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Lehi in the Desert, Part V—Contacts in the Desert

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Abstract: This series is a classic reflection on Lehi's world in Arabia: poetry, tree of life, family affairs, politics, imagery, travel, tents, and foods. It comprises one of the first attempts to test the Book of Mormon against known geographical and cultural details in the regions where Lehi probably traveled in the Old World. The fifth part focuses on interactions with other people that Lehi's family likely had in their journeyings.

THE Book of Mormon makes no mention of Lehi's people meeting any other party in their eight years of wandering. Casual meetings with stray families of Bedouins then as now would merit no special attention, but how were they able to avoid any important contacts for eight years and some twenty-five hundred miles of wandering? One illuminating "aside" by Nephi explains the whole situation: It was only after reaching the seashore that they were able to make fires without danger, "for the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness; for he said: I will make thy food become sweet, that ye cook it not; and I will also be your light in the wilderness. . . ." (1 Ne. 17:12f). That tells all. "I well remember," writes Bertram Thomas, "taking part in a discussion upon the unhealthfulness of campfires by night; we discontinued them forthwith in spite of the bitter cold."¹⁹² Major Cheesman's guide would not even let him light a tiny lamp in order to jot down his star readings, and they never dared build a fire on the open plain where it "would attract the attention of a prowling raiding party over long distances and invite a night attack."¹⁹³ Once in a while in a favorable sheltered depression "we dared to build a fire that could not be seen from a high spot," writes Raswan.¹⁹⁴ That is, fires are not absolutely out of the question, but rare and risky—"not much fire" is Lehi's rule. Things are hardly better by day. Palgrave tells how his party were forced, "lest the smoke of our fire should give notice to some distant rover, to content ourselves with dry dates," instead of cooked food.¹⁹⁵ So again another of those strange-sounding passages from the Book of Mormon rings the bell.

As for the matter of cooked food, "Throughout the desert," writes Burckhardt, "when a sheep or goat is killed, the persons present often eat the liver and kidney raw, adding to it a little salt. Some Arabs of Yemen are said to eat raw not only those parts, but likewise whole slices of flesh; thus resembling the

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By Hugh Nibley, Ph. D.

Abyssinians and the Druses of Lebanon, who frequently indulge in raw meat, the latter to my own certain knowledge."¹⁹⁶ Nilus, writing fourteen centuries earlier, tells how the Bedouin of the Tih live on the flesh of wild beasts, failing which "they slaughter a camel, one of their beasts of burden, and nourish themselves like animals from the raw meat," or scorch the flesh quickly in a small fire to soften it sufficiently not to have to gnaw it like dogs.¹⁹⁷ Only too well does this state of things match the grim economy of Lehi: "they did suffer much for want of food," (1 Nephi 16:19, ". . . we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness." (*Ibid.* 17:2.)

All this bears out the conviction, supported both by modern experience and the evidence of archaeology, that Lehi was moving through a dangerous world. In ancient times Jewish merchants traveling through

other . . . to surprise the enemy by a sudden attack, and to plunder a camp, are the chief objects of both parties."¹⁹⁸ "Raiding to them is the spice of life . . . might is right, and man ever walks in fear for his life and possessions."¹⁹⁹ Lehi could ill afford to get embroiled in perennial desert feuds, and the only way of avoiding them is to observe a rule which Thomas lays down for all travelers in the desert, even today: "an approaching party may be friend, but is always assumed to be foe."²⁰⁰ In the words of the ancient Zuhair, "He who travels should consider his friend to be his enemy."²⁰¹ St. Nilus describes Bedouins on the move in the fifth century as possessed by the same jittery nervousness and unbearable tension that makes the accounts of Cheesman, Philby, Thomas, Palgrave, and others, such exciting reading.²⁰² A state of almost hysterical apprehension.

