

ANNE BLUNT

A PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD,
THE CRADLE OF THE
ARAB RACE. VOL. 1 [OF
2]

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PREFACE BY THE EDITOR

Readers of our last year's adventures on the Euphrates will hardly need it to be explained to them why the present journey was undertaken, nor why it stands described upon our title page as a "Pilgrimage." The journey to Nejd forms the natural complement of the journey through Mesopotamia and the Syrian Desert; while Nejd itself, with the romantic interest attached to its name, seems no unworthy object of a religious feeling, such as might prompt the visit to a shrine. Nejd, in the imagination of the Bedouins of the North, is a region of romance, the cradle of their race, and of those ideas of chivalry by which they still live. There Antar performed his labours of Hercules, and Hatim Taï the more historical hero entertained his guests. To the Ánazeh and Shammar, especially, whose northward migrations date only from a few generations back, the tradition of their birth-place is still almost a recollection; and even to the Arabs

of the earlier invasions, the townsmen of such places as Bozra, Palmyra, and Deyr, and to the Tai Bedouins, once lords of Jebel Shammar, it appeals with a fascination more than equal to that of the Hejaz itself. Nejd is to all of them what Palestine is to the Jews, England to the American and Australian colonists; but with this difference, that they are cut off from the object of their filial reverence more absolutely in practice than these by an intervening gulf of desert less hospitable than any sea. It is rare to meet anywhere in the North an Arab who has crossed the Great Nefûd.

To us too, imbued as we were with the fancies of the Desert, Nejd had long assumed the romantic colouring of a holy land; and when it was decided that we were to visit Jebel Shammar, the metropolis of Bedouin life, our expedition presented itself as an almost pious undertaking; so that it is hardly an exaggeration, even now that it is over, and we are once more in Europe, to speak of it as a pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage then it is, though the religion in whose name we travelled was only one of romance.

Its circumstances, in spite of certain disappointments which the narrative will reveal, were little less romantic than the idea. Readers who followed our former travels to their close, may remember a certain Mohammed Abdallah, son of the Sheykh of Palmyra, a young man who, after travelling with us by order of the Pasha from Deyr to his native town, had at some risk of official displeasure assisted us in evading the Turkish authorities, and accomplishing our visit to the Ánazeh. It may further be

remembered that, in requital of this service and because we had conceived an affection for him (for he appeared a really high-minded young fellow), Mohammed had been given his choice between a round sum of money, and the honour of becoming "the Beg's" brother, a choice which he had chivalrously decided in favour of the brotherhood. We had then promised him that, if all went well with us, we would return to Damascus the following winter, and go in his company to Nejd, where he believed he had relations, and that we would help him there to a wife from among his own people.

The idea and the promise were in strict accordance with Bedouin notions, and greatly delighted both him and his father Abdallah, to whom they were in due course communicated. Arab custom is very little changed on the point of marriage from what it was in the days of Abraham; and it was natural that both father and son should wish for a wife for him of their own blood, and that he should be ready to go far to fetch one. Moreover, the sort of help we proposed giving (for he could hardly have travelled to Nejd alone) was just such as beseemed our new relationship. Assistance in the choice of a wife ranks in Bedouin eyes with the gift of a mare, or personal aid in war, both brotherly acts conferring high honour on those concerned. Mohammed too had a special reason in the circumstances of his family history to make the proposal doubly welcome. He found himself in an embarrassing position at home with regard to marriage, and was in a manner forced to look elsewhere for a wife. The history of

the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur, the family to which he belonged, will explain this, and is so curious, and so typical of Arabia, that it deserves a passing notice here.

It would appear that seven or eight generations ago (probably about the date of the foundation of the Wahhabi empire) three brothers of the noble family of Arûk, Sheykhs of the Beni Khaled of south-eastern Nejd, quarrelled with their people and left the tribe. The Ibn Arûks were then a very well-known family, exercising suzerain rights over the important towns of Hasa and Katif, and having independent, even sovereign, power in their own district. This lay between the Persian Gulf and Harik, an oasis on the edge of the great southern desert, and they retained it until they and the rest of their fellow Sheykhs in Arabia were reduced to insignificance by Mohammed Ibn Saoud, the first Wahhabi Sultan of Nejd.¹

At the beginning of last century, all Arabia was independent of central authority, each tribe, and to a certain extent each town, maintaining its separate existence as a State. Religion, except in its primitive Bedouin form, had disappeared from the inland districts, and only the Hejaz and Yemen were more than nominally Mahometan. The Bedouin element was then supreme. Each town and village in Arabia was considered the property of one or other of the nomade Sheykhs in its neighbourhood, and paid him tribute in return for his protection. The Sheikh

¹ Such at least is the family tradition of the Ibn Arûks. Niebuhr writing in 1765 gives Arâr as the name of the Beni Khaled Sheykhs.

too not unfrequently possessed a house or castle within the city walls, as a summer residence, besides his tent outside. He in such cases became more than a mere suzerain, and exercised active authority over the townspeople, administering justice at the gate daily, and enrolling young men as his body-guard, even on occasion levying taxes. He then received the title of Emir or Prince. It was in no other way perhaps that the "Shepherd Kings" of Egypt acquired their position and exercised their power; and vestiges of the old system may still be found in many parts of Arabia.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab, the Luther of Mahometanism, preached his religious reform in Nejd, and converted Ibn Saoud, the Ánazeh Sheykh of Deriyeh, to his doctrines. By Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab's help Ibn Saoud, from the mere chief of a tribe, and sovereign of one city, became Sultan of all Arabia, and reduced one after another every rival Sheykh to submission. He even ultimately destroyed the system of tribute and protection, the original basis of his power, and having raised a regular army from among the townsmen, made these quite independent of Bedouin rule. Arabia then, for the first time since Mahomet's death, became a united empire with a centralised and regular government. It must have been about the year 1760 that the three Ibn Arûks, disgusted with the new state of things in Nejd, went out to seek their fortunes elsewhere. According to the tradition, partly embodied in an old ballad which is still current in Arabia, they were mounted

all three upon a single camel, and had nothing with them but their swords and their high birth to gain them credit among strangers. They travelled northwards and at first halted in Jôf, the northernmost oasis of Central Arabia, where one of them remained. The other two, quarrelling, separated; the younger going, tradition knew not whither, while the elder held on his way still further north, and settled finally at Tudmur (Palmyra), where he married a woman of the place, and where he ultimately became Sheykh. At that time Tudmur consisted but of a few houses. His name was Ali, and from him our friend Mohammed and his father Abdallah, and his uncle Faris, the real head of the family in Tudmur, are descended.

