

# THE ARAB WAR



GERTRUDE BELL

REPORTS REPRINTED FROM  
THE SECRET "ARAB BULLETIN"



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**Gertrude Bell**

**Reports reprinted from  
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## INTRODUCTION

Gertrude Bell, writer, traveller, political officer, archaeologist and cartographer, was one of the most remarkable women to emerge from post-Victorian England. As the daughter of a wealthy, well-connected family, she grew up politically aware and accustomed to the company of articulate, well-educated parliamentarians, diplomats and intellectuals. She enrolled at Oxford University at age 17 and two years later graduated with a first class honors degree in history, the first woman to ever graduate from Oxford.

In 1892, she visited her uncle Sir Frank Lascelles, British minister to Iran, at his residence in Tehran. This began her lifelong fascination with the Near East and for the next 15 years she visited most of the major cities of the Levant developing her linguistic abilities – she was fluent in Arabic, Persian, French and German and conversant in Italian and Turkish – and learning the meticulous discipline of archaeology. In 1909, she traveled to Mesopotamia where she visited the Hittite city of Carchemish and mapped the ruins of Ukhaidir before going to Babylon and the Shia holy city of Najaf. Back in Carchemish, she consulted with the two archaeologists on site, one of whom was the young scholar T. E. Lawrence. In 1913 she made an adventurous journey to Hail in Northern Arabia where after a series of difficulties she met and visited with Ibn Rashid, the chieftain of the powerful Shammar tribe. She wrote several books about her travels and adventures that enhanced her reputation as a Middle Eastern expert and a singular woman with practical knowledge of the Near East.

At the beginning of World War I she requested to serve the British government as a Middle Eastern advisor, her offer was spurned, so she volunteered with the Red Cross in France. With the failure of the invasion of Gallipoli, the British government turned to the strategy of instigating an Arab revolt to engage the Turks in the Near East. To this end the Arab Bureau was formed in Cairo under the command of General Gilbert Clayton and the direct supervision of Lieutenant Commander David Hogarth, the renowned professor of archaeology and history at Oxford. In late 1915 Bell was recruited to rejoin her fellow Arabist and archaeologist T.E. Lawrence

to begin the development of a comprehensive profile of the region's leading personalities, and important tribes along with their affiliations and customs.

Six months later Bell was rushed to Basra to advise Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer of Mesopotamia, on the British advance to Bagdad over terrain she knew better than any serving British officer. She drafted maps that were instrumental in the safe passage of the Imperial forces to Bagdad which fell to the British on March 10, 1917. In recognition of her contribution she was named the only female British political officer and officially given the title of Oriental Secretary.

Her other duties in Basra included submitting reports to the Arab Bulletin, the intelligence summary published by the Arab Bureau in Cairo, concerning the various events and personalities of the eastern Arab theater that she considered important to the war against the Turks. These reports comprise *The Arab War*.

To quote her superior officer Lord Kinahan Cornwallis, "They [the reports] made no attempt to give a connected account of how the war was moving in her area, but each was complete in itself, whether it described a system, an individual, or a phase in tribal history. She wrote them as an official for official purposes, but officialdom could never spoil the freshness and vividness of her style or the terseness of her descriptions. Throughout them all can be seen the breadth of her knowledge, and her sympathy and understanding for the people whom she loved so well. It is good that they have been recovered from the oblivion of the Arab Bulletin and it seems a great pity that more of the reports which she wrote during the years when she was in Iraq cannot be unearthed from the dusty file cupboards where they must still be reposing."

After the war, in 1921, Bell, Cox and Lawrence were invited by Churchill to attend a conference in Cairo to determine the boundaries of the British mandate and the new countries of Transjordan and Iraq. Throughout the conference, she and Lawrence successfully advocated for the establishment of constitutional monarchies in the two countries with the sons of Sharif Hussein of Mecca, Abdullah and Faisal, as kings.

She resided in Bagdad where she devoted herself to advising the new King Faisal and creating the Iraqi Archaeological Museum. She has been called the mother of modern Iraq and until her death on July 12, 1926 she served on the Iraq British High Commission advisory group.

She was an extraordinary woman who lived a fascinating life, there are many excellent books about her life and times among them Janet Wallach's *Desert Queen* and Georgina Howell's *Gertrude Bell, Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations*.

## **I. THE BASIS OF GOVERNMENT IN TURKISH ARABIA**



[Arab Bulletin, 5 October, 1916]

NO COUNTRY WHICH TURNED TO THE EYE OF THE WORLD an appearance of established rule and centralized Government was, to a greater extent than the Ottoman Empire, a land of make-believe. On paper, every co-efficient of sovereignty, every process of administration, could be found in its proper place, with its fitting attributes and its staff, from Pasha to Gendarme, all with suitable emoluments clearly set down and activities defined. In due course the satisfactory results of the exertions of these worthies would be chronicled, the taxes they had collected, the fines they had exacted, the roads they had drawn across mountain and desert, the provincial and municipal labours which they had punctually performed. On paper, but for the meticulous inquisitor who could carry his researches further than the written pages, parade the shadowy personnel, count out the money bags, or journey along the airy structure of the Sultan's highways, disillusion was at hand. And he who, without being guilty of incautious curiosity, was forced by circumstances to test the relations that existed between documentary evidence à la Turque and the hard facts of the Ottoman Empire, was apt to find himself lost in bewildered annoyance, not unaccompanied by uncontrollable hilarity — annoyance when his progress was brought to a standstill by unbridged torrents or the rifle shots of the local magnate whom paper ordinances were not strong enough to check, hilarity when the neighbouring Vali expatiated to him on the benefits which had resulted to the land from his own forethought (under God), in regard to the adequate provision of bridges, or the Commandant assured him solemnly that every part of the wilderness was covered by the dove-like wings of the Sultan's peace.

That the Turkish Empire should have run at all was, at a hasty appreciation, a matter for marvel, but increased familiarity furnished a clue to a part at least of the problem. It ran, not on the paper ordinances, but on unwritten laws, unrecorded provisions of Government, habits of command and of obedience inherited from a remote past and applicable to an immediate present, which was not so very dissimilar from the past; it was founded, not on the power and efficiency of Vali and Commandant, but on the authority of village headman, tribal sheikh and local *saiyid*. Outside the

narrow circle of the towns the official mechanism was set aside, while more efficacious, if more ancient, methods of procedure were adopted, and over a great part of Asiatic Turkey the executive lay in the hands of men who had no part in the make-believe.

But since the final basis of genuine administration was to a large extent independent of Ottoman officials, it will remain undisturbed if from any specified part of the empire those officials should disappear. The power of sheikh or headman was derived neither from the Sultan, nor yet from the Constitution, nor can it fall with them. It is deeply rooted in the daily life of the people and, with wise supervision, will form for several generations to come the staple of law and order. Indeed, it should form the groundwork of all government until the time when developed facilities of communication and a wider circle of enlightenment shall lead by a natural growth to such measure of centralization as is profitable. It is safe to predict that it will be a centralization very different from that which the Committee of Union and Progress sought to impose upon the inchoate agglomeration of creeds and races, which in the course of six years they dragged into two ruinous wars. The material which lies to the hand of those who may be called upon to undertake the supreme task of creating prosperity in rich lands, which have lain derelict for over half a millennium, can scarcely be demonstrated more clearly than in the domain of judicial administration.

The stock-in-trade of Turkish justice, familiar to all residents, and to most travellers in the Ottoman Empire, depended ultimately on sacred law, but Turkey had to a certain extent modified her strict adherence to inspired legislation by the super-imposition of provisions which were mostly derived from the Code Napoleon. Thus the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure in use in Turkish courts were based on the French, and the Code of Commercial Procedure which guided the commercial courts, had the same origin. Foreigners, however, refused to admit the application of the Commercial Code to themselves except where issues not above £1.10 in value were in question, and for all others where they were concerned the ordinary Civil Code, the *Mujalli*, was employed.

The *Mujalli* rests on Mohammedan religious law, the actual code having been drawn up by Turkish jurists. All Turks being Sunnis, and belonging, moreover, to the Hanafi sect of that division of Islam, the law which the jurists followed was that of the Hanafis, and in consequence the Shi'ahs (that is to say, over ninety per cent. of the population of

Mesopotamia), together with the members of the three other orthodox Sunni sects outside the Hanafis (Malikis, Shafais, and Henbelis) were obliged to submit to Hanafi ruling. The Mujalli dealt with suits connected with rents, sales, exchange, contract, evidence, and many other matters, but there remained a large body of civil suits which were beyond its jurisdiction. All domestic disputes, marriage, divorce, and every relation between husband, wife, and child, all questions of inheritance, and all land cases were the province of the *Shara'* courts, the Courts of Sacred Law, which were presided over, not by a civil judge, but by a *qadhi*. The *Shara'* law rests on no formulated code. Mutatis mutandis it may be compared to our judge-made law, if it were understood that, whenever the judge was in doubt, he should seek a solution from a passage of the Old or New Testament. The *Shara'* depended on the individual opinion of the *qadhi*, or more technically on his individual interpretation of the Koran and the Traditions, subject to any knowledge of the interpretation of his predecessors which he might possess.

Such in outline was the structure of Turkish law, and theoretically all disputes in the Turkish Empire, from those between merchants in Stambul to those between Kurdish chieftains in their mountain fortresses, or Arab sheikhs in their arid deserts, came under its purview. But the most cursory acquaintance with any province of the Empire disproved the theory. Take for example Turkish Arabia: a short experience would convince the observer that the Sultan's writ fell powerless ten hours' journey west of Baghdad and possibly after a still less prolonged march to the south of the capital of Iraq, while it was palpably a subject for ridicule two hours south-east of Damascus. Even when gendarmes and police officers were on the spot to emphasize the majesty of the law, it was not the courts, civil, criminal or *Shara'*, not the judge nor the *qadhi*, who regulated the relations between man and man, or assigned the penalties for breaches in their observance. Behind all legal paraphernalia lay the old sanctions, understood and respected because they were the natural outcome of social needs, a true social contract handed down by the wisdom of forbears to descendants who found themselves confronted by problems to which the passage of centuries had brought no modification. Village headman and Arabian Amir 'sat in the gate' as the Kings of Babylon and Judaea had sat before them, and judged between their people without code or procedure. The sheikh in his tent heard the plaint of petitioners seated round his coffee hearth, and gave his

verdict with what acumen he might possess, aided by a due regard for tribal custom, calling on the coffee drinkers to bear witness before God to his adjudication. Or the tribal *saiyid*, strong in his reputation for a greater familiarity than that of other men with the revealed ordinances of the Almighty — and yet stronger in the wisdom bought by long experience in arbitration-delivered his awards to all who referred to him. Moreover, the decisions reached were as a rule consonant with natural justice, and invariably conformable to the habits of thought of the disputing parties.

Thus it happened that, in spite of the un-relaxed efforts of Ottoman officials to drag all cases (more especially all criminal cases) into their courts, beyond the immediate limits of the towns the bulk of the crimes and misdemeanours of the nomad and of the settled population — from murder and robbery under arms to the pettiest disagreements — never reached the Turkish law courts, afforded no livelihood to professional pleaders and hired witnesses, nor were subject to the expense and delay entailed by judicial proceedings. In their colossal ignorance of the temperament of the alien races whom they ruled, and in their blind impulse to draw all authority into a single net, the Turks not only neglected but actively discouraged the delegation of power, though they were unable to prevent it. Officially, the jurisdiction of an Arab sheikh was recognized as little as possible, and any Turkish judge would have scorned to refer to him; but in practice a weak and inefficient Government allowed him to go his own way, not only for good but for evil, with occasional brief efforts to prevent him — efforts which were applied as impartially to that which was of value in existing conditions as to that which was harmful. Their spasmodic character made them the more irritating to all concerned.

But in the eyes of wiser and more sympathetic rulers, the system of local justice which prevails over the land will have far more than a sociological interest. It is not only in itself a strong weapon on the side of order and good conduct, but it has induced in the people habits of mind which are of advantage to the State. Where no adventitious profits can arise from litigation there is no inducement to excessive litigiousness; when the procedure is transparently simple the probity of litigants is open to fewer temptations, and, in point of fact, the absence of any love of litigation for its own sake and the honesty of the disputing parties have already been noticed with commendation by British officials in the Iraq who have been engaged in the administration of justice. Not only is the need of detective work on

the part of the police largely abrogated by the almost disconcerting sincerity with which the accused will own up to his offence, but the limited facilities for the pursuit of complex enquiries, as well as for the execution of sentences possessed by the extemporized courts of the village gate and the coffee hearth, have accustomed the people to be satisfied with primitive expedients. These are no less effectual, while they are far less vexatious, than the exhaustive inquisition and the expensive retribution of more highly elaborated — let it not be said necessarily of higher — civilizations.