ARABIC inscriptions from Lehi's time show that "in the peninsula . . . there was constant unrest . . ." then as in modern times.

the desert fell so often into the hands of Bedouin raiders that by the beginning of the Christian era their word for "captor" normally meant simply "Arab!"²⁰³ Arabic inscriptions from Lehi's time show that "in the peninsula . . . there was constant unrest . . ." then as in modern times.²⁰⁴ Ordinary times in the desert are bad times when, in the words of one of the oldest Arab poets, "the honored man did not dare stay in the open country, and flight did not save the coward. . . ."²⁰⁵ Desert life has ever been the same: "A lonely life it is," writes Philby, ". . . a life of constant fear . . . hunger is the rule of the desert. . . ."²⁰⁶ Hunger, danger, loneliness — Lehi's people knew them all. What was the danger? "The Arab tribes are in a state of almost perpetual war against each

these people have learned, is a basic condition of survival in the desert."²⁰⁷ "A bedawy never tells his name, nor his tribe, nor his business, nor the whereabouts of his people, even if he is in a friendly district. They are and must be very cautious . . . a word out of season may bring death and destruction."²⁰⁸ When the Beni Hilal migrate, it is "under the darkness of the night, under the obscuring veil of the rain," by-passing settled places in darkness and in silence. Nothing can better describe the state of mind that goes with this way of life than the Book of Mormon expression "a lonesome and a solemn people." Doughty said he had never met a "merry" man among the Arabs—and there is no humor in the Book of Mormon. This mood is not accidental; the Hebrew

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This modern-day scene of a caravan being made ready shows some of the cautious apprehension and careful preparation against trouble which is uppermost in the minds of desert travelers.



—Photograph by Adelbert Bartlett

gets it from his desert ancestors. Why not the Lamanite?¹⁹⁰

Lehi's party, like the Beni Hilal, were trespassers wherever they walked. Every inch of the desert is claimed by some tribe or other that will demand the life of a trespasser.²⁰⁰ "Marked boundaries do not exist, and it is natural that questions of ownership should be settled by fighting, which becomes an annual affair, while looting of camels grows into a habit."²⁰¹ After a raid a whole tribe will go into hiding, to avoid reprisals,²⁰² and Philby sums up the crazy economy in the simple formula, "you chase me, and I chase you."²⁰³ Extreme caution and strict avoidance are therefore the first rule for travel in the desert. "In most cases," says Jennings-Bramley, "Arabs do not think it prudent to allow the raiders near enough to decide whether they are friendly or not," and he describes a typical meeting in the desert: "both we and

they were doing our best not to be seen."²⁰⁴ Of course this sort of thing leads to comic situations, ignoble panic, and ridiculous anti-climaxes, but in a game of life and death one simply can't take chances, and Lehi was playing for the highest stakes. The picture of a wandering band sticking glumly to themselves for years on end, impossible as it seems to us, is a normal thing in the desert, where the touchy, dangerous, unsocial Bedouin takes his stand as the most "difficult," challenging, and fascinating creature on earth.²⁰⁵

But how do the members of such closed corporations hit it off among themselves? It is the domestic history that presents the really difficult problem. To handle it convincingly would tax the knowledge of the best psychologist, and woe to him if he does not know the peculiar ways of the eastern desert, which surprise and trap the unwary westerner at every turn!

THE ancient Hebrew family was a peculiar organization, self-sufficient and impatient of any authority beyond its own; "these are obviously the very conditions," writes Nowack, "which we can still observe today among the Beduin."²⁰⁶

Thus, whether we turn to Hebrew or Arabic sources for our information, the Book of Mormon must conform. Lehi feels no pangs of conscience at deserting Jerusalem, and when his sons think of home, it is specifically the land of their inheritance, their own family estate, for which they yearn, and not even Nephi feels any loyalty to "the Jews at Jerusalem," split up as they were into squabbling interest-groups. Indeed, Nephi speaks of his book as "an account . . . of my proceedings, and my reign and ministry," as if the wandering family recognized no government but that of its own head—which is strictly according to the rules.²⁰⁷ While Lehi lived, he was the *sheikh*, of course, and the relationship between him and his family as described by Nephi is accurate in the smallest detail. With the usual deft sureness and untroubled simplicity, the book shows Lehi leading—not ruling—his people by his persuasive eloquence and his spiritual ascendancy alone, while his reluctant sons follow along behaving exactly like Philby's Arabs—"an undercurrent of tension in our ranks all day . . ."; the leader must make every effort to "appease their evil, envious souls . . ."²⁰⁸ and like Burton's: "we left Suwaykah, all of us in the crossest of humors. . . . So 'out of temper' were my companions, that at sunset, of the whole party, Omar Effendi was the only one who would eat supper. The rest sat upon the ground, pouting and grumbling. . . . Such a game at naughty children, I have seldom seen played even by Oriental men. . . ."²⁰⁹