Mohammed then had some reason, as far as his male ancestry were concerned, to boast of his birth, and look high in making a "matrimonial alliance;" but *par les femmes* he was of less distinguished blood; and, as purity of descent on both sides is considered a *sine quâ non* among the Arabs, the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur had not been recognized for several generations as *asil*, or noble. They had married where they could among the townspeople of no birth at all, or as in the case of Mohammed's father, among the Moáli, a tribe of mixed origin. The Ánazeh, in spite of the name of Arûk, would not give their daughters to them to wife. This was Mohammed's secret grief, as it had been his father's, and it was as much as anything else to wipe out the stain in their pedigree, that the son so readily agreed to our proposal.

The plan of our journey was necessarily vague, as it included

the search after two families of relations of whom nothing had been heard for nearly a hundred years. The last sign of life shewn by the Ibn Arûks of Jôf had been on the occasion of Abdallah's father's death by violence, when suddenly a member of the Jôf family had appeared at Tudmur as avenger in the blood feud. This relation had not, however, stayed longer there than duty required of him, and having slain his man had as suddenly disappeared. Of the second family nothing at all was known; and, indeed, to the Ibn Arûks as to the other inhabitants of Tudmur, Nejd itself was now little more than a name, a country known by ancient tradition to exist, but unvisited by any one then living connected with the town.

These singular circumstances were, as I have said, the keynote of our expedition, and will, I hope, lend an interest beyond that of our own personal adventures to the present volumes. To Mohammed and the Arabs with whom we travelled, as well as to most of those we met upon our journey, his family history formed a perpetual romance, and the *kasid* or ballad of Ibn Arûk came in on every occasion, seasonable and unseasonable, as a chorus to all that happened. But for it, I doubt whether the journey could ever have been accomplished; and on more than one occasion we found ourselves borne easily on by the strength of it over difficulties which, under ordinary conditions, might have sufficed to stop us. By extreme good luck, as will be seen in the sequel, we lit upon both branches of the family we set out in search of, the one citizens of the Jôf oasis, the other Bedouins

in Nejd, while the further we got the better was the Arûk name known, and relations poured in on us on all sides, eager to shew us hospitality and assistance. We were thus passed on from kinsman to kinsman, and were everywhere received as friends; nor is it too much to say that while in Arabia we enjoyed the singular advantage of being accepted as members of an Arabian family. This gave us an unique occasion of seeing, and of understanding what we saw; and we have only ourselves to blame if we did not turn it to very important profit.

So much then for the romance. The profit of our expedition may be briefly summarised.

First as to geography. Though not the only Europeans who have visited Jebel Shammar, we are the only ones who have done so openly and at our leisure, provided with compass and barometer and free to take note of all we saw. Our predecessors, three in number, Wallin, Guarmani, and Palgrave, travelled in disguise, and under circumstances unfavourable for geographical observation. The first, a Finnish professor, proceeded in 1848, as a Mussulman divine, from the coast of the Red Sea to Haïl and thence to the Euphrates. The account of his journey, given in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, is unfortunately meagre, and I understand that, though one more detailed was published in his own language, he did not live long enough to record the whole body of his information. The second, Guarmani, a Levantine of Italian origin, penetrated in disguise to Jebel Shammar, commissioned by the French Government to

procure them horses from Nejd; and he communicated a lively and most interesting account of his adventures to the “Société de Géographie” in 1865. He too went as a Turkish mussulman, and, being rather an Oriental than a European, collected a mass of valuable information relating chiefly to the Desert Tribes through which he passed. It is difficult, however, to understand the route maps with which his account is illustrated, and, though he crossed the Nefûd at more than one point, he is silent as to its singular physical features. Guarmani started from Jerusalem in 1863 and visited Teyma, Kheybar, Áneyzeh, Bereydah, and Haïl, returning thence to Syria by Jôf and the Wady Sirhán. Mr. Palgrave’s journey is better known. A Jesuit missionary and an accomplished Arabic scholar, he was entrusted with a secret political mission by Napoleon III. and executed it with the permission of his superiors. He entered Nejd, disguised as a Syrian merchant, from Maan, and passing through Haïl in 1864 reached Riad, the capital of the Wahhabi kingdom, and eventually the Persian Gulf at Katif. His account of Central Arabia is by far the most complete and life-like that has been published, and in all matters of town life and manners may be depended upon as accurate. But his faculty of observation seems chiefly adapted to a study of society, and the nature he describes is human nature only. He is too little in sympathy with the desert to take accurate note of its details, and the circumstances of his journey precluded him from observing it geographically. He travelled in the heat of summer and mostly by night, and was

besides in no position, owing to his assumed character and the doubtful company in which he was often compelled to travel, to examine at leisure what he saw. Mr. Palgrave's account of the physical features of the Nefûd, and of Jebel Shammar, the only one hitherto published, bears very little resemblance to the reality; and our own observations, taken quietly in the clear atmosphere of an Arabian winter, are therefore the first of the kind which have reached Europe. By taking continuous note of the variations of the barometer while we travelled, we have been able to prove that the plateau of Haïl is nearly twice the height supposed for it above the sea, while the granite range of Jebel Shammar exceeds this plateau by about 2000 feet. Again, the great pilgrim-road from the Euphrates, though well-known by report to geographers, had never before been travelled by an European, and on this, as on other parts of our route, we have corrected previous maps. The map of Northern Arabia appended to the first volume of our work may be now depended upon as within its limits substantially accurate.

In geology, though possessing a superficial knowledge only of our subject, we have, I believe, been able to correct a few mistakes, and to clear up a doubt, much argued by Professor Wetzstein, as to the rock formation of Jebel Aja; while a short memoir I have appended, on the physical conformation of the great sand desert, will contain original – possibly valuable – matter. The sketches, above all, which illustrate these volumes, may be relied on as conscientious representations of the chief

physical features of Central Arabia.

Botanists and zoologists will be disappointed in the meagre accounts of plants and animals I am able to give. But the existence now proved of the white antelope (*Oryx Beatrix*) in Nejd is, I believe, a fact new to science, as may be that of the *Webber*, a small climbing quadruped allied to the marmots.

A more important contribution to knowledge will, I hope, be recognised in a description of the political system to which I have just alluded under the name of Shepherd rule, and which is now once more found in Central Arabia. I do not know that it has ever previously been noticed by writers on Arabia. Neither Niebuhr nor Burckhardt seem to have come across it in its pure form, and Mr. Palgrave misunderstood it altogether in his contempt of Bedouin as contrasted with town life. Yet it is probably the oldest form of government existing in Arabia, and the one best suited for the country's needs. In connection with this matter too, the recent history of Nejd, with an account of the downfall of the Ibn Saouds, for which I am mainly indebted to Colonel Ross, British Resident at Bushire, and the decay of Wahhabism in Arabia, will prove of interest, as may in a lesser degree the imperfect picture given in the second volume of the extreme results produced in Persia by despotic rule, and the iniquitous annexation of Hasa by the Turks. The value, however, of these "discoveries" I leave to our readers to determine, premising only that they are here pointed out less on account of their own importance, than as an excuse in matter for the manner of the narrative.