On small issues the evidence of an oath is readily accepted, especially in the rural districts, and the plaintiff will go on his way content if the defendant will swear to his own innocence in terms which are considered binding. An oath will be taken on the Koran or on the grave of some holy man of local celebrity, or even on the holy man in his own person ‘by the life of this *saiyid*’ and all who hear the words know, beyond question, that, if the speaker is forsworn, his temerity will bring upon him within the year a judgment greater and more inexorable than that of men. In place of litigation, resort is made to arbitration — even the reference to the sheikh is primarily of this nature. The judgment delivered by the arbitrator is accepted by both parties as final, and is usually the result of a sincere effort to gauge the facts, and to deal fairly between the disputants.

The universal recognition of arbitration as a sound judicial process has helped to the solution of what might otherwise have been an awkward problem in the preliminary organization of the occupied territories in the Iraq. In place of the *Shara*’ Court, which dealt with all the more intimate sides of Mohammedan life, the English judge calls upon the doctors of Islam to act as arbitrators. Cases which would have come to the *Shara*’ courts are now adjudicated by men selected for their acquaintance with Mohammedan law as laid down in the holy books, and, whereas in Turkish days none but an Hanafi *qadhi* was available, each division and sect of Islam can now choose an approved jurist of its own peculiar complexion, whose judgment, when delivered, is ratified and recorded in the British court.

By the same method, the jurisdiction of the sheikh, clearly a notable asset in the administration of districts which are wholly innocent of road and rail, and characterized either by such superfluity of water as makes them unapproachable, or by such absence of that essential element as



forbids passage across them, can be preserved with a full regard to the rights of a Sovereign Government.

It is obvious that elementary judicial processes are suited only to a society which is yet in an elementary stage of development, but no less obvious is the converse proposition, though it is perhaps more difficult to bear in mind. Men living in tents, or in reed huts almost as nomadic as the tent itself, men who have never known any control but the empty fiction of Turkish authority — for in spite of the assurances of the Vali and Commandant, the tribes inhabiting the Iraq were scarcely more obedient to Ottoman command than those who roamed the vast Arabian steppes — men who have the tradition of a personal independence, which was limited only by their own customs, entirely ignorant of a world which lay outside their swamps and pasturages, and as entirely indifferent to its interests and to the opportunities it offers, will not in a day fall into step with European ambitions, nor welcome European methods. Nor can they be hastened. Whether that which we have to teach them will add to the sum of their happiness, or whether the learning of inevitable lessons will bring them the proverbial attitude of wisdom, the schooling must, if it is to be valuable, be long and slow. In our own history, from the Moot court through Magna Charta to the Imperial Parliament was the work of centuries, yet the first contained the germ of all that came after. The tribes of the Iraq have advanced but little beyond the Moot court, and should the shaping of their destinies become our care in the future, we shall be wise to eschew any experiments tending to rush them into highly specialized institutions—a policy which could commend itself only to those who are never wearied by words that signify nothing.

G. L. B.

**II. NOTE ON THE TRIBAL AUTHORITY OF THE  
SHEIKHS OF MUHAMMERAH AND KUWEIT IN THE  
OCCUPIED TERRITORIES**

**[Arab Bulletin, 7 October, 1917]**

THE POLITICAL FRONTIER OF THE OTTOMAN VILAYET OF BASRAH does not correspond with the tribal boundaries of the two great independent Arab chiefs upon its border, the Sheikhs of Kuweit and Muhammerah. The Sheikh of Kuweit is more completely under British protection than the Sheikh of Muhammerah, who remains nominally a Persian subject, and the influence of the former in Basrah territory is less extensive than that of the latter. His tribesmen are settled in the Fao district only, whereas sections of the two confederations of the Muhaisin and the Cha'ab (both of whom own the Sheikh of Muhammerah as overlord, while the Muhaisin are his own particular tribe, and stand in the closest relations to him), are found on either bank of the Shatt-el-Arab from above Basra to Fao. There are, moreover, a considerable number of persons who are commonly regarded as Raji' to the Sheikh of Muhammerah, that is, resorting to him ; they stand in loose tribal connection with the Muhaisin, and are as completely under the tribal control of the Sheikh as is that tribe itself. The expansion of the Muhaisin is largely due to the inefficiency and corruption of the Turkish Government, owing to which it was preferable to come under recognized tribal authority and under the jurisdiction of the Sheikh of Muhammerah.

The Muhaisin form the bulk of the population of the Shatt-el-Arab Nahiyah on the left bank, i.e., from Mufati above Basrah to Muhammerah; in the Harthah district, on the right bank of the Shatt from Nahr' Umr to the Khandaq creek immediately above Basrah, they include some of the fellahin: on the richest stretch of the river from the Khorah creek, below Basrah on the right bank, to the Abul Filus creek, five miles below Abul Khasib (with the exception of a small group round Abul Khasil itself), both landowners and tenants are Muhaisin, and so are most of the fellahin round Dawasir, half-way between Abul Khasib and Fao, while in the Fao district a large proportion are either Muhaisin or Cha'ab. The two tribes have in the past recognized no jurisdiction but that of Sheikh Khazal, and they are accustomed to go to him for the settlement of all disputes, both civil and criminal; even murder cases were never taken to the Turkish officials, but a money compensation, payable by all the criminal's tribal section — about

2,000 krans was the usual sum — was arranged by the Sheikh. They are, moreover, liable to him for military service, for which purpose he can summon them as occasion requires, irrespective of all considerations but his own needs. It is to be noted that from the Khorah creek to the Abul Filus creek, the whole population are Sunnis, including the Muhaisin, who are elsewhere Shi'ahs, but no difficulty arises in accepting the awards of Sheikh Khazal, who is a Shi'ah. Thus, under Ottoman rule, the administration of a large part of the banks of the Shatt-el Arab was left to the Sheikh, while the Turkish officials were content with the position of tax-gatherers. When the fellahin were absent on military service, even the collection of the revenue would be found difficult, if not impossible.

The fellahin of the Sheikh of Kuwait's date gardens in the Fao district stood in much the same relationship with him as their practical overlord, and in almost equal detachment from the Ottoman Government.

Putting aside the large landlords, none of whom live on their lands, the population of the river banks enjoys an active tribal organization. Disputes between men of one subsection of the tribe are taken for settlement to the sheikh of that section; intersectional disputes are either settled by agreement between the respective sheikhs or, if they fail to come to terms, referred to the Sheikh of Muhammerah, whose decision is final. It, therefore, happens that comparatively few of the cases actually get as far as Sheikh Khazal, but as all but one of the sheikhs of the sub-sections live in Muhammerah territory, it may be said generally that the disputes of the mass of the people in the Basra Qadhal with the exception of two small sections round Basra and Abul Khasib, have in the past been decided in Muhammerah. The principal sections of the Muhaisin in Basra Qadha are as follows :

[ Section – Shaikh – Residence of Shaikh]

Bait Ghanaim – Fadhil al Ghanim – Sorah, near Failiyah, Muhammerah.

Bait Chan'an – Muhammad al Chan'an – Kut al Zain, Basra.

Al Mutur – Hajii Arraq – Muhaizin, Muhammerah.

Albu Mu'arrif – Nasir – Manyuhi, Muhammerah.

Albu Farhan – Abdul Saiyid ibn Sultan – Nahr Yusuf, behind the Sheikh's palace at Failiyah, Muhammerah.

Baghlaniyah – Ghulaiyim ibn Harb – Suwainakh in Guban, Muhammerah.

Al Hilalat – 'Ali Sangur – Haffar, Muhammerah.

'Idan – Nasir ibn Shari – Albu Hamid, Muhammerah .

The various sections are much intermingled territorially, but they keep their tribal organizations distinct, and the vigour of the tribal system is not impaired though every settlement contains two or three families of a number of sections. There is little intermarriage between the sections.

A large proportion of the Muhaisin in Basra territory spend a part of the year on the Karun looking after their wheat crops. They go there at the beginning of the hot weather to reap. Thus, though they live in Basrah territory, they are constantly subject to the influence of Muhammerah.

Under the regime of the Turks, the only sign of Ottoman sovereignty was the collection of revenues, but we have now, over considerable areas, done away with this last remaining vestige of sovereignty by remitting in favour of the two sheikhs and their heirs, as a mark of their long friendship and signal services during the war, the whole of the revenue accruing from properties held by them personally on the Shatt-el-Arab. The principal properties of Sheikh Khazal lie in a solid block opposite Muhammerah and include all but a small part of the island of Umm al Khasif, the whole of the islands of Rumailah and Umm al Rasis, and the tract between Umm al Zain and Subah on the right bank of the Shatt-el-Zain. Since these lands will now pay no revenue and are peopled by Muhaisin entirely subject to the jurisdiction of the Sheikh, British sovereignty over them is in danger of becoming a fiction.

No difficulty has as yet arisen out of this state of imperium in imperio, as the two sheikhs concerned, who have been entirely loyal adherents and allies during the course of the war, recognize, no less than the British political authorities, the need for postponing the consideration of such important issues. For the time being, Sheikh Khazal has explicitly left matters entirely in our hands. But the problem is a complicated one and if we were to proceed to annexation, the matter would have to be put upon some workable basis which would at once recognize and preserve the tribal authority of the sheikhs and safeguard the sovereign authority of Great Britain.

With the very cordial relations and community of material interests existing between the three parties concerned, the solution of it when our hands are free should not prove a task of insurmountable difficulty.

G. L. B.



### **III. THE REBELLION AGAINST THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT MAY 1913 TO JULY 1916**

**[Arab Bulletin, 26 October, 1916]**

## 1. Oman

THE REBELLION AGAINST THE SULTAN OF MUSCAT is due partly to old and deep-seated matters of disagreement, and partly to the reflex action of modern European politics in the Gulf on the internal affairs of Oman. Chief among the former causes of unrest is the curious and interesting survival in Oman of the very ancient rivalry between the Ahl Qibli and the Ahl esh-Shimal, i.e. the southern tribes of Yemen origin, and the northern tribes descended from Nizar ibn Maad, represented respectively in Oman by the Hinawi and Ghafiri groups. Though these two factions, which are almost identical with the older divisions, did not spring into existence as actively hostile elements until the civil wars which rent Oman in the eighteenth century, they revived an enmity which goes back to the days before the Prophet. Roughly speaking the Ghafiri, or Nizarites, are at present with the Sultan of Muscat, while the Hinawi, or Yemenites, are with the Imam.

A second and very fertile source of division between the Sultan and his subjects in the interior, was the transference of the capital, in 1784, from Rostaq in the Wadi Fara to Muscat. This was done by Hamad, son of the Imam Said ibn Ahmad. Said, son of the founder of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty, was the last elected Imam of Oman to hold sovereign power, and when he was forced to abdicate in favour of his more capable son, he was left to vegetate at Rostaq while the seat of Government was moved to the coast. Thereby the rulers of Oman were assured of an easily collected customs revenue, enabling them to preserve a semblance of authority by bribery alone. They were absolved from the necessity of maintaining themselves by military and political efficiency, and finally, they became exposed to foreign influences, which alienated from them the sympathies of the tribes in the interior.

To these foreign influences, to the reliance of the Sultans of Muscat on foreign naval and military power, and to their enforced submission to foreign requirements in the matter of the traffic in slaves and in arms, the modern unrest is due. The late Sultan, Seyyid Feisal ibn Turki, saw in the

suppression of the arms trade by the British Government a distinct advantage to himself, since his rebellious subjects became unable to furnish themselves with weapons to use against him; but before his death the discontent which it had caused among the tribes had come to a head. The chief sheikh of the Ibadhi, to which sect most of the Hinawi tribes belong, roused the country by his preaching, in which he represented the arms warehouse as a device of the English to deprive the tribes of Oman of modern weapons; and in May, 1913, the Imam of Tanuf, Salim ibn Rashid el-Kharusi, rose in revolt.

Nizwa, one of the chief towns of Oman proper, fell in June; Izki, immediately to the east of Nizwa, in the following month. After the fall of Izki the rebels, who already had among them as temporal leaders Sheikh Hamyar ibn Nasir and Nabhan, the Tamimah of the Beni Riyam, were joined by Sheikh Isa ibn Salih, son of the famous Sheikh Salih ibn Ali el-Harithi, who led the great revolt against Seyyid Feisal in 1895. Sheikh Isa, an austere man of strong character, though far from unamenable to bribes, is the leading figure in the confederation. In July, 1913, the situation became so threatening that the British Government sent a small garrison to Matrah, on the coast north of Muscat, but the rebels continued to gain ground, and in August, Samail fell into their hands. In September we doubled the garrison at Belt el-Falaj, near Muscat. Seyyid Feisal died in October, and was succeeded by his son Seyyid Teimur, who, relying on an old personal friendship with Sheikh Isa, opened negotiations with him, as a result of which Sheikh Isa visited Muscat in December. No permanent result was, however, attained.

