



CHAPTER THE FIRST

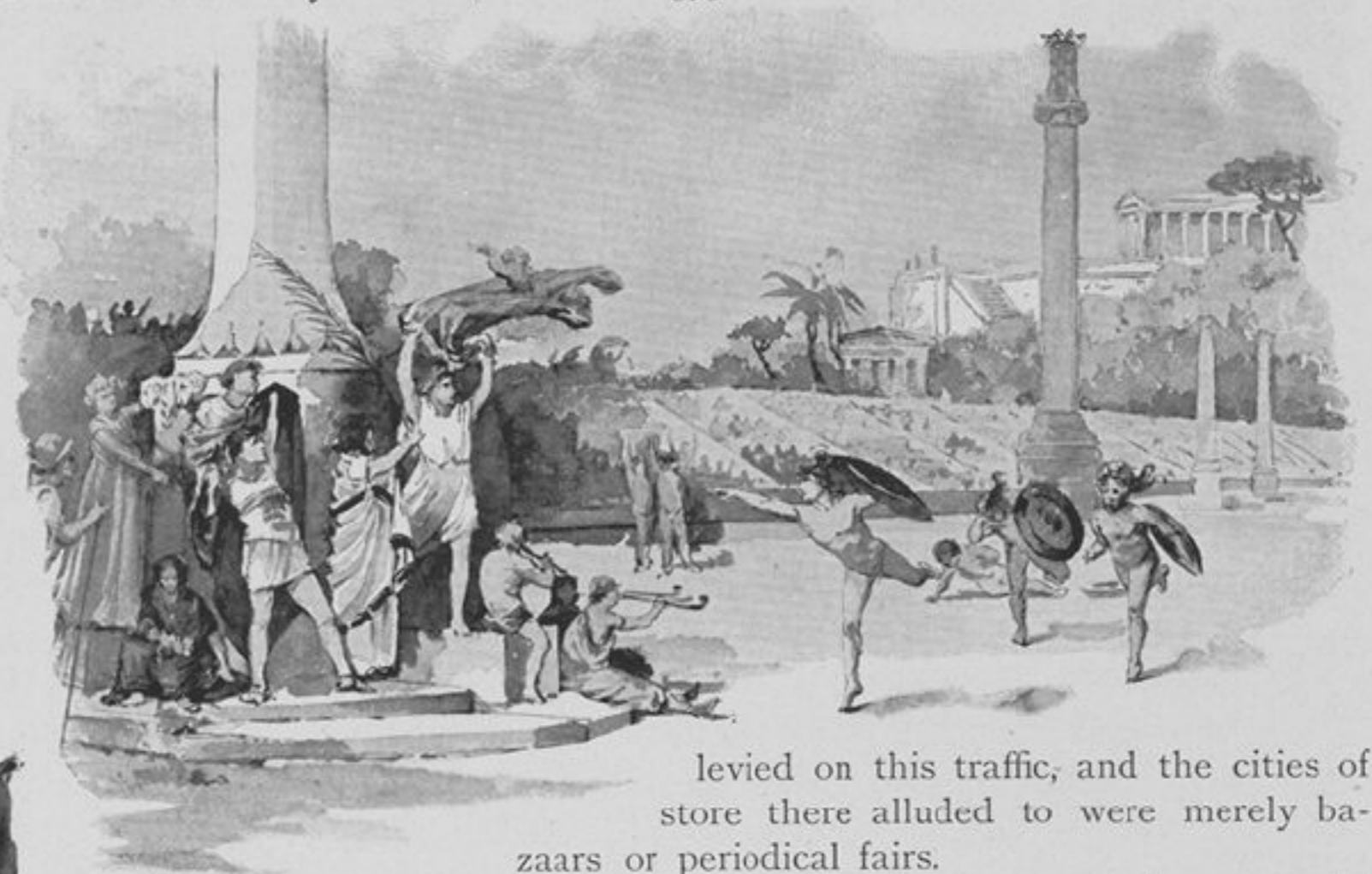
FAIRS OF THE PAST



IF all the records of our race there are few more ancient than the records of its trade, and even in this nineteenth century there are countries in which traffic is still conducted almost as in the days of the Pharaohs. Says Ebers, in his *Agypten und die Bücher Moses*: "The traffic of the Nile with the

