

# RAILWAY BUILT for MOSLEM PILGRIMS

**T**HE Damascus to Mecca railroad has many remarkable features which distinguish it from other lines. Its principal object is to provide a means for faithful Moslems to perform their pilgrimage to the holy places of Mecca and Medina with a greater degree of comfort than formerly.

Its inception is due to the initiative of the present sultan, and the enthusiasm created by its first announcement brought in subscriptions from the faithful in all parts of the Islamic world. A special stamp-tax forms a solid annual contribution to the expenses, somewhat less evanescent than other contributions may prove to be.

Geographically, the line has provided a means of travel in a country with a fascination of scenery quite peculiar to itself and unlike any other part of the world. Instead of traversing populous countries and great cities, it seems to delight in passing through immense solitudes—through a country peopled mainly by the spirits of the "Arabian Nights," where little surprise would be occasioned in finding a roc's egg in some inhospitable, rocky valley, or in seeing a genie floating in a stream of thin vapor out of a magic bottle.

The line commences at the traditional parting-place of the great pilgrimage, the Bab el Allah, or Gate of Allah, in Damascus. For the first few miles the line traverses the Hauran, running parallel to the French Hauran railroad. From ancient times this district has been an extremely rich one, and the Romans used it as a granary.

The deep, narrow ravines of the Yarmuk, the ancient Hieromax, which the line follows in its descent to the Jordan, present several difficulties of engineering successfully overcome. Large numbers of Italian, Montenegrin, Croatian, Greek, and other European workmen had to be employed on the difficult rock cuttings, tunnels, and viaducts of this section.

The Jordan valley, where the line crosses it, is 800 feet below Mediterranean level; but the difficulties of construction cease when the Yarmuk valley has been successfully traversed, and the ascent to the sea is made by easy gradients.

South of Deraa the main line soon leaves the richer corn land and enters an upland, undulating country, the land of Bashan, producing abundant grazing in the spring. At that season troops of gazelle roam about the country, and the Bedouin, with vast herds of camels, are found close to the line.

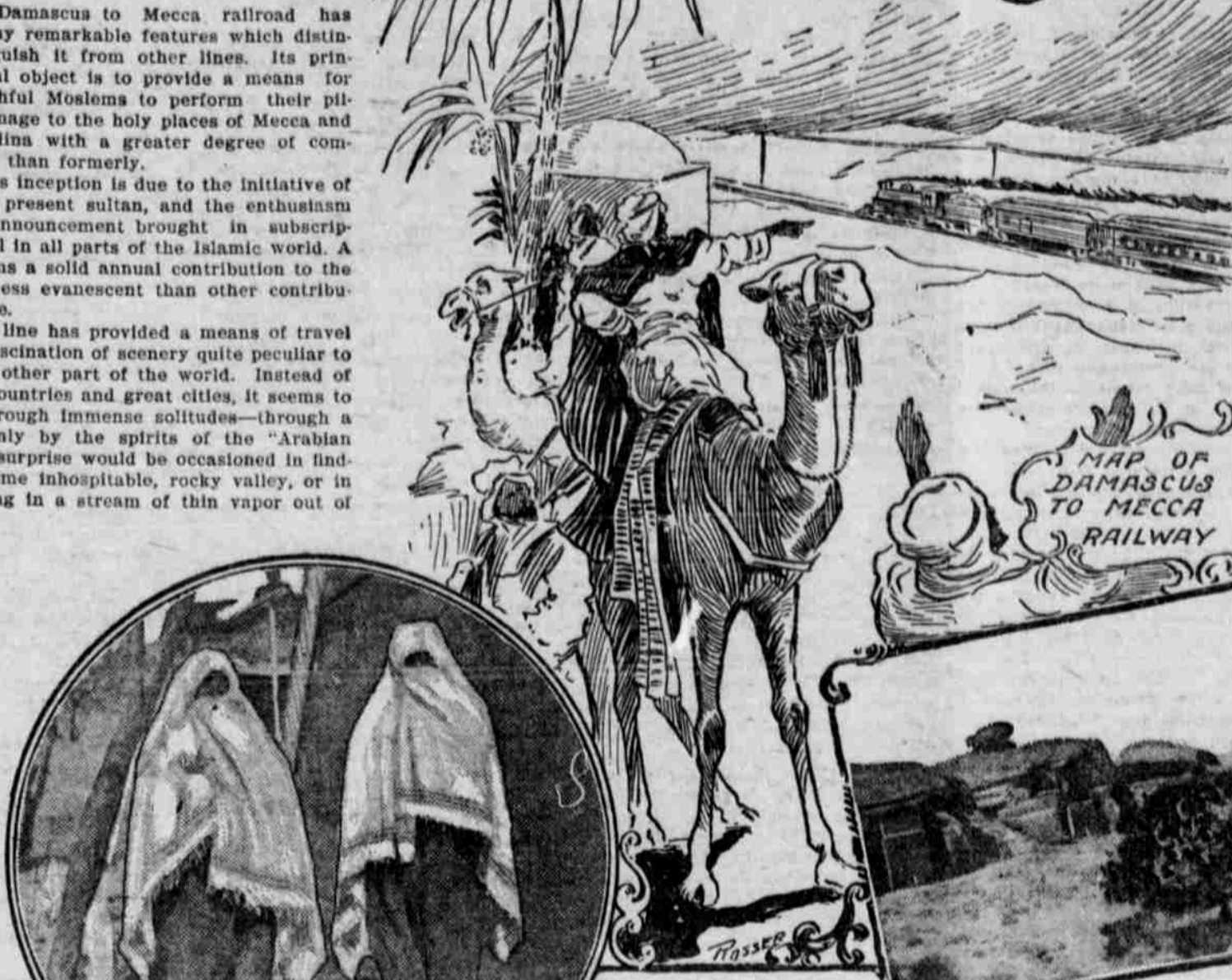
The landscape gets bleaker as the train moves south. The mountains of Moab are passed some distance to the west, and the track is laid far out in the desert, where the valleys are wide and easy to cross, and before they deepen into narrow ravines as they enter the mountains.