With regard to the sequel of our Arabian journey, the further journey from Bagdad to Bushire, I should not intrude it on the notice of the public, but that it serves as an additional proof, if such be wanting, of the folly of those schemes which, under the name of “Euphrates Valley” and “Indo-Mediterranean” railway companies, have from time to time been dangled before the eyes of speculators. A country more absolutely unsuited for railway enterprise than that between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, has probably never been selected for such operations; and, if the recital of our passage through the uninhabited tracts, which form nine tenths of the whole region, shall deter my countrymen from embarking their capital in an enterprise financially absurd, I feel that its publication will not have been in vain.

One word before I end my Preface. It was objected to me at the Royal Geographical Society’s meeting, where I read a paper on this “Visit to Nejd,” that though we had crossed the Great Sand Desert, and visited Jebel Shammar, we had after all not been to Nejd. Nejd, I was told on the “best authority,” was a term applicable only to that district of Central Arabia which is bounded by the Jebel Toweikh and the lesser Nefûds, neither Jebel Shammar nor Kasim being included in it. Strange as this statement sounded to ears fresh from the country itself, I was unable at the time to fortify my refusal to believe by any more special argument than that the inhabitants of the districts in question had always called them so, – an argument “quod semper et ab omnibus” which to some seemed insufficient. I have

therefore taken pains to examine the grounds of the objection raised, and to give a reason for the belief which is still strong within me that Haïl is not only an integral part of Nejd, but Nejd *par excellence*.

First then, to repeat the argument “quod ab omnibus,” I state emphatically that according to the Arabs themselves of every tribe and town I have visited, Nejd is held to include the lands which lie within the Nefûds. It is a geographical expression including three principal sub-districts, Jebel Shammar and Kasim in the North, and Aared in the South. The only doubt I have ever heard expressed was as to the Nefûds themselves, whether they were included or not in the term. The Bedouins certainly so consider them, for they are the only part of Nejd which they habitually inhabit, the stony plateaux of the centre being unfit for pastoral life. Jôf is considered outside the limit northwards, as are Kheybar and Teyma to the north-west, while Jobba and Harik are doubtful, being towns of the Nefûd.

Secondly, I plead written authority: —

1. Abulfeda and Edrisi, quoted by Colonel Ross in his memorandum, include in the term Nejd all those lands lying between Yemen, Hejaz, and Irak.
2. Yakut, an Arabian geographer of the thirteenth century, quoted by Wetzstein, expressly mentions Aja as being in Nejd.
3. Merasid confirms Yakut in his geographical lexicon.
4. Sheykh Hamid of Kasim, also quoted by Wetzstein, says, “Nejd in its widest sense is the whole of Central Arabia; — in

its narrowest and according to modern usage, only the Shammar Mountains and the Land of Kasim, with the Great Desert bordering it to the South.”

5. Niebuhr, the oldest and most respectable of European writers, enumerating the towns of Nejd, says, “Le mont Schamer n’est qu’à dix journées de Bagdad; il comprend Haïl, Monkek, Kafar, et Bokà. L’on place *aussi* dans le Nejdsjed une contrée montagneuse nommée Djof-al-Sirhán entre le mont Schâmer et Shâm (la Syrie),” etc.; thus showing that all, and more than all I claim, were in Niebuhr’s day accounted Nejd.

6. Chesney, in his map of Arabia, published in 1838, includes Kasim and Jebel Shammar within the boundary of Nejd, and gives a second boundary besides, still further north, including districts “sometimes counted to Nejd.”

7. Wallin defines Nejd as the whole district where the *ghada* grows, a definition taken doubtless from the Bedouins with whom he travelled, and which would include not only Jebel Shammar, but the Nefûds and even the Southern half of the Wady Sirhán.

8. In Kazimirski’s dictionary, 1860, I find, “*Ahlu’lghada*, surnom donné aux habitants de la frontière de Nejd où la plante *ghada* croit en abondance.”

Finally, Guarmani gives the following as the result of his inquiries in the country itself: “Le Gebel est la province la plus septentrionale du Neged. C’est, comme disent les Arabes, un des sept Negged;” and on the authority of Zamil, Sheykh of

Áneyzeh, explains these seven to be Aared, Hasa, and Harik, in the south, Woshem in the centre, and Jebel Shammar, Kasim, and Sudeyr, in the north.

Opposed to this mass of testimony, we find among travellers a single competent authority, Mr. Palgrave; and even his opinion is much qualified. After explaining that the name Nejed signifies “highland,” in contradistinction to the coast and the outlying provinces of lesser elevation, he sums up his opinion thus: “The denomination ‘Nejed’ is commonly enough applied to the whole space included between Djebel Shomer on the north, and the great desert to the south, from the extreme range of Jebel Toweik on the east to the neighbourhood of the Turkish pilgrim-road or Derb-el-Hajj on the west. However, this central district, forming a huge parallelogram, placed almost diagonally across the midmost of Arabia from north-east-by-east to south-west-by-west, as a glance at the map may show, is again subdivided by the natives of the country into the Nejed-el-aala or Upper Nejed, and the Nejed-el-owta or Lower Nejed, a distinction of which more hereafter, while Djebel Shomer is generally considered as a sort of appendage to Nejed, rather than as belonging to that district itself. But the Djowf is always excluded by the Arabs from the catalogue of upland provinces, though strangers sometimes admit it also to the title of Nejed, by an error on their part, since it is a solitary oasis, and a door to highland or inner Arabia, not in any strict sense a portion of it.”

The exact truth of the matter I take, then, to be this. Nejd, in its

original and popular sense of “Highlands,” was a term of physical geography, and necessarily embraced Jebel Shammar, the most elevated district of all, as well as Kasim, which lay between it and Aared; and so it was doubtless considered in Niebuhr’s time, and is still considered by the Bedouins of the North, whose recollections date from an age previous to Niebuhr’s. With the foundation, however, of the Wahhabi Empire of Nejd, the term from a geographical became a political one, and has since followed the fluctuating fortunes of the Wahhabi State. In this way it once embraced not only the upland plateaux, but Jôf and Hasa; the latter, though a low-lying district on the coast, retaining in Turkish official nomenclature its political name of Nejd to the present day. At the time of Mr. Palgrave’s visit, the Wahhabis, from whom doubtless his information was acquired, considered Jebel Shammar no longer an integral part of their State, but, as he expresses it, an appendage. It was already politically independent, and had ceased in their eyes to be Nejd. But since his day the Nejd State has seen a still further disruption. Kasim has regained its independence, and Hasa has been annexed to the Turkish Empire. Nejd has therefore become once more what it was before the Empire of Nejd arose, a term of physical geography only, and one pretty nearly co-extensive with our term Central Arabia.