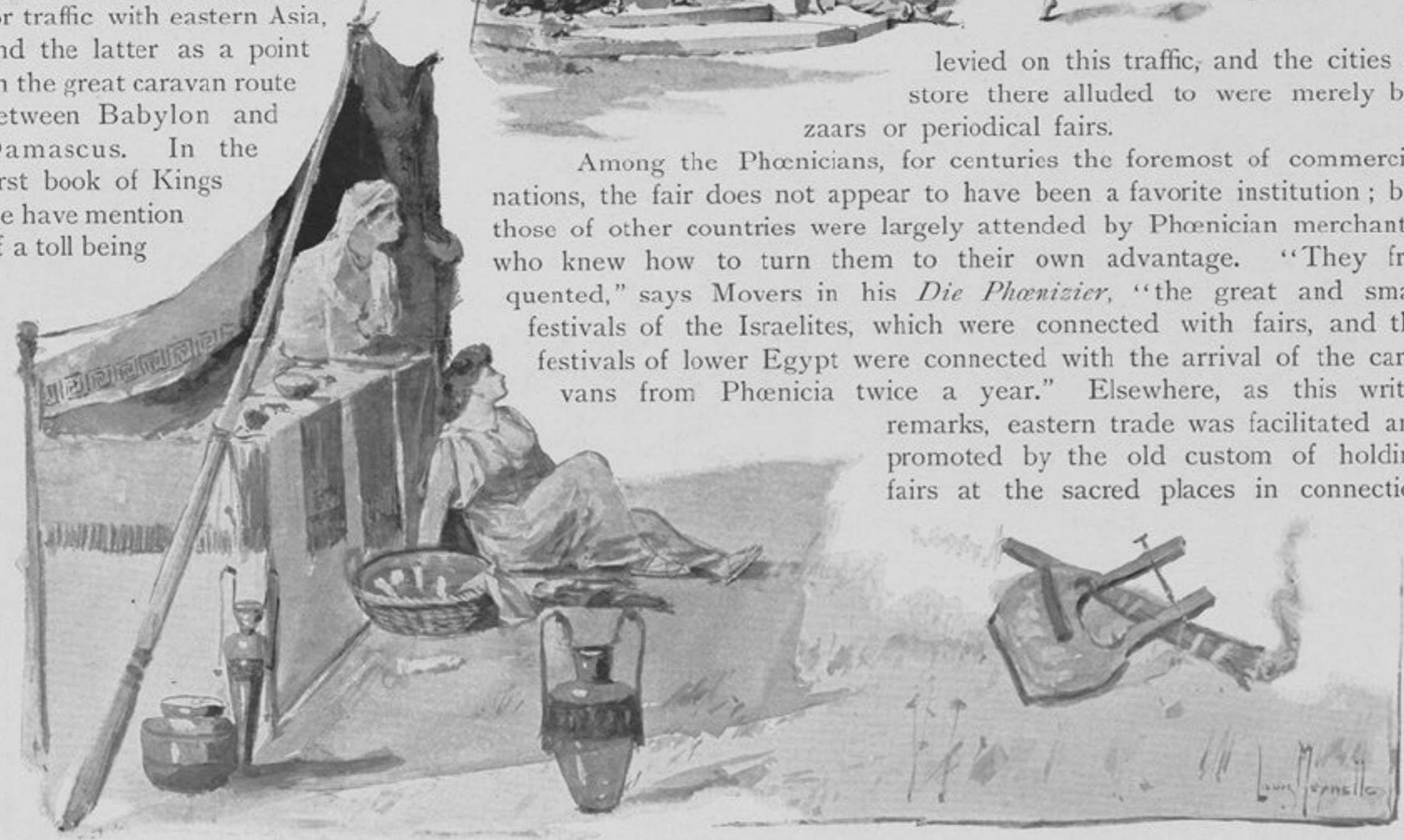
East is still carried on about as in Joseph's time, the caravans bringing in their goods with Ishmaelites as leaders."

