

we shall see later. Whatever we may deny Mohammed, we can never deny that he was a man of great talents. He was not, however, a self-made man. His environment accounts, in large measure, for his might and for his methods as a religious leader. What was that environment?

There is no doubt that Arabia, for two centuries before Mohammed, was a refuge for all sorts of religious fugitives, and each band added something to the national stock of religious ideas. There were Star-worshippers in the northwest along the Euphrates; Zoroastrians came to east Arabia; Jews settled at Khaibar, Medina, and in Yemen. For all pagan Arabia Mecca was the center many centuries before Mohammed. Here stood the Kaaba, the Arabian Pantheon, with its three hundred and sixty idols—one for each day in the year. Here the tribes met in annual pilgrimage, to rub and kiss the Black Stone, to run around the Beit Allah or Bethel of their faith, and to hang portions of their garments on the sacred trees. At Nejran a sacred date-plant was the center of pilgrimage. Everywhere in Arabia there were sacred stones, or stone-heaps, where the Arab devotees congregated, to obtain special blessings. The Arabs were always superstitious, and legends of all sorts cluster around every weird desert-rock,

Pagan Arabia
before
Mohammed