I hold, then, to the correctness of our title, though in this matter, as in the rest, craving indulgence of the learned.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT.

Crabbet Park,
August 1, 1880.

CHAPTER I

"You have been a great traveller, Mercury?"

"I have seen the world."

"Ah, a wondrous spectacle. I long to travel."

"The same thing over again. Little novelty and much change. I am wearied with exertion, and if I could get a pension would retire."

"And yet travel brings wisdom."

"It cures us of care. Seeing much we feel little, and learn how very petty are all those great affairs which cost us such anxiety."

Ixion in Heaven.

**The charm of Asia – A return to old friends –
Desert news – The Palmyrene colony at Damascus
– New horses and camels – Mrs. Digby and her
husband Mijuel the Mizrab – A blood feud –
Abd el-Kader's life – Midhat Pasha discourses
on canals and tramways – He fails to raise a loan**

Damascus, *Dec. 6, 1878.* – It is strange how gloomy thoughts vanish as one sets foot in Asia. Only yesterday we were still tossing on the sea of European thought, with its political anxieties, its social miseries and its restless aspirations, the

heritage of the unquiet race of Japhet – and now we seem to have ridden into still water, where we can rest and forget and be thankful. The charm of the East is the absence of intellectual life there, the freedom one's mind gets from anxiety in looking forward or pain in looking back. Nobody here thinks of the past or the future, only of the present; and till the day of one's death comes, I suppose the present will always be endurable. Then it has done us good to meet old friends, friends all demonstratively pleased to see us. At the coach office when we got down, we found a little band of dependants waiting our arrival – first of all Mohammed ibn Arûk, the companion of our last year's adventures, who has come from Palmyra to meet and travel with us again, and who has been waiting here for us, it would seem, a month. Then Hanna, the most courageous of cowards and of cooks, with his ever ready tears in his eyes and his double row of excellent white teeth, agrin with welcome. Each of them has brought with him a friend, a relation he insists on calling him, who is to share the advantage of being in our service, and to stand by his patron in case of need, for servants like to travel here in pairs. Mohammed's *cousin* is a quiet, respectable looking man of about five and thirty, rather thick set and very broad shouldered. He is to act as head camel man, and he looks just the man for the place. Hanna's *brother* bears no likeness at all to Hanna. He is a young giant, with a rather feckless face, and great splay hands which seem to embarrass him terribly. He is dressed picturesquely in a tunic shaped like the ecclesiastical

vestment called the "dalmatic," and very probably its origin, with a coloured turban on his head. He too may be useful, but he is a Christian, and we rather doubt the prudence of taking Christian servants to Nejd. Only Ferhan, our Agheyl camel-driver, is missing, and this is a great disappointment, for he was the best tempered and the most trustworthy of all our followers last year. I fancy we may search Damascus with a candle before we find his like again.

The evening we spent in giving and receiving news. Mohammed in his quality of Wilfrid's "brother," was invited to dine with us, and a very pleasant hour or two we had, hearing all that has happened in the desert during the summer. First of all, the sensation that has been caused there by our purchase of Beteyen's mare, which after all we have secured, and the heart-burnings and jealousies raised thereby. Then there have been high doings among our friends in the Hamád. Faris and Jedaan have (wonderful to relate) made peace,² and between them have it all their own way now on the Euphrates, where the caravan road has become quite unsafe in consequence. Ferhan ibn Sfuk, it seems, marched against his brother with some Turkish troops to help him, and Faris retreated across the river; but most of the Shammar have, as we anticipated last year, come over to him. The Roala war is not yet finished. Ibn Shaalan, rejecting the proposals made him through us by Jedaan, persisted in reoccupying the Hama pastures last spring, and Jedaan attacked

² A truce only, I fear.

and routed him; so that he has retreated southwards to his own country. Mohammed Dukhi and Jedaan have parted company, the Sebaa having cleared off scores with the Roala, and being satisfied with the summer's campaign; while the Welled Ali are still a long way on the creditor side in their blood feud. Mohammed Dukhi is a long-headed old rogue, but it is difficult to see how he is to hold his own with Sotamm in spite of a new alliance with Faris el Meziad, Sheykh of the Mesenneh, who still has some hundred horsemen to help him with, and of another with Mohammed Aga of Jerúd. The Welled Ali are at the present moment encamped close to Jerúd, so we shall probably go there, as the first step on our road to Nejd.

Mohammed of course knows nothing about the roads to Nejd or Jôf, except that they are somewhere away to the south, and that he has relations there, and I doubt if anybody in Damascus can give us more information. The Welled Ali, however, would know where the Roala are, and the Roala could send us on, as they go further south than any of the Ánazeh. The difficulty, we fear, this winter will be the accident of no rain having fallen since last spring, so that the Hamád is quite burnt up and without water. If it were not for this, our best course would undoubtedly be outside the Hauran, which is always dangerous, and is said to be especially so this year. The desert has often been compared to the sea, and is like it in more ways than one, amongst others in this, that once well away from shore it is comparatively safe, while there is always a risk of accidents along the coast. But we

shall see. In the meantime we talk to Mohammed of the Jôf only, for fear of scaring him. Nejd, in the imagination of the northern Arabs, is an immense way off, and no one has ever been known to go there from Damascus. Mohammed professes unbounded devotion to Wilfrid, and he really seems to be sincere; but six hundred miles of desert as the crow flies will be a severe test of affection. We notice that Mohammed has grown in dignity and importance since we saw him last, and has adopted the style and title of Sheykh, at least for the benefit of the hotel servants; he has indeed good enough manners to pass very well for a true Bedouin.

There is a small colony of Palmyra people at Damascus, or rather in the suburb of the town called the Maidan, and with them Mohammed has been staying. We went there with him this morning to see some camels he has been buying for us, and which are standing, or rather sitting, in his friends' yard. The colony consists of two or three families, who live together in a very poor little house. They left Tudmur about six years ago "in a huff," they say, and have been waiting on here from day to day ever since to go back. The men of the house were away from home when we called, for they make their living like most Tudmuri as carriers; but the women received us hospitably, asked us to sit down and drink coffee, excellent coffee, such as we had not tasted for long, and sent a little girl to bring the camels out of the yard for us to look at. The child managed these camels just as well as any man could have done. Mohammed seems to have made

a good selection. There are four deluls for riding, and four big baggage camels; these last have remarkably ugly heads, but they look strong enough to carry away the gates of Gaza, or anything else we choose to put upon their backs. In choosing camels, the principal points to look at are breadth of chest, depth of barrel, shortness of leg, and for condition roundness of flank. I have seen the strength of the hocks tested by a man standing on them while the camel is kneeling. If it can rise, notwithstanding the weight, there can be no doubt as to soundness. One only of the camels did not quite please us, as there was a suspicion of recent mange; but Abdallah (Mohammed's cousin) puts it "on his head" that all is right with this camel, as with the rest. They are not an expensive purchase at any rate, as they average less than £10 a piece. One cannot help pitying them, poor beasts, when one thinks of the immense journey before them, and the little probability there is that they will all live to see the end of it. Fortunately they do not know their fate any more than we know ours. How wretched we should be for them if we knew exactly in what wady or at what steep place they would lie down and be left to die; for such is the fate of camels. But if we did, we should never have the heart to set out at all.