The character and behavior of Laman and Lemuel conform to the normal pattern. How true to the Bedouin way are their long bitter brooding and dangerous outbreaks! How perfectly in keeping with the Arabs of Doughty, Burton, Palgrave, and the rest are their sudden and complete changes of heart when their father has lectured them, fiery anger yielding for the moment to a

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great impulse to humility and an overwhelming repentance, only to be followed by renewed resentments and more unhappy wrangling! They cannot keep their discontent to themselves: "the fact that all that happens in an encampment is known, that all may be said to be related to each other, renders intrigue almost impossible."²¹⁰ "We were all one family and friendly eyes,"²¹¹ says Doughty, but then describes another side to the picture "Arab children are ruled by entreaties. . . . I have known an ill-natured child lay a stick to the back of his good cherishing mother, and the Arabs say, 'many is the ill-natured lad among us that, and he be strong enough, will beat his own father!'"²¹² The fact that Laman and Lemuel were grown-up children did not help things. "The daily quarrels between parents and children in the desert constitute the worst feature of the Bedouin character," says Burckhardt, and describes the usual source of the trouble: "the son . . . arrived at manhood is too proud to ask his father for any cattle . . . the father is hurt at finding that his son behaves with haughtiness towards him, and thus a breach is often made."²¹³ The son, usually the eldest one, does not feel that he is getting what is coming to him and behaves like the spoiled child he is; Doughty has described the attitude of a great Bedouin *sheikh* to his son: "the boy, oftentimes disobedient, he upbraided, calling him his life's torment, Sheytan, only never menacing him, for that were far from a Beduin father's mind."²¹⁴ In these altercations, the usual thing is for the mother to take the part of the son, just as Sariah joins with her sons in chiding her own husband, and rates him roundly when she thinks he has been the cause of their undoing.²¹⁵

Is it any wonder that Laman and Lemuel worked off their pent-up frustration by beating up their younger brother with a stick when they were once hiding with him in a cave? Every free man in the East carries a stick, the immemorial badge of independence and of authority; and every man asserts his authority over his inferiors by his stick;²¹⁶ "a blow for a slave," is the

maxim of Ahikar, and the proper designation of an underling is *'abida l-'asa*, "stick-servant." This is exactly the sense in which Laman and Lemuel intended their little lesson to Nephi, for when the angel turned the tables he said to them, "Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen *him* to be a ruler over *you*. . . ." (I Nephi 3:29.) But age and dignity count for everything in the East—witness the importance of the beard — and Nephi's two brothers were never reconciled "that our younger brother should rule over us." (I Nephi 18:10, *Ibid.* 16:37.) All that saved Nephi's life on one occasion was the pleading of a daughter of Ishmael and her mother — another authentic touch, since the proud Semite may yield to the entreaties of a woman without losing face.^{216a} Through it all, Laman, as the eldest son, is the nastiest actor: "when only one boy is in the family, he is the tyrant, and his will dominates over all."²¹⁷ So we see Laman still thinking to dominate over all and driven mad that a younger brother should show superior talents. The rivalry between the sons of a *sheikh* "often leads to bloody tragedies in the *sheikh's* household,"^{217a} and Nephi had some narrow escapes.

