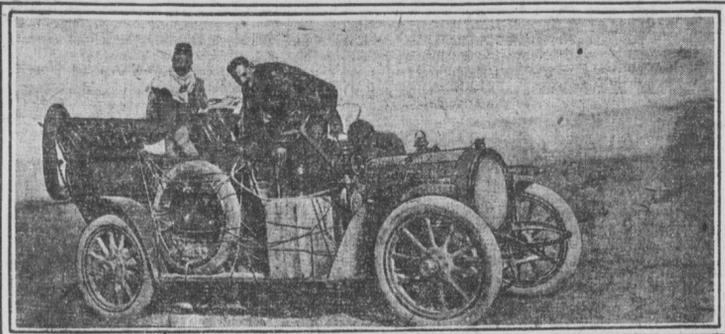


THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE TO CROSS THE SYRIAN DESERT.

By Salim G. Tabet.



Making Repairs in the Middle of the Desert.



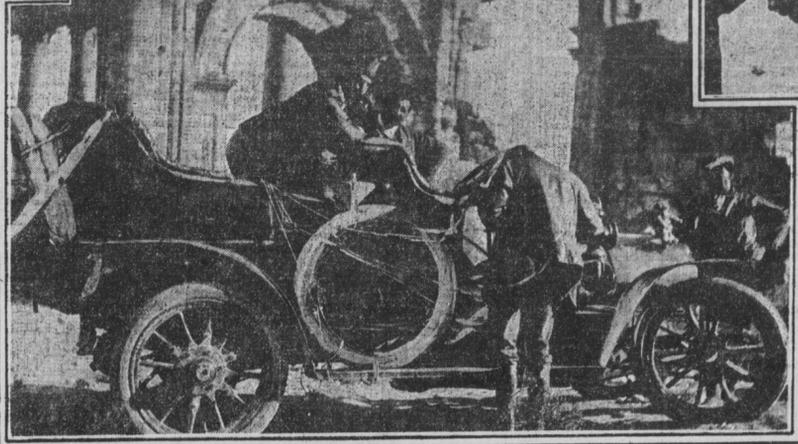
A Halt on Mt. Lebanon.



On the Outskirts of Damascus.



In the Tent of Emir Nimir, the Sebah Tribe at Kuryatan.



In Front of the Triumphal Arch in Palmyra.



Emir Nimir's Third Attempt to Ride the "Devil's Horse."

MR. PHILIP SECAF, a Damascene, was the first to import into Syria an automobile of modern perfection. I had often imagined what a great sensation this self-propelled vehicle would cause among the peasants in the interior of Syria, most of whom had never seen a railroad or even experienced the luxury of a carriage ride, but I did not expect the unusual consternation which we encountered.

Mr. Secaf invited me to accompany him on a trip across the Syrian desert. I at first feared that we might fall into the hands of hostile Bedouins. But I wished to determine the practicability of a service for tourists between Damascus and the ruined city of Queen Zenobia, in the Syrian desert, Palmyra, so I set forth.

Well supplied with gasoline and extra tires, we started with joyous anticipation on our initial journey from Beyrout to Damascus over the picturesque Lebanon Mountains. When we were about twenty miles out of Beyrout we stopped for refreshments for ourselves and water for the car's cooling tank. Every person in the village of Ain-Anoub who saw us climbing the steep approach gathered in the village square to look at the wonderful thing that could go without the aid of men or beast. I approached a middle-aged man, who seemed to be the village philosopher, and, pointing to the automobile, I asked him what he would call it in Arabic. He looked at me with a smile as if he knew that I wanted him to express his surprise, and said:

"You brought this devilish machine into our village and you want us to give it a name. I will, if you insist. I would call it the 'Majic Carpet.'"

Another who had recently returned from Cairo called it "Pharaoh's Chariot," and a young girl ran up and said in Yankee accent, "Why, that's an automobile. I saw hundreds of them in New York," and began to explain in her own way how the motor worked.

As we left the village and passed the orchards and vineyards we heard something like the crack of a pistol. It was the bursting of an inner tube. The roadside was full of natours (native guards), who roamed about armed with heavy rifles. Dozens of them quickly gathered around the machine. While the chauffeur was busy changing the tires I asked one of them to take a ride. When we had been running about ten minutes the poor fellow asked to be let off, as he was getting "seasick," and I am sorry to say that those few minutes' ride meant for him a good long walk back to his post of duty.