The old pilgrim route is followed very closely throughout, and at the stations the stone cisterns and reservoirs, to provide a supply of water to the pilgrims are noticed. Water becomes very scarce; in a few places wells have been dug and water is raised by wind-pumps. For some reason boring for artesian wells does not seem to have been tried. One attempt was made in rocky ground, and when the drills broke no further attempts were made.

As the line approaches Maan an extremely desolate country is traversed. Low ranges appear to the east, apparently of sandstone or limestone formation, although the ground is strewn thickly with black fragments of obsidian along some sections of the line. The ravines now trend eastward, to lose themselves in a wide depression in that direction, as shown in the recent maps of this country by Prof. Alois Musil. Maan is the first point since Amman where water is procurable in any quantity, either from springs in the small town itself or from wells at the railroad station. The place is a large railroad center, with several stone buildings for officials, a small shop for temporary repairs, a hospital, and quite a good hotel—a substantial building, rather small in size. The small town, containing some good stone and mud houses, is not visible from the railroad, but lies beyond a hill nearly a mile off. Two copious springs supply the necessary water.

Date palms are reared; small gardens with various kinds of fruit trees and a few fields of corn are visible, but from a little distance the place is little else than a drab patch on a gray landscape. Its principal distinction is its proximity to the rocky city of Petra, a ride of some eight hours to the west among the Moab hills. The climate of Maan is invigorating, both in winter and summer, as the place stands 3,525 feet above sea-level, surrounded by the dry, invigorating air of the desert.

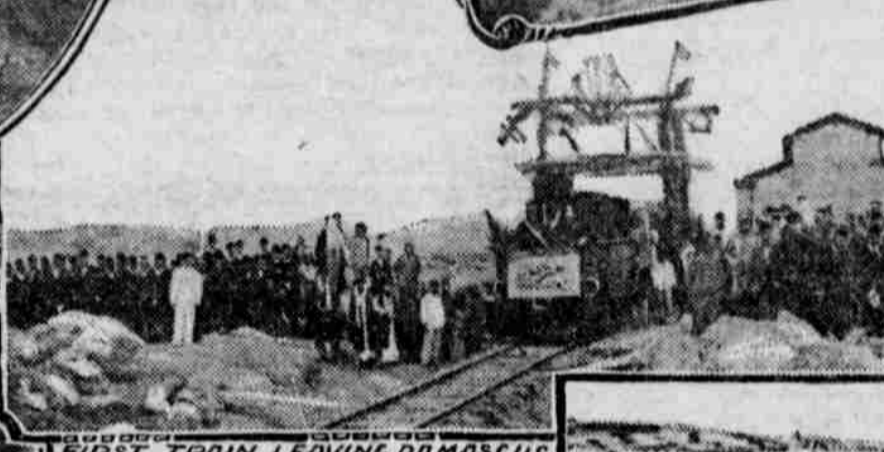
The principal drawbacks are the severe dust storms. Rain is not uncommon in the spring, and then a tinge of green spreads over



MOSLEM VILLAGE WOMEN



MOUTAKA PILLARS IN ARABIA



FIRST TRAIN LEAVING DAMASCUS



A CITY IN THE DESERT: MAAN

the landscape. The ancient fortress of Petra and now Maan owe their importance as standing at the gate of Arabia, and forming the last outpost of Syria and western civilization before the long, dreary stages of the northern Arabian journey.

For countless ages—long before the present pilgrimages—this was the route by which the gold, frankincense, and Arabian products found their way to Syria; but the Suez canal and steamer transport by the Red sea seem to have abolished all, or almost all, trade prospects, and only the pilgrims remain.

