as chief of Meccah until Shayba was old enough to succeed to his father's dignities. In course of time Muttalib went to fetch Hashim's son from Yathrib, where he was living with his mother. When Muttalib returned to Meccah in company with the young lad, the people thought he had bought a slave, and called the boy Abd al-Muttalib, which means the slave, or the servant, of Muttalib. The name clung to him, and he is known in history by no other name than that of Abd al-Muttalib.

When he was old enough Hashim's son was installed in his father's place; but one of his uncles, whose name was Naufal, disputed his possession of the property and tried to rob the orphan of his rights. Abd al-Muttalib sent word to his mother's relations in Yathrib, letting them know how he had been treated. Thereupon eighty men of his mother's clan rode in haste to Meccah, and appeared before the Kaabah fully armed. Their chief, drawing his sword, threatened Naufal with instant death if he did not swear to respect the rights of his nephew Abd al-Muttalib. Naufal, overawed by this sudden boldness, swore a solemn oath in the presence of the assembled chiefs of the Kuraysh, agreeing to recognize the claims of Hashim's son.

For many years, however, Abd al-Muttalib had a hard struggle to retain his position, and he had many rivals who were jealous of his power. At last an event occurred which seemed to be the turning point in his fortunes. The site of Zem-Zem, the ancient well of Meccah, had, as I have already told you, been long forgotten. Abd al-Muttalib, having got some clue to its position, set himself diligently to find it. Long and patiently he continued excavating, with the help of his son, Harith. At last their efforts were rewarded, and they came on a quantity of treasure which had been buried in the well more than three hundred years before, during a tribal war. Two golden gazelles, some swords and suits of armour were discovered; the well was cleaned out, and found to contain an ample supply of water. Some of the other members of the tribe of Kuraysh disputed the right of Abd al-Muttalib both to the well and the treasure. Lots were cast with the arrows of Hubal to decide whether the newly found treasure should belong to Abd al-Muttalib, to the tribe of Kuraysh, or to the gods of the Kaabah. The drawing of the lots apportioned the golden gazelles to the Kaabah and the rest of the treasure to Abd al-Muttalib, while the arrows of the Kuraysh were blank. The gazelles were hammered out into plates of gold and nailed to the door of the Kaabah, and Abd al-Muttalib hung up the swords on the outside of the building to guard the treasures within.

From this time the fortunes of the chief steadily improved, his wealth increased, and he became famous, as his father Hashim had been before him, for the liberality with which he entertained the pilgrims. As guardian of the well Zem-Zem, it was also his duty to supply them with water. Thus Abd al-Muttalib acquired power and influence. But amid all his prosperity there was one thing which seriously troubled his peace of mind. In the East, people think a great deal of having many sons to succeed them and uphold the honour of the family. During the time of his long struggle with fortune, Abd al-Muttalib had but one son to help him, and in those days he had made a rash vow, for he had sworn before the gods of the Kaabah that if he ever possessed ten sons he would show his gratitude by offering up one of them in sacrifice. Years passed, several sons and daughters were born to Abd

al-Muttalib, and at last the fatal number was reached. He was the father of ten sons, and the youngest, whose name was Abdallah, was his best beloved. For a long time Abd al-Muttalib delayed the fulfilment of his vow, which he now bitterly repented, but an oath sworn before the gods could not be lightly regarded. The day arrived when the sorrowing father took his ten sons with him to the Kaabah; each of their names was inscribed on a wingless arrow, that the lots might decide which of the ten was to be offered up in sacrifice.

Great were the lamentations in the family of Abd al-Muttalib when the lots were drawn, and it was found that Abdallah, the youngest and best-beloved, was doomed to death. His sisters clung to him, weeping bitterly, begging that his life might be spared. The unhappy father, stricken with grief, vowed that he would sacrifice ten camels in the place of his son if the divining arrows should decide in Abdallah's favour. So the lots were cast between ten camels and the life of Abdallah, but again the fatal arrow fell to him. Abd al-Muttalib now doubled the number of camels—twenty camels against the life of his son! But fate seemed determined not to spare him; again and again the lots decreed that Abdallah should die, and each time Abd al-Muttalib vowed ten camels more, until the number reached a hundred! The distracted father now waited in an agony of suspense while once again the lots were cast—a hundred camels against the life of Abdallah!

Fate at length relented, reversing her decree, and this time the arrow of death fell to the lot of the camels. These were slaughtered, and all the meat given away to the poor, for the family of Abd al-Muttalib refused to touch Abdallah's ransom. Released from his cruel doom, the boy was restored to his family; in course of time he became the father of Mohammed the Prophet.

When he was twenty-four years of age, Abdallah was married to Aminah, a maiden belonging to a distant branch of his own tribe, the Kuraysh. The year following their marriage was an important one in the history of Meccah. A large army advanced upon the city from the south, led by Abraha, viceroy of the king of Abyssinia, who at that time ruled in Yemen. Abraha rode at the head of his troops on a huge el-

elephant, and the sight so impressed the Arabs that the year A.D. 570, in which these events occurred, has ever since been known as the Year of the Elephant. The invading army was stricken by a deadly disease and retired.

But another event, of vastly greater importance, happened in the Year of the Elephant; for in that year was born Mohammed, the son of Abdallah, destined to be the Prophet of Arabia.

## The Youth of Mohammed

**G**REAT HAD BEEN the rejoicings at the marriage of Abdallah and Aminah, but the happiness of the bridal pair was not to last long. A year had scarcely passed before Abdallah died, while on a visit to Yathrib, leaving to his sorrowing wife the care of her infant son.

Abd al-Muttalib had from the first taken a great interest in his little grandson. When told the news of his birth he had gone to the house of Aminah, and, taking the child in his arms, had carried him to the Kaabah, there to give thanks to God. The boy was named Mohammed, which means "The Praised," or "Illustrious."

It was the custom in Meccah to give young children into the care of Bedouin women, thus sending them away from the hot and dusty city into the pure air of the desert. The little Mohammed was nursed by a woman named Halimah, of the tribe of Banu Saad, and the first five years of his life were spent in the tents of this wandering tribe. All through his life, Mohammed remembered his Bedouin nurse and his foster-sister Al-Shaima, with tender affection. At the age of five he was brought back to Meccah by Halimah, who told his mother wonderful stories of the boy's early intelligence.

Aminah was very proud of her son, and anxious to show him to all his relations. When he was about six years old she took him to Yathrib, the place where Abdallah had died, and where his mother's relations lived. It was a long journey for so young a child, the distance being about the same as that between London and Edinburgh, but Arabs, with their wandering instincts, think very little of distance. Mounted on two camels, Aminah, her son, and a slave girl called Umm Ayman, accomplished the journey in safety. They spent a month in Yathrib, and Mohammed always looked back with pleasure to this time with his cousins. He amused himself with all sorts of childish games—years



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# The Story of Möhammed

EDITH HOLLAND

**T**he *Story of Mohammed* tells the legendary life of Mohammed.

Born in 570 CE in the Arabian city of Mecca, Mohammed was orphaned at an early age; he was raised under the care of his paternal uncle, Abu Talib. After his childhood, he primarily worked as a merchant.

Occasionally, Mohammed would retreat to a cave in the mountains for several nights of seclusion and prayer.

At age 40, Mohammed reported that he was visited by Gabriel and received his first revelation from God. Three years after this event, Mohammed started preaching the revelations publicly, proclaiming that he was a prophet and messenger of God.



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ISBN 978-1-5085-3786-1



9 781508 537861

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