Gertrude Bell's Journey to Hayil

Author(s): D. G. Hogarth

Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Jul., 1927, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Jul., 1927), pp. 1-17

Published by: The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1781879

The Geographical Journal

Vol. LXX No. 1 July 1927

GERTRUDE BELL'S JOURNEY TO HAYIL

Dr. D. G. Hogarth, C.M.G., President R.G.S.

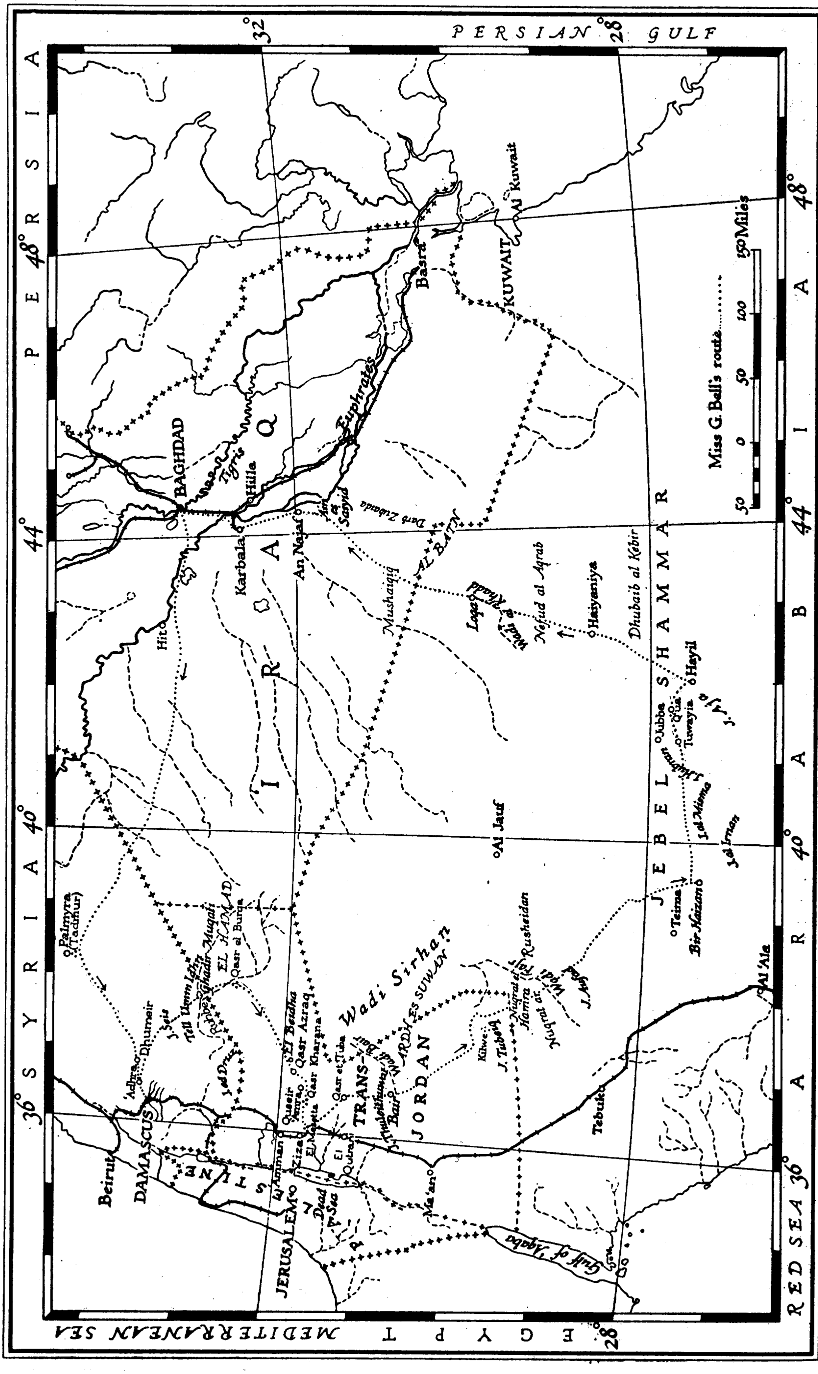
Read at the Meeting of the Society, 4 April 1927.

THIS journey was carried out in the winter of 1913–14. When Miss Bell reached England again, less than three months before the outbreak of the Great War, she was physically worn out; nor had she recovered completely when called to perform war service in Boulogne and London. She proceeded late in 1915 to Cairo and, early in 1916, to Basra; and from this moment to the day of her death, in 1926, she was engaged in exacting political work, taking few and brief holidays. It is, therefore, not surprising that she published no narrative of her journey to Hayil. When urged to write it at Baghdad she pleaded lack of time, of books, and of other facilities; but before her death, intending soon to return to England for good, she looked forward to realizing various literary projects, and among these, I have little doubt, was the composition of the desired narrative. In the meantime, she put the cartographic material which she had collected on that journey at the disposal of the War Office and the Royal Geographical Society, and her route was plotted throughout and incorporated in the "Million Map." Also during the War her social and political information was communicated to the Intelligence Services concerned with Arabia, 'Iraq, and Palestine. Taking these facts into consideration, together with the remarkable character of her single-handed achievement and its value for geographical and ethnographical science, I felt, after her death, little hesitation in asking her representatives to approve an attempt to put together, from diaries and letters and recollection of conversations, a narrative of her Arabian journey. For assurance of such approval I have to thank her father, Sir Hugh Bell, and for facilities to inspect and use documents in the possession of her family, I am beholden not only to him but also to Lady Bell and Lady Richmond.

Miss Bell arrived at Damascus on 25 November 1913, hoping to fulfil a long-cherished desire to penetrate Central Arabia and traverse Nejd to the borders of the great south desert. Since she had reason to know that such a project would not be approved either by the Ottoman

authorities or by the chief representative of Great Britain in Turkey, she avoided officials so far as possible during her three weeks' stay in Damascus, and discussed her plan only with unofficial friends and such Arabs as she thought would be both useful and discreet. These included the local agent of Ibn Rashid of Hayil, through whom she arranged to draw money on arrival at that town, and others who, like Muhammad el Bassam, the son of Doughty's 'Aneiza friend, might be supposed well informed about Central Arabia and the way thither. On such matters, however, she obtained contradictory and often unsound information, although she heard much of good authority on Arab politics and especially the activities of the Arab Unionists and the Wahhabis, which was to be of great service after the entry of Turkey into the Great War. Among other things she learned that the Desert was united for the first time since the Prophet's day—a sanguine anticipation of what would come true for a brief space three years later.