The nature of Lehi's authority is made clear in the Book of Mormon. Of the Arab *sheikh* we have noted Burckhardt's remark: "His commands would be treated with contempt; but deference is paid to his advice . . . the real government of the Bedouins may be said to consist in the separate strength of their different families . . . the Arab can only be persuaded by his own rela-

PLANTING IN RAIN-FALL WEATHER

By Anobel Armour

His father had to spade the monstrous
hole
Wider than wide to cover all the roots
Because the boy just reached the tree's top
bole
Although he stretched from cowlick to
brown boots;
And yet he didn't really mind at all,
Not being big enough to dig, that is,
Because his father was so strong and tall
And being here with him made all earth
his,
Here, where they stood in early rain-fall
weather
Planting a tree for growing tall together!

tions." The *sheikh's* "orders are never obeyed, but his example is generally followed."²¹⁸ Especially on the march it behooves all to follow that example; while the tribe is in motion the *sheikh* "assumes all responsibility and the whole power of government."²¹⁹ Yet in leading the march he gives no orders: when his tent is struck "it is the *rahlah*," and all the others without a word strike theirs; and "when the place of encampment is reached the *sheikh* puts his spear in the ground, and at once the tents are pitched."²²⁰ The *sheikh's* tent is always the center of everything; "a white flag is sometimes hoisted above his tent to guide strangers and visitors. All visitors are led directly to the tent of the *sheikh*."²²¹ When Nephi urged the frightened Zoram to join the party in the desert, he said: "If thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father thou shalt have place with us." The correctness of the proposal is attested not only by the proper role of Lehi in receiving members into the tribe but also in the highly characteristic expression, "thou shalt have *place* with us," for the proper word of welcome to a stranger in a tent is *ahlan wa sahlan wa marhaban*, literally, "a family, a smooth place, and a wide place!"^{221a}

In the *sheikh's* tent the councils of the tribe are held (I Nephi 9:1-2) and all decisions for the journey are made, but "no *sheikh* or council of Arabs can condemn a man to death, or even inflict a punishment . . . it can only, when appealed to, impose a fine; it cannot even enforce the payment of this fine."²²² Why, then, if there was no power to compel them, did not Laman and Lemuel simply desert the party and go off on their own, as discontented Arabs sometimes do?²²³ As a matter of fact, they tried to do just that (I Nephi 7:7), and in the end were prevented by the very considerations that keep any wandering Bedouin party together, according to Philby: greed and fear. They hoped for a promised land and were bitterly disappointed when they reached the sea without finding it: "Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions. . . ." (*Ibid.* 17:21.) It was by convincing them of the great

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OH BOY!



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LAMANITES ATTEMPT TO PRESERVE INDEPENDENCE

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liberties. The Indian who is not of the conservative group, it is held,

can no longer take part in the ceremonies carried on by the "pure" members of the tribe. He must leave the religion entirely. Thus, those members of the Moenkopi Village who accepted allotments of fertile land offered them by the government many years ago, were immediately considered to be excommunicated, and they themselves accepted this belief.

Later, being a sizable body, they took up the practice of their religion again, but in the eyes of the conservatives they are still excommunicated. Their practice of ceremonies is considered blasphemous, and they remain cut off from participation in the common efforts of the communities nearest to them.

And I quote a little further:

Indians holding this belief may trade with the white man, may work for him and earn money, (but not for the government), may use the white man's material and goods, but they may not take relief or other governmental handouts. They are consistent in this. The Hotevilla conservatives and others of their belief have not accepted relief, have always insisted on paying for clothing issued to schoolchildren, and so forth. Normal trade is one

thing; any action indicating acceptance of the government's, to them, blasphemous and irreligious plans for Indians, is entirely different.

This whole concept seems ridiculous to us, but it is vital to them. It should be emphasized that it is not a self-serving concept. On the contrary, it is a belief which has caused them to endure many hardships and for which they are prepared to endure many more. Be it noted that under this belief the extreme conservatives have remained the most self-respecting, industrious Indians on the reservation, denying themselves many assistances offered by the government, determined to get by solely on their own efforts. They are orderly, notably industrious, even in that industrious tribe, and self-supporting.