Next in importance to the camels are the horses we are to ride. Mohammed has got his little Jilfeh mokhra of last year which is barely three years old, but he declares she is up to his weight, thirteen stone, and I suppose he knows best. Mr. S. has sent us two mares from Aleppo by Hanna, one, a Ras el Fedawi, very

handsome and powerful, the other, a bay three year old Abeyeh Sherrak, without pretension to good looks, but which ought to be fast and able to carry a light weight. We rode to the Maidan, and the chestnut's good looks attracted general attention. Everybody turned round to look at her; she is perhaps too handsome for a journey.

December 7. – We have been spending the day with Mrs. Digby and her husband, Mijuel of the Mizrab, a very well bred and agreeable man, who has given us a great deal of valuable advice about our journey. They possess a charming house outside the town, surrounded by trees and gardens, and standing in its own garden with narrow streams of running water and paths with borders full of old fashioned English flowers – wall-flowers especially. There are birds and beasts too; pigeons and turtle doves flutter about among the trees, and a pelican sits by the fountain in the middle of the courtyard guarded by a fierce watch-dog. A handsome mare stands in the stable, but only one, for more are not required in town.

The main body of the house is quite simple in its bare Arab furnishing, but a separate building in the garden is fitted up like an English drawing-room with chairs, sofas, books, and pictures. Among many interesting and beautiful sketches kept in a portfolio, I saw some really fine water-colour views of Palmyra done by Mrs. Digby many years ago when that town was less known than it is at present.

The Sheykh, as he is commonly called, though incorrectly, for

his elder brother Mohammed is reigning Sheykh of the Mizrab, came in while we were talking, and our conversation then turned naturally upon desert matters, which evidently occupy most of his thoughts, and are of course to us of all-important interest at this moment. He gave us among other pieces of information an account of his own tribe, the Mizrab, to which in our published enumeration of tribes we scarcely did justice.

But before repeating some of the particulars we learned from him, I cannot forbear saying a few words about Mijuel himself, which will justify the value we attach to information received from him as from a person entitled by birth and position to speak with authority. In appearance he shews all the characteristics of good Bedouin blood. He is short and slight in stature, with exceedingly small hands and feet, a dark olive complexion, beard originally black, but now turning grey, and dark eyes and eyebrows. It is a mistake to suppose that true Arabs are ever fair or red-haired. Men may occasionally be seen in the desert of comparatively fair complexion, but these *always* (as far as my experience goes) have features of a correspondingly foreign type, showing a mixture of race. No Bedouin of true blood was ever seen with hair or eyes not black, nor perhaps with a nose not aquiline.

Mijuel's father, a rare exception among the Ánazeh, could both read and write, and gave his sons, when they were boys, a learned man to teach them their letters. But out of nine brothers, Mijuel alone took any pains to learn. The strange accident of his

marriage with an English lady has withdrawn him for months at a time, but not estranged him, from the desert; and he has adopted little of the townsman in his dress, and nothing of the European. He goes, it is true, to the neighbouring mosque, and recites the Mussulman prayers daily; but with this exception, he is undistinguishable from the Ibn Shaalans and Ibn Mershids of the Hamád. It is also easy to see that his heart remains in the desert, his love for which is fully shared by the lady he has married; so that when he succeeds to the Sheykhat, as he probably will, for his brother appears to be considerably his senior, I think they will hardly care to spend much of their time at Damascus. They will, however, no doubt, be influenced by the course of tribal politics, with which I understand Mijuel is so much disgusted, that he might resign in favour of his son Afet; in that case, they might continue, as now, living partly at Damascus, partly at Homs, partly in tents, and always a providence to their tribe, whom they supply with all the necessities of Bedouin life, and guns, revolvers, and ammunition besides. The Mizrab, therefore, although numbering barely a hundred tents, are always well mounted and better armed than any of their fellows, and can hold their own in all the warlike adventures of the Sebaa.

According to Mijuel, the Mizrab, instead of being, as we had been told, a mere section of the Resallin, are in fact the original stock, from which not only the Resallin but the Moáhib and the Gomussa themselves have branched off. In regard to the last-mentioned tribe he related the following curious story: —

An Arab of the Mizrab married a young girl of the Suellmat tribe and soon afterwards died. In a few weeks his widow married again, taking her new husband from among her own kinsmen. Before the birth of her first child a dispute arose as to its parentage, she affirming her Mizrab husband to be the father while the Suellmat claimed the child. The matter, as all such matters are in the desert, was referred to arbitration, and the mother's assertion was put to the test by a live coal being placed upon her tongue. In spite of this ordeal she persisted in her statement, and got a judgment in her favour. Her son, however, is supposed to have been dissatisfied with the decision, for as soon as born he turned angrily on his mother, from which circumstance he received the name of Gomussa or the "scratcher." From him the Gomussa tribe are descended. They first came into notice about seventy years ago when they attacked and plundered the Bagdad caravan which happened to be conveying a large sum of money. With these sudden riches they acquired such importance that they have since become the leading section of the tribe, and they are now undoubtedly the possessors of the best mares among the Ánazeh. The Mizrab Sheykhs nevertheless still assert superiority in point of birth, and a vestige of their old claims still exists in their titular right to the tribute of Palmyra.

Mijuel's son, Afet, or Japhet, whom we met at Beteyen's camp last spring, has taken, it would appear, an active part in the late fighting. During the battle where Sotamm was defeated by the

Sebaa and their allies, the head of the Ibn Jendal³ family, pursued by some Welled Ali horsemen, yielded himself up a prisoner to Afet whose father-in-law he was, and who sought to give him protection by covering him with his cloak. But the Ibn Smeyr were at blood feud with the Ibn Jendals, and in such cases no asylum is sacred. One of Mohammed Dukhi's sons dragged Ibn Jendal out of his hiding-place and slew him before Afet's eyes. On that day the Sebaa took most of the mares and camels they had lost in the previous fighting, and our friend Ferhan Ibn Hedeb is now in tolerable comfort again with tents and tent furniture, and coffee-pots to his heart's content. I hope he will bear his good fortune as well as he bore the bad.