In April, 1914, the rebels were intimidated by the bombardment of Barkah and Quryat by *H.M.S. Fox* and *H.M.S. Dartmouth*, but in August fresh hostile movements were set on foot, which made it necessary to send reinforcements to the garrison at Muscat. In January, 1915, the Imam's followers attacked the British outposts, and met with a crushing defeat.

The Viceroy visited Muscat in the following month and took the opportunity of recommending the Sultan to come to terms with his rebellious subjects, pointing out that the British garrison would not be maintained indefinitely. He offered the services of the Political Agent as mediator. The latter summed up the difficulties of the situation in the following terms:

1. The rebels held the key of the situation, in the possession of the Samail valley and fort, which were essential to the commercial prosperity of Muscat.

2. The rising had assumed a religious character and the Imam was preaching a Jihad. Moreover, so many of the rebels had been killed by our troops in the unsuccessful attack in January, that feelings of resentment had been aroused which it would be difficult to allay.

3. The offer of tribal allowances was not likely to prove a strong inducement; the Imam might be prevented by religious scruples from accepting an allowance, and the other two leaders enjoyed good incomes from their present positions and the appropriation of State lands in the interior.

4. The reduction of the garrison to normal strength would leave the Sultan without support, since in war time H.M's ships were not, as was usual in peace time, within a few hours' call of Muscat.

Reports were, however, received from the interior that the rebels were discouraged by the January reverse and anxious to come to terms; the Sultan was glad to accept the proposed mediation of the Political Agent, and in April the latter despatched letters to the three rebel leaders, the Imam Salim ibn Rashid el-Kharusi, Sheikh Isa ibn Salih and Sheikh Hamyar ibn Nasir, asking them to state frankly their views and feelings and offering to try and find a *modus vivendi*.

The Imam replied that he must consult his people who were in the hands of their priests, and that these latter were scattered over the country from Sharqiyah to Nizwa, and were being summoned to a conference. Hamyar suggested that a Mohammedan deputation should be sent to discuss the question. Sheikh Isa did not reply until May, when a letter, neither signed nor sealed, was received from him through the Imam. It was friendly in tone, and showed a desire to open negotiations. He mentioned that he was sending an envoy, Abdullah ibn Hamad, to see the Sultan.

All reports combined to show that the despatch of letters by the Political Agent was popularly regarded as a symptom of weakness on the part of the British, who were credited with wishing to withdraw their troops. Evidence of extensive intrigue by German agents in the interior was not wanting. It was generally believed by the tribes that the Germans were victorious, that the Kaiser and his followers had embraced Islam, and that

the moment was propitious for driving the Sultan and the English out of the country.

In spite of the friendly character of Sheikh Isa's letter, the Sultan was convinced that the religious element was opposed to peace. An intercepted letter, written by Nasir ibn Suleiman Siyabi of Samail, stated that the Imam and Sheikh Hamyar would accept Sheikh Isa's advice, but that the Imam would never consent to make open surrender, and would fight to the end to overthrow the present state of affairs in Muscat, where there was no Mohammedan law or justice.

Following upon the replies from the leaders, Humeid ibn el-Fuleiti, of Wadi Maawal, visited the Political Agent with the object of obtaining further information about the terms of the negotiation. He is a man of some intelligence and instruction, he has trade interests in Socotra, knows the Aden authorities, and has been employed by them as an intermediary in a Socotra dispute. He expressed his views, which were probably those of the rebel leaders, as follows:

1. The people as a whole welcomed British intervention, but were anxious to know what we expected to gain.

2. The Sultan was not really anxious for a reconciliation, but was moved by a wish to please the English.

3. He does not conform to the Mohammedan faith and is regarded as a heretic.

4. Peace could only be agreed to on the following terms:

- (a). Full recognition of the Shari'a law, as practised by the Imam, in substitution for the present unjust system of dealing with civil and criminal cases. There was to be no favouritism towards people connected with the palace.

- (b). Removal of British troops and of the land blockade of imports into the interior.

- (c). Full settlement of the financial claims of the tribes of the interior.

- (d). Importation of wine, spirits, and tobacco to be prohibited.

- (e). The Sultan to be regarded as ruler of Oman, but the Imam to administer the country according to the Shari'a, either personally or through a representative at Muscat.

- ( f ). Free purchase of arms and ammunition to be allowed.

Humeid was informed in general terms what demands could not be considered.



1. Any demand that implied the non-recognition of the Sultan's legitimate rights in Muscat and the interior.

2. Any demand implying the contravention of treaty rights between Great Britain and the Sultan, in which connection we recognized no one but Seyyid Teimur.

3. Any demand that might injure or hamper our trade.

4. Any demand for the discontinuance of the existing arms warehouse arrangements. In June, letters were received from Humeid el-Fuleiti and from the *Qadhi* of the Imam, Abdullah ibn Rashid el-Hashimi, the latter unsigned and unsealed, but purporting to represent the views of the Imam. Humeid admitted that he had had no success with the Imam and said that it was essential that escaped slaves should be returned to their owners, the purchase of arms and ammunitions be allowed, the excess duty levied by the Sultan be stopped, and the Ulema administer justice. No law but the Shari'a would be recognized.

The *Qadhi* complained:

1. Of the stopping of the slave trade, a trade which is consonant with the laws of Islam.

2. Of the British claim to command the sea which is common to all.

3. That the British interfere in the affairs of the Sultans of Omen, and support them in matters contrary to their religion.

4. That the people of Oman are suffering from:

(a). The fall in the value of the dollar.

(b). The increase in the price of food and cloth.

5. Finally he lodged a general complaint against the British, from the stand-point of Islam, for permitting the forbidden, such as the sale of wine and tobacco, and forbidding the permitted, such as the trade in arms and in slaves.

It was impossible to take action upon a letter which was not from the Imam himself, and might not represent his views completely. The Political Agent, therefore, refused to enter further into the negotiations until the Imam himself had acquainted him with his terms. Towards the end of June, the Beni Battash, a Hinawi tribe to the south of Muscat, broke into open hostilities. A force of 500 raided and damaged the date gardens of the Wadi Hatat. They were reported to have reached Hajar six hours from Belt el-Falaj, which is the headquarters of the British garrison. The naval contractor, Khan Sahib Nasib ibn Mohammed, received a letter from them

demanding 1,100 dollars as zakat, in respect of his date gardens in Hajar, but was subsequently informed by the Imam's Wali of Heil that 300 dollars would be sufficient. This sum he paid with the Sultan's knowledge and approval. The latter lost no time in organizing a punitive expedition against the Beni Battash, and towards the end of July they submitted to him, and surrendered unconditionally their chief town in the interior, Heil el-Ghaf, together with Dagmar, on the coast, where the Sultan proceeded to build a fort.

From Quryat, whence he had conducted the Beni Battash operations, the Sultan went with his successful troops to Sib, but the Imam was in possession of the Samail forts, and the Sultan dared not trust the local tribes, though they had been profuse in protestations of loyalty to him. They ultimately went over to the Imam, but their chiefs were seized and imprisoned by him for having visited the Sultan at Sib. All the tribes were reported to be suffering under the excessive levies of zakat, the taxes being levied doubly, in the interior by the Imam, and on the coast by the Sultan.

In July a joint letter was received by the Political Agent from Humeid el-Fuleiti and the *Qadhi*. They reiterated their former grievances, and mentioned as additional subjects of complaint, the bombardment of Barkah by the *H.M.S. Fox* in 1914, and the fact that direct trade between the coast towns and Aden, Karachi and Bombay was stopped, all vessels being obliged to call at Muscat and pay duty there.

In August the rebel chiefs communicated with the Political Agent in a letter signed by the Imam, Isa ibn Salih, Hamyar ibn Nasir and the *Qadhi*. They requested him to arrange for a meeting with the Imam's representative, Sheikh Isa ibn Salih, near Sib. They added with no little effrontery that the meeting must take place as soon as possible, since the Imam had collected a large body of troops for the purpose of attacking the Sultan and could not postpone operations for more than a few days. He had gathered together the heads of the rebellious tribes at Sarur, near Samail, to hear the upshot of the conference. The projected meeting was approved, and the Political Agent went to Sib on September 10, in *H.M.S. Dalhousie*, but news was brought to him by Humeid el-Fuleiti that, owing to trouble in the interior, Isa ibn Salih would not be able to come to Sib till September 15. The excuse seemed to be genuine; the trouble in question was the murder of the Sheikh of the important Hinawi tribe of the Beni All, Khalaf ibn Sinan; and the Political Agent consented to return on September 15.

On that date he met Sheikh Isa, his brother and the *Qadhi* of the Imam ; the grievances and demands of the rebels were discussed and the Political Agent came to the conclusion that, with one or two exceptions, they did not seem to be incapable of adjustment. The main difficulty arose over the Sultan's demand for the surrender of the Samail forts. Sheikh Isa was at first inclined to agree, but he was overcome by the bigotry of the *Qadhi*, who declared that the forts could never be surrendered in the Imam's lifetime, and supported his attitude by references to the *Shara'*. Sheikh Isa gave way and the demand was unconditionally refused.

Since the conference the rebels have been reported as active in preparation and propaganda. In October, 1915, the Imam and Sheikh Isa were said to be in Sharqiyah awaiting the arrival of Sheikh Hamyar to attack Sur. All the local tribes had joined them except the Beni Bu Hassan (Hinawi) and the Jannabah (Ghafiri). The people of Sur were much alarmed, and had sent messages to Seyyid Nadir, the Sultan's brother, asking for help.

In November, news reached Muscat that Ali ibn Salih, brother of Sheikh Isa, had fallen out with the latter, and was seeking the Sultan's friendship. Sheikh Isa's brothers, Ali and Hamad, are mere marauders, much inferior to him in political calibre. The Rahbiyin, a Ghafiri tribe, usually followers of the Sultans of Muscat, were said to be about to attack the British garrison at Belt el-Falaj.

In June, 1916, a further defection from the Sultan took place. Sheikh Nasir ibn Humeid, principal sheikh of Bahlah, was obliged to make peace with the Imam and to turn out Muzaffir, the Sultan's Wall in the coast town of Khaburah, who was with him in the fort at Bahlah. Sheikh Nasir is a man of forcible character who attained his position about 1885 by the murder of his two brothers. He was a protege of the Sultan, who had paid him a large sum of money and given him, in addition, arms, ammunition and rice. He was obliged to take refuge at Araqi, on the extreme western limit of Oman, in fear of his life.

According to the last reports (July, 1916), the Imam is near Nakhl, in the fertile Wadi Maawal, and is said to intend to make himself master of the whole complex of valleys which passes under that name. The neighbouring Sheikh of Mazahit, near Rostaq, had joined him, causing a defection from the Sultan of 500 to 1,000 men. Towards the end of July, Hamad ibn Ibrahim, a cousin and friend of the Sultan—in more or less independent

possession of the forts of Rostaq and Hazam—surrendered to the Imam. Some discussion concerning him had arisen between the Imam and Sheikh Isa, the former wishing to remove him from Rostaq, while the latter was in favour of his being allowed to remain. Ramadan, of course, helped to delay any active revival of the rebellion, but current reports seem to indicate that Muscat affairs may come into prominence again during the coming winter.

G. L. B.

#### **IV. IBN SAUD**



**[Arab Bulletin, 12 January, 1917]**

THE VISIT TO BASRAH OF IBN SAUD, on November 27, was an episode in the Mesopotamian campaign no less picturesque to the onlookers than it was significant to those who have studied the course of Arabian politics.

For the past century the history of the interior of the peninsula has centred round the rivalry between the Emirs of Northern and Southern Nejd, Ibn Rashid and Ibn Saud. When Abdul Aziz, the present representative of the house of Saud, was a boy of fifteen, the power of the Rashid touched its zenith; the great Emir Mohammed, Doughty's grudging host, drove the Saud into exile and occupied their capital, Riyadh.

For eleven years Abdul Aziz ate the bread of adversity, but in 1902, the Sheikh of Kuwait, on the Persian Gulf, himself at enmity with the Rashid, saw in the young emir a promising weapon and gave him his chance. With a force of some eighty camel riders supplied by Kuwait, Abdul Aziz swooped down upon Riyadh, surprised Ibn Rashid's garrison, slew his representative and proclaimed his own accession from the recaptured city. The story of his bold adventure is part of the stock-in trade of Bedouin reminiscence — the arrival of the tiny band at dusk in the palm-gardens south of the town, the halt till nightfall, the scaling of the palace wall by Abdul Aziz and eight picked followers, the flash of steel which roused and silenced the sleeping foe and, at dawn, the throwing open of the city gates to the comrades of the victor.