It was not until the days of Solomon that the Hebrews had an established foreign trade; nor was this trade, as some would have us believe, of a purely maritime character; for by Solomon were built and fortified the cities of Palmyra and Tadmor, the former as a caravan station for traffic with eastern Asia, and the latter as a point on the great caravan route between Babylon and Damascus. In the first book of Kings we have mention of a toll being

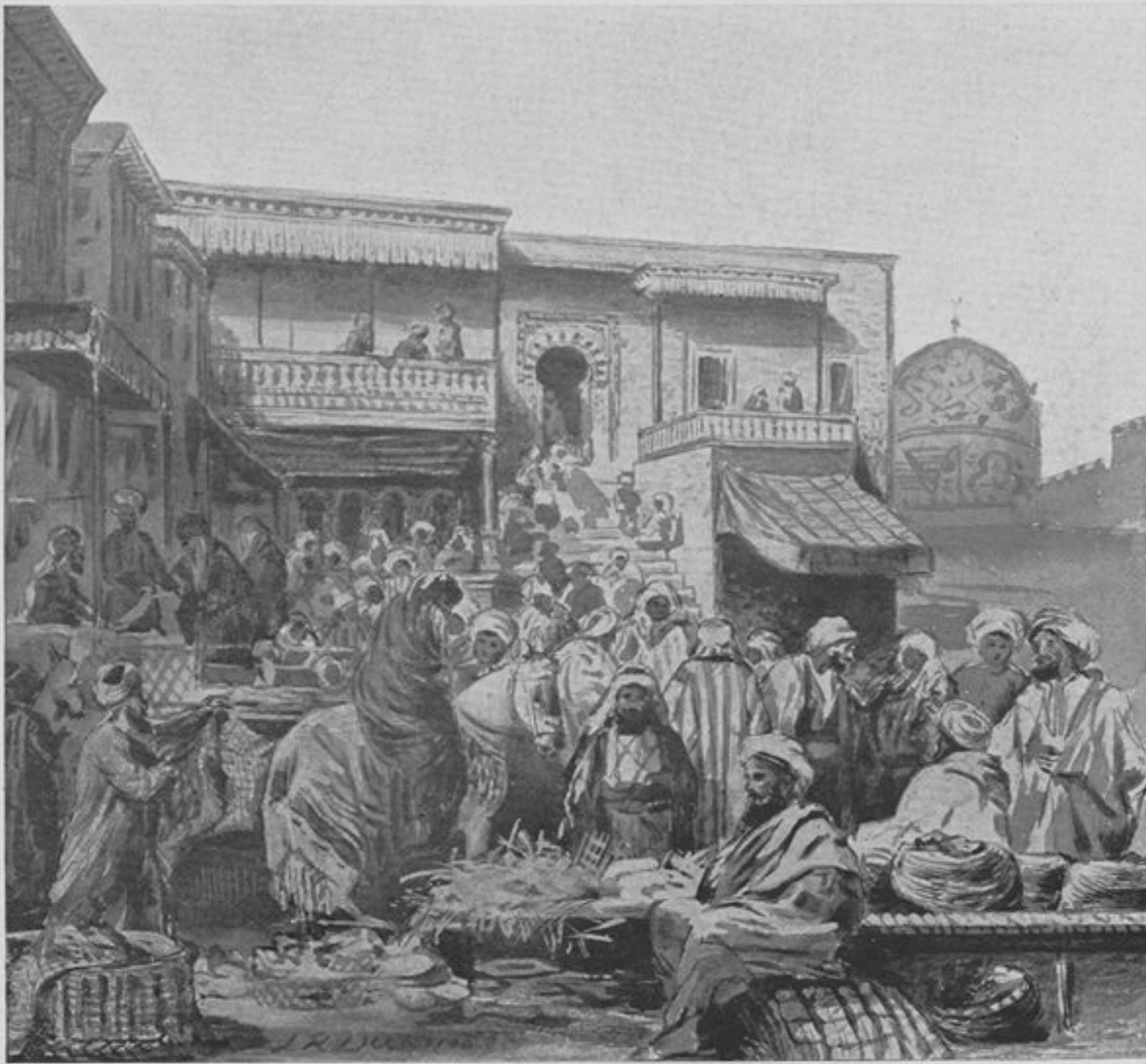


levied on this traffic, and the cities of store there alluded to were merely bazaars or periodical fairs.