Mijuel can of course give us better advice than anybody else in Damascus, and he says that we cannot do better in the interests of our journey than go first to Jerúd and consult Mohammed Dukhi. The Welled Ali after the Roala are the tribe which knows the western side of the desert best, and we should be sure of getting correct information from them, if nothing more. The Sebaa never go anywhere near the Wady Sirhán, as they keep almost entirely to the eastern half of the Hamád; and even their ghazús hardly ever meddle with that inhospitable region. Mijuel has once been as far south as to the edge of the Nefûd, which he describes as being covered with grass in the spring. The Wady Sirhán, he believes, has wells, but no pasturage.

Another interesting visit which we paid while at Damascus

³ One of the noblest of the Roala families.

was to Abd el-Kader, the hero of the French war in Algiers. This charming old man, whose character would do honour to any nation and any creed, is ending his days as he began them, in learned retirement and the exercises of his religion. The Arabs of the west, "Maghrabi" (Mogrebins), are distinguished from those of the Peninsula, and indeed from all others, by a natural taste for piety and a religious tone of thought. Arabia proper, except in the first age of Islam and latterly during the hundred years of Wahhabi rule, has never been a religious country. Perhaps out of antagonism to Persia, its nearest neighbour, it neglects ceremonial observance, and pays little respect to saints, miracles, and the supernatural world in general. But with the Moors and the Algerian Arabs this is different. Their religion is the reason of their social life and a prime mover in their politics. It is the fashion there, even at the present day, for a rich man to spend his money on a mosque, as elsewhere he would spend it on his stud and the entertainment of guests, and nothing gives such social distinction as regular attendance at prayer. There is too, besides the lay nobility, a class of spiritual nobles held equally high in public estimation. These are the marabouts or descendants of certain saints, who by virtue of their birth partake in the sanctity of their ancestors and have hereditary gifts of divination and miraculous cure. They hold indeed much the same position with the vulgar as did the sons of the prophets in the days of Saul.

Abd el-Kader was the representative of such a family, and not, as I think most people suppose, a Bedouin Sheykh. In point of

fact he was a townsman and a priest, not by birth a soldier, and though trained, as nobles of either class were, to arms, it was only the accident of a religious war that made him a man of action. He gained his first victories by his sermons, not by his sword; and, now that the fight is over, he has returned naturally to his first profession, that of saint and man of letters. As such, quite as much as for his military renown, he is revered in Damascus.

To us, however, it is the extreme simplicity of his character and the breadth of his good sense, amounting to real wisdom, which form his principal charm. "Saint" though he be "by profession," as one may say, for such he is in his own eyes as well as those of his followers, he is uninjured by his high position. It is to him an obligation. His charity is unbounded, and he extends it to all alike; to be poor or suffering is a sufficient claim on him. During the Damascus massacres he opened his doors to every fugitive; his house was crowded with Christians, and he was ready to defend his guests by force if need were. To us he was most amiable, and talked long on the subject of Arab genealogy and tradition. He gave me a book which has been lately written by one of his sons on the pedigree of the Arabian horse, and took an evident interest in our own researches in that direction. He made the pilgrimage to Mecca many years ago, travelling the whole way from Algeria by land and returning through Nejd to Meshhed Ali and Bagdad. This was before the French war.

Abd el-Kader returned our visit most politely next day, and it was strange to see this old warrior humbly mounted on his little

Syrian donkey, led by a single servant, riding into the garden where we were. He dresses like a mollah in a cloth gown, and with a white turban set far back from his forehead after the Algerian fashion. He never, I believe, wore the Bedouin kefiyeh. His face is now very pale as becomes a student, and his smile is that of an old man, but his eye is still bright and piercing like a falcon's. It is easy to see, however, that it will never flash again with anything like anger. Abd el-Kader has long possessed that highest philosophy of noble minds according to Arab doctrine, patience.

A man of a very different sort, but one whom we were also interested to see, was Midhat Pasha, just arrived at Damascus as Governor-General of Syria. He had come with a considerable flourish of trumpets, for he was supposed to represent the doctrine of administrative reform, which was at that time seriously believed in by Europeans for the Turkish Empire. Midhat was the protégé of our own Foreign Office, and great things were expected of him. For ourselves, though quite sceptical on these matters and knowing the history of Midhat's doings at Bagdad too well to have any faith in him as a serious reformer, we called to pay our respects, partly as a matter of duty, and partly it must be owned out of curiosity. It seemed impossible that a man who had devised anything so fanciful as parliamentary government for Turkey should be otherwise than strange and original. But in this we were grievously disappointed, for a more essentially commonplace, even silly talker, or one

more naïvely pleased with himself, we had never met out of Europe. It is possible that he may have adopted this tone with us as the sort of thing which would suit English people, but I don't think so. We kept our own counsel of course about our plans, mentioning only that we hoped to see Bagdad and Bussora and to go on thence to India, for such was to be ultimately our route. On the mention of these two towns he at once began a panegyric of his own administration there, of the steamers he had established on the rivers, the walls he had pulled down and tramways built. "Ah, that tramway," he exclaimed affectionately. "It was I that devised it, and it is running still. Tramways are the first steps in civilisation. I shall make a tramway round Damascus. Everybody will ride in the trucks. It will pay five per cent. You will go to Bussora. You will see my steamers there. Bussora, through me, has become an important place. Steamers and tramways are what we want for these poor countries. The rivers of Damascus are too small for steamers, or I should soon have some afloat. But I will make a tramway. If we could have steamers and tramways everywhere Turkey would become rich." "And canals," we suggested, maliciously remembering how he had flooded Bagdad with his experiments in this way. "Yes, and canals too. Canals, steamers, and tramways, are what we want." "And railways." "Yes, railways. I hope to have a railway soon running alongside of the carriage road from Beyrout. Railways are important for the guaranteeing of order in the country. If there was a railway across the desert we should have no more

trouble with the Bedouins. Ah, those poor Bedouins, how I trounced them at Bagdad. I warrant my name is not forgotten there." We assured him it was not.

