

drawn up and he considered it his duty in the name of the absent Minister to declare that the latter would take cognisance of the Interpellation. Within the time appointed by law the Duma would receive a decisive answer. He would not confirm the facts as stated in the Interpellation, nor would he dispute them, but he would confine himself to taking cognisance of the fact of the Interpellation. The Duma adopted the form of the Interpellation as proposed, unanimously. The sitting was then closed.

THE ROUMANIAN PARLIAMENT.

Bucharest, May 21.

The Parliament, summoned to a special sitting on the occasion of the Jubilee festivities, was opened today by a Royal message which ran:

"Almighty God has allowed me to conclude 40 years of my reign. During this long time I have never ceased to share sorrow and joy with my people. Today, when my work is richly crowned with success and security, I rejoice with all Roumanians and deem myself fortunate that my first words are addressed to the representatives of the people. When I look back on the path we have trodden during these 40 years, when I reflect on the first years of my reign, the very first thought that occurs to me is to thank all Roumanians from the highest dignitaries to the simplest peasants, who in every situation have supported me with unlimited confidence and unbounded love in the execution of my many difficult tasks, to carry out which I came to my new country 40 years ago, namely to lay the foundations of a new Roumania. My thoughts linger especially with those who are no longer with us, and, above all, with those who gained immortality on the field of honour and fame, in order to secure independence for Roumania and to weld anew my crown. Today's celebration is not only my festival, it is the festival of the whole people, a festival which draws closer for all eternity the hallowed ties which bind my dynasty to the Roumanian nation.

I do not doubt, gentlemen, that this extraordinary session will be taken advantage of to enrich the legislation by new laws."

The message was received with enthusiastic cheers.

Latest Telegrams on page 4.

AKABAH.

A Correspondent of a London paper sends an interesting account of Akabah, which has come into such prominence lately. In the course of his letter he says:

The village of Akabah, which has recently emerged into notice, is occasionally visited by travellers who, having proceeded through the peninsula of Sinai as far as the Monastery of St. Catherine, wish to pursue their journey to visit the wonderful remains of Petra, that "rose-red city, half as old as time." The route from Sinai to Petra passes through Akabah, where a new set of camels and Bedouins must be hired, and where the traveller must enter into negotiations with the Turkish officials and the Arab Sheikhs for permission and an escort to proceed. These negotiations are always tiresome and protracted, and probably most tourists who have found themselves at Akabah are heartily glad when they get away again. There is nothing attractive about the place except its site. It lies amid a pleasant grove of palms at the head of the Eastern Gulf of the Red Sea, corresponding to Suez at the head of the Western Gulf. But there the similarity ends.

Akahab has none of the busy life, the bustling traffic, or the procession of "great liners white and gold," that give interest to the scene at Suez. It is in a *cul de sac*. You may walk for a day along the shores of its barren gulf and never see a sail. Brilliant and sparkling as are its waves, yet as far as traffic is concerned the gulf is almost as dead as the Dead Sea, and at the head of the Gulf the waters die away into a dismal salt flat, as if from mere dulness.

On the land side, too, Akabah is equally cut off from the world by leagues of flinty desert, skirted by jagged and precipitous mountains, a region bare, stoney, waterless, and inhospitable. Of course if the new Mecca railway has a branch to Akabah the isolation of the place will be remedied, but hitherto it has touched civilisation no nearer than Gaza, which is a week's camel ride distant. Save at times of exceptional excitement, such as the present, or when the caravan of the Haj, or Pilgrimage to Mecca, passes through, life at Akabah must be extremely dull. No wonder then that the rare advent of a European traveller with his camp is an occasion of which the most is made in the way of getting as much out of him as possible. The route from the Monastery of Sinai to Akabah strikes the shores of the Gulf at Nuweba, where there is an Egyptian outpost in an oasis of palms on the sea shore. Some thirty miles farther on up the coast the traveller passes through Tabah, which, though sometimes lately alluded to as a "town," is merely a wadi, or valley, where a few palm trees and a spring make a possible camping-place. Another two hours' journey round the top of the Gulf brings him to Akabah itself.