The struggle was not over with the capture of Riyadh. In a contest, renewed year after year, Abdul Aziz recovered the territories of his fathers and made for himself a name which filled the echoing deserts. At length, in 1913, his restless energy brought him into fields of wider political importance. He seized the Turkish province of Hasa, formerly an appanage of Riyadh, ejected the Ottoman garrisons and established himself on the seaboard of the Persian Gulf. He was already on terms of personal friendship with Captain Shakespear, our Political Agent at Kuwait, and nothing was more certain than that his appearance on the coast must ultimately bring him into direct contact with Great Britain; but before the

difficult question of his precise relationship to Constantinople had been adjusted, the outbreak of war with Turkey released us from all obligation to preserve a neutral attitude.

In the winter of 1914 - 1915, Captain Shakespear made his way for the second time into Nejd and joined Ibn Saud, who was marching north to repel the attack of Ibn Rashid, engineered and backed by the Turks. The two forces met in Sedeir in an indecisive engagement in which Captain Shakespear, though he was present as a noncombatant, was wounded and killed. We lost in him a gallant officer whose knowledge of Central Arabia and rare skill in handling the tribesmen marked him out for a useful and distinguished career. His deeds have lived after him.

Ibn Saud's connection with us has received public confirmation in a durbar of Arab sheikhs held at Kuwait on November 20, where he was invested with the K.C.I.E. On that memorable occasion three powerful Arab chiefs, the Sheikh of Muhammerah, who, though a Persian subject, is of Arab stock, the Sheikh of Kuwait and Ibn Saud, Hakim of Nejd, stood side by side in amity and concord, and proclaimed their adherence to the British cause. In a speech as spontaneous as it was unexpected, Ibn Saud pointed out that, whereas the Ottoman Government had sought to dismember and weaken the Arab nation, British policy aimed at uniting and strengthening their leaders, and the Chief Political Officer, as he listened to words which will be repeated and discussed round every camp fire, must have looked back on years of patient work in the Gulf, and seen that they were good.

Ibn Saud is now barely forty, though he looks some years older. He is a man of splendid physique, standing well over six feet, and carrying himself with the air of one accustomed to command. Though he is more massively built than the typical nomad sheikh, he has the characteristics of the well-bred Arab, the strongly marked aquiline profile, full-fleshed nostrils, prominent lips and long, narrow chin, accentuated by a pointed beard. His hands are fine, with slender fingers, a trait almost universal among the tribes of pure Arab blood, and, in spite of his great height and breadth of shoulder, he conveys the impression, common enough in the desert, of an indefinable lassitude, not individual but racial, the secular weariness of an ancient and self-contained people, which has made heavy drafts on its vital forces, and borrowed little from beyond its own Forbidding frontiers. His deliberate movements, his slow, sweet smile, and the contemplative glance of his heavy-lidded eyes, though they add to his dignity and charm, do not

accord with the Western conception of a vigorous personality. Nevertheless, report credits him with powers of physical endurance rare even in hard-bitten Arabia. Among men bred in the camel-saddle, he is said to have few rivals as a tireless rider. As a leader of irregular forces he is of proved daring, and he combines with his qualities as a soldier that grasp of statecraft which is yet more highly prized by the tribesmen. To be 'a statesman' is, perhaps, their final word of commendation.

Politician, ruler and raider, Ibn Saud illustrates a historic type. Such men as he are the exception in any community, but they are thrown up persistently by the Arab race in its own sphere, and in that sphere they meet its needs. They furnished the conquerors and military administrators of the Mohammedan invasion, who were successful just where Ibn Saud, if he had lived in a more primitive age, might have succeeded or failed (just as in a smaller field he may fail), in the task of creating out of a society essentially tribal, a united and homogeneous State of a durable nature. Mohammed el Rashid was the classic example in the generation before our own. He has been dead twenty years, but his fame survives. Like him, Abdul Aziz has drawn the loose mesh of tribal organization into a centralized administration and imposed on wandering confederacies an authority which, though fluctuating, is recognized as a political factor. The Saud have, in the palm-groves of Riyadh and oases of their northern and eastern provinces, Qasim and Hasa, wider resources, greater wealth and a larger settled population than the Rashid, and their dominion rests, therefore, on a more solid foundation; but the ultimate source of power, here, as in the whole course of Arab history, is the personality of the commander. Through him, whether he be an Abbasid Khalif or an Emir of Nejd, the political entity holds, and with his disappearance it breaks.

If the salient feature of the Kuwait durbar was the recognition by the assembled Arab chiefs of the good will of Great Britain towards their race, it was the presence of an unchanging type of desert sovereignty, among conditions so modern that they had scarcely grown familiar to those who created them, which gave Ibn Saud's visit to Basrah its distinctive colour. In the course of a few hours the latest machinery of offence was paraded before him. He watched the firing of high explosives at an improvised trench and the bursting of anti-aircraft shells in the clear heaven above. He travelled by a railway not six months old and sped across the desert in a motor-car to the battle-field of Shaaibah, where he inspected British

infantry and Indian cavalry, and witnessed a battery of artillery come into action. In one of the base hospitals, housed in a palace of our good friend the Sheikh of Muhammerah, he was shown the bones of his own hand under the Roentgen ray. He walked along the great wharfs on the Shatt el-Arab, through the heaped stores from which an army is clothed and fed, and saw an aeroplane climb up the empty sky. He looked at all these things with wonder, but the interest which he displayed in the mechanism of warfare was that of a man who seeks to learn, not of one who stands confused, and unconsciously he justified to the officers who were his hosts the reputation he has gained in Arabia for sound sense and distinguished bearing.

‘It is good for us’, said the Sheikh of Muhammerah, as the two chiefs took their leave, ‘to see your might.’ Those who heard him may well have found their thoughts reverting to a might greater and more constant than that of the War Lord, and looked forward to the day when we shall expound the science of peace instead of the science of destruction.

G. L. B.

## **V. TRIBAL FIGHTS IN THE SHAMIYAH**

***Compiled from Arab reports, recorded by A. P. O. Zubeir***

[Arab Bulletin, 28 February, 1917]

HUMAN NATURE BEING WHAT IT IS — AND AT BOTTOM THE SAME in the Arab as in the European, pugnacious, ambitious and covetous, sometimes loyal but mainly treacherous, occasionally enlightened but always restless — the tribal fights in the Shamiyah desert may be expected to exhibit the same to and fro, change and interchange, of alliances as may be found in the history of the relations between the various nations which compose Europe. The redeeming feature of the picture is its comparative bloodlessness. Normally, an Arab fight means the taking of an enemy by a surprise raid, and the casualties may be in some cases more, in others rather less, than those of a football match. As a rule, no prisoners are taken. By that phrase, ill-omened as it is to us more barbarous Europeans, it is not meant that they are killed.

A man who surrenders gives up his rifle, his horse, and even his clothes, except the bare minimum that will save a blush. He is then let go. At times, however, the fight is waged without respite and without mercy, and, considering the numbers engaged, with sanguinary results. The history of these fights has its own intrinsic interest, apart from any lesson it may convey about the possibility of relating the tribes together under the influence of an external power. For those concerned, the story has landmarks as great to Bedouins as are Hastings and Waterloo to us. What to Ibn Rashid and Ibn Suweit are Hastings or Waterloo compared with the battle of the Reeds or the battle of Naba?

We will begin from the time when Saadun Pasha, the Muntafiq chief, had been driven back from north of the Euphrates and made the Shamiyah desert his own particular '*dira*' and sphere of influence. The great Muntafiq family of Saadun — not native to Iraq by origin, for they boast themselves descended from the nobles of Mecca — had built itself a ring of wells and forts extending from Ghabashiyah through Chabdah and Shagrah to Abu Ghar and Neba, a ring of defiance to any attempt of the alien Turk to reduce their proud souls to subjection. The great Saadun had once carried his arms to the very walls of Basrah itself. When the disciplined forces of the Turks at length drove this unruly element into the desert, Saadun Pasha set up his standard there, and virtually proclaimed himself King of the Shamiyah.

But there was another enemy beside the Turk. These desert forts were both a defence against the inevitable raids of Arab enemies and a base for their tenants' own raids. The Bedouin has no work and no play. His only work and only play is the '*ghazzu*', or raid. The fashion was set and sealed by that arch-raider, the Prophet; and though a raid appears to us in the light of mere theft, to the Bedouins it is a legitimate ebullition of spirits, albeit it has rules more binding with them than the rules of International Law with us.

To return to Saadun, if one man could be regarded as king of the desert more than another, it was Ibn Rashid, the great Shammar Emir. His traditional enemy, Ibn Saud, Emir of Nejd, was at this time at the lowest ebb of his power. There was no one to contest Ibn Rashid's supremacy. When, therefore, Saadun Pasha set up his standard in the Shamiyah, Ibn Rashid said: 'This cannot be. There cannot be two standards in the desert.' Whether his or Saadun's actions were influenced by secret encouragement from the Turks, it is difficult to say.

At any rate, some sixteen years ago, rumours came to the environs of Khamisieh that Ibn Rashid was preparing a great raid on Saadun. Saadun, therefore, collected his forces and made all ready to repel the attack. Besides Muntafiq tribes, he had with him the Dhafir, a Bedouin tribe derived in part from Hijr, north of the Hejaz, which had long ago been driven thence and had settled in the district between Kuweit, the Shammar and the Euphrates. This tribe in its day has been as strong as any in the Shamiyah. In the time of the present sheikh's grandfather, Sultan Ibn Suweit, or of his brother, Jalan, its easily dissolved elements were united by the personal influence of the sheikh. Without such personal influence, the temptations to disunion are obvious from the position of the tribe, situated as it normally is between Shammar and Muntafiq, and, therefore, requiring to have influence with both sides. On this occasion a number of the Dhafir were with Saadun. Many of them did not enter into the affair at all. The Muntafiq and the Dhafir together were ready for all emergencies; but no raid came. Thinking they had been collected by a false alarm, the tribes to a great extent dispersed, Saadun himself remaining encamped east of Khamisieh by the reeds.

This was Ibn Rashid's chance; and one day Saadun's followers observed a mysterious cloud of dust on the southern horizon. They sent out the usual scouts, who returned to report the coming of a host of Shammar. It



was too late for all Saadun's followers to flee. He himself escaped towards Sakhariyah. The Shammar easily defeated the rest, and captured a great booty of horses and camels. This was the well known Battle of the Reeds (El-Bardiyah). Ibn Rashid encamped for a time at Tell el Jibarah and then retired to his own country.

Saadun Pasha, desirous of avenging his defeat, took advantage of a quarrel between Mubarak Ibn Sabah, Sheikh of Kuweit, and Ibn Rashid to ally himself with Ibn Sabah. A famous merchant of Kuweit, one Yusuf el-Ibrahim, who had seceded from Mubarak after his act of fratricide (he had killed his two brothers, Mohammed and Jara), went over to Ibn Rashid. Mubarak, angry at his defection, employed some of his wealth in the arming of Ibn Saud, and readily accepted the invitation of Saadun to join forces against the common enemy. This time Jalan Ibn Suweit, Sheikh of the Dhafir, refused to join the confederacy. The three, Saadun, Ibn Sabah and Ibn Saud, joined forces in Nejd. But Ibn Rashid was too strong for them, and defeated the confederacy with ease in a battle known as 'El-Turafiyah', from the place where it was fought. This took place the year after the Battle of the Reeds.

After this time there appears to be a lull in important events. Though there were continual raids, there was no fight of any importance. Ultimately a quarrel arose between Ibn Sabah and Saadun. A section of the Dhafir, called Es-Said, consistently friendly to Saadun, captured a number of Ibn Sabah's camels. Ibn Sabah asked Saadun to procure their return. He refused, and his refusal led Ibn Sabah to call in aid from Ibn Saud. Ibn Saud was not strong. Two of his tribes, the Muteir and the Ajman, had left him. Hence it was only a meagre force he sent to the help of Ibn Sabah. Such as they were, their forces reached Arkhamieh, where they were surprised by a mixed body of Dhafir, Zayyad, and Muntafiq (including the Budur), under Saadun.

The Zayyad are not a Muntafiq tribe. They belong to a confederacy known as the Beni Mucheim, and dwell south and about Samawah. But their friendship with the Dhafir dates back to many years ago, and bodies of them continually appear in Shamiyah fights. There was no real battle on this occasion. The forces of Ibn Sabah and Ibn Saud were captured without a struggle. Hence this event is known as the Hadiyah or 'the Gift'. That such events are possible is intelligible only to those who know the distance and

pace that can be accomplished by Arabs intent on a raid. The 'Hadiyah' took place in the spring nine years ago.

