

and various other fruits. In the Persian Gulf are valuable pearl fisheries. Arabia is celebrated for its horses. The camel is the only animal which can endure the fatigue of traversing the deserts.

Hedjaz and Yemen in the west and El Hasa in the east are tributary to Turkey; the south-east belongs to the Sultan of Muscat; in the interior is the kingdom of Nedjed.

*Mecca* (30,000), the birthplace of Mohammed, 60 miles from the Red Sea, and *Medina*, containing his tomb, farther north, are the holy cities of the Mohammedans, and are visited by vast numbers of pilgrims, as Mohammedans are enjoined to visit Mecca at least once in their lives. *Jeddah* is the seaport of Mecca.

*Sana* is the capital of Yemen, and *Mocha*, celebrated for its coffee, is the chief seaport. *Aden*, at the entrance of the Strait of Babelmandeb, has belonged to Britain since 1839.

*Muscat* (60,000), on the east coast, is the capital of Oman, the most enterprising and maritime country in Arabia, and even in Western Asia. It carries on an important trade in gums, myrrh, and frankincense, a large portion of which is brought from Africa.

*Riad* (30,000), in the centre of the country, is the capital of the kingdom of Nedjed and the chief town of the Wahabees, a particularly strict sect of Mohammedans.

The ruins of *Petra*, the ancient capital of Edom, in the north, about midway between the Dead and the Red Seas, consist of a long street or narrow valley, in which houses, temples, and all the buildings are hewn out of the solid rock; and are amongst the most interesting ancient remains in existence.

### PERSIA.

Area, 636,000 square miles; about one-half larger than Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland; population, 7,653,000; persons to a square mile, 12.

Persia is bounded on the north by Asiatic Russia, the Caspian Sea, and Turkestan; on the west by Turkey; on the south by the Persian Gulf; and on the east by Afghanistan and Beloochistan. It was formerly a nation of great importance, forming one of the most powerful empires of ancient history, but is now sadly reduced, and seems to be decreasing in population.

The surface is mountainous, especially in the north and west, where the *Elburz Mountains* extend from Afghanistan to the mountains of Armenia. The highest summit is Mount Demavend, about 20,500 feet high. The interior is a high plateau about 3,000 feet above the sea, forming part of the great *Desert of Iran*, which extends into Afghanistan. The rivers are few and small, and either lose themselves in the sand, or flow into lakes so salt that fish cannot live in them. The largest of these

lakes is Urumiah, in Kurdistan, a salt lake 4,000 feet above the sea, and about one-fourth the size of Lake Ontario. Along the shore of the Caspian Sea, and wherever there is water, vegetation is luxuriant, and cotton, the sugar-cane, and mulberry, fig, and pomegranate trees abound. In the south it is hot, dry, and arid, and the date-palm is the only tree that will grow.

The Persians are a gay, polite, and hospitable people, and carry on large manufactures in fine silks, carpets, and brocades. Two-thirds of the people are engaged in pastoral pursuits. The sheep of Persia are famous for their size. Trade is chiefly in the hands of the British and Russians, the latter having almost exclusive control of the navigation on the Caspian Sea. The government is a despotism, under a ruler called the Shah; and the religion is the Mohammedan.

*Ispahan* (60,000), the former capital, is situated on a high plain in a well-cultivated district. *Teheran* (85,000), the capital, is in the desert, where the climate is so hot and unhealthy, that in summer the city is almost deserted. *Shiraz*, near the Persian Gulf, is in the centre of a fertile and beautiful valley. North of it are the ruins of *Persepolis*, among which are supposed to be those of the palace of Darius, destroyed by Alexander the Great. *Bushire*, on the Persian Gulf, is the chief port. *Tabriz* (100,000), the largest city, near lake Urumiah, *Mashed* (60,000), *Yezd*, and *Hamadan*, the latter on the caravan route to Bagdad, are important towns. *Reshd* and *Astrabad* are ports on the Caspian.

### AFGHANISTAN.

Area, 278,650 square miles; larger than Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, together; population, about 4,000,000; persons to a square mile, 14.

Afghanistan is situated between Persia and the northern part of India. It is mountainous in surface, and in the south-west the Persian desert extends into the country. In the north-east are the *Hindoo Koosh Mountains*, some of them rising 20,000 feet in height; and from these the *Suleiman Mountains* extend southwards into Beloochistan.

Owing to the elevated position of the country, it is subject to great extremes of heat and cold, but the mountains enclose many rich and fertile valleys. Two famous mountain passes lead from the high plateaus of Afghanistan to the valley of the Indus. They are the Khyber Pass and the Bolan Pass, and are on the two great roads between India and the West.

The towns are chiefly inhabited by Persians and Hindoos, who carry on the trade; while the Afghans are principally priests or soldiers, holding trade in contempt. They are divided into a number of semi-independent tribes, but unite for the common defence of the country.