Among the Phœnicians, for centuries the foremost of commercial nations, the fair does not appear to have been a favorite institution; but those of other countries were largely attended by Phœnician merchants, who knew how to turn them to their own advantage. "They frequented," says Movers in his *Die Phœnizier*, "the great and small festivals of the Israelites, which were connected with fairs, and the festivals of lower Egypt were connected with the arrival of the caravans from Phœnicia twice a year." Elsewhere, as this writer remarks, eastern trade was facilitated and promoted by the old custom of holding fairs at the sacred places in connection



THE OLYMPIC GAMES



AN EGYPTIAN FAIR

especially those held for political purposes, and even at the Olympic and other games, where trading was an important feature. Such at least is the statement of Cicero, who relates that as far back as the days of Pythagoras the religious games were frequented by merchants for the purposes of traffic. At Delphi annual fairs were held, partaking of a religious character, as was the case in most European countries until far into the middle ages. In Rome, the market-place where Horace loved to stroll while bargaining for his corn and oil, was thronged with vast multitudes on occasions of festive and political gatherings, and on such occasions the special facilities for trade gave to these markets the character of fairs.

Among African nations, whether savage or civilized, the commercial instinct is strongly developed, and even in the interior of the dark continent most of the tribes are to a certain extent engaged in trade. For many centuries Cairo was the emporium for some of the choicest productions of the earth, and here annual fairs were held on the arrival of the caravans from Syria, Arabia, and central Africa, bringing with them goodly stores of gold dust ivory and ostrich feathers, aromatics, spices and perfumes, together with bands of slaves, the traffic in human flesh yielding larger profits than all the rest. In the villages scattered throughout the Congo basin periodical markets are held for the sale of food and clothing, and on the lower Niger there are fairs once a fortnight at various points, permitting commercial intercourse with neighboring tribes, and forming the nearest approach to foreign commerce of which this region is capable. In the district traversed by Mungo Park fairs were not infrequent. "At Sansanding, near Sego," he says, "there is a very large space which is appropriated for the great market every Tuesday. On this day astonishing crowds of people come from the country to purchase articles at wholesale, and retail them at the different villages."



SCENE IN NORWAY

with the great festivals, and with the scattered and often disunited nomadic tribes of Arabia and Africa such festivals were the only means of intercourse.

At the fairs held in many of the principal seaports and inland towns of the ancient world, Phœnician merchants were present; for almost until the downfall of Carthage their commerce extended in every direction, penetrating by way of the Persian gulf to the coasts of Africa and Hindostan, while through the straits of Gibraltar their vessels passed north to the British isles for cargoes of tin, and to the shores of the Baltic for amber. All the products of their own and other lands, whether articles of common use or such as would cater to luxury and fashion, were carried from far and near between the leading marts of traffic by these eager and covetous traders.

Among the ancient Greeks there were fairs in connection with their popular assemblies,

At Mecca is held, during the annual pilgrimage, the greatest of Arabian fairs, and one of the greatest in the world, the concourse, though largely diminished within recent years, often exceeding 100,000 of the faithful,

among whom is a large admixture of merchants and traders. Elsewhere in Arabia there are fairs and festivals in many localities on certain days of the week, attended by the villagers from all the country round, traffic being followed by games, races, recitations, and other amusements. In the province of Hasa the fair is one of the most ancient of its institutions, and among others may be mentioned those held at Hofhoof, and at the town of Mebarraz, toward the north, where the booths are so arranged as to form temporary streets and squares. The goods exposed for sale would appear to be selected more for utility than elegance, and include such articles as brass utensils, coarse clothing and sandals, muskets and daggers, with a miscellaneous assortment of beasts of burden, especially of camels and dromedaries. By professional peddlers are offered, in temporary booths, glass bracelets, beads, and mirrors, with arm and ankle rings of copper, brass, or silver, while elsewhere are piled in front of the vendors, both male and female, bags of meal and flour, bundles of sugar cane, and heaps of vegetables and fruit, of charcoal and firewood.

At Ocadh was held, once a year, a general assembly of the tribes, with a fair on the Sabbath of each week. Traffic was not, however, the main object of this gathering, but rather to encourage a friendly emulation among their poets. Nowhere was poetry held in greater esteem than among the Arabs, whose orations were often delivered in metrical diction, and by whom no accomplishment was held in such esteem as that of writing smooth and elegant verse.