The following summer Saadun went to Baghdad on a visit to the Wali, Kadhim Pasha. The Muteir, a Nejdi tribe normally of the following of Ibn Saud, heard of this, and judged it a good opportunity for a raid. They came to Ibn Sabah and said 'Now that Saadun has gone to Baghdad, there is great chance of booty from the Dhafir and the Muntafiq. Let us make a raid upon them.' Not loth to attempt revenge upon the Dhafir for his late disaster, Ibn Sabah and the Muteir made a considerable raid on the Dhafir at Shagrah, and succeeded in capturing much booty. News of the raid came to Saadun at Baghdad, and was reported to the Wali. The Wali offered to establish Saadun in the position of Emir of the Iraq tribes and Kuweit if he would overthrow Ibn Sabah.

Saadun always ambitious, agreed to the project, and set out to collect his forces. Among others he took with him the Dhafir. His forces arrived as far as the Ashgag, between the Safwan and Jahrah, to the west. Ibn Sabah, hearing of their approach, and always in touch with the Dhafir, to the extent even of allowing them to take '*khawa*' on goods going from Kuweit, or paying them a certain sum to forego their ancient practice, got into secret touch with the leaders of this tribe. The mare of a Saadun noble, Yusuf el-Mansur, was killed by them and made a ground of quarrel with the result that the Dhafir quietly deserted Saadun and frustrated the enterprise. Saadun gave up his quest; but though still nominally friendly with the Dhafir, he determined to take revenge for their treachery.

He wrote secretly to Ibn Rashid inviting him to co-operate in the punishment of the Dhafir. Were he to agree to this, he was to appear with a following at the Dahanah, the sandy desert in the middle of Shammar territory. Meanwhile, Saadun himself would take his following including the Dhafir to the Dahanah. Ibn Rashid fell in with the plan, and the parties met at the Dahanah. Ibn Rashid called the headmen of the Dhafir to him and asked them for an explanation of their conduct. There seems to have been no excuse for them, and Ibn Rashid fined them 500 camels. The Dhafir were fairly trapped and had to submit to this imposition. But Saadun knew them too well to let Ibn Rashid depart without taking further safeguards against the future conduct of the tribe. Hence it was arranged that five of the Dhafir chiefs should go as hostages with Ibn Rashid.

So the parties dispersed; but the Emir's chiefs, whether of their own free will or under the secret persuasion of the captive Dhafir, came to the Emir and represented the harshness of his judgment. Had not the Dhafir already paid their fine of 500 camels? Was it just, further, to take captive five of their chiefs? The Emir was convinced by their arguments and released the hostages two days after he took them. As might be expected, the liberated chiefs hastened to their tribe, intent on revenge, collected their 'Khail' and 'Jais', and overtook and routed Saadun and his following, south of Shagrah at El-Jaraibiyat.

Saadun retired to Khamisieh while the Dhafir settled in the environs of Zubeir, at Safwan and Shwebdah. One section of the Dhafir, the Saud, were at the time with the Shammar, but now came to join Saadun at Khamisieh. Saadun and his following, with the addition of the Saud, moved to Alowi. This was within easy distance of the Dhafir, who straightway collected their forces, drove Saadun out, and returned to their tents.

The Turks had chosen this time to send agents to Basrah and to approach Saadun on the question of making him Emir of the Dirat el-Muntafiq on the Shatt el-Hai. Mubarak Ibn Sabah was then at Muhammerah and had got into touch with Seyyid Talib. It is said that he offered Seyyid Talib 3,000 liras to persuade the Government to seize and imprison Saadun. Seyyid Talib agreed and represented to the Turkish agents how fatal a policy it would be to make a turbulent spirit like Saadun head of a combine of tribes notorious for its unruliness. 'Let me only bring Saadun to Basrah,' he said, 'and the rest is easy. What follows is famous in Arab history. The Turkish agents complied with the infamous proposal of Seyyid Talib. Saadun was invited to the latter's house, the well-known Belt el-Naqib, accepted the invitation without suspicion, and duly appeared. By arrangement of Seyyid Talib, Saadun was to sleep secure for the night, and was to be invited next morning to a repast while Seyyid Talib was to excuse himself on the plea that he had business in the harem. When Saadun had eaten, the Turkish agents sent men in the guise of emissaries of the Wali to invite him to appear before the Wali at the Serai.

The plan was successfully carried out. Saadun left Belt el Naqib with the supposed emissaries of the Wali. When, however, they reached the Serai, they were told that the Wali had gone to Ashar. Saadun still unsuspecting was taken to Ashar in a *bellam* and from there straight to a Turkish gunboat where he was informed he was a prisoner. The boat left

quietly in the night, and on his arrival at Baghdad Saadun was taken to Aleppo, where he remained a prisoner and ultimately died.

From the time of Seyyid Talib's signal act of duplicity, the great Muntafiq chief passes out of history, and his place is taken by his second son, Ajaimi. Ajaimi was at this time besieged by the Budur in a fort north-west of Nasiriyah, at Maiyah. The Turkish agents secured his release and let him go. He fled to the Ghazzi, but the Sheikh of the Ghazzi, Ibn Hubiyib, was not prepared to take on his shoulders the onus of protecting this restless spirit, and Ajaimi was compelled to seek protection elsewhere. Isolated but not despairing, he mounted his *dhelul*, rode almost alone to Hail, and knelt his camel before the great Emir. 'I claim your protection, O Emir,' he said, 'and your help to avenge me on my enemies. This you owe me as a right; for it was while he was under your protection, that my father, Saadun, was set upon and defeated by the Dhafir.' At Hail he stayed for some time, until at length Ibn Rashid consented to help him to attack the Dhafir.

Ajaimi went to call in the help of the Juwarin. Ibn Rashid, on the first occasion he met the enemy, fled and brought in the help of Dhari ibn Tawala and the Aslam. Then he returned to the fight, and attacked and defeated a combined body of Dhafir and Budur between Shagrah and Abu Ghar. Ajaimi arrived one day late. Ibn Rashid returned to Hail and left the Muteir, whom he had also called to his help, as a protection to Ajaimi. This was in the spring of 1913. Next winter the Dhafir and the Budur returned from their summer quarters north and west of Nasiriyah. Ajaimi was still able to call in the Muteir, but, fearing he was not strong enough to repel attacks, he appealed to the Muntafiq sympathies of sections of the Beni Malik and drew a body of them to his side. The opposing forces met somewhere between Shagrah and Arkhamieh; but before they met, the Budur had entered into secret negotiations with the Beni Malik; for the Budur, too, are a Muntafiq tribe. The Beni Malik either fled or offered only a weak resistance, with the result that Ajaimi and the Muteir were routed, and their effects and animals were captured. Ajaimi fled with his scattered forces to Safwan, where he remained until the summer. He then removed to Ghabashiyah, where he perpetrated a ruthless act of robbery upon an unoffending relation. His father's cousin, Mazyad, came to settle with him and deposited, in a building known as 'Mazyad's treasury', the sum of 60,000 liras. Ajaimi appropriated the whole vast sum and moved to the Shatt al-Hai.

Another winter arrived, and the Dhafir, as usual, began to move southeast towards their well-known settling places, Diralsiyah, Dafinah, Abu Ghar and Suleibiyah. Mazyad, who had been looking about him for opportunities of revenge, went to the Dhafir and appealed to them for help. Meanwhile, Ajaimi too crossed the Euphrates with the idea of revenging himself for his late defeat. Always generous with his money, whatever its source, he was able, with the sum robbed from Mazyad, to attract a band of 400 mercenaries from various directions. His force consisted of some Muteir, some Shammar, some Beni Malik and other miscellaneous mercenaries. With these he invaded the Dhafir district, and brought up against the Dhafir and the Budur at Naba. Then ensued one of the bloodiest fights in the history of tribal warfare in the Shamiyah desert. The Dhafir and Budur inflicted a severe defeat on Ajaimi and his following, and are said to have killed nearly 300 of them, their own losses being forty killed.

The following day, Mazyad, overjoyed at the result, mounted his horse and galloped and curvetted before the victorious Arabs. This incongruous act met with disfavour in the eyes of Nemesis, and the unfortunate old man — he was then eighty — fell and broke his neck.

Ajaimi was now at the end of his resources, and was reduced to making peace with his enemies. Hence he invited Hamud Ibn Suweit, chief of the Dhafir, to join up with him near Chabdah. Hamud consented, and settled alongside of him with some fifty tents. The rest of the Dhafir repudiated his overtures. Whether Ajaimi originally meditated treachery, or was driven to what he did by the unfriendliness of the rest of the Dhafir, it is difficult to say. At any rate, he quietly sent word to the Muteir, acquainting them with this splendid opportunity of revenge. The Muteir arrived, all out for a raid. Hamud Ibn Suweit protested to Ajaimi against this gross act of treachery, and Ajaimi, repenting, attempted to dissuade the Muteir. But the Muteir were inexorable. They had come for a raid or a fight at Ajaimi's express invitation, and were determined to carry it out. Ajaimi had to submit to his own arrangement, and reverted to his original intention of calling up the Muteir. 'Qalab ala Ibn Suweit', as the Arabs say — it turned round against him. Hamud and his fifty tents fell an easy prey to the Muteir, and this affair is since known as the Qalbah.

A speedy revenge overtook Ajaimi. News of the event soon reached the Budur, ancient friends of the Dhafir and their refuge in time of trouble, and two months after the Qalbah, the Dhafir and the Budur defeated Ajaimi

at Shagrah. As the fiercest of Arab fights cannot permanently weaken a tribe, inasmuch as prisoners are normally released and live to fight again another day, there was no hope that Ajaimi was put out of court for good and all. So little depressed was he by his late defeat, that not more than two months later he engineered a raid by Ibn Rashid on the Arail section of the Dhafir at Tugayyid, while he himself and the Muteir defeated the Suweit section at El-Qusair.

Meanwhile, greater events than any tribal dissensions were looming over Arabia. Turkey had declared war on Great Britain, and the Turks, who were joined by Ajaimi with 250 sowars, were gradually driven from Fao and Basrah. But other events, not of such significance to the world at large, though of greater purport to the Jezirat el-Arab, began to develop — events which introduce us to elements and dissensions not within the scope of this account, which concerns chiefly the Shamiyah desert. But it will be useful to describe one great struggle, so as to explain certain elements which can never be altogether out of relation with the Shamiyah. This is a famous fight between Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid. The events which led up to it are somewhat as follows. Ibn Saud delivered an ultimatum to the Muteir, who were really one of his own tribes, though they had of late joined Ibn Rashid or Ajaimi indifferently, when these offered occasions for plunder. He demanded their return to his suzerainty on pain of permanent hostility. The Muteir were willing to return to their old allegiance, and celebrated their decision by pilfering a caravan of 1,000 camels, which was on its way from Zubeir to the followers of Ibn Tawala, chief of the Aslam section of the Shammar. They were then ready to return to their own country and join forces with Ibn Saud.

At the beginning of their war with Great Britain, the Turks had tried to persuade Ibn Rashid to attack Ibn Saud in force. Ibn Rashid, nothing loth, collected his forces. Meanwhile, the Turks changed their minds. It occurred to them that if they could persuade Ibn Rashid to keep his forces in the Iraq, and Ibn Saud to attack Kuwait, they would at the same time completely overawe the Arabs of the Iraq and overthrow a great stronghold of British influence. It was accordingly decided to call upon the notorious Seyyid Talib to proceed on a mission to Ibn Saud to induce him to cooperate. At that moment Seyyid Talib was occupied in offering us his services on extravagant terms, and while he was still hesitating to abate his demands, the sudden declaration of war precipitated matters and placed him in a

dangerous situation, from which the mission to Ibn Saud offered him a providential means of escape. On reaching Ibn Saud he placed himself into communication with the British authorities, and was allowed to proceed to India via Kuwait.

Meanwhile, when the possibility of Turkey's entry into the war had become likely, H.M. Government had decided to send an emissary to Ibn Saud in our own interests in the person of Captain W. H. I. Shakespear, formerly Political Agent at Kuwait, who was then in England. By the time he had reached the Persian Gulf, war had already been declared, but it was none the less desired to maintain touch with Ibn Saud and if possible to get him to move up towards Iraq in our interests. Captain Shakespear accordingly proceeded from Kuwait on this mission and found Ibn Saud with a large force moving towards the Shammar country to attack Ibn Rashid, and very confident of success. His force included a contingent of the Ajman tribe, a redoubtable, though at the same time disreputable, tribe from the Hasa district which had long been estranged from its overlord but was still under his suzerainty and obeyed the order for a general union of forces. The Muteir too were on their way to join, and in the circumstances it was believed in the desert that Ibn Sand was bound to defeat his traditional enemy; for, in addition to the large numbers of his fighting men, he had with him three or four Turkish mountain guns with trained gunners. But there is one factor in any Arab fight which is outside prophecy and that is treachery.

It is believed that there could have been no doubt of the result, had it not been (according to the tales of the Bedouin) for the treachery of the Ajman. They are said to have turned upon their own side at a critical stage of the conflict, killed large numbers, confused the rest, and made off with a large booty of camels.