On leaving Maan it may indeed be said that all hope of dividend is left behind and the line enters a spirit world without towns or even inhabitants. The stages south of Maan, the old pilgrim route, were the most desolate of all, and the way was always strewn by dead and dying camels as the caravan toiled along. The line crosses a constant succession of small wadis.

Some 50 miles south of Maan comes the most remarkable change in the landscape and the veritable gate of Arabia and the home of the genie is at last reached. The line arrives quite suddenly at the edge of the curious escarpment known as the Batn-el-Ghrul, or the Hollow of the Genie.

From the station of Batn-el-Ghrul, at the top of the descent, the traveler can walk to the edge of the cliff and take in the immense extent of view which unfolds itself to the south. The escarpment is visible for some 20 miles to the east, and is a sheer cliff without, it is said, a single passage of descent. For some 15 miles to the west, also, the escarpment is fairly well defined, until it merges in the high ranges overlooking the Gulf of Akaba. The pilgrim route follows the descent close alongside the line and is from 3,207 feet at the summit to 3,278 at the foot of the escarpment, or 329 feet altogether.

The view from the summit is extremely striking and comprises a great inland depression, walled in by a continuation of the escarpment on the east, and glowing throughout in the most brilliant and striking colors. The prevailing note is bright red and yellow, changing to violet, purple and black, so that every tint except green seems to be supplied. The escarpment is of sandstone, which seems to have worn away in some places to sand-drift of all colors, but principally red and yellow. The spurs of the Telesh-Shahim, which run out parallel to the line, are covered with glistening black rocks, at first sight volcanic, but, as I was told by an engineer, they were really of sandstone blackened by the intense heat of the sun. The depression extends south for a distance of about 120 miles. In this clear, dry air every feature is visible. Inquiries regarding the country to the east gave it as an almost waterless region, although a route does exist from Maan to Jauf along which some scanty

wells can be found. Towards the Red sea the district is said to contain a few villages, and a sufficient supply of water from small springs.

An endless series of beautiful mirages unfold themselves as the train toils slowly along these two lines of steel leading through an endless expanse of sand and rocks, varied with an occasional volcanic outcrop raising black-topped hills.

At Tebuk, 430 miles from Damascus, is the first oasis of any size, and here a depot has been formed, at which the railroad can recoup itself before another long stretch of nearly waterless desert is entered and the next depot at El Ula reached. A group of buildings for the employes, a small repairing shop, and a hospital with 60 beds form the principal part of the depot.

Tebuk consists of a group of date palms about a half a mile square, deriving water from a large spring and watched over by another of the masonry forts which mark a pilgrim station. Altogether there were about 60 mud houses, with a few walled gardens belonging to the permanent inhabitants of Tebuk. All that were seen were of a distinctive negroid type, different from the nomad Bedouin the surrounding country is but sparsely inhabited by Arabs.

Besides date palms, there are in the gardens a few lemon trees and pomegranates, and outside are some few fields of wheat, cultivated principally as green fodder. The Italian engineer in charge of this section had managed to make a garden in the sand, where by means of irrigation he grew most kinds of European vegetables, but none of the inhabitants seemed inclined to copy his example.

It seems certain that Mohammed visited Tebuk in his earlier wanderings, and tradition refers to Jebel Sherara as the Pulpit of the Prophet, probably from its commanding position overlooking all the surrounding country.

The rainfall in this country is extremely capricious, and perhaps two or even three years may elapse before there is any appreciable fall here, although at Maan there appears to be always some rain in the spring.

Of animal life there appears to be very little. An antelope, which the Turks call a wild cow, but which looks to be oryx beatrix, is to be found in this district, but only in small numbers. The large troops of gazelle seen north of Maan do not roam here. It is said that the ostrich is occasionally found, and the skin of one specimen is preserved in Maan station.

The desert air is extremely dry and clear, always invigorating, and even the great heat in summer is not as insupportable as in a damper climate, where the thermometer is probably lower. Climate has without doubt a great effect on the human character and intellect, and the nervous, high-strung temperament of the Arab is to a great extent the creation of his environment of desert, with its splendid mirages to fire the imagination and sparkling air to keep the nerves always alert.

South of Tebuk want of water is again a great difficulty, and the small posts have to be

supplied daily from the train. At Medain-Salih the valley widens a little, and here are found some rock-cut tombs similar to those at Petra, but far fewer and less ornate. Traces of a town exist, but there is nothing now visible except the usual fort of the pilgrim. Here again, as well as at Tebuk, the site would seem a favorable one for trying artesian wells, but no attempts have been made to prove their success or other wise.