He then went on to talk of the Circassians, "*ces pauvres Circassiens*," for he was speaking in French, "*il faut que je fasse quelque chose pour eux*." I wish I could give some idea of the tone of tenderness and almost tearful pity in Midhat's voice as he pronounced this sentence; the Circassians seemed to be dearer to him than even his steamers and tramways. These unfortunate refugees are, in truth, a problem not easy of solution: they have been a terrible trouble to Turkey, and, since they were originally deported from Russia after the Crimean war, they have been passed on from province to province until they can be passed no further. They are a scourge to the inhabitants wherever they go, because they are hungry and armed, and insist on robbing to get a livelihood. To the Syrian Arabs they are especially obnoxious, because they shed blood as well as rob, which is altogether contrary to Arab ideas. The Circassians are like the foxes which sportsmen turn out in their covers. It is a public-spirited act to have done so, but they cannot be made to live in peace with the hares and rabbits. Midhat, however, had a notable scheme for setting things to rights. He would draft all these men into the corps of zaptiehs, and then, if they did rob, it would be in the interests of Government. Some score of them were waiting in the courtyard at the time of our visit, to be experimented on; and a more evil-visaged set it would have been difficult to select.

On the whole, we went away much impressed with Midhat, though not as we had hoped. He had astonished us, but not as a wise man. To speak seriously, one such reforming pasha as this does more to ruin Turkey than twenty of the old dishonest sort. Midhat, though he fails to line his own purse, may be counted on to empty the public one at Damascus, as he did at Bagdad, where he spent a million sterling on unproductive works within a single year. As we wished him good-bye, we were amused to notice that he retained Mr. Siouffi, the manager of the Ottoman Bank, who had come with us, with him for a private conference, the upshot of which was his first public act as Governor of Syria, the raising of a loan.⁴

⁴ Midhat's reign at Damascus lasted for twenty months, and is remarkable only for the intrigues in which it was spent. It began with an *action d'éclat*, the subjugation of the independent Druses of the Hauran, a prosperous and unoffending community whom Midhat with the help of the Welled Ali reduced to ruin. The rest of his time and resources were spent in an attempt to gain for himself the rank and title of khedive, a scheme which ended in his recall. Of improvements, material or administrative, nothing at all has been heard, but it is worth recording that a series of fires during his term of office burnt down great part of the bazaars at Damascus, causing much loss of property, and that their place has been taken by a boulevard. Midhat has been now removed to Smyrna, where it is amusing to read the following account of him: — Midhat Pasha – September 28: – ‘A private correspondent of the *Journal de Genève*, writing ten days ago from Smyrna, says that Midhat Pasha, being convinced that he possessed the sympathy of the inhabitants and could count on their active co-operation, conceived a short time since vast schemes of improvement and reform for the benefit of the province which he has been called upon to administer. The first works he proposed to take in hand were the drainage of the great marshes of Halka-Bournar (the Baths of Diana of the ancients), the cleansing of the sewers of Smyrna, and the removal of the filth which cumbers the streets, pollutes the air, and, as an eminent physician has told

him, impairs the health of the city and threatens at no distant date to breed a pestilence. He next proposed, at the instance of a clever engineer Effendi, to repress the ravages of the river Hermus, which in winter overflows its banks and does immense damage in the plain of Menemen. Orders were given for the execution of engineering works on a great scale which, it was thought, would correct this evil and restore to agriculture a vast extent of fertile, albeit at present unproductive, land. Administrative reform was to be also seriously undertaken. The police were to be re-organized, and order and honesty enforced in the courts of justice. The scandal of gendarmes being constrained, owing to the insufficiency of their pay, to enter into an alliance, offensive and defensive, with all the thieves and cut-throats of the city – the disgrace of judges receiving bribes from rogues and other evil-doers – were to be promptly put down. It was ordered that every *caïmacan*, *mudir*, chief of police, and president of tribunal, guilty either of malfeasance or robbery, should be arrested and imprisoned. The municipalities were to cease being the mere mouthpieces of the *valis*, and consider solely the interests of their constituencies. The accounts of functionaries who, with nominal salaries of 800 francs a year, spend 10,000, were to be strictly investigated and their malversations severely punished; and many other measures, equally praiseworthy and desirable, were either projected or begun. But energy and goodwill in a reformer – whether he be a Midhat or a Hamid – are, unfortunately, not alone sufficient to accomplish reforms. To drain marshes, embank rivers, cleanse sewers, remove filth, pay magistrates and policemen, procure honest collectors of revenue, much money is necessary. How was it to be obtained? Not from the revenues of the port or the province; these are sent regularly, to the last centime, to Constantinople, for the needs of the Government are urgent and admit of no delay. Midhat Pasha, not knowing which way to turn, called a *medjeless* (council), but the members were able neither to suggest a solution of the difficulty nor to find any money. In this emergency it occurred to the Governor that there existed at Smyrna a branch of the Ottoman Bank, at the door of which are always stationed two superb *nizams* in gorgeous uniforms, who give it the appearance of a Government establishment. Why should not the bank provide the needful? The idea commended itself to the Pasha, and the manager was requested to call forthwith at the Konak on urgent public business. When he arrived there Midhat unfolded to him his plans of reform, and proved, with the eloquence of a new convert, that the public works he had in view could not fail to be an unspeakable benefit to the province and restore its waning prosperity. Never, he assured the wondering manager, could the bank have a finer opportunity of making a splendid investment than this of lending the Government

a few million francs, to be strictly devoted to the purposes he had explained. The projected schemes, moreover, were to be so immediately profitable that the bank might reckon with the most implicit confidence on receiving back, in the course of a few years, both interest and principal. Unfortunately, however, all these arguments were lost on M. Heintze, the manager; and he had to explain to the Pasha that, although he, personally, would have been delighted to advance him the millions he required, his instructions allowed him no discretion. He was there to do ordinary banking business, and collect certain revenues which had been assigned to the bank by way of security; but he had been strictly enjoined to make no loans whatever, however promising and profitable they might appear. And this was the end of Midhat Pasha's great schemes of public improvement and administrative reform. In these circumstances it would be the height of injustice to accuse him of not having kept the promises which he made on entering office; for nobody, not even a Turkish Governor-General, can be expected to achieve impossibilities.

CHAPTER II

*"This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
I better brook than flourishing peopled towns."*

Shakespeare.

**Brotherly offices – We prepare for a campaign
– Mohammed Dukhi comes to court – A night
robber – We start for Nejd – Tale of a penitent
– The duty of revenge – We are entertained
by poor relations – The fair at Mezarib**

We spent a week at Damascus, a week not altogether of pleasure, although it was to be our last of civilised life. We had an immense number of things to buy and arrange and think over, before starting on so serious a journey as this, which we knew must be very unlike the pleasure trip of last year. We could not afford to leave anything to chance with the prospect of a three months' wandering, and a thousand miles of desert, where it was impossible to count upon fresh supplies even of the commonest necessities of life. Jôf, the first station on our road, was four hundred miles off, and then we must cross the Nefûd, with its two

hundred miles of sand, before we could get to Nejd. The return journey, too, to the Persian Gulf, would have to be made without coming to anything so European as a Turkish town. Nobody could tell us what supplies were to be had in Nejd, beyond dates and corn. Mr. Palgrave's account of Jebel Shammar was, in fact, the only guide we had to go on, and its accuracy had been so much doubted that we felt obliged to take into consideration the possibility of finding the Nejd towns mere oases, and their cultivation only that of the date.