Adherents of either side naturally give very different versions of what occurred, but there is no doubt that while both parties suffered severely from the shock of the encounter and from the depredations of the Ajman and other marauders after it, Ibn Saud was the hardest hit and was for the time crippled. It was in the course of this action that Captain Shakespear, who insisted on being present as an interested spectator, though pressed by his friend and host to remain at a distance, met his lamented and untimely end. No two accounts give the same version of the precise circumstances of his death, and until the clouds of war have passed over and reliable sources

from both sides can be reached under conditions of peace, it is hardly possible that they can be ascertained with certainty. But to return to the fight. The Muteir were some distance away when the fight began. When they drew near and heard the sound of shots, they worked round the fight to the south and finally came up right behind the Shammar to where they had left their camels. These they seized and made off with and secured large booty. They then returned to their own country and to the defeated Ibn Saud said: 'Why did you fly ? See, we have captured the very *dhelul* of Ibn Rashid himself.' As indeed they had. But nothing could compensate for the reversal of fortune caused by the treachery of the Ajman. And to this day Ibn Saud cherishes the hope of wiping them out to a man. Only their reputation as fighting men — and it is often said there are no Arabs their equals — has preserved them from extinction. For they have many enemies and no friends.

Arabs themselves say that of Bedouins the stoutest fighters are the Ajman, and of the Muntafiq the Budur. The Shammar too are redoubtable, as are the Zayyad, who occasionally appear to the help of the Dhafir. Less reputable fighters, though famous raiders, are the Muteir and the Dhafir. There is no tribe to touch the Dhafir for what seems to us mere thieving, though it is dignified by the Prophet under the name of a raid. It will be noticed in this brief history of tribal dissensions that the Budur have continually saved the Dhafir from disaster. And indeed the Dhafir owe everything to the Budur. Certain tribes like the Azairij are distinguished fighters on their own ground but helpless far afield. It is not so with the Budur. At home or abroad they display the same consistency of valour, and they have a quality almost peculiar to them, the quality of always rallying to the standard of their head chief in the face of a common enemy, notwithstanding their internal quarrelsomeness and a certain reputation for ruffianism. It is different with another similar tribe, the Juwarin, who certainly at the present time find no chief round whom they will readily rally at need. So with the Zayyad; brave enough as fighters, they are split up into so many ill-united sections that one cannot conceive them rallying to one standard. Most of the Shamiyah tribes have taken part on one or other of the many raids and fights recorded in this history, Dhafir, Budur, Juwarin, Ghazzi, Zayyad. But the protagonists are the Dhafir and the Budur. It is a curious alliance, Bedouin and camel tribe with Muntafiq and donkey tribe, originating in a blood feud against a common enemy, Ajaimi.



Until the latter is eliminated from Shamiyah by inducement or force, he will remain, though of no military importance, a chronic source of intrigue and centre of unrest, and as such, a nuisance to us and a valuable asset to the Turks. So much so that Ibn Rashid is said to resent Ajaimi's competition for their favours, and at this moment their relations are definitely strained. It may be too, that it was because they realized the incompatibility of these two elements, that the Turks, after inviting Ibn Rashid to sit on our flank in the Shamiyah desert, finally asked him to return to Hail and await a more favourable opportunity for a second visit to the Iraq. For Ajaimi had gradually won the powerful Zayyad tribe to his side, and the Zayyad cannot tolerate the Shammar at any price. It says much for Ajaimi's ascendancy that, though Ibn Rashid has departed, the elements he has left behind with us are in closer touch with Ajaimi than they are with their ancient overlord. Even Dhari Ibn Tawala, who should know Ajaimi, seeing that he was with him only a year ago, reluctantly pays a tribute to Ajaimi's personality. Ajaimi is a '*nafar*', as the Arabs say of an individual, a man who counts.

G. L. B.

## **VI. ISMAIL BEY**

**[Arab Bulletin, 23 March 1917]**

ISMAIL BEY, SON OF IBRAHIM PASHA MILLI, ARRIVED AT ZUBEIR on December 28, seeking British protection and offering us his co-operation against the Turks.

His father was the most considerable figure in northern Mesopotamian politics during the last ten or fifteen years of Abdul Hamid's reign. He had established, with the favour of the Sultan and of the latter's powerful minister, Izzet Pasha, an authority which was little short of sovereignty over the country between Diarbekr and Ras el-Ain, and he controlled the northern roads between the Euphrates and Tigris. If his rule was not an unqualified blessing, neither was it an unmixed evil; he harried the smaller tribes of the Euphrates, and was at constant loggerheads with the Shammar Jerbah and Sinjar Yezidis; but he protected Christians and provided a rough and ready administration as good as, if not better than, anything which the Turks had managed to set up. His headquarters, established at an ancient but almost obliterated site, Wiransheher (Antoninopolis), grew into a flourishing little town, doing a brisk trade with the desert. The opening of the constitutional era brought Ibrahim's glory to an end. Local independence was distasteful to the C.U.P. and Ibrahim's personal relations with the Sultan made him an object of special distrust. Local tribes, both Kurdish and Arab, who had suffered justly or unjustly under his strong hand, were let loose upon his flocks and fields during his absence in Damascus, whither he had gone with the purpose of coming to terms with the new rulers of the Ottoman Empire. He hurried back to Aleppo, crossed the Euphrates at Qalat en- Nejm and died in the desert between the Euphrates and the Khabur, probably from natural causes, for he was ill when he passed through Aleppo.

He left six sons, Abdul Hamid (usually known as Hamud), Mamu (now about 30), Ismail (28), Khalil Pasha (26), Abdul Rahman (18) and Tama (16). The mother of Mamu, Ismail and Khalil is Khansah Khansum, a lady of remarkable force of character, who administered the family estates when the elder sons were imprisoned in Diarbekr after Ibrahim's death. Abdul Hamid died in prison, but Ismail and his brothers were released after a

captivity of many months' duration, and their possessions were in great part restored. Though the power of the ruling house had suffered, the Milli remained a strong tribe, trained in arms in the Hamidiyah levies, while the sons of Ibrahim are still wealthy, and soldiers from their youth up.

Ismail is a fair man, of medium height and slight figure, pleasant mannered, with a fine confident bearing. He looks what he is, the son of a great chief, accustomed to dealing with high officials, and conversant with big political issues. He speaks with affection and respect of his brother Khalil Pasha, who, according to him, has some 1,400 troops, more or less trained in the Hamidiyah, under his command. He himself claims to have about 400 horsemen of a similar kind, and says that his tribe numbers 25,000 men and can raise 12,000 horse. He includes, no doubt, in these last two figures various Arab tribes, such as the Adwan, who come directly under the influence of the Milli, and probably he intends them to cover the Shammar Jerbah also. The half-trained Milli horse he speaks of as the Sabyan. They are all armed with Mausers and have plenty of ammunition. He suggests that he should summon his 400 men to the Iraq, if we could get them safe passage through Ibn Hadhdhal's country. He proposes to place them at our service under his command, and to maintain them at his own expense.

He is confident that Khalil Pasha would have no objection to their leaving Wiransheher, as Khalil has an ample force of his own. Ismail states that at the beginning of the war the Milli furnished a body of irregular horse to the Turks for service against the Russians. They deserted during the first winter and returned home, bringing with them the arms which they had received from the Ottoman Government. This led to a conflict between Turks and Milli near Diarbekr about a year ago. Ismail claims that the Turkish casualties were heavy and included some German officers, but the upshot seems to have been unfavourable to the Milli, and Ismail fled south, intending to make his way to the Sherif by the Hajj railway. He was caught at Qatranah and imprisoned first at Shobaq and then at Damascus. After he had been there some weeks, Sherif Ali Haidar arrived, on his way to Medina. Ismail begged for his intercession with Jemal Pasha, and at Ali Haidar's instance he was released, on condition that he would join the Turkish force in Sinai. He succeeded, however, in making his escape to Fawwaz el-Faiz of the Sukhur, and so by the Wadi Sirhan to Jauf, where he was hospitably welcomed by Nawwaf es-Shaalan.

While he was at Jauf, Nawwaf received letters from the Sherif asking for his support, but these he had not answered before Ismail left. A correspondence was going on between Ibn Shaalan and Ibn Hadhdhal. Nawwaf had urged Fahad Bey to join him in helping the Sherif, but the latter replied with characteristic caution that he was restrained from taking action lest the Turks should seize his lands, but that it would be a different matter if the English offered him their equivalent in the Occupied Territories. Ibn Mijlad is hand in hand with Ibn Shaalan. Ismail considers that he and Hachim Ibn Muheid (especially the latter) are of greater fighting value than Fahad Bey. Since the action a year ago, the Turks have left Khalil Pasha unmolested at Wiransheher. They are afraid of stirring up trouble with the Milli who, according to Ismail, are bitterly anti-Turk. He thinks they would be prepared to take action on our side on the Turkish lines of communication, and he agreed that their help would be more useful there than at Kut.

Nawwaf wished him to remain at Jauf, but he was insistent in his desire to come to us, and Nawwaf provided him with an escort. He fell in with Ibn Ajil (Shammar Abdah), met Rashid Ibn Leilah near Mashhad, and went from him to Ajaimi's camp, where he lodged with a Dhafir Sheikh (Ibn Dhira ?). He concealed his purpose from Ajaimi, and told him he was looking for his brother Mamu, who, he has reason to believe, is on his way to join Ibn Saud. Ajaimi gave him rafiqs to Dhari Ibn Tawala, Ismail undertaking to return when he had made inquiries about his brother. Once in Dhari's camp, he dismissed Ajaimi's men, and came on to Zubeir, where his arrival coincided almost exactly with that of Saud es-Subhan, whose messengers he had met while he was with Dhari. Ismail reports Ajaimi to be disgusted by the lack of political acumen shown by the Turks in their handling of the Arabs. No doubt it weakens his hand with the tribes. The Milli have no direct relations with Fahad Bey. Ismail is anxious to get into touch with him from here. He looks on Ibn Muheid as a friend, and seems to anticipate no difficulty in roping in the Shammar Jerbah.

Ismail believes that a number of chiefs could be induced to join in interrupting the railway and cutting the telegraph line along the Euphrates. He thinks he can operate more easily from Basrah than from Egypt, and he has been given a house at Zubeir. He treats Saud es-Subhan with respect, and appears to allot to him the role of leading conspirator.

The Milli took a hand in the Armenian massacres, and Ismail, though not favourably inclined to Turkish policy, thinks that in this case it was justifiable. He said that the Armenians were aiming at complete independence, and that it was well known that the first blood was on their heads, they having risen and massacred the Turks. This version of the story meets with Ismail's unquestioning acceptance.

G. L. B.

## **VII. THE SITUATION IN HAIL**

[ Arab Bulletin, 24 July, 1917 ]

SULEIMAN EL-DAKHIL, A NATIVE OF BUREIDAH, one of whose daughters is married to Ibn Saud, has recently arrived in Baghdad, from Hail. Formerly in Baghdad, he had fallen under suspicion of the Ottoman Government owing to an article in his newspaper urging the Government not to quarrel with Ibn Saud, and, after the war broke out, went first to Nejf and thence to Hail, where he evaded the arrest which the Government ordered by telegraph. Ibn Rashid interceded for him but received no reply and El-Dakhil, on hearing that we were established in Baghdad, made his way there. The following, according to his account, is the position in Hail: — There are three parties, Rashid ibn Leilah's friends, the Shammar and townsfolk who want to come in to us, on the ground that if we hold Iraq there is no other alternative, and the Emir, who, up to now, has been under the thumb of Ibn Leilah. The latter has been heavily bribed by the Turks. Of the moneys entrusted to him for Hail he has appropriated about three-fourths, investing it in property in Constantinople. Of the one fourth which reaches Hail, one third goes to his own supporters, one-third to the Emir and one-third to the Shammar. The Shammar complain that they get no profit out of the Turkish alliance. The Ottoman representative at Hail is Abdul Hamid, an Egyptian. He has quarrelled with Ibn Leilah, and has retired to Mustajiddah. The Emir has forbidden him to go on to the railway. He and Ibn Leilah send mutual recriminations to Jemal Pasha, Abdul Hamid saying that it is all Ibn Leilah's fault that Ibn Rashid has done nothing, and vice versa. Suleiman was in Hail when Ibn Subhan quarrelled with the Emir and came to us. The cause of the quarrel was chiefly Ibn Subhan's antagonism to Ibn Leilah and jealousy of him. Suleiman heard that a good many Shammar Sheikhs have recently joined Ibn Subhan. Al Baij of the Sinjarah, Al Maij and Nida ibn Nukhaiyir of the Abdah and Ibn Thanayan of the Sinjarah. They are all out against Ibn Leilah and his policy which they regard as suicidal to the Shammar.