The permanent way has been laid

throughout by Turkish soldiers, but the staid buildings, all of very solid masonry, as well as bridges and culverts, of which there are great number, have been constructed mostly by Italian workmen, with some Greeks and Montenegrins. As many as three or four hundred Italian workmen were employed at one time on the works near Tebuk, and so little did fanaticism come into play that they built the fine new mosque at Tebuk. Subsequently they instructed some Turkish engineers, who continued the work from El Ula to the Holy City itself.

It is difficult to think of this railroad being a great highway or developing a great trade with Central Arabia, as the section from Maan to Medina traverses an unproductive country without possibility of development, and the interior of Arabia has no surplus products to dispose of. In any case, when the line reaches the sea, at Sherm Raghib, it is probable that any trade, either export or import, to Medina or Mecca will pass through that port in preference to the long land journey. The following summary of distances shows the extent of the line:

Damascus to Maan ..... 285 miles  
 Damascus to Tebuk ..... 430 miles  
 Damascus to El Ula ..... 609 miles  
 Damascus to Medina ..... 820 miles  
 Damascus to Mecca ..... 1097 miles



MAP OF DAMASCUS TO MECCA RAILWAY



TOMBS AT MEDAIN SALIH

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## THE ONLOOKER

### THE SONG



From the cage there comes a strain Full of mingled joy and pain— Tears and laughter, sighs and smiles, Echoing the hygone whistles; And the song goes on until We catch words that softly thrill Through the music of the bird As a shadow of each word.

Listen! Hear it sing of trees, And of drifting winds that seize Nodding blossoms as they run Heralding the rising sun; Hear it sing of winds that shake Jeweled waves upon the lake, And of wondrous blossom-tang Where the wild grapes clutch and hang.

And it tells us more and more In its notes that rise and soar

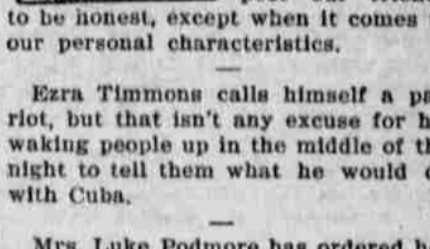
As though they would find the goal Kept from this imprisoned soul. Faint and fine the music now, Rising, falling, as a bough Rocked upon a zephyr's breast, Swinging thus a cradle-nest.

So it sings of night and morn, Of the berry and the thorn, Of the wild, wild sweeps of sea, Of the clover and the tree, Of the mystic woodland hush Where the fairies romp and rush Through the mazes of their dance In their olden necromance.

What? You hear it not? Ah, well, Thus we break the dreaming spell That made it both sweet and strong— Sunshine sparkling into song. And so dies each lilting note In the little songster's throat.

This, assuredly this I heard: "I remember!" sang the bird.

## OLD MAN GIDDLES OBSERVES.



If it isn't a man who wants to tell you that he takes a cold bath every morning it is one who insists on telling you he eats two apples every night at bedtime.

Most of us expect our friends to be honest, except when it comes to our personal characteristics.

Ezra Timmons calls himself a patriot, but that isn't any excuse for his waking people up in the middle of the night to tell them what he would do with Cuba.

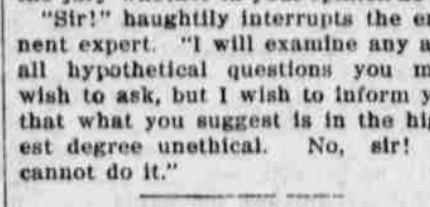
Mrs. Luke Podmore has ordered her winter dress made with short sleeves, but she is worried to death because Luke won't begin wearing his fall overcoat already.

There are men who brag about their poor memories.

I read a magazine clear through the other night, advertisements and all, and then sat for an hour trying to think what was peculiar about it. At last I figured it out; nothing had been exposed in that issue.

When a woman marries a man to reform him she may as well count on being a reformer the rest of her life.

When a woman who does her own cooking reads a story in which the



heroine bosses four or five maids about she begins to think that her husband doesn't love her as he should.

Drawing the Line. "Doctor," says the lawyer, "will you kindly examine the defendant, who is seated within two feet of you, and tell the jury whether in your opinion he—" "Sir!" haughtily interrupts the eminent expert. "I will examine any and all hypothetical questions you may wish to ask, but I wish to inform you that what you suggest is in the highest degree unethical. No, sir! I cannot do it."

A Spree in the Cooperage. The keg was gayly rolling across the cooper's floor, the cask was trying vainly to edge in through the door. The hogshead vowed 'twas easy to do the loop-the-loop, the barrel sang a merry stave that ended with a hoop; The crowd was soon arrested and flung into the jail—their friend, the water bucket was shortly giving bail.

The Wretch. "You have deceived me!" sighs the trusting wife. "I? Deceived you? How?" demands the surprised husband. "You have been telling me the truth about where you spend your evenings."

W. D. Nesbit.