

TO THE LAND OF MIDIAN

THITHER DR. FRIEDMAN WILL, IN
VITE THE RUSSIAN JEWS.

IN LETTERS FROM LONDON, HIS HOME,
HE OUTLINES HIS PLANS—HE WILL
BEGIN OPERATIONS NEXT WINTER—
ASSISTANCE INVITED.

The question of making provision for the exiled Jews of Russia is occupying the minds of other wealthy and philanthropic men besides Baron Hirsch. Prominent among these is Dr. Paul Friedman. Dr. Friedman is a gentleman of Jewish descent, a native of Berlin, and at present a resident of that city, though he has spent the greater part of his life in London, where he has earned the reputation of a littérateur. He is related to the Mendelssohns, the bankers of Berlin and Dessau, and is himself very wealthy.

Dr. Friedman has been for some time in correspondence on the subject with Dr. Richard J. H. Gotthell, the lecturer on Syriac languages and literature in Columbia College, and Dr. Gotthell, who will sail for Europe on Thursday in the *Normannia*, will meet him shortly in London to discuss his plans. When the project first suggested itself to him, Dr. Friedman thought of founding a colony for the exiled Jews in Somal, which is on the east coast of Africa, near the Gulf of Aden, but after a visit of inspection to that country he concluded that it would not suit. He next turned his attention to the Land of Midian, which extends from 26° to 30° north latitude and is situated on the Gulf of Akaba, near the head of the Red Sea.

It is worthy of note that this idea of colonizing the Jews in and about Palestine is acceptable at once to the orthodox and liberal Jews; to the former on the ground that it will be a fulfillment of prophecy, for they still look forward to the re-establishment of the Jewish Nation in Palestine, and to the latter on the purely practical ground of replacing the race under the topographical and climatic conditions in which it found its first development. Such were the considerations, no doubt, which eventually turned the thoughts of Dr. Friedman to Northern Arabia, regardless of the comparatively barren nature of the country.

It was undoubtedly the same idea which led the Rothschilds and the late Laurence Olyphant to found colonies in Palestine proper. These colonies are said to be now in a tolerably flourishing condition. Hitherto the chief obstacle in the way of carrying out the scheme on any extended scale has been the hostile attitude of the Turkish Government, but Oscar S. Straus, ex-United States Minister to Turkey, while in that country succeeded in softening the attitude of the Porte so far as to render further colonization possible.

Dr. Friedman, in pursuance of his plan, made a visit last Winter to the Land of Midian, and has given the results of his observations in a letter to Dr. Gotthell. He says that, notwithstanding the fearful reports he heard, he ventured to travel quite alone with the Midianite chiefs, and found them remarkably polite, courteous, and obliging. "If Palmer was murdered by them," he continues, "it probably was largely due to his own recklessness and to the general troubled state of the country. He came there as the emissary of the *de facto* Egyptian Government, and so the Howietat, (Bedouins,) who are under Egyptian rule, thought it but right to kill him; but, by all I saw and heard, they would not only receive an industrial colony under Egyptian protection courteously and well; they would also hail it with joy.

"Everything in that country is extremely expensive, being imported in small, rickety boats from Suez, and often lost or spoiled in transit. Flour costs double its price in Egypt, corn 50 per cent. more, tobacco, sugar, &c., the same, and all these things are only to be got in large quantities when a boat has just arrived. On a shore line of about two hundred English miles, with excellent harbors, there is not a single shop. A needle, a few yards of thread, a piece of soap is often an invaluable present. The sea is immensely rich in fish, some of them very good. Corn may be had cheap from India or Egypt. Oil might be imported and afterward grown on the mountains. So the main staple of Jewish food would be cheap.

"The climate is good, the desert air delicious, and I was assured on all sides that the Summer is not very hot, there being always a breeze. The Egyptian Government is not unfriendly; the officers who have the direct control of the country are even friendly. So I have decided to try the venture—to go there next Winter, to build a few houses at the uninhabited harbor, to try to bore an artesian well or two, and to form a settlement in the mountains as a Summer residence. At the same time I would survey the whole country, thereby occupying the camels of the Bedouins and giving them a fair profit. They would, therefore, be friendly. When the survey is done, I hope I shall have already gained a firm hold at a few points.

"The Bedouins cannot storm any kind of fortified house. Even if they objected I could hold out. But I do not think that they will object. A few sacks of corn will overcome their reluctance. You know that according to the sacred law, the Shareea, I shall be the lawful owner of the ground I build upon, plant, or inclose. This law is also that of Egypt. If, therefore, the Bedouins attack me, I shall have a cause of action against them; I shall bring it to the international courts of Egypt and certainly obtain judgment in my favor and heavy damages. This will be most annoying to the Government, and then I think they may grant me a charter to govern the country in the Khédive's name.

"This they actually will not do now, fearing complications. As to the capabilities of the country, I can only say that it is not absolutely barren, there being camel grasses and a little sheep pasture and a good many thorny trees and shrubs and some thousand palms in the wadys, (valleys.) In the hills there is more pasture; on the heights it is said to be even good. But at first agriculture would be out of the question; that would mean instant war. I would have to live on industry and on fishing and diving for mother-of-pearl, of which there is a great deal. But as soon as I should be able to extend east and northward agriculture might also become possible. Palm growing would be so at once, but it only gives a return in eight to ten years."

In a letter written at London in May last, Dr. Friedman says that he intends to go out in the coming Autumn with a number of well-armed and disciplined Jews from Galloia, Hungary, &c., to settle. He proposes to begin by making not only clothes, saddles, ornaments, and boats for the native population, but also by working the mother of pearl found on the shores into buttons for export.

"Now," he adds, "there are many things which might be done for me in America, and when once I am settled I shall apply for them. But even before that something might be done for me; foremost of all, some good young American Jews, or Christians friendly to Jews, might join me and assist me in my work. If they take an interest in Semitic science they would in Midian find a rich and nearly virgin field for inquiry, for there are numerous inscriptions of all kinds."

Dr. Friedman says further that he is about to go to Glasgow to buy a steam yacht to establish communication with Suez, so as to carry mails and such persons as may join him.