The summit of the Damascus carriage road is a little over 5,000 feet high, yet our car behaved remarkably well, and with all the roughness of the road (especially that part from Aleh to Shotra) we were able to travel the distance in two hours less than by rail. Future automobilists will find this road and all other roads throughout Syria fit for driving, as under the new régime graft among government officials is done away with.

On reaching Damascus there was a large crowd to meet the first automobile owned by a Damascene. Women, children and grown men came long distances, some in carriages, some on horseback and some walking. They blocked the way and pushed each other as if it were election night in Broadway.

Usually on an expedition by caravan from Damascus to Palmyra the first and most important thing for the safety of the party is the leather water bottles and provisions for the five days' journey on horseback through the desert, but our preparations were altogether different from those of any previous expedition to Palmyra. The first thing we had to consider was how many cans of gasoline and how many extra tires we ought to have. As we expected to make the journey, which was usually made in five days on horseback, in one day by automobile, we were not afraid of a water famine, but feared a shortage in our supply of gasoline and tires. One can imagine our dire predicament if such shortage were to occur. We saw the imperative necessity of loading every available space with the products of the Oil King and attaching the tires to all sides of the car.

Of the five extra tires of gasoline which we carried we used only three, so that, counting the two with which we filled the reservoir before starting, the consumption of gasoline for the round trip was five tires in all. The five extra tires were all used, and we even had to change the tires from the rear to the front wheels, and also use the spare wheel. We only carried two small leather bottles of water, one for ourselves and the other for the cooling tank, and found them ample.

We left Damascus through the street called Straight and out through Thomas Gate, thence over the Aleppo carriage road as far as Katfeih. Here we turned to the right and went by way of the village of Adameh. In my fourteen years of travel I have met many hospitable sheiks, but never have I met one whose hospitality could compare with that of Sheik Da'ass, of Adameh. This honorable chief is actually happy at the sight of strangers in his village. When we reached his village we intended to spend the night at Jaroud, three miles beyond, at the guest's house of Mohammed Pacha El-Jaroudi, but Sheik Da'ass met us at the entrance of Adameh and insisted on our coming into his house for a rest. The moment we entered he refused to sit with us unless we granted him his wish, saying:

"Gentlemen, if you think I am worthy of your

entertainment I pray you to order the men to bring in your baggage. I beg of you not to disgrace me by refusing my invitation."

This, of course, was not our plan, yet the sincere and kind words he showered upon us made it impossible for us to refuse his earnest plea. I thanked the Lord that I had no tourist with me on this occasion to say:

"No, I cannot do it. We must go on and get back to catch the steamship."

I do not mean to say that the tourist would be less kind in listening to the appeal of our host, but, as he could not understand the language, those kind words would not be so convincing when translated.

While serving us a liberal dinner, in accordance with Eastern etiquette, Sheik Da'ass waited on us in person. Our appeals were useless, he absolutely refused to sit with us, and therefore we said to him:

"At your request we altered our programme and agreed to stop with you. We hope for our sake you will join us at dinner."

"For your pleasure I will do anything," he answered, "but to sit at dinner with you would be to break the law of hospitality, which I am sworn to observe by the rule I like to be one."

The following morning we left Adameh for Kuryatan. The time required for a camel driver to travel this sixty miles is seventeen hours. The desert begins about six miles east of Adameh and extends for hundreds of miles, far beyond the centre of Arabia. We went for nearly sixty miles without seeing a human being or a green tree, but we met herds of hundreds of gazelles. The desert was as level as the sea, with bare mountains on each side. It had been explained that after leaving Adameh the road would be through the desert between the two mountains. This route was not allowed by the government for travelers or caravans on account of the hostility of the Bedouins, and the road for ten years has been closed to traffic. A wide detour has been necessary, heretofore, to reach Kuryatan, and only with a military escort. For a time we thought we had lost our road. Going zigzag among small hills, we anxiously looked on all sides for the village of Kuryatan. We climbed many hills, hoping to see our destination. We stopped to consider our serious situation. There were many roads before us, and the difficulty was which one to take. We decided to take the road that seemed best for an automobile and started with reduced speed among the hills. Kuryatan came suddenly into view, an oasis surrounded a mile on each side by hundreds of green trees. Near Kuryatan we met a number of caravans of camels. A flying, whirling, man-made motor car had invaded the land where, from time immemorial, the great method of transportation had been the camel.