The Lord bless the Indians. And, brothers and sisters, may God bless you and me that we may go back to our stakes and our missions with the determination to pray for the red man and then to do something about it to see that he is trained in the ways of God; that he is educated, that he is given the opportunities he so richly deserves after this long period of suffering.

This I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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danger of returning to Jerusalem (e.g. 7:15) that Nephi persuaded his brethren to stick it out. And indeed, where would they go if they deserted their father? As we have seen, with these people family was everything, the Arab or the Jew will stick to "his own people" because they are all he has in the world.²¹⁸ The family is a religious society with the father as its head.²¹⁹ To be without tribe or family is to forfeit one's identity in the earth; nothing is more terrible to these people than to be "cut off," and that is exactly the fate that is promised Laman and Lemuel if they rebel. (1 Nephi 2:21.)²²⁰

Authorities on the East have often observed that the Arab, and only to a lesser extent the Jewish, character is remarkable for its two faces: on the one side the Semite is thoroughly proud and noble, the soul of honor, the impeccable family man, the true friend, and on the other, the low and cunning tramp, the sly assassin, dangerous companion, and unpredictable rogue. Every page of Doughty reflects this

strange paradox of the desert character, which has received its classic treatment in the third chapter of Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: pure gold mixed with basest dross within a single family. That also is the story of the Book of Mormon.²²¹

(To be continued)

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¹⁸³Cheesman, *Unknown Arabia*, pp. 228f, 234, 240f, 280.
¹⁸⁴*Drinkers of the Wind*, p. 200.
¹⁸⁵J. Zeller, "The Bedavin," *PEFQ* 1901, p. 191.
¹⁸⁶Burckhardt, *Notes* I, 242, cf.
¹⁸⁷W. E. Jennings-Bramley in *PEFQ* 1909, p. 256
¹⁸⁸St. Nilus, *Narratio* iii, *Migne Patrol. Graec.* 79, col. 612.
¹⁸⁹Margoliouth, *Arabs and Israelites*, p. 57.
¹⁹⁰*Idem.*, p. 54.
¹⁹¹No. vii of the *Mu'allaqat*, ascribed to Harith ibn Hillizah, line 38.
¹⁹²*The Empty Quarter*, p. 27.
¹⁹³Burckhardt, *Notes* I, 133.
¹⁹⁴Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 172.
¹⁹⁶No. iii of the *Mu'allaqat*, line 58.
¹⁹⁷Nilus, *Narrat. vi, Patrol Gr.* 79, 669: At the merest sign of an armed man the Bedu fled in alarm "as if seized by panic fear," and kept on fleeing. "For fear makes them exaggerate danger and causes them to imagine things far beyond reality, magnifying their dread in every instance."
¹⁹⁸"They live always under the impression that an invasion is on the way, and every suspicious shadow or movement on the horizon calls for attention." Baldensperger in *PEFQ* 1925, p. 81. Literature on the Arabs is full of this theme.
¹⁹⁹P. J. Baldensperger, in *PEFQ* 1922, p. 168f.
²⁰⁰Sir Richard Burton, one of the few individuals who has ever known both the American Indian and the Bedouin Arab at first hand was greatly impressed by their exact resemblance to each other, which he has discussed in a detailed comparison of the two (*Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* II, 118f). He warns the reader against attributing the really astonishing parallel to a common origin,

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yet he himself can only explain it by noting that "The almost absolute independence of the Arabs, and of that noble race the North American Indians . . . has produced a similarity between them worthy of note . . ." (loc. cit.) Yet many a tribe of Asia and Africa, enjoying equal independence, and inhabiting a like terrain, has a way of life that anything but resembles that of Bedouins and Indians. One of the writer's best friends is Mr. George Lawand, a venerable but enterprising Lebanese, who has spent years both among the Bedouins of the desert and among the Indians of New Mexico as a peddler and trader; he avers that there is absolutely no difference between the two races so far as manners and customs are concerned.

²⁰⁰Hence it is regarded as an honorable and courageous act to camp outside of one's own tribal domain. Jacob, *Altarabisches Beduinenleben*, p. 211.