Mohammed, less "insouciant" than most of his countrymen are on such matters, now made himself most useful, spending many hours in the bazaars with Wilfrid, as I did with the cook and the camel-man; and being a town Arab and a trader born, he saved us an infinity of trouble and time, and no few mejidies.

They began by choosing a complete suit of Bedouin clothes for Wilfrid, not exactly as a disguise, for we did not wish, even if we could have done so, not to pass for Europeans, but in order to avoid attracting more notice than was necessary on our way. The costume consisted of a striped silk jibbeh or dressing-gown worn over a long shirt, a blue and white abba of the kind made at Karieteyn, and for the head a black kefiyeh embroidered with gold which was fastened on with the Bedouin aghal, a black lamb's-wool rope. Mohammed had brought with him a sword which had belonged to his grandfather, a fine old Persian blade curved like a sickle. He gave it to Wilfrid and received in return a handsome weapon somewhat similar but silver-mounted, which

they found in the bazaar. Thus rigged out, for Mohammed too had been reclothed from head to foot (and he much required it), they used to sally out in the town as two Bedouin gentlemen. Wilfrid by holding his peace was able to pass with the unwary as an unconcerned friend, while Mohammed did the bargaining for cloaks, kefiyehs, and other articles suitable as presents to the Sheykhs whose acquaintance we might make. Mohammed was an expert in driving a hard bargain and knew the exact fashion in vogue in each Bedouin tribe, so that although his taste did not always quite agree with ours, we let him have his way. The only mistake he made, as it turned out, was in underestimating the value of gifts necessary in Haïl. Not one of us had the least idea of the luxury existing in Nejd, and Mohammed, like most of the northern Arabs, had heard of Ibn Rashid only as a Bedouin Sheykh, and fancied that a red cloth jibbeh would be the *ne plus ultra* of magnificence for him, as indeed it would have been for an Ibn Shaalan or an Ibn Mershid. We had, however, some more serious presents than these to produce, if necessary, in the rifles and revolvers we carried with us, so that we felt there was no real danger of arriving empty-handed.

The purchases which it fell to my share to make, with the assistance of Abdallah and the cook, were entirely of a useful sort, and do not require a detailed description here. As to dress, it was unnecessary for me to make any change, save that of substituting a kefiyeh for a hat and wearing a Bedouin cloak over my ordinary travelling ulster. Hanna and Abdallah were both of

them masters in the art of haggling, and vied with each other in beating down the prices of provisions. Dates, flour, burghul (a kind of crushed wheat, which in Syria takes the place of rice), carrots, onions, coffee, and some dried fruit were to be the mainstay of our cooking, and of these we bought a supply sufficient to last us as far as Jôf. We had brought from England some beef tea, vegetable soup squares, and a small quantity of tea in case of need. We had agreed to do without bulky preserved provisions, which add greatly to the weight of baggage, and that as to meat, we would take our chance of an occasional hare or gazelle, or perhaps now and then a sheep.

All began well. Our servants seemed likely to turn out treasures, and we had no difficulty in getting a couple of Agheyls to start with us as camel drivers. We thought it prudent to keep our own counsel as to the direction we intended to take, and it was generally supposed that Bagdad was to be our first object. Only Mohammed and Hanna were informed of the real design, and them we could trust. Not but what Hanna had occasional fits of despondency about the risk he ran. He did not pretend to be a hero, he had a wife and children to whom he was sincerely attached, and he felt, not quite wrongly, that Central Arabia was hardly the place for one of his nation and creed. He came to us, indeed, one morning, to announce his intention of returning home to Aleppo, and he required a good deal of humouring before he recovered his spirits; but I do not think that he ever seriously intended to desert us. He had come all the way from

Aleppo to join us, and, besides, the companionship of the young giant he called his "brother," who was to share his tent, reassured him. Once started, we knew that he would bear patiently all that fortune might inflict.

By the 11th the necessary preparations had been made, and we were ready to start. As a preliminary, we moved into a garden outside the town with our camels and our mares, so as to be at liberty to go off any morning without attracting notice and in the direction we might choose. It was generally believed in Damascus that we intended going to Bagdad, and we had made up our minds to start in that direction, partly to avoid questions, and partly because at Jerúd, the first village on the road to Palmyra, we should find Mohammed Dukhi with the Welled Ali. He seemed the most likely person to put us on our way, and in expeditions of this sort the first few marches are generally the most difficult, if not the most dangerous. The edges of the desert are always unsafe, whereas, once clear of the shore, so to speak, there is comparatively little risk of meeting anybody, friend or foe. We thought then that we should be able to get a man from Mohammed Dukhi to take us in a straight line from Jerúd to some point in the Wady Sirhán, keeping well outside the Hauran, a district of the worst reputation, and following perhaps a line of pools or wells which the Bedouins might know. But just as we had settled this, Mohammed Dukhi himself appeared unexpectedly at Damascus, and our plan was changed.

Mohammed Dukhi ibn Smeyr is the greatest personage in

the north-western desert next to Ibn Shaalan, and as I have said before was at that time hotly engaged in a war with the Roala chief. His object in visiting Damascus was as follows: in the course of the autumn a detachment of fifteen Turkish soldiers attacked his camp without provocation and, firing into it, killed a woman and a child. This camp numbered only a few tents, the tribe being at the time scattered on account of pasturage, and the Sheykh himself was absent with most of the men. Those, however, who had remained at home managed to cut off and surround the soldiers, one of whom was killed in the fray. The Welled Ali would have killed the rest but for Mohammed Dukhi's wife, Herba,⁵ who rushed in among the combatants, and remonstrated with her people on the folly of involving themselves in a quarrel with the Government. Her pluck saved the soldiers' lives. She took them under her protection, and the next morning sent them under escort to a place of safety.

Now Mohammed Dukhi, having the Roala war on his hands and being obliged to shelter himself from Ibn Shaalan under the walls of Jerúd, was naturally anxious to clear up this matter of the soldier's death; and, directly he heard of Midhat's arrival at Damascus, he shrewdly determined to make his count with the new Pasha by an early call at the Serai. Ibn Shaalan was out of the way, and the first comer would doubtless be the one most readily listened to. Ibn Smeyr had besides a little intrigue on foot respecting the escort of the Damascus pilgrims, which

⁵ Daughter of Faria-el-Meziad, Sheykh of the Mesenneh.

he in part provided or hoped to provide. Abd el-Kader was his friend, and it was at the Emir's house that he alighted and that we found him. Mohammed Dukhi, noble though he is in point of blood, is not a fine specimen of a great Bedouin