The rise of a new poet was made a subject of congratulation by the neighboring tribes, and only on two other occasions were such congratulations tendered, these being the birth of a boy and the dropping of a foal of superior breed. The assembly, with its attendant fair, was suppressed by Mohammed, in whose days poetry could not go hand in hand with the Koran and the sword.

In India the local traffic of the larger towns is conducted at the bazaars, which are in the nature of permanent markets, while, at many of the villages, weekly markets or fairs are held, with larger annual gatherings at certain points, originally for devotional purposes, but where in more recent years religion has only served as an excuse for traffic and amusement. One of the largest of these fairs is held at Hurdwar, on the upper Ganges, during the season of the vernal equinox, and is attended by 200,000 to 300,000 visitors, while at the sacred festival, held every twelfth year, it is said that no less than 2,000,000 pilgrims and merchants are present. On such occasions every article of home production is offered for sale, and thousands of the smaller class of traders add to the collection everything that can be packed into a peddler's wallet.



AN IRISH FAIR



AN ENGLISH FAIR

But it is with the fairs of Europe and America that we are more immediately concerned, and before presenting a brief outline of their history, a few remarks may be of interest as to their origin and characteristic features. In the majority of instances the ancient fairs of Europe were established in connection with religious festivals, and hence were held within or near some place of worship, or on some sacred spot, as around the shrine of a martyr, or the tomb of a saint. At first these gatherings were purely for devotional purposes, but presently a certain business was transacted in provisions, the demand for which increased with the influx of worshippers. Then came the idea of profiting by this traffic, followed by the attendance of merchants who offered for sale a variety of wares. In describing a miracle wrought at the tomb of St Eugene, it is related by Gregory of

Tours that, on the anniversary of his martyrdom, merchants offered their goods for sale in the atrium of the church, and, says Levasseur, writing of the Carolingian period in his *Histoire des Classes Ouvrieres*, "The aisles of the cathedral were then in Christian towns what the forum had been in Roman cities." At the fair of St Denis, the origin of which was an indictum, or assembly of the people, summoned by the archbishop of Paris in

1109, a piece of wood from the true cross was exhibited, and such was the curiosity of the people that almost until its suppression in 1789, this became one of the most popular of all European fairs.

Before and during the middle ages fairs were of unquestionable benefit, especially to remote and inland countries, where, even in the larger cities, shops were restricted in number, as were the articles offered for sale. Moreover, to many of them were granted valuable privileges, together with special facilities for traffic. For the most part they were exempt from taxation, and those who attended them received the protection of government for their persons and property, advantages duly estimated at a time when travel was difficult, and unsafe, and when commerce was burdened with imposts of every conceivable description. Such institutions were also beneficial as a means of instruction, bringing distant communities into closer contact with civilization, and affording an opportunity for comparing the qualities of home-made and foreign goods. With the development of legitimate commerce, however, they gradually became unnecessary, and now belong to an order of things that is rapidly passing away. In the United States fairs of this kind never acquired a permanent foothold, and if established in a few instances, were not considered of the same importance as among old-world communities.

In England the first fairs of which there are any record were in the opening years of the third century, at which date they were already regarded as a public necessity.