²⁰¹Cheesman, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

²⁰²"Not a spot was to be seen, for the Debar were in temporary hiding, having come home from a successful raid, and the victims might daily expect to return the compliment." W. E. Jennings-Bramley, in *PEFQ* 1912, p. 16.

²⁰³*Empty Quarter*, pp. 229f.

²⁰⁴In *PEFQ* 1908, pp. 36, 31.

²⁰⁵"Continual strifes between the tribes, whether for pasture (as in the days of Abraham and Lot), or because of murder or suspicion as to their women, kept the Bedu aloof, roaming about the desert. . . . P. Baldensperger, in *PEFQ* 1922, p. 170. The pathologically unsocial mood of the Bedouins of North Arabia has often been noted by travelers. e.g. A. Jaussen, in *Revue Biblique* N.S. 3 (1906) 443; Ed. Palmer, *The Desert of the Exodus* (1872), *op. cit.*, *PEFQ* 1941, p. 69.

²⁰⁶Nowack, *Hebr. Archaeologie*, p. 152.

²⁰⁷Thus the ancient poet Ibn Kulthum (*Mu'allaqat* V) line 30, writes of "many a sheikh whom the tribe had crowned with the crown of authority and who protects those who seek refuge with him," like an independent monarch. See esp. Oppenheim, *Die Beduinen* I, 29-30.

²⁰⁸*The Empty Quarter*, p. 219.

²⁰⁹Burton, *Pilgrimage to Meccah* I, 276.

²¹⁰Jennings-Bramley, in *PEFQ* 1905, p. 213.

²¹¹*Arabia Deserta* I, 272.

²¹²*Ibid.*, I, 282f.

²¹³Burckhardt, *Notes* I, 353.

²¹⁴*Arabia Deserta* I, 258.

²¹⁵Ne. 5:2. "The Arab holds his parents in great respect; his mother, especially, he loves most affectionately; indeed he sometimes quarrels on her account with his father, and is often expelled from the paternal tent for vindicating his mother's cause." Burckhardt, *Notes* I, 114.

²¹⁶"There are many kinds of sticks, rods, and staves, which Orientals always have in their hands. . . . The first is the *kadib*, a common stick of oak, about three to three-and-a-half feet in length, which is carried in the hand or under the arm. . . . It shows that the holder is a man of position, superior to the workman or day-labourers. The government officials, superior officers, tax-gatherers, and school masters use this short rod to threaten—or if necessary to beat—their inferiors, whoever they may be. . . . One associates this with the Heb. *shebet*, with which the Israelite chastised his servant. . . ." P. Baldensperger, in *PEFQ* 1905, p. 33. The formal way of making a man renounce rights or claims on another is to beat him with a stick. Burckhardt, *Notes* I, 161, cf. 326.

²¹⁷Thus Burton, *Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah*, etc., II, 107, tells how Bedouin robbers spare their victims' pride and forestall resistance by appealing to them in the names of wives and daughters. "You will (of course, if necessary) lend ready ear to an order thus politely attributed to the wants of the fair sex."

²¹⁸Baldensperger, in *PEFQ* 1901, p. 75.

²¹⁹Oppenheim, *Beduinen* I, 30.

²²⁰Notes I, 116.

²²¹Antonin Jaussen, in *Revue Biblique* XII (1903) p. 108; M. Oppenheim, *Beduinen* I, 30.

²²²J. Zeller, in *PEFQ* 1901, p. 194; in *Rev. Bibl.* XII, 254.

²²³T. Canaan, in *Jnl. Palest. Or. Soc.* XIII (1933) p. 54f.

²²⁴This is a very ancient formula, the exact meaning of which escapes modern grammarians, though all are agreed that it promises the newcomer a place. Thus Thornton (following Wright) says "the verb must be conjectured" and suggests: "thou hast come to people and a plain, i.e. to friends and a smooth place. . . . thou hast found for thyself roominess." E. Du Pre Thornton, *Elementary Arabic* (Ed. R. A. Nicholson) (Cambridge, Univ. Press, 1943) p. 15f.

²²⁵Jennings-Bramley, *PEFQ* 1905, p. 217.

