



The Story of the Saracens, from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Baghdad

Arthur Gilman

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Pyrrhus Press specializes in bringing books long out of date back to life, allowing today's readers access to yesterday's treasures. This is a history of the Saracens Empire, the term by which Europeans referred to the Islamic empire started by Muhammad that spread across much of the Middle East, North Africa, and even into parts of modern-day Spain. From the start of the book: "East of the Red Sea, and just south of Palestine, there lies a strange land, belonging, we sometimes think, neither to Europe nor to Asia, nor to Africa. Its rocky borders are washed by water on three sides, while on the fourth there lies a sandy desert of such little importance that men hardly care to own it, and no boundary line is drawn to show where one nation's possessions end and the territory of the next neighbor begins. Sandy and rocky, almost without rivers or lakes, except in favored regions, with a great part entirely unknown, save, perhaps, to a few lonely wanderers or enthusiastic travelers, who have ventured to explore its barren wastes, this land was, at the time of which we write, strange to all the world. Roman and Macedonian, Jew and Gentile, had wandered around it; but no nation cared to inquire what secrets lay hidden in its broad and treacherous deserts. The haughty inhabitants looked back through many generations and assured each other that they were the ancient ones,—that they had Adam and Noah and Abraham and Ishmael for their fathers, and they cared as little for the rest of the world as the rest of the world cared for them. For how many generations these peculiar sons of the sands had lived in their primitive simplicity; for how many centuries they had fought the terrible simoons and had carried their small merchandise over the deserts in a venerable commerce; for what length of time they had dwelt in tents, feeding their dusky children with the dates and tamarinds that clustered on the branches which shaded them from the tropical sun, we cannot tell. They had no books, and their traditions were so evidently framed to bolster up a national pride that we cannot depend upon them as truth. At the time at which our story begins a change was about to come over this strange people; they were to be known of all men. They were no longer to be simply mysterious sons of the desert, but something more. Mystery was certainly to be always about them, but they were to have dealings with men which were destined to carry their name and their fame to all lands and to the end of time. It is to this people that the story of the Saracens calls us. It carries us back to a period several centuries before the Norman invasion of England; to a time when our ancestors were bowing their heads to Woden; but it introduces us to quite a different world—it shows us a Semitic instead of an Aryan type of social life. It interests us, people of another race of humanity, for the reason that it is new."

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