Her original plan was to slip into the Hamad desert on the east of the Damascus oasis and swing due south by such tracks as Musil had followed in 1908 and Leachman in 1912. Thus she would avoid altogether the Hejaz Railway, with its inquisitive officials and police. An illness, however, which struck down Fattuh, her indispensable Armenian body-servant, after his arrival from Aleppo, led her so to modify this plan as to render his rejoining her possible by use of the railway; and her final route was laid out in such a curve round the east of Jebel ed Druz and its eastward lava tracts (*Harrat*), as, after two or three weeks of desert marching, would bring her into touch with the railway at Ziza. She purchased twenty camels, engaged three cameleers, and sent all eastward on December 15. Following herself next day with two personal servants, one of whom was the same Muhammad Merawi who had travelled with Carruthers in 1909, she camped at 'Adhra. This place, and its larger neighbour, Dumeir, lie on the north-eastern edge of the Oasis; accordingly the Ottoman authorities seem to have supposed that Miss Bell was bound for some point in the northern Hamad or Mesopotamia, and would go by the Qaryatein–Tadmor road. But when, after delay by rain all the 17th, she entered the desert, she headed at once south of east (forward bearing 102°) for Jebel Sais, intending, after examination of the extinct volcano and early ruins reported by Oppenheim to exist there, to turn due south. Her party had been increased by a fourth cameleer and an Arab of the Ghiyadh tribe of the Jebeliya group, who was to serve as *rafiq* (guarantor) till some tribesman of the more important Beni Hasan could be procured. She was well aware that a Druse, whose people were then at peace with all the tribes which range the Safa and the Hamad immediately to east of the Jebel, would have afforded better assurance; but none could be found at the moment. The largest local Bedouin tribe, the Walad 'Ali, was reported gone east, and not likely to be in her path.



Sketch-map to illustrate Miss Gertrude Bell's Journey to Hayil

Jebel Sais was reached at noon on the 20th, the way having lain through desolate but not untrodden desert of volcanic formation on which *fellah* Arabs of Dumeir raise sparse crops. One of these was seen to sow first and plough afterwards. This tract was rendered the more inhospitable by very cold weather conditions, which coated all hilltops with snow, and at Jebel Sais itself brought down the night temperature below 20° Fahr., the tent canvas having to be thawed by fire in the morning before camp could be struck. Miss Bell found at Jebel Sais a very perfect crater and below it a two-towered fort, a mosque dating from the first century of the Hegira, a bath curiously constructed of mingled stone and brick (she wondered whence the latter could have come), and house-ruins of finely cut stone. Good well and pond water and sufficient grazing were at hand.

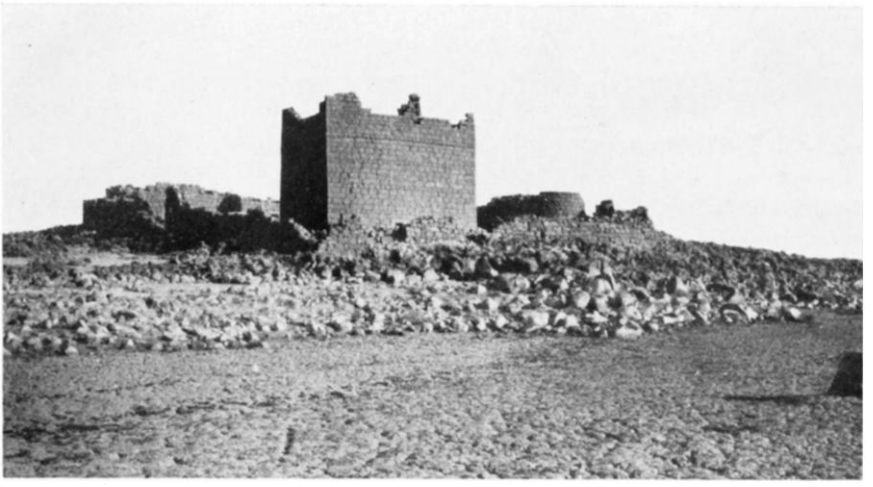
Next day (forward bearing about 136°) progress was resumed under the eastward face of the *harra* of Umm Idhn; and presently the party fell in with armed shepherds of the Masaid tribe, who, being at feud with the Ghiyadh, held up the party and began to plunder. In the nick of time, however, two of its members were recognized for friends; and sheikhs, coming up, called off the attack, restored the booty, and supplied a *rafiq*. Ahead lay a very repellent region. "The stony hills," wrote Miss Bell on the 22nd, "draw together in front like the gates of an abandoned Hades!"; and to add to the dreariness heavy mist and cold rain came up next day, when the large wadis Muqati and Umqad, running west to the Ruhbe marsh, had to be crossed. But Burqu was duly reached on the 24th, and Miss Bell camped there over Christmas Day, taking several latitude observations (32° 37′ 19″ N.), and finding extensive ruins to study and measure and inscriptions, Greek, Safaitic, and Kufic (one being of the Umaiyad Caliph, Walid) to copy. The fort, she concluded, had indeed seen a Roman occupation, far though it lies beyond the eastern limit of Provincia Arabia.

On the 26th she breakfasted in a temperature of 25° Fahr., and then followed across a *harra* patch the trace of an ancient road (bearing about 230°) which led down the Wadi Resaya towards Qasr el Azraq. On the 28th she sighted the southern end of Jebel ed Druz and reached camping-grounds and dry wells of the Ruwalla 'Anaza, a great tribe of the Hamad, whose headquarters lie some three days to the east. They come thus far to westward only when at full strength. She actually encountered, however, not those tribesmen but their sworn foes, the Serdiya, a branch of the large Beni Sakhr group, and was hospitably entertained by their sheikh, Ghalib ibn Mit'ab, famous (or infamous) in the Arab world for having betrayed the paramount Ruwalla chief, Nuri Sha'lan, to the Turks. On the 30th, after hearing the women wail at the cenotaph of Mit'ab, she emerged at last from the volcanic country, crossed the main track between Jebel ed Druz and Wadi Sirhan, and reached the Roman fort and springs of Baida, from which place to Qasr

The crater of Jebel Sais

The Hammam, Jebel Sais

Pinnacles of volcanic rock (Harra)



The keep of Burqu

The castle of Bayir

Qasr el 'Amra

el Azraq there remained but a short ride, on the last day of the year. We need not linger with her there (lat. 31° 49′ 4″ N.), for this large castle, whose existing ruins, though they contain an inscription of Diocletian, are of the period of the Egyptian Mamluks, has been well described, together with its palm grove and reedy pools. The place became famous, in 1918, as the rendezvous or rallying-point of the Emir Feisal's force which afterwards took Damascus. Lawrence spent many days of that winter and spring in its ruinous keep. Miss Bell found it, as usual, in the hands of outlaws, and experienced some difficulty. It has since harboured Druse refugees.