²²⁶H. H. Kitchener, *PEFQ* 1884, p. 215.

²²⁷"Pride in tribal history and family lineage forms an important element in the social makeup of Bedouin life," the family being "the basic unit of Bedouin society." E. Epstein, "Bedouin of the Negeb," *PEFQ* 1939, p. 61f. "Reciprocal liability extends not only to all members of the family in the stricter sense, but also to the whole kindred. . . ." P. Baldensperger, *PEFQ* 1906, 14. A man will endure all before deserting his family. "The tyranny of relations is more severe than the descent of the Indian sword," says the ancient poet Tarafah (*Mu'allaqat* ii) line 81.

²²⁸M. J. Lagrange, *Rev. Bibl.* XII, 255; Nowack, *Hebr. Archaeol.*, p. 154; anciently the authority of an Arab father was absolute. Jacob, *Altarabisches Beduinenleben*, p. 212.

²²⁹This feeling of fearful dependency is well expressed in the Arab proverb: "Within his own country the Bedouin is a lion, outside of it he is a dog." A. Jaussen, *Rev. Bibl.* XII, 109.

²³⁰It is very significant that the curse against the Lamanites is the same as that commonly held in the East to blight the sons of Ishmael who are ever described as "a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations. . . . an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety" etc. (I Ne. 12:33, II Ne. 5:24). It is noteworthy that all of Ishmael's own descendants (we mean the Book of Mormon Ishmael) fall under the curse (Alma 3:7), in view of our own suggestion that this Ishmael was probably a Bedouin and certainly not a full-blooded Israelite. The Book of Mormon always mentions the curse of the dark skin in connection with and as part of a larger picture: "after they had dwindled in unbelief they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, etc." "Because of the curse which was upon them they did become an idle people. . . and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey." (II Ne. 5:24.) The statement that "God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them" (v. 21) describes the result, not the method, which is described elsewhere. Even so we are told (Alma 3:13, 14, 18) that while the fallen people "set the mark upon themselves," it was nevertheless God who was marking them: "I will set my mark on them," etc., yet so natural and human a thing suggested nothing miraculous to the ordinary observer, and "the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves. . . . it was expedient that the curse of God should fall upon them." (Alma 3:18). Here God places his mark on people as a curse, yet it is an artificial mark which they actually place upon themselves. The mark was not a racial thing but was acquired by "whosoever suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites," (id. 3:10); Alma moreover defines a Nephite as anyone observing "the traditions of their fathers. . . ." (3:11). Thus the difference between Nephite and Lamanite is a cultural, not a racial, one. Does this also apply to the dark skin? Note that the dark skin is never mentioned alone but always as accompanying a generally depraved way of life. When the Lamanites become "white" again, it is by living among the Nephites as Nephites, i.e., adopting the Nephite way of life (III Ne. 2:15-16). The cultural picture may not be the whole story of the dark skin of the Lamanites, but it is an important part of that story and is given great emphasis by the Book of Mormon itself. There is no mention of red skin, but only black and white. With the Arabs, to be white of countenance is to be blessed and to be black of countenance is to be cursed; there are parallel expressions in Egyptian and Hebrew. The whole problem still awaits investigation.



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THE FINEST FENCE

By Alfred I. Tooke

I WENT over to see what my neighbor across the road was doing.

"I'm fencing in a patch for an extra garden," he said, "and you're just in time to help string the wire. You know, fences are fine things to build—that is, if they are well built and you use good material. They do two things: They keep out the things you don't want, and they keep in the things you do want. This fence we are going to build will be a good fence. I'm using red-wood posts and first-grade wire."

He pulled the post-hole digger out, and when he looked up, there was a twinkle in his eye. "There's only one better material for fence building that I know of," he said. "Nothing like it in the world for keeping out what you don't want, and keeping in what you do want. What's more, it's free for anyone who wants it, any time, and anywhere." He eyed me as though expecting me to say something.

"If I'm supposed to guess what it is, I give up," I said. "What is it?"

"Good habits!" he replied.