While Suleiman was at Hail one biggish caravan (200 camels) came in from Kuweit bringing petroleum, cotton, cloth, tobacco, coffee, but not rice or dates. This was the one which started for the Qasim and split up half way, part going to Hail and part to the Qasim. Driblets have come in from



Kuweit over and above this, forty camels at a time, but the merchants are now very much afraid of going to Kuweit, fearing that Ibn Subhan will give information against them and have them arrested. As for the caravan which came up recently to Nejf, it was at the outside 4,000 camels strong, it loaded in great haste, not more than one-third of its full load, and left about four days ago in very great alarm lest it should be captured on the return journey. This caravan was sent out from Hail as a feeler. They are at the end of their food supplies, they were not certain of the truth of the report that we were holding Baghdad and the Iraq, and they sent up the caravan to spy out the land. Its experiences will encourage the Shammar sheikhs and the townsfolk in their desire to come to terms with us.

Suleiman says that Fahad Beg can absolutely control the whole Musablah from Nejd to the Iraq if he undertakes to do so.

When he left Hail nothing was definitely known as to negotiations between Ibn Rashid and Ibn Saud, but Suleiman had heard gossip that Ibn Rashid had asked for peace. He did not think that Ibn Saud would accept, as it was obviously not in his interest to do so. This is exactly what Ibn Saud said to us, but he added that he would come to terms with Ibn Rashid if we wished it.

As to the position in the Qasim, Bureidah alone counts; Aneizah will follow its head. It is true that the Qasim towns like a great deal of freedom, but there is a strong party in Bureidah which does not wish for complete independence, for they fear that that would imply the return of their former emirs, the Abu Hail, whom they hate. One of these, Mohammed, is now with Ibn Saud and stands high in his favour but is bitterly disliked at Bureidah. The other, Fahad, is at Hail and is much better liked by the Bureidah people. He is anti-Turk. He refused an Ottoman subsidy. Ibn Saud's overlordship is infinitely preferable to that of Ibn Rashid. The Rashid have a name for tyranny, whereas Ibn Saud deals very liberally with the Qasim towns and in ordinary times allows them complete freedom of trade.

Ibn Rashid is not popular. He never speaks in the Mejlis and does nothing to make himself a personal position. The Shammar look to the sons of his cousin Talal, who was murdered in 1906, as possible successors. These boys I saw three years ago in Hail; Abdullah and Mohammed are their names. They were then aged respectively twelve and eleven, charming distinguished children. They are true Rashid and belong to an older branch

than that of the present Emir. Munirah, his sister, and Mudhi, his mother, sent me greetings by Suleiman. The Shammar chiefs make a point of attending the coffee meetings of Abdullah and Mohammed, and invite them to their coffee gatherings. This year they refused to go out on the spring raids unless the two boys were allowed to come also, and the Emir reluctantly consented. It is very improbable that the Shammar would accept an emir outside the Rashid family.

G. L. B.

## **Excerpt: REVOLT IN THE DESERT**

By Thomas C. Barger

Available at Amazon or [www.SelwaDigital.com](http://www.SelwaDigital.com)

## INTRODUCTION

During my visit to Kuwait February 5-8, 1948, I stayed with Colonel H. R. P. Dickson at his invitation. The Colonel was brought up in Damascus in the 1880's and learned Arabic as a child. He had lived in Iraq or Kuwait since 1915. A British officer in the Indian Army in World War I, he was the liaison officer with the local governments and the tribes of southern Iraq. After World War I, in 1929, he became the "British Resident" in Kuwait. When he retired from British Government service in 1936, he became the local representative of the Kuwait Oil Company. He understood the Bedouin better and had more friends among them than any other European I have ever known.

One evening before dinner I asked the Colonel if he were familiar with the Battle of Sibila. I had heard the Qasiymis speak of it as one in which many men from the Qasiym had been killed, but I had not understood how it came about. The Colonel said yes he knew a great deal about the Battle of Sibila. If I liked, he would get his notes out and give me an account in complete detail. The Colonel had appeared for dinner with a muffler around his throat and had remarked his throat was a bit sore so he would not talk very much. I replied I certainly would like to see his notes sometime, but perhaps he could just give me a quick outline of what had happened. Three hours later the "short" account of Sibila ended, the Colonel having talked almost without stop through the Scotch and sodas, dinner -and coffee, and Sibila had become but one scene in a larger panorama. Before going to bed I wrote an outline from which this account was written. Several months later the Colonel visited Dhahran, read the draft, made a few corrections and gave it his approval.



‘Abdul Aziz ibn Saud at the age of 41. Taken in 1921  
when he was proclaimed the Sultan of Nejd

## BACKGROUND

Dickson began his explanation of Sibila by saying the battle on 29 March 1929 marked the beginning of the Ikhwan revolt headed by Faisal al Duwisah, the Shaikh of the Mutair tribe. Sibila itself is merely a bit of desert near Zilfiy in the northern Najd.

The Ikhwan were a body of fighting men that King 'Abdul Aziz bin Saud, the founder of today's Saudi Arabia, had built up over a period of 15 years in the course of his conquest of most of the Arabian Peninsula. They were all adherents to the teachings of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab who, in Central Arabia (the Najd) in the mid-18th Century, preached a return to primitive, austere puritanical Islam. His most notable converts were the Saud family. By the beginning of the 19th Century Saudi military ability combined with the religious fervor of 'Abdul Wahhab's message and his missionaries conquered an area similar to that of the present Saudi Arabia, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and their ports on the Red Sea.

The Sultan of the Ottoman Empire could not brook such a challenge to his position as the Caliph of Islam by upstarts from the interior of Arabia. He ordered his Viceroy in Egypt, Muhammad Ali, to restore his authority in the holy cities. Muhammad Ali did not stop with the reconquest of the Hijaz and the two holy cities. He carried on some eight years of war ending in 1819 in the utter defeat of the Saudi forces; the destruction of their capital, Dir'iyah, a few miles north of present day Riyadh; and the capture of the Saudi ruler, Abdullah, who was taken to Constantinople and beheaded.

The fluctuating fortunes of the Saud family during the rest of the 19th Century reached their lowest point when the father of 'Abdul Aziz bin Saud was driven out of Riyadh in 1890 and sought refuge in Kuwait. Setting out from Kuwait with a party of 40 men, 'Abdul Aziz, age 22, captured Riyadh in 1902 in a surprise attack. He slowly extended his area of political control not only by military successes, but also by a revival of Wahhabi missionary activity. In 1912 he initiated a policy designed not only to stop the Bedouins' incessant raiding of each other and the settled communities, but also to improve their economic well-being and to provide them with the

reliable military force he needed for further expansion of his rule. He did this by fostering the establishment of agricultural settlements by converts to Wahhabiism, both Bedouin and villagers, who foreswore their tribal allegiance and pledged loyalty to him, alone. In all, about seventy such settlements were founded. Many of them eventually failed, largely because of inadequate water supplies. On the other hand, some of them became thriving permanent villages - 'Artawiyah, for example, attained a population approaching 10,000. In their heyday, they provided a large, comparatively well-disciplined, experienced and, above all fanatical body of fighting men absolutely loyal to the King, even against their own tribes.

The name "Ikhwan" comes from the Arabic for "brother" and signifies their "brotherhood" as dedicated "Wahhabis." Parenthetically, they never called themselves "Wahhabis." They were "Muwahhid," the Arabic equivalent of "Unitarian," no association with Christian "Unitarian" doctrine is implied. The implication is that they associated no one with God and they recognized no intermediaries whatsoever between God and man. Hence, when they conquered Mecca and Medina in the early 19th Century and again in 1925-1926, they destroyed all the tombs of saints and holy men that had been built in these cities by other Islamic sects. They were only barely restrained from destroying the tomb of the Prophet himself.

Raiding was thoroughly repressed in the territory of 'Abdul Aziz. For the first time in over a hundred years pilgrims and commercial caravans could travel everywhere in complete safety. Those for whom the ancient ways were too great a temptation were relentlessly hunted down and government forces always won the shoot-outs.

## **Excerpt: IBN SAUD: KING BY CONQUEST**

By Nestor J. Sander

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## STEPS UPWARD (1902-1912)

After consulting his father and winning the approval and support of Shaikh Mubarak, Ibn Saud decided to act. Was the venture he was to embark on planned only as a razzia, as most authors suggest, or had he already determined to attempt to restore his family to its high estate? He was almost twenty-five years old. Thrice married, he had two living wives and a son, Turki. Surely it was time to free himself and his family from dependence on a meager stipend from the Turks and the uncertain income from raids.

Would a man of his stock be content to continue only as a leader of forays? If not, concealment of his true purpose was essential, for spies were everywhere. Raiding would serve to dissimulate his intent.

**Prologue:** In the autumn of 1901 Abdul Aziz left Kuwait with an older half-brother Mohammed, three cousins, four more distant relatives, and about fifty followers from the tribes of eastern Arabia. They were mounted on riding camels, Dhulul, some ridden double. With Ibn Saud's servant and his bodyguard, both slaves, the troop totaled sixty. The band was soon joined by nomads eager to share in the plunder and derring-do of the nearly bloodless raids, a form of gainful employment age-old in the desert. For a time the forays were successful, garnering many camels near the village of Majma' two hundred miles southwest of Kuwait. But the looted tribes and Ibn Rashid's supporters began to fight back and Turkish patrols had to be avoided. So, four months after its departure from Kuwait the band of several hundred shrank as prospects of easy booty vanished. Too, Ramadan was near, the month of daylight fasting when raiding usually ceased. Ibn Saud stopped his forays and retreated southward, ignoring a request from his father to return to Kuwait.

*Many accounts say that he was unable to return to Kuwait because he was blocked by Ibn Rashid's forces, but the desert is like the sea, except that there are watering places, most of which are generally known and can be denied in time of war. The Turks had few troops and could occupy continuously only one or two wells or oases near the coast. Messengers from Ibn Rashid could have insured that the raiders had no access to water*

*in places occupied by his supporters, but it is unlikely that this mighty shaikh would put his soldier-tribesmen on a war-time footing merely to stop a ghazzu.*

**Decision (?):** A messenger from Kuwait found Ibn Saud to warn him that Ibn Rashid had asked the Turks to capture him. He and his band were camped in southern al Hasa at a well called Ain Haradh. According to some published accounts this site was his Rubicon, but was it in fact only then that he decided to retake Riyadh? All agree that it was only then that he asked his followers to undertake the perilous mission, but it was only then that he could be sure that no one would return to Kuwait to betray his purpose, for the fate of anyone who chose not to join him might have been uncertain. Among the sixty he could be sure only of his brother, seven other relatives and his two slaves. The loyalty of the rest was doubtful for they came from other tribes. Hence the oath of fealty to him and his cause that he demanded from them, and his pledge of fidelity to them, a pact made much of by some writers.

The party then moved fifty miles farther south to the Jabrin oasis. Only the Murra frequented it, for its ponds are at the northern edge of the Rub' al Khali and in summer its far-flung palm groves were hotbeds of malarial fever. There the now oath-bound sixty passed the first days of the month of Ramadan secure from prying eyes, for the Murra, like many of the tribes of southern Nejd and Asir owed no allegiance to the Rashids.

On 23 December 1901, almost three weeks before the new moon would mark the end of Ramadan, the small troop left its covert and set out for Riyadh, two hundred miles to the northwest. It avoided the usual watering places both for security and because in the cool of winter the camels drank only every ninth day, or with good forage, not at all. Leisurely night marches punctuated by long halts to avoid detection by travelers and Bedu shepherds found them on the evening of 12 January 1902 at the limestone cliffs and steep slopes forming the weathered scarp in front of which lay the deep ravine containing the five wells of Abu Jifan. As the last of these marches began the party saw a pale sliver of new moon and knew that no travelers or even dispatch riders would be at the wells, for no one traveled during the three holidays of the *Id al Fitr*. Nevertheless they scouted the area before couching the camels and spent the next day furbishing their arms and sleeping.

That night, a forty-mile ride brought them in sight of the cluster of villages near Riyadh. The party moved with extreme caution to avoid discovery, but on the morning of the second day, 15 January 1902, all lay concealed in the hills north of the populated area.

At nightfall on that day men and beasts quit their hiding-places and stole into the shelter of the very extensive plantations of date palms that lay on all sides of the town. At an outlying grove, Shamsiyah, thirty men, headed by the Ibn Saud's stocky, heavily bearded brother, Mohammed, were detailed to guard the couched camels. They were instructed to wait until noon of the following day for news. If none came they should try to escape, for the others of the band would be dead. Desire to share in the attack ran high, but in the narrow streets near the fort a large group would have been conspicuous and the surprise that was the keystone of Ibn Saud's strategy might have been lost.