She was now on a doubtful frontier between the range of greater tribes. Certain graveyards of the Ruwalla, who had used fragments of Byzantine and Umaiyad architecture for headstones, and some horsekeepers of the Sherarat, who, as landless men without feuds, frequent frontiers, were met with on January 2 as she moved down towards the well-known ruins of Qasr el 'Amra, Kharana, and Meshetta—the last a "ghost," stripped of the lacework façade which adorns a room in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum at Berlin. There she was well within the range of the Beni Sakhr, the Ruwalla's chief foes. At Kharana, less well known than Meshetta, but dating in part from the first century A.H. full of Kufic texts and, as she wrote, "splendid surprises," she camped and worked for two whole days, postponing her appearance in the neighbourhood of the railway till January 7.

This first stage, completed in twenty-one days had, she confessed, tried both her body and her soul. Continuous cold and the absence of Fattuh, who knew her ways, made for acute discomfort; and this had been aggravated by the uncertainties of passage through the ranges of small and lawless tribes. To make matters worse, it looked for some days as if that trial had been endured in vain; for, though Fattuh duly joined her at Ziza, there followed on his heels a sergeant and posse of soldiers, sent to stop her further journeying in the desert and bring her to 'Amman. Ten weary days, therefore, had to be spent in interviewing officials (the *Kaimmakam* of Salt, fortunately for her, was a Christian), in telegraphing to Damascus, and in waiting—too familiar process!—for the Turkish official will to weaken. A powerful local Christian family, the Bsharras of Judeida, befriended her; and returning to Ziza on the 14th, she was able to persuade the chief of police to accept a document absolving the Ottoman Government from further responsibility for her fate. That same day also she received a message from her friend, Sir Louis Mallet, H.M. Ambassador at Constantinople, warning her that the British Government would likewise disclaim responsibility if she persisted in the way to Nejd. The thought that she was about to re-enter the desert (it "always looks terrifying from without," she wrote) as an outlaw threw her for a few hours into deep despondency; but reflection followed that, after all, in no case could either Government, Ottoman or

British, do anything to protect her in that desert; nor could it, if she came to grief, take measures that would give the smallest satisfaction to any one. Eventually, though she failed to induce the police officer to return her document, and her three 'Aqail cameleers refused to continue, she slipped away on the 17th, in good spirits, with help and fresh men from the Bsharras, and rode south-east over recently tilled lands of the Beni Sakhr for Tuba, a small Umaiyad palace visited and planned by Musil. This place, which lies within the drainage basin of Wadi Sirhan, is known as the " gate of the 'Anaza," being on the line between the *dira's* of the Beni Sakhr and the Ruwalla. On the 19th the party descended the Wadi Mukhaiwir, and reached the black and dreary Ard es Suwan (Land of Flints). Here three pointed and white-capped hillocks, known as the Thuleithuwat, make a conspicuous landmark. She passed close to them but on the west, not the east side from which Carruthers, on his outward ride from Qatrani, had seen them in 1909. Crossing several tributaries of the Wadi Bayir, the party dropped, on the 21st, into the main valley which contains much tamarisk scrub, several wells, and the ruin which Carruthers saw on his return journey. He guessed it to have been a caravanserai on a Roman trade-route to the Persian Gulf, but Miss Bell thought it an early Islamic castle like Tuba, and the last that the desert-loving Caliphs of Damascus had pushed out into the Syrian waste. Lawrence, however, who visited it more than once in 1917, believes it to date back to the Ghassanids. As the first halting-place of importance on the path to Arabia, Miss Bell thought well to fix its latitude at 30° 40′ 43″ N.*

Thenceforward, until she entered the Nefud, three weeks later, Miss Bell, unlike her predecessors, Guarmani in 1864 and Carruthers in 1909 (their tracks ran respectively to east and to west of hers almost to Tor at Tubaiq, and both to westward of hers south of that point) was enabled, by the certainty of finding *khabra's* (ponds) after recent heavy rains, to avoid the dangerous proximity of wells, which too often are rendezvous of raiding parties. Bayir itself is such a rendezvous, but less in winter than in summer, when the Beni Sakhr frequent it. Though it is the resting-place of this tribe's *jidd* (tribal forefather), it lies near the limit of its southward and eastward range and is apt to be occupied from time to time by its enemies. At all seasons, indeed, the tract of desert north and south of Bayir is dangerous, and especially so when (as at the moment of Miss Bell's passage) it is *khala, i.e.* empty of shepherds. Moreover, it is of a melancholy monotony. No outstanding feature relieves a dreary succession of shallow sandy wadis, declining towards the Sirhan, and of dusty, flinty levels between them. Over this waste

* Miss Bell carried a 3-inch transit theodolite, in whose use she had been instructed at the R.G.S. Judged by a subsequent observation at Hayil, which, when computed, agreed within 42″ with another obtained by Charles Huber, her latitudes may be relied upon.

the party zigzagged from *khabra* to *khabra*, not keeping on one course, as travellers do between wells whose position is fixed and known, but seeking rain-waters which might have collected and remained unexhausted.

On the 25th came a change. The party was approaching the northern verge of Tor at Tubaiq, the Itbaik of Carruthers and Tobeyk of Doughty (who knew it by report alone)—a knot of hills to which Bedouins resort all the year round for pasturage. Here the sandstone has been protected from denudation by a lava-cap, now largely wasted and lying in the form of great boulders on the valley-floors. Smoke was seen, a portent of terror in so silent and vacant a land; but it heralded nothing worse than a camp of Howeitat shepherds, who reported that many of their great tribe, of both the Tayi and the Jazi sections, were pasturing in the hills ahead. Reassured, Miss Bell rode on over ground covered with green plants and starred with little flowers, white, purple, and yellow, and up between broken hills into the heart of the Tubaiq, which she describes as "rusty red hills with a dropping of coal-black stones down their steep sides" and with sands, at first red and then yellow, on their valley-floors. She found it a real hill region where dews, not met with since the Jordan valley, soaked her tent-flies, and frost sparkled at dawn. The most important chief, 'Auda abu Tayi, was away raiding the Shammar; but she was well received on the second day by another sheikh, Harb ad Darausha, at whose tent in the evening arrived 'Auda's cousin, Muhammad adh Dhailan, who was "sheikh ad Daula" *i.e.* agent for the collection of camel-tax for the Ottoman Government and responsible for the safety of a section of the distant Hejaz Railway.