In order to understand the game of traveller-fleeing as played at Akabah, it is necessary to describe the situation there in normal times. First, there is the Turkish garrison, usually under command of a Kaimakam (colonel), who acts as Governor of the place. This garrison is located in the fort, the only substantial building in the place, a great, square, old-fashioned castle, whose massive curtain walls and frowning gateway are flanked by imposing towers. The rest of Akabah, consisting of mud-built hovels, clusters modestly among the palms around the fortress. Pay-day comes rarely in the Turkish army, and at Akabah it hardly ever comes at all, to judge from the ragged and miserable appearance of the soldiers. A gleam of satisfaction, however, probably crosses their countenances at the sight of the traveller's camp arriving. Here at least comes someone who can be made to hand over money even if the Sultan cannot. Allah be praised! The tourist cannot proceed on his way without the permit of the Kaimakam, who will see to it that he does not start too easily.

Next in importance to the Turkish Governor, and in many ways even more influential, is the Sheikh of the local Bedouins. He owns all the camels in the district, and as camels are the sole means of transport, he can make his own terms. He is the ally of the Governor in making the traveller pay out liberally, though these two worthies are evidently suspicious of one another as to dividing the spoil. Lastly, there are the villagers who have eggs, scraggy chickens, and goat-like lambs to sell, and who are anxious that the stranger should not depart from their coasts too soon. Judging from the rapacity of all these people, you conclude that some of the sharks, of which the Red Sea is so full, finding the water come to an end at Akabah, must have got out here on to the shore.

The traveller who rashly intrudes into this home of harpies does not do so without fair warning of what he may expect. The admonitions of guide-books and the records of previous journeys warn him that every care should be taken by inquiry at

Cairo and Suez to ascertain whether the route to Petra is open, or whether the lawlessness of the Bedouins makes the journey on from Akabah in that direction impossible, that letters of commendation should be carried to the military authorities at Akabah, and that, as a final precaution, a messenger should be sent on about a week ahead from Sinai to Akabah on a swift camel to bring back an assurance that the traveller really can be sent on to Petra. But what avail all these precautions? Your messenger, of course, brings back glowing promises from the Akabah authorities, who naturally want you to walk into their clutches, your letters of commendation are received with every mark of consideration, but when you are a week's journey from everywhere, and there is no telegraph, such things avail but little. The main point is, "Behold, this traveller cometh, come let us bleed him!" The traveller is presumably accompanied by an honest dragoman, who has contracted to carry out the journey at so much per diem, inclusive, and who naturally does not care to submit to exactions, though otherwise he has no objection to the journey being lengthened by a few days' delay.

The process of traveller-bleeding as practised by Turkish officials is simple and efficacious. First comes a great overhauling of all your baggage and stores for contraband or suspicious articles, and as the Customs laws in the remoter parts of the Ottoman dominions are, to say the least of it, vague, there is much baksheesh necessary before the matter is settled. Then the examination of passports, however carefully procured, always discloses some mysterious and alarming irregularity, which, however, is capable of equally mysterious removal by dint of a cash payment. Next you are informed that the Kaimakam, out of solicitude for your safety, has sent ten soldiers to guard your tents. This guard is quite unnecessary, but it is provided in order that you may have to pay the soldiers, who also expect to be provided with cigarettes and coffee, and anything that may happen to be going in the way of food. As these poor creatures very seldom get any pay or any little luxuries, one does not grudge them a few simple treats if one has spare stores, but you would have preferred, say only one sentry, instead of ten, as then you would not be kept awake at night as they sit round a camp fire discussing you and your coffee. The arrival of a message hotfoot from the castle to say that two of the officers are suddenly and dangerously ill, and could you spare a bottle of brandy, need cause no alarm, but the request had better be complied with, if possible.

While your dragoman is conducting the more serious negotiations with the Kaimakam and the Sheikh, you have plenty of time to "do" Akabah. Your guide-book tells you that in Solomon's time this was Elath, through whose port poured vast stores of merchandise and treasure; that later on, in the days of the Crusades, this was so important a citadel that Saladin thought it worth while to transport boats across the desert from the Mediterranean for its capture. Nothing now remains to suggest the busy traffic or the commanding importance of the past. It has all gone, gone as completely as Solomon's glories and Saladin's boats. Still, you may wander pleasantly among the palm trees if the persistent wind is not blowing a cloud of sand and dust, you may notice the curious freshwater wells on the sea shore almost within wash of the waves, and you imagine what this shore, with no quay, and with scarce a boat, must once have been. No doubt if the railway comes thither the place will regain some of its lost life and energy, but the traveller of the past will remember its silent sunbaked network of hovels as a spider's web stretched glistening across his path in the glaring desert, in which he for a time was the fly.

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