The twenty-three accompanying Ibn Saud in his approach to the wall included three cousins and several more distant relatives. The party moved silently through the dark shelter of the deserted groves carrying the long trunk of a palm tree. For an hour the men thus burdened stole through long rows of boles and then through the gardens nearer the gates: a maze of sunken paths, wells, irrigation channels and palm-thatched shelters. The cemetery just outside the north wall offered less difficulty – no stone fences and ditches to slow progress. But the approach had taken more than two hours and the sliver of new moon glowed dully in the west.

In front of the ruinous wall was a dry moat half-filled with dirt and debris. After the family's departure a decade before, the twenty-five-foot barrier of sun-dried brick had been left to the weather by Ibn Rashid's governors, and in some places was less than half its original height. The guard towers were not manned and all was silent, except for an occasional bark from a troubled dog and the droning whine from the wooden pulleys of the few draw-wells working during the last night of the *Id*. The palm trunk as ladder, and Abdul Aziz and eight of his party were over the crumbling obstacle. These paladins included three other cousins, Abdulla ibn Jiluwi and two of his sons, Nasr ibn Saud and the servants Ma'shouk and Sab'an. The other fifteen sat patiently at its foot to await events. The nine stole warily through narrow dark streets and alleys, past the barred doors and the blank dwellings. Shut-in dogs warned loudly of their hushed passage but the clamor raised no alarm. Their walk was short for the massive stone

*Mismak* (citadel) was not far from the north wall. Silhouetted against the backdrop of the cold blaze of myriad stars in a blue-black heaven the round towers of the fort rose high above the dark rectangle of its bulk. The open ground around the stronghold was bounded to the west and south by low, flat-roofed houses. The governor's residence, known to be close to the seat of power, must be one of the few two-story homes facing it to the west, but which one? A likely prospect, larger than some of the others, had a heavy door below and a latticed opening on the second floor. This house was less than two hundred feet from the massive iron-studded wooden portal of the citadel.

*The events that ensued have been recounted many times in print, and Ibn Saud himself told the story often. The published versions vary in detail, even in such basics as the number of participants, and differ even more in their interpretation of intangibles such as the state of mind of the doers. Some suggest that Ibn Saud changed the particulars of his story at will. And why not? He had created a legend.*

*This version is based on probabilities, given the circumstances, the place, the ambience of the high desert in winter, and Ibn Saud's propensity, recorded by several observers, to outbursts of violent anger.*

**Coup:** (16 January 1902) The nine discussed their next move cloaked in the dark obscurity of a narrow street bounded by low, windowless houses. They huddled, heads together, the white vapor of their breath streaming in the chill north wind that fluttered the loose ends of their checkered head cloths and wrapped the skirts of their long white *thobes* tightly against their legs. All were bundled up against the cold and burdened with arms: rifles wrapped in tanned goatskin slung over a shoulder or clutched by the barrel, butt in the dust; swords hitched high, belted daggers partly hidden under quilted vests. One of Ibn Saud's cousins, Abdullah ibn Jiluwi, short and heavily bearded, leaned on a stout, iron-tipped spear.

'The two-story place with the latticed window must be the one,' ibn Jiluwi said, 'No other house has a window.'

'Probably,' replied Abdul Aziz, 'but we have to be sure. Let's get off the street and ask somebody. If we stay here we might be seen and reported. There could be guards in the towers of the fort, too. There's just enough light for them to spot us if we move around much. Look! This used to be Juwaisir's place. He sold cows. Maybe he's still here.'

A repeated peremptory but cautious knock was at last answered by the voice of a querulous woman, 'Who is it? What do you want at this hour?'

'It's ibn Mutriff (one of the guard at the citadel known to ibn Saud) The Amir wants to buy two cows. Let me in to talk it over,' answered Abdul Aziz

'It's late, nearly midnight. No honorable man would knock at the door of a respectable house now. There are no *Qahab* (sluts) here. Go away!'

'Amir Ajlan will not take that kindly. You know what he's like. Juwaisir will suffer for it. Is he there? Is Juwaisir there?'

With a rasp of wood on iron a bar was lifted from its sockets. The heavy door opened a crack and the dim light inside silhouetted a man's bare head. Ibn Saud wrenched the door wide open. 'Quick, men, in with you!' A rush of bodies at full pelt surged through the doorway. Shouldered roughly aside, the man at the door fell to his knees.

The troop jostled in the dark of the small, close room. 'Build up the fire so we can see!' Abdul Aziz ordered. Shaken by his fall, Juwaisir, old and stooped, staggered to his feet and heaped brushwood on the hearth, which crackled into a roaring blaze.

Peering dazedly at the weapons of the group crowding his dwelling he quavered, 'What do you want? We are poor folk, as you see. O Master! I saw you on your mare when you had Ajlan cooped up in the fort. Why did you go away?'

'Well, we're back now. You can help us. Where is Ajlan? That's his house, isn't it, the big one opposite the door of the fort?'

The old man bowed as he said that his abode was his Master's. Yes, that was the governor's residence, but he wasn't there. He slept in the fort with his men, some eighty of them. But in the morning just after prayer he visited his wife, although sometimes he rode for a time before going to her. Six guards accompanied him everywhere.

'Can we get to Ajlan's terrace from yours?' Ibn Saud asked.

'Almost, Sir. There is a gap of about four feet, and of course it's higher. But the wall of Sa'ad's house touches his. Next door, you know.'

'Is Sa'ad alone?'

'Only his wife. They are like me—too poor to buy a slave.'

'Thank you, Juwaisir. Those steps lead up to your terrace?'

Ibn Saud in the lead, all his men climbed the steep, narrow stair to the flat roof, a terrace edged by a waist-high crenelated wall. It was not pitch

dark. Everyone lay flat for the fort was only three hundred feet away. Sentinels in the corner towers could, if observant, see movement below. Abdul Aziz raised himself slowly and studied the menacing bulk for a long moment: an infinity of brilliant points in a dark firmament outlining silent towers of jet bounding a black oblong.. Nothing moved. 'They don't know we're here. Let's go!'

Cautiously, all straddled the low walls separating the terraces of the two houses. Ibn Saud and ibn Jiluwi descended silently into the darkness of the stair in the second house. A stifled scream and two unfortunates lay tied and gagged in their bed. Back on the roof, Abdul Aziz dispatched two of his eight men (sons of ibn Jiluwi) to summon those waiting at the enceinte of the town. 'When you come back with them, don't bunch up, and stay inside this place until I send for you,' he warned.

Then, much taller than his companions, he leapt high, grappled the bounding wall of the governor's terrace and pulled himself up and over it. Feet on shoulders, upstretched arms pulled, and in moments the six were beside him. With their daggers loosened, Abdul Aziz led them down into the menacing, stygian blackness of the upper floor.

'Make sure that the slaves don't make a row, men,' he whispered. Then to ibn Jiluwi, 'Light the candle. Let's see if Ajlan is here, or not.'

The two moved warily from room to room in the silent house, the taper in ibn Jiluwi's hand guttering as they peered into each. A brass bed in this one—only a shaikh could afford that! Abdul Aziz held his rifle ready to fire into one of two mounds under the quilts. Ibn Jiluwi lowered the candle and went to the head of the bed: the light showed the two heads to be women.

A high-pitched, sleepy voice, 'Who is it? Who is it?'

'Abdul Aziz ibn Abdur Rahman. Quiet woman! And you too!' he added as the other bundle stirred.

'Oh, it's you, Father of Turki. What do you want? You are in the harem.' The woman had known Ibn Saud as a child, and was not afraid. Honest women were never molested.

'No impudence! I want your husband, wicked woman who married a Shammari!

Where is he?'

'I married only after you ignored me! He is in the fort with his men. When he comes back after morning prayer you had better be gone, if you value your life.'

‘If you value yours, you and your friend will not raise your voices. Or do you prefer to be gagged?’

The two women were herded into a lower room where four terrified slaves huddled: three Somali men and a woman. All were again warned to silence.

‘The others must be here by now. Have the slaves open a passage into the other house. It shouldn’t take long to loosen these mud bricks. But keep an eye on them. No noise!’ ordered Abdul Aziz. ‘Have the cook make coffee and bring whatever there is to eat upstairs.’

The troop of twenty-three was soon together, the newcomers voicing satisfaction at the handiwork of the nine. The room behind the latticed alcove facing the fort was large and furnished comfortably with cushions and rugs. All lounged at ease as a trembling slave served coffee, dates, and unleavened bread, stumbling in the darkness, for a light in the room behind the grated opening would have been visible to anyone in the fort.

‘Only two hours to sunrise,’ ibn Jiluwi commented, ‘we should get some rest.’

‘Yes. We’ll take care of Ajlan when he comes home. Find out which slave opens the door and select one of us of similar build to don her clothes so that Ajlan will suspect nothing when the door is opened.’

‘Abdul Aziz lay back against the cushions behind him. ‘Let’s recite a few *surahs* <sup>7</sup> together before we rest. Allah, look favorably on our affairs!’

The muezzin’s predawn call brought all to their feet for sleep had been fitful at best. Two lines of men, Ibn Saud before them, began the morning prayer, *al fajr*. The murmur of the prescribed orisons accompanied the ritual of kneeling and prostration toward Mecca.

Waiting began. The pale salmon-orange of the pre-dawn gave way to the brassy brilliance of sunrise. A dark shadow of the fort wall leapt into existence, its edge ruler-straight on the tan, trodden earth in front of the governor’s house. Ibn Saud and ibn Jiluwi peered anxiously through the lattice while sipping coffee. Bright lozenges of early morning sunlight marked their white robes as they knelt behind the screen. Four riflemen knelt behind them, ready to open fire when targets appeared.

Suddenly a loud grating groan broke the silence. The massive, iron-studded, wooden portal of the fort swung slowly inward. Ajlan ibn Mohammed ar Rashid and six of his retinue stood framed in the panel of light at the foot of the high wall. All bore arms, but carried them with the

carelessness of the unsuspecting. This morning the Amir had decided not to ride the mare held in check by a groom, for as the weighty gate shut behind him he sauntered into the open, sword at his side. Abdul Aziz saw his arrogant bearing, stiffened, sprang to his feet, threw off head rope and scarf, and muttered, 'I'll kill him.' He dashed down the stairs shouting, 'Let's go! Now! Come On!' threw open the door and raced toward the Amir, bawling as a war cry, 'Akhu Nura.' (Nura's brother!) [She was his favorite sister.] The others streamed after him, ibn Jiluwi at their head.

Ajlan, a stately figure in his padded winter cloak, blue trimmed in scarlet, was startled and for a moment only stared, then drew his sword and held it high while backing toward the fort. As Ibn Saud neared him he slashed down. The young warrior parried with his rifle. Ajlan, seeing his adversary a giant, began to turn away. Abdul Aziz fired hastily, and the Amir, hit in the shoulder, dropped his blade and ran toward the great door. His guards had already retreated. One of them stooped to pass through the small wicket that had opened at the right end of the portal.

Ibn Jiluwi and the others in the forefront of the attackers engaged the retreating guards who battled courageously, sword against sword, but fell back continually toward the wicket. One of them fended off two assailants until he fell with a great gaping cut in the neck. Ibn Saud caught the fleeing Amir from behind as he bent to pass through the wicket and wrestled him to the ground. Desperately, the fallen man lashed out with a kick that caught Ibn Saud in the groin, doubling him up in pain. Thus freed, Ajlan again ran to the wicket. As he bent low to go through it, ibn Jiluwi threw his spear with tremendous force, but missed. Its point struck the door just to the right of the opening. Aided by men inside, Ajlan struggled over the high sill, and was at last pulled into the courtyard. Ibn Jiluwi, drawn blade in hand, bent low and plunged through behind him, braving a possible sword stroke that would have cut off his head. Ibn Saud was behind him in a flash. The defenders fled, Ajlan lagging behind because of his wound. The two paladins rushed to unbar the great portal, pushed open at once by a swarm of shouting attackers brandishing swords.

All pursued the fugitives, most of whom sought refuge in the guard room not far from the gate. Ibn Jiluwi caught up with Ajlan and cut him down. Led by Abdul Aziz the others hunted out those who resisted, and took the surrender of the rest. Many asked for mercy in the time-honored



way: dropping their weapons they put the thumbs of both hands between their teeth with fingers widely spread. All was over in less than an hour.

Ibn Saud, flushed with victory, took Ajlan's head to the battlements and threw it into the street, shouting, 'Who is on my side—Who? Your own Prince is with you again!'.

*Most writers who describe the taking of Riyadh say that the casualties inflicted on the defeated were heavy. They report that nearly half of the eighty defenders were killed or wounded; the remainder jailed or pardoned. On the other hand a few minimize the number of casualties. According to a 'reliable source', Ibn Saud lost two killed and four critically wounded – a quarter of his force.*

The Arab War

Introduction ©2012 Selwa Press

Published digitally Selwa Press 2012

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