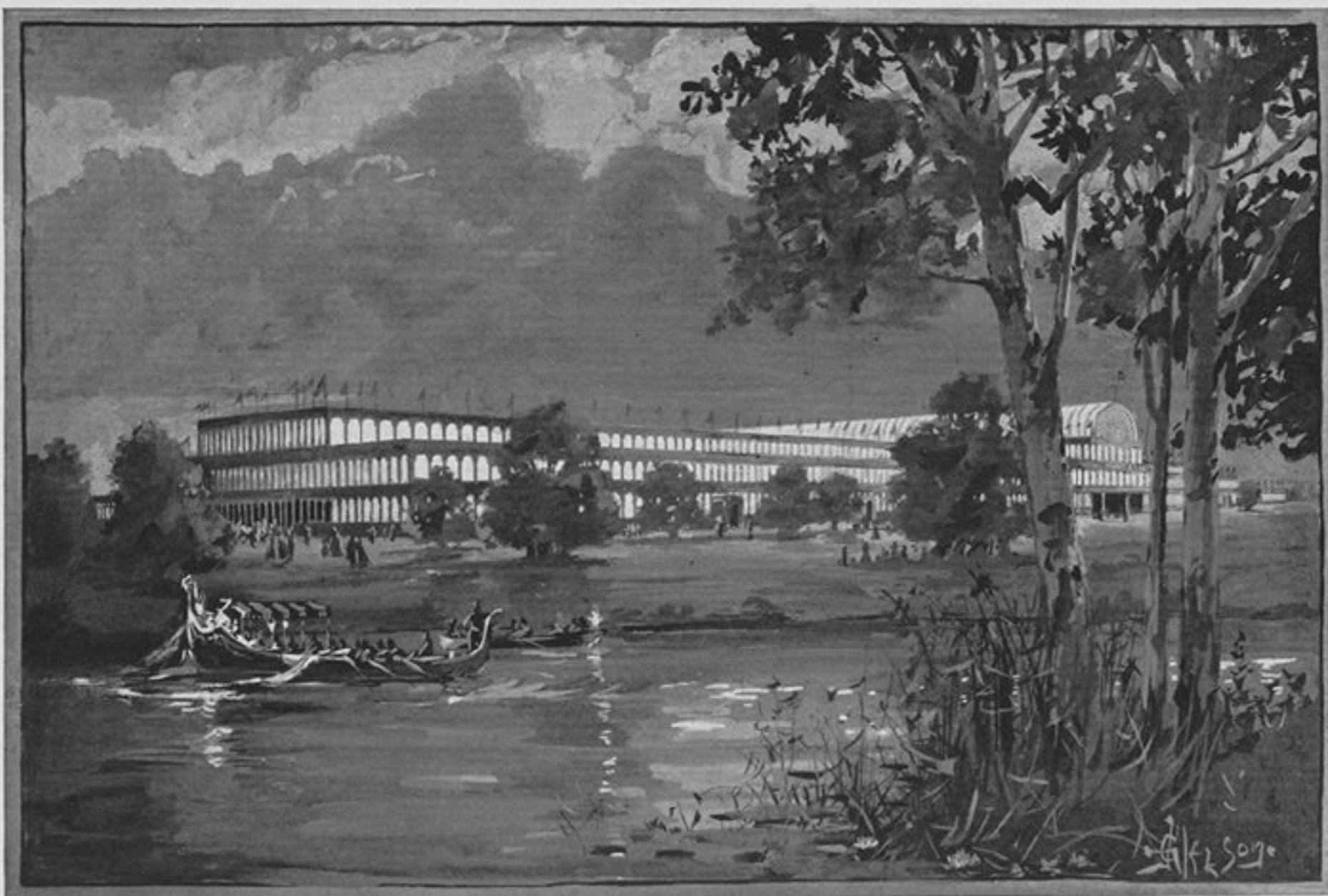
As some have it, the word fair is derived from the Latin *forum*, a market place, though a more probable derivation is from *feriæ*, the festival days of the church, since in olden times fairs were held on such days in the churchyard, or even in the church itself. In the days of the Plantagenets the revenues proceeding from fairs were granted by the reigning sovereign to the dignitaries of the church, or for charitable purposes, as when King John bestowed a charter on the Stourbridge fair for the support of a leper hospital. Occasionally, however, they were applied to baser uses, the king's jester, for instance, receiving in 1133 a charter for the fair of St Bartholomew, held annually after that date until 1855, when this, the last of all the London fairs, was abolished as had been the rest, as public nuisances, "productive of grievous immorality."

While, during the first half of the present century, national exhibitions, and some almost of an

international character, were held at the metropolitan cities of Europe, prejudice and indifference long stood in the way of such enterprises in the United Kingdom. Some minor efforts there were, as in the exposition of 1828, which, after a lingering existence of several years, sank to the level of a bazaar; but the only one approaching to national importance was at Birmingham in 1849, and then considered as a marvel of industrial display. At length, after the spread of railroad and steamship lines had



PRINCE ALBERT



WORLD'S FAIR LONDON, 1851