Miss Bell was disturbed to find that even here she was not quite beyond reach of the Ottoman arm, and to hear her men questioned whether she was or was not travelling with the leave of the "Daula." But no harm followed, and in the end she spent no less than eight days in and about the Tubaiq, of which "very interesting region," as Carruthers called it, her diary gives the best account we have. The keen-eyed Howeitat—Doughty's "stout nomad nation" which he guessed to be of Nabathæan descent—seem to have pleased her. The time was passed partly in the hospitable tents of Harb and Muhammad, she being, as she said, "baptized of the desert" in the camel's milk of the Tayi; partly in taking, without let or hindrance, many photographs and a latitude observation (this worked out at 29° 52′ 53″ N.); partly in excursions to two neighbouring ruins; partly in climbing heights from which she could "look over fold on fold of golden red sand and smoke-grey ridge"; and always in making and re-making plans for the journey ahead. After long debate between the Jauf and the Taima routes, she elected the first, being warned that the Bishr, Hutaim, Fejr, Wad Suleiman, and others ceaselessly raid the second; and with Harb's brother, Awwad, as *rafiq*, she actually made a start ahead on January 28. But next day came news that the Wadi Sirhan, by which she must pass, was full of Ruwalla tents, among which

Awwad might neither go safely nor frank his charge. So she turned back after calling on the *harim* of 'Auda, who told her of the " burden of woman " in nomad life ; and she abode other four days with Muhammad adh Dhailan, beguiling part of the time with an excursion to the walled pool of Kilwa, where are a small stone cistern of uncertain date and a sacred High Place. This ride took her beyond the Tubaiq which she saw, on the south, " break down abruptly in great riven crags " to a plain of red sand spotted with vegetation and diversified by rain-pools, left over from the downpouring of November. Meanwhile she had been advised so strongly to give Taima a wide berth (Carruthers had had to fly thence in 1909) that, when finally she started south on February 2, she intended to try to reach Hayil by the directest line that the Nefud desert would allow, *i.e.* by cutting across its south-western angle, where she heard of two wells—Haizan and Thoza—and of dunes less high and intervening horseshoe hollows less deep than they become farther east.

Besides a Howeiti *rafiq* her caravan now included two starveling families of Shammar folk with tents, children, and livestock. Though mendicant and graceless, they were welcome as unofficial *rafiqs* in the event of encounter with Shammar elements ahead. All went well for four marches slightly east of southward over steppes of sandstone and gravel cut by deep wadis falling east. " I read 'Richard Feverel,' " she noted on the first afternoon. The next day was beguiled by legends of the Tubaiq, and the next again by the red-gold sands and grey-green trees of the Nuqra depression. On the seventh day her march lay over a " regular garden " of flowers in the Aufad. But on the eighth came a check. After a party of Howeitat on the move had been passed, a camp of the Wad Suleiman (these nomads are Jeda'n of the 'Anaza group, and range to Tebuk and Taima) was seen ; and its sheikh, Saiya ibn Murted, barred passage unless Miss Bell would surrender a revolver and a Zeiss binocular to his greed. Even with these in his hands, he tried to induce her *rafiq*, by a promise of half the plunder, to abet a plot for leaving her to his mercy ; but, finding the Howeiti steadfast, he dared not provoke a great tribe, and in the end let the party go next day, with his own cousin and two men of the Fuqara—a tribe which befriended Doughty—for *rafiqs*.

On the third day—the eighth from Tubaiq—the first red dunes of the Nefud showed abreast ; and on the morrow, at a point only one long camel-march from Taima, the pebbly steppe was left for the sands. The pale yellow dunes, lying east and west with steep sides to north, were bare, but the lower sand was found well clothed with camel food. The change from the monotony of the steppe to a winding course, keeping a general direction south by east, round or through *qu'ara* (steep hollows between dunes), seemed pleasant enough. But in the absence of rain the going was heavy, and the weather continued cold. On February 13 the sands were white with frost. Many shepherds of the 'Awaji group were met, who had news that the Rashid Emir ex-

The defile of Habrun

Su'ud in Abu Tayi's tent

Auda abu Tayi's harim

Drawing water at Haizan well

Jebel Aja

pected the *sitt* (lady), but was himself, at the moment, far from Hayil, raiding in the northern Nefud. On the 14th Miss Bell reached Haizan, where many of those shepherds were watering from a brackish well, evidently of great antiquity, to judge by its cemented upper part, and its depth (150 feet) into rock. A sweeter well near by, called Haiyar, had lately been blocked. Jebel 'Irnan in Nejd had been visible for two days past; and now from dune-crests some bearings on its northern butt, called Dhurru, were obtained to south-south-east, and others on Jebel Misma almost due east.

Next day the other reported well, Thoza, was passed. On the 17th, to the general delight, heavy rain fell, and hardened the sand for that day and the following. Gravel was near at hand on the south, but fear of raiding Hutaim—reckoned, like the Sherarat, landless men of tainted blood—and consideration of pasture moved the guide to keep within the shelter of the Nefud. The party wound among dunes and horseshoe hollows at a rate of not more than one crow-fly mile an hour, and Miss Bell began to grow as tired of the sands as she had been glad to get into them. Though, as she writes, she "brought the world back into perspective" by reading Hamlet in the rain, she decided, on the 19th, to bear right-handed to harder ground, and so she came to the southernmost dunes, and between the black rocks of Misma at last saw Nejd.

"It was a landscape terrifying in its desolation. Misma drops in precipices of sandstone weathered to a rusty black, and at its feet are gathered endless companies of sandstone pinnacles, black too, shouldering one on the other. They look like the skeleton of a vast city planted on a sandstone and sand-strewn floor. And beyond and beyond more pallid lifeless plain and more great crags of sandstone mountains rising abruptly out of it. Over it all a bitter wind whipped the cloud shadows. 'Subhan Allah!' (said one of her servants), 'we have come to Jehannum!'"

That plain, however, proved by no means infernal. Pasture and waterpools lurked among its sand-pillars and tables; and for that day and the next it provided fair going. Then a southward tongue of the Nefud projected far across the path, and the party, now bearing almost due east, had to wind again among dunes. The defile of Habrun was passed late on the 21st, the soil became granitic, the long ridge of Jebel Aja showed ahead, and a mud-built village, Tuwaiya, the first seen since Ziza, invited the party to stay after sending out five riflemen to investigate it. The course henceforward lay but little to north of that followed by Doughty on his ride eastwards from Taima in 1877. Presently for the third time intervened dunes, from which there was no escape till, on the 23rd, the deeply worn track from Jubba and Jauf was struck. Following this past the village of Qana with its palm gardens and cornfields into a sandy pass walled with black pinnacles, Miss Bell came through Jebel Aja down to red plains which support villages, mud-walled and palm-girt; and on the 25th, entering

a basin larger than the rest, she saw Hayil. Well knowing the unwisdom of taking such a place by surprise, she had sent two men ahead at dawn. No European, other than a Turkish officer, was known to have been seen in Hayil for over twenty years, and no European woman for more than thirty. The all-powerful Emir, Muhammad ibn Rashid, who protected more than one Western visitor, had died half a generation ago; and since his death murder after murder had thinned the princely house. Its power had been waning for some time in comparison with that of the Emirate of Southern Nejd; and one result of the growing preponderance of the Ibn Sa'uds in Central Arabia was likely to be accentuation of Wahhabism heretofore lukewarm. Miss Bell might well be doubtful how she would be received.

All however seemed to promise fair. The envoys were met returning to say that the party was welcome, and Miss Bell was guided in a half-circuit round the town wall with its machicolated brick towers and admitted by the south, or Qasim, gate. But, to her disappointment, she was directed to quarters allotted to her immediately on the left, in what had been a subsidiary palace of the great Emir Muhammad, and since his day used as a guest-house. An inclined way, open on one side, led to a roof court and a lofty *roshan*, or reception-hall, whose floor was spread with carpets and its divan with cushions, below a red and blue frieze of pious texts. A ladder to the roof tempted her to view the town; but, beyond the knowledge that her house stood within a large fivefold enclosure, which once had bloomed with gardens and cornfields but was now uncultivated, and that other gardens and fields occupied a large part of the town area, she gained little before being called down to receive two women told off to attend her. Of these a lively Circassian, once sent by the Sultan 'Abdul Hamid for a concubine to Muhammad ibn Rashid and now married, took her fancy. This woman's mission no doubt included espionage; but her reports, in the end, did Miss Bell some service, and she seems to have reciprocated the latter's liking. The Emir, Sa'ud ibn Rashid, proved indeed to be absent, and the town was nominally in charge of his uncle, Ibrahim as Subhan, but really in that of Fatima, the Emir's grandmother, the real power behind the throne. Presently an odour of attar of roses heralded the entry of Ibrahim himself, and a polite conversation about former European visitors, especially the Blunts and Doughty (under his Arab name, Khalil), and about the stormy history and present state of the Rashids, left Miss Bell with no nearer prospect either of cashing the draft for £200 which she had brought from the Rashidian agent in Damascus, or of penetrating farther into the town. In fact, Ibrahim warned her that the *ulema* disliked her presence, and next day a message enjoined her not to leave the house without express invitation. On the 27th, however, she was bidden after nightfall by Ibrahim to the Qasr or palace, and conducted thither through clean silent streets, empty but for a woman or

two creeping under the wall. The way lay through the market-place, which was entered by a wooden gate, and past the columned façade of the chief mosque to a second and then a third barred gate. These passed, she found herself in the Qasr and was led to the main reception hall, white of walls and of floor, below a high roof propped by stone pillars. The usual courtesies were exchanged, and she handed over the presents which she had brought.

But on March 1, the fourth day of her stay, she had seriously to consider her position. She was told that neither would permission to depart be given nor would her draft be honoured till the Emir should return at some unknown date. She had sold six of her weaker camels, and with their price held just £40 in hand. A request for an audience of Fatima was not answered, and the presents left overnight at the Qasr were returned. She could only sit and wonder what the dark minds of the Rashids might be meditating, the Rashids, on their side, evidently being equally at a loss to tell what was in hers. In Hayil she knew murder to be "like the spilling of milk," and no prominent head to rest easy on its shoulders. "To the spiritual sense," she writes in her diary, "the place smells of blood." The political situation in Nejd, she had learned, was as unfavourable to her plan of going south as it well could be. Rashid power was everywhere on the wane. In the north Nuri Sha'lan held Jauf in secure defiance, and in the south Ibn Sa'ud was mobilizing for an anti-Rashid campaign destined to materialize toward the end of the year. Contrary to much that she had heard in Damascus, North Arabia was full of war and rumour of war.

Therefore she came, either now or earlier, to the conclusion that it was useless to attempt to reach Southern Nejd, and formed a new plan for direct return to Baghdad with eight camels, while the rest, with her spare men, should take the road for Medina and regain Damascus by the railway. Exactly when she began to doubt of her original plan is not clear, nor does the question matter, except in so far as it affects another which puzzled and worried herself—why she was not more frankly welcomed at Hayil. During her first two days, at any rate, she seems still to have cherished hope of reaching Ibn Sa'ud; and, if so, she probably gave some hint of it to Ibrahim, even if she did not directly ask for permission. At any rate, it may be inferred from Fatima's remark, "Is that all?" made a week later than this to the Circassian Turkiya, when the latter convinced her at last that it was for Baghdad, not Riyadh, that Miss Bell wanted a *rafiq* and money, and also from that old queen's action in forthwith cashing the draft, that previously the latter had seen reason to think that the Englishwoman intended to proceed in some less acceptable direction. At this juncture the Rashids, menaced by Ibn Sa'ud, and anxious, as always, to stand well with the Ottoman Government, whose forces their enemy had just expelled from Hasa, could hardly help an Englishwoman to take her money, her prestige, and her

knowledge into the Southern Emirate; and seeing that they had received forenews of Miss Bell's coming, they probably knew also that she had come without Turkish sanction.

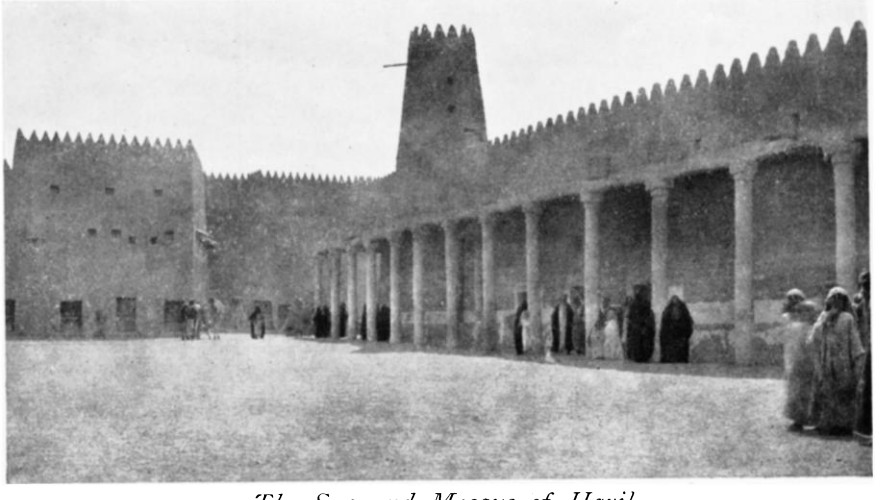
A significant passage in her diary for the 28th reflects disillusionment about the utility, if not the practicability, of travelling in independent Arabia *à la franca*, as she called it, *i.e.* as a European notable without assumption of Arab character, but with train of servants and private tent, equipped with travelling comforts of the West. Thus Shakespear had gone to South Nejd, as she knew, but not Palgrave, Doughty, or Leachman. She questioned if it were at all worth while to travel like the first named. Doughty, at the price, it is true, of pain and ignominy, had succeeded in seeing all Hayil and much of its intimate life. What could she add to his picture, penned, as she was, like a plague-stricken patient, within an implacable cordon? She seems keenly to have felt a sense of isolation even before she reached Hayil, and during all the time that she spent in the town, an unwelcome consciousness of being alien and incongruous. "I was the one blot," she wrote, after describing the company gathered about the Emir's mother, Mudi, when audience of the *harim* in the Qasr had at last been granted. On all her previous journeys in the Near East, and especially among the Bedouins of the desert, Miss Bell had never failed herself to control her actions and those of her men, to disarm suspicion and to establish reasonable relations with whoever was in authority. Now her failure in all these respects galled her not less than did the inactivity enforced, day after day, on her energetic body, and her disappointment at having come so far to see so little. She wrote bitterly now and later of her "imprisonment" in Hayil.

It should be said on the other side, however, that while she was treated there from first to last as a great lady, with formal and even distinguished courtesy, her arrival in a Wahhabi town placed its rulers in a difficult position. No one of its existing generation had seen a Christian woman of this station before. Why this one had come and whither she meant to go were questions that were bound to be canvassed suspiciously. The princely house, none too safe or sure of itself, evidently felt her a grave responsibility. Had Miss Bell's nerves been as well under control as in her younger days (she was now forty-four, and showed clearly in her diary that, from the start of this journey, she was neither physically nor morally as fit for the road as once she had been), she might have allowed more for peculiar circumstances of the moment, social and political, governing the action of the Rashids in Hayil.

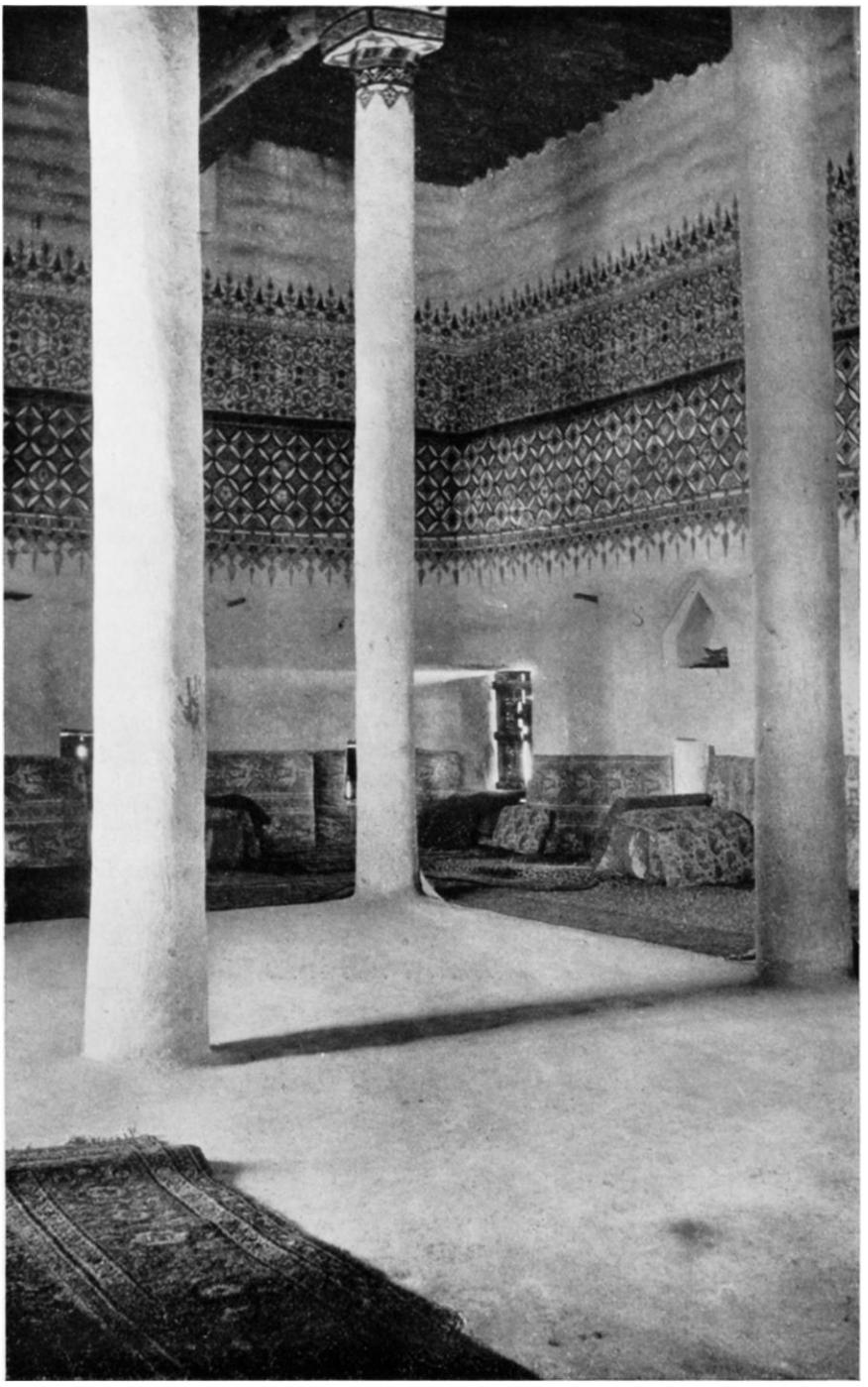
That visit to the Emir's ladies on March 5 was almost the only occasion, before the sky cleared on March 7, which offered her any further opportunity of seeing the life of Hayil. Except for one angry conversation with Ibrahim in the Barzan, on the 2nd, and an excursion outside the walls to his garden, she had to keep for nearly a week after the 28th to

Villages near Hayil

Hayil from the north-west



The Suq and Mosque of Hayil



The Roshan in the guest-house at Hayil

her house or its precincts, protesting to all and sundry and waiting for the camels which she had called back from their distant grazing-ground on the Nefud. The audience with Mudi, still young and attractive, though three Emirs, one after another, reeking of the blood of her husband or her son, had forced her into their beds, stirred all Miss Bell's sense of the strangeness of the place with its silent moonlit streets and blood-stained society—" the unadulterated East in its habit as it has lived for centuries." She received a visit from two princely children, and returned it to find herself confronted in a garden by five small cousins, scented, solemn and silent in stiff gold-embroidered robes, who stared at her with painted eyes.

Whether these visits broke the ice, or the accomplished fact of the division of her caravan added conviction to Turkiya's pleading, certain it is that late next day Fatima did open the Treasury, and Miss Bell did find herself free to go. But, greatly daring, she refused after all to budge unless allowed a sight of town and Qasr by daylight—a sight which Mudi had told her she might on no pretext enjoy till the Emir's return. On the 7th, however, this facility was accorded. Crowds beset the path, but none molested her. The Hayil zealots, whether spontaneously or under compulsion, were all smiles and benevolence, vying with one another to supply subjects for the Englishwoman's camera ; and she was conducted all over the Qasr, even to the kitchen.

Relieved of her late anxieties and cheered by serene weather, Miss Bell ended with a more kindly feeling towards Hayil. " In spite of imprisonment," she wrote, " I carry away a deep impression of the beauty and charm of it all." The sunset glow on Qasr and town ; the art of the palace gate ; the noiselessness and, strange to say, dustlessness of the clean streets ; the green of cornfields " shining like jewels within the walls " ; the atmosphere of Harun ar Rashid's Arabia—all these things brought balm, and coloured the descriptions which she would give to her friends after her return to England.

If northwards she must go, she desired to follow the Persian Pilgrim track along which over a thousand years before Queen Zubaida ordered wells and tanks to be provided. Not that these attracted her, but she had heard of " written stones " near Dhubaib, some two marches from Hayil. On the 8th, however, she learned that, on the double pretext of the insecurity of the Darb Zubaida and of her obligation to meet the Emir, her guide had been ordered to lead by a more westerly track to the Haiyaniya well, and thence as straight as might be to Najaf. She could only bow. But in the end her disappointment about Dhubaib, was to prove short-lived ; on the second day out, she heard enough of its stones to recognize natural freaks or fossiliferous blocks, rather than cuneiform *stelæ*. Two days she rode east of north over the plain to a low sandstone ridge which marks the limit of Jebel Shammar, and then once more into the Nefud by a deep-worn track between daisy-

starred dunes smaller than those of the west. Everywhere were to be seen abundant pastures and Shammar shepherds' tents. Two days up to Haiyaniya—where water was drawn from 150 feet depth before a castle built by the Emir 'Abdullah ibn Rashid in the middle of the nineteenth century—and two days beyond it the land was still sandy, and known as Nefud el 'Aqrab; but it soon changed to a gravelly steppe—a type of desert usually called Dahna—and, after the bush-grown Wadi el Khadd had been passed, to flat and stony levels. "Oh, but it's a long and weary way!" sighed Miss Bell, as soon as the hills of Jebel Shammar dipped below the southern horizon; and her one solace was found in steadily mapping a track which, except at Haiyaniya, diverged from any followed by previous explorers. At Loqa, on the 15th, were found wells; but for the most part the camels drank from rain-pools. At Haiyaniya Miss Bell had been told that the Emir had passed eastwards. Now it leaked out that his raid on Jauf had failed. All idea, therefore, of meeting him was abandoned.

On the 17th, in a low sandy tract called here (as on the Kuwait road) Batn (Belly), the limit of the Shammar country was left behind, and with it the careless security of the past nine days. The track, bearing now slightly east of north and converging towards the Euphratean borderlands, brought the party within the extreme range of small semi-settled tribes—Arab but not Bedouin—which, in search of spring pasturage, resume nomadic habits. This year, owing to the favourable rains of the past winter, they were pushing farther afield than usual. The first two groups met with—one of Ri'u tents and one of the Beni Hasan—were ready to loot the caravan, and only refrained from fear of the Shammar. A third group belonged to another small and ignoble tribe, the Beni Salama. Much nervous energy and time were spent in persuading each of these groups to find *rafiqs*, whose guarantee would serve for a few hours only and be doubtfully valid with the next group that might be met; and great was Miss Bell's relief on the 19th, after the usual tentative approach to a fourth camp surrounded by great numbers of grazing donkeys, to find it occupied by Ghazalat, a tribe of such repute and strength that robbers (more and more likely to be met as Najaf drew nearer) would be slow to ignore its safe conduct. The worth of the Ghazali *rafiq*, Dawi, was to be proved next day and the day after, when, deaf to bribes, he stood by his charge and twice stopped attempts by Madan tribesmen to loot. The track had now fallen into the high-road, the Darb Zubaida, and what with camel-herdsmen, who shot by way of precaution, and Najaf merchants, who shot from nervousness, the rest of the way did not lack incident. As the margin of cultivation drew nearer, grassy *wadis* set with sparse trees were met with. Najaf could have been reached on the 22nd had not Miss Bell set her heart on holding on to and camping at a historic spot, 'Ain as Saiyid, which was once called Qarqisiya. Its castle however proving of recent date, and

the place being without other interest than its associations, Miss Bell rode on to within sight of Najaf, camped near a village two hours away, and on the 23rd coaxed her camels across irrigation channels and rotten canal bridges into the town.

We need not follow her further travelling by carriage to Karbala and Baghdad over well-trodden ways; and I shall not attempt to relate her return across the Hamad to Damascus, after she had spent some three weeks in Baghdad. To another European woman, in the days before desert motor services had been thought of, such a journey would have seemed adventurous enough. But to Miss Bell, who had been into Nejd, a crossing of the Hamad, though it offered hardships and some danger, and the chance of visiting one of the greatest of Bedouin chiefs—Fahd ibn Hadhdhal—at his camp in the broad Ghara depression, and also of seeing and studying many unrecorded ruins of early Islamic and even pre-Islamic times, seemed something of an anti-climax.

She was now very tired and lacked her old zest for the novelties of exploration. A fit of depression at Baghdad issued in self-reproach for her failure to go beyond Hayil, or, as she thought, to render services to science commensurate with the labour and risks of her journey. She had learned, for one thing, that her pet study, archæology, would find little to feed upon in Central Arabia. But this mood did not prevent her from registering then and there a vow to ride direct to Ibn Sa'ud at some future date—a date which, in the event, the Great War was to postpone for ever.

Of her journey she felt in Baghdad indisposed to write; but she admitted that after a while she might feel differently. Such change of feeling did, indeed, come to pass. Had she, however, lived to write her own narrative, she would have claimed less for her achievement than here and now I propose to claim. To my thinking its interest and value lie by no means only or principally in its mere demonstration that a Christian Englishwoman could penetrate Nejd alone and return unscathed, but more in all sorts of gains that accrued to the geographical and archæological sciences, and to our social and political knowledge of the Arabs. Her journey in its first stage from the Oasis of Damascus round the back of the Syrian *harra*, was a pioneer venture, which not only put on the map a line of wells, before unplaced or unknown, and enabled account to be taken during the War of the strength and local ranges of the Jebeliya tribes, heretofore names in the void, but also cast much new light on the history of the Syrian desert frontiers under Roman, Palmyrene, and Umaiyad domination. It is to be hoped that Miss Bell's detailed notes on the ruins marking these frontiers may be made available for students of history and architecture. On the second stage from Ziza to Hayil, archæology gained less (since nothing ancient of importance was met with after Bayir), but geography gained more. Miss Bell gives in her diary much the best account that we have to date both of the steppeland

forming the western half of the Sirhan basin and also of the isolated hill group of Tor at Tubaiq. She was the first European to find a way across the south-western angle of the Nefud and to prove the existence of wells there; the first, too, to discover the character of the denuded sandstone region of north-western Jebel Shammar, which escaped Doughty. But perhaps the most valuable result of that stage consists in the mass of information that she accumulated about the tribal elements ranging between the Hejaz Railway on the one flank and the Sirhan and Nefud on the other, particularly about the Howeitat group, of which Lawrence, relying on her reports, made signal use in the Arab campaigns of 1917 and 1918. There is more to be learned of Bedouin life, thought, and custom from this part of Miss Bell's diary than in any book except Doughty's 'Arabia Deserta.' It is especially informing on the subject of the women, of whom her sex enabled her to see more than her predecessors.

Her stay in Hayil was fruitful, not of fresh topographical matter—for the place had been well described a generation before and had not materially changed—but of political information, especially concerning both the recent history and the actual state of the Rashid house, and also its present and probable relations with the rival power of the Ibn Sa'uds. Her information proved of great value during the War, when Hayil had ranged itself with the enemy and was menacing our Euphratean flank. Miss Bell became, from 1915 onwards, the interpreter of all reports received from Central Arabia.

The final stage of her journey—the ride from Hayil to Baghdad—had less important results. Though her route was new to geographical science, and therefore has been of much interest to cartographers, trying to plot the wadis running eastward towards the Shatt by their occurrence on different north–south tracks, it proved singularly poor in scenic and social features. Moreover travellers over other tracks lying not far from it on either hand had informed us already about the general character of this eastern end of the Nefud, and of the Dahna and the Shamiya steppes. Indeed, whether for topography or for social anthropology and ethnology or, needless to add, for archæology, the entries in Miss Bell's subsequent diary kept between Baghdad and Damascus are more valuable than those made between Hayil and Baghdad. But what she had learned about the Shi'a tribes of the Euphratean fringe was to prove of much service in the War and after.

It remains to be said that, in addition to half a dozen latitude observations, Miss Bell took her bearings and kept her marching times, also daily readings of barometer and thermometer, without a break from one end of this journey to the other. These bearings and readings she noted and recorded in such workmanlike fashion that little difficulty was found in plotting her continuous route from and back to Damascus—a total march of about 1500 miles.

The jaded traveller, writing her diary and letters at Baghdad in April 1914, had no suspicion that, in little more than half a year, the knowledge and experience acquired during the past four months, which seemed to her then so little important, would become of national value. Nor could she foresee that, even after the War, Northern Nejd would return to the obscurity from which she had rescued it. Up to this year of grace, 1927, her visit to Hayil, thirteen years ago, remains the last that has been put on scientific record by a European traveller.

Before the paper the PRESIDENT said: I have no one to call upon to-night but myself, and I shall spare you any effort at self-introduction. But may I say a few words by way of introduction to my discourse? You will understand, without my impressing it upon you, from the circumstances of this paper, that I am speaking of what I have not myself seen; and that I am entirely dependent for what I am to say to-night upon the notebooks and diaries of Miss Gertrude Bell, written in the desert under every conceivable circumstance of difficulty and in every sort of weather. They contain mere *memoria technica* which her remarkable visual memory and mind richly stored with the experiences of the desert and of the desert men would have been able to clothe with flesh. I cannot clothe them with anything like the same flesh, and I hope you will not expect much more than the bare bones of an itinerary.

Dr. Hogarth then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.

Sir PERCY COX: Dr. Hogarth, when he commenced the paper, told us how difficult he found it to do more than give us the dry bones of Miss Bell's narrative. We all know that with her great command of English and her powers of description what an absorbing narrative she would have given us; but as Providence did not spare her to tell her own story I think we are greatly to be congratulated on the material having been given to the hands of Dr. Hogarth. Apart from the fact that he is President of our Society and our great authority on Arabia in general, he was a close friend of Miss Bell's, and always in touch and in sympathy with her work and her ideals. We can all admire the extraordinary pluck and tenacity with which she went through this lonesome journey. It is a very great pity that none of our Arabian travellers are in England now, or with us to-night, who could have entered into the details of her narrative and commented upon its great value in many respects. Arabian exploration, indeed, seems to have a rather fitful history. The end of the 'seventies and the beginning of the 'eighties was the period which saw the great expeditions of Doughty, the Blunts and Huber. After that there came a lull for a number of years, and it was not until the early years of this century that English interest seemed to have revived. I cannot help thinking that the revival was in a great measure due to the extraordinary amount of interest taken in that sphere and in the Persian Gulf by Lord Curzon during the seven years of his Viceroyalty in India. I cannot say whether Miss Bell first got her inspiration from that source, but, at any rate, I know that some of her contemporaries did—for instance, Captain Shakespear and Captain Leachman, who had both made fine expeditions into Central Arabia. Unfortunately, they were both killed in the war, or they would, I am sure, have gone back to the field of their early expeditions.

Miss Bell's journey, of which we have heard such a graphic story from Dr. Hogarth, was the beginning of my acquaintance with her, in this way.