How this mighty traveller of the desert flew in terror before the whistling callopio of the newcomer! How the Bedouin, who but yesterday was slinging stones in praise of his beloved animal, now leaves his tent in haste to see what this commotion means! He hears the shrieks of a siren horn and sees a huge thing flying along the road and his herds of camels and cattle running in fright. Back to his tent he hastens, and, terrified, kneels and prays to Allah to protect him and his from this "devil" let loose from Gehenna!

We went on peacefully and reached the threshing village of Kuryatan. Here we were met by Faris Aga, the chief of the village, who had been attracted by the automobile's horn, which was something he could not understand. We stopped, I jumped out to shake hands with him, and he shrank from me. It was several minutes before he recognized me, and then in surprise asked me when I had returned from America. "Where are the horses of the carriage?" he asked. "How are you able to go without something to pull the car?"

Women, children and old men were running from all directions to see the unknown object; but they were afraid to get too near, until, encouraged by Faris Aga, who was now having a thorough look at the car, they dared to close in upon us until it was difficult to keep them at a convenient distance.

Our plans were to leave Kuryatan immediately for Palmyra, but Faris Aga insisted that we should come into his guest's house. I tried to explain that we were endeavoring to establish a record, and his answer was, "Plenty of time!" However, we were not able to go without him, because he is a relative of the Sheik of Palmyra, with whom I was not acquainted. We had to stay. We asked Faris Aga to go with us to his house, but he refused to ride on the "devil's horse." We were therefore obliged, according to the custom of the East, to walk with him. There were a dozen Bedouin chiefs, armed to the teeth, awaiting his return, hoping to learn from him something about the mysterious genii. When they saw him with us they backed out of our way. Leaving Faris Aga and our party, I went over to the Bedouins and addressed them in their mother tongue, which seemed to soothe their fears. The first thing they asked was: "Have you seen the genii?"

I tried to explain that it was only a carriage, but even this they did not understand, for they had never seen one. The chauffeur brought the car around and on hearing his noise they were on the alert. I told them that this was our horse and that they need not be afraid, as we were friends of Faris Aga, and, therefore, friends to his friends. I beckoned to the chauffeur, called to him to stop, and by argument brought the Bedouins to Faris Aga, who helped me to explain the unknown thing to them. We walked to where the chauffeur had stopped and I jumped in and out of the car before them, kicked it to show them there was no life in it, and tried to explain why we were able to go so swiftly. But they wanted me to show them the horses, where we kept them and how I fed them.

My friend, Mr. Secaf, who is full of fun and has had many experiences with the Bedouins, was laughing at my difficulties. Seeing that my explanations were in vain and that the Bedouins insisted on my showing the horses, he whispered something to me, and, remembering that I had under the seat a Teddy bear which was given to me before leaving New York to take to the Orient as a mascot, I got it out with my left hand, put the other on the horn and said: "Here is one of our horses!" The noise of the horn and the unexpected sight of the bear put the Bedouin chiefs and villagers to flight. Faris Aga thought it was an altogether unbecoming, if not dangerous, joke. He was afraid the Bedouins might take up arms and seriously try to defend themselves by attacking me. Faris Aga invited them all to go into the guest's house and he called me to speak to them. I asked their chief, Emir Nimir, to ride in the motor, but he replied:

"No! As long as my horse and camel can carry me through the desert I do not care to ride anything else." Nevertheless, after luncheon, he consented, and took his seat beside the chauffeur. We expected some surprise, and feared he might try to jump out. But as soon as the car began to move he threw his strong arms around the chauffeur and held him so fast that we were compelled to force him to loose his grasp and thus give the chauffeur a chance to steer the car. A little later he came to me with a serious look, as if disgusted with himself for not trusting to the word of a friend.

"With your permission," he said, "I will take a short ride, provided Faris Aga comes with us." To this Faris Aga agreed, and we had a good ride at high speed, and both of these desert bred men seemed to enjoy it immensely. The Bedouin Prince, Emir Nimir, wanted to know how much the car cost and how many horses and camels would buy him one.

In the afternoon the women of our host's family were invited for a drive. Unluckily, before they had gone far one of the tires burst, and they had to walk back. While changing the tires a large crowd which was not quite used to the automobile stood near. A young Bedouin remarked to another, "They are putting new shoes on the horses." Leaving Kuryatan we had to travel by a rough road through ploughed fields. It was a very discouraging start. Although we were going slower than even the

laws of New York city allow, we were badly shaken up and in danger of causing an accident to the motor.

Faris Aga, whose custom was to travel on horseback, thought the road excellent. We left the car and scouted for a better road, and found one to the north of the village, a short distance from the so-called caravan road. To us it was anything but a road. The alkali was very thick, large chunks of it covering the entire desert, but there now lay before us a straight road to our right, but instead took the longer route by way of a deserted military post of Kaser el-Hay, to find out, for the benefit of future travellers, if water was still obtainable from the twenty fathom well that was dug there by the Turkish government. The barracks had been deserted by the Turkish troops on account of the raids of the warring Bedouins. This part of the road was the worst we came across in our journey. There were large stones in the way, which led us to conclude that there once stood here either a village or an important Palmyrian castle. Considering the heavy weight of the car and the roughness of the road we were surprised that the motor behaved so well. It gave us no trouble whatever, but we were disappointed to find that, while the well contained plenty of water, the soldiers had taken away with them the especially imported rope, fifty yards long, without which we were helpless.

From the top of the barracks we saw to our left a long stretch of sand covered with dry grass of a yellowish color, and on account of the roughness of the caravan road to Palmyra, which extended eastward, we drove due north for about two miles, till we reached the stretch of sand, which, we were exceedingly glad to notice, had a hard bottom and offered as good a road as one could wish. Looking at the sun for bearings, Faris Aga gave us a new landmark, and again we drove full east. As Faris Aga put it, "Tell him (the chauffeur) to drive for that hill, all the time keeping the sun to his right."

This direction was as accurate as that of the best transatlantic captain guiding his ship to Sandy Hook. The change in our course from a road covered with alkali to the smooth roadway of the desert sands gave the motor a remarkable opportunity to show our companions how fast we could go.

Before we were half an hour on the way we sighted Ain el-Bayadah, a Turkish military barracks built on the site of an old Palmyrian castle. Faris Aga thought it was a mirage, and rubbed his eyes to clear his vision. With the field glass the building was clear enough to me, so I drew the attention of Faris Aga to it.

"Aga, isn't this Ain el-Bayadah?"

His reply showed that he was perplexed. "By the Prophet of Mecca, I am altogether lost. I see the place clearly, yet I do not believe it. It takes me fully seven hours on my swiftest horse from Kaser el-Hay to this place, and now it is only a few minutes since we left. Look, the cigarette I lighted at the other place is still in my hand. Upon my word, it is Ain el-Bayadah. You can see the soldiers taking their horses into the courtyard of the barracks. They are scared, and cannot make us out. So doubt they think the very devil himself got loose in the desert."

Then he became serious, and said: "Tell him to stop. The soldiers are taking refuge on the roof; they might fire at us."

We immediately stopped out of the range of their guns.

Faris Aga turned to me and said: "Is it a flying machine, or what is it? We certainly must have been flying, or we never would have got here so quickly. Wait here till I go and talk to them."

As Faris Aga walked toward the barracks his dress evidently had its effect upon the terrified soldiers. He waved his cane to them—the private signal of his tribe—and walked courageously within talking distance, explaining that he was in company with friends and that the thing they saw was only a horseless carriage. He beckoned to us to come nearer, and we went on very slowly.

When we reached Faris Aga he said: "Those fellows have no particular fancy for your 'atavio.' They agreed to let you come in only because they know you and acted my explanation that the 'atavio' was simply a carriage without horses."

"Didn't they ask you how it goes without any horses?" I asked him.

"Take my advice," he replied, "and do not try to explain the 'atavio' to any people you meet, as your explanation is more perplexing than the thing itself. Say it is a horseless carriage that can go by itself." Seeing the entrance to the barracks open, we walked in and saluted two soldiers, who, we found, were the sole occupants of the place. They might as well not be there at all. They were absolutely helpless and could render no assistance against the raiding Bedouins. They were cordial to us, however, and served us with coffee. I asked one of them what he thought of the automobile when he first saw us coming.

"We first heard a kind of buzzing," he said, "we listened and looked and saw something coming. We thought it was racing with a sandstorm. We immediately decided to take in our horses, close the doors and await your approach."

We stayed at Ain el-Bayadah about half an hour listening to the soldiers' stories of exciting adventure

with Bedouins. Speaking of the well, Shawish Mohammed said:

"Our well here is as old as the desert itself. Every traveller who has gone by this route, from the days of Solomon the Wise till now, must have acknowledged the wisdom of Sayedna Solomon in building Tadmor to shelter his commercial caravans between Jerusalem and the Assyrian Empire. This well, like many others which the modern caravans pass on the way to Bagdad, was dug by Solomon's order."

Whether it was built by Solomon or by Queen Zenobia cannot be determined; but certainly it is as old as tradition itself. The grooves cut by ropes along the inside edge of the well's mouth are four inches deep, indicating very ancient use. After tarrying here a half hour we started on the last "leg" of the trip to Palmyra. The road was rough and we lost two tires on this stretch before we reached our destination.

The entrance to the ruined city of Palmyra is a melancholy sight. The shattered and scattered columns were depressing, and those still standing had a solitary, sad appearance, as if weeping over the lost glory of the capital city of Queen Zenobia's empire, which included Egypt, Palestine and Asia Minor, and extended from the Nile to the Euphrates, and northward from Betra to beyond the Gallician gates.

The entire village and the Sheik, Abd-Allah, turned out to see the noisy visitor. Sheik Abd-Allah had been to Europe. He knew what an automobile was, loathed the fears of the people, and came out to meet us with a cordial welcome. We drove right into his courtyard. I when we told him that we came that day from Kuryatan to Palmyra it was hard even for him to credit the story. Faris Aga, our desert guest, assured him that it was so.

"We left Kuryatan when the sun was high up in the sky," he said, "and the Muzain had not yet called the faithful to the noon prayer. We have done the trip from Kuryatan to Palmyra, which takes your swiftest dromedary or horse twenty-five hours, in four hours and a half in this automobile."

We went first to the Temple of the Sun. Between the fluted columns of the ancient temple, with their beautifully engraved capitals, have been built the walls of a madhouse, and the fifteen hundred inhabitants of the city, which once contained three or four thousand souls, live with their live stock within the walls of this vast temple. From here we went out to the Triumphal Arch and the Colonnade, followed by hundreds of youngsters, who were kept at a distance by the Sheik's son, who carried our bag of photographic materials. The tombs here are unique in architecture. The crypts, now robbed of their contents, were hewn out of the solid rock, and each contained from two to seven chambers, cut into the walls as receptacles for the dead.

We saw beautiful women on the way; but the prettiest girl I ever saw, except one, was in the midst of the ruins of Palmyra, filling her jar with water from the stream, just as Rebecca had done in the land of the Chaldeans. I stood and stared at her. Going down the stairway, I asked her for a drink of water. She held the jar to me. Instead of drinking, I gazed till my arms grew tired holding the jar, and I asked:—"Are you Zenobia?"

She said:—"Drink, if you please," and I drank and meekly passed the jar to my friend.

It is always the custom when going to visit a Bedouin sheik to take presents of coffee, tobacco, sugar and sometimes articles of dress, such as the aba (scarf for the head), long red leather boots and knives and other small articles for his servants. It would be an insult to offer money to a sheik.

SUPPLYING THE SHIPWRECKED.

OUT of other people's tragedies the Blue Anchor Society gets its exciting data, which, however, read like commonplace happenings in the secretary's "logbook"—so many barrels or cases of food supplies, so many boxes of clothing sent to the life saving stations on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts for the use of the shipwrecked. Since the incorporation of the New York State Board of the Women's National Relief Association in 1882, of which the Blue Anchor forms a subsidiary body, there have been 853 instances of relief afforded by the bulk of its support from this city. It holds its meetings on the second Thursday of each month from two to five at the United Charities Building.

Captains of the life saving crews are instructed to notify the society by wire of cases of need, and the action of the Blue Anchor is prompt and generous. Clothing is at once despatched and food supplies follow as soon as they can be gathered and made ready. Among the members are several ladies who charge themselves with the duty of providing flour, rice, cereals of various kinds, canned meats and vegetables, hams and smoked beef—in a word, the provender which can safely be shipped to any point.

Donations of money are made every now and then to the society for the purpose of purchasing food, and its bank account is said to be generally ready for an emergency. The clothing collected for the shipwrecked sailors is stored until it is needed. But, strange to say, though garments are constantly being received by the society, when requisition is made upon them for clothes there is seldom enough to go around and emergency effort has to be made to fill the deficiency. To the credit of the officers it may be said that they have so far met bravely all the demands upon them without calling in the aid of the main board of the relief association.

WISDOM IN WHIFFS.

Content is often a citadel built out of the ruins of happiness.

When man works he is a puppet—when he dreams he is a poet.

Life is a game of cards in which we dream of a heart, console ourselves with a diamond, while time away at a club and have "Finis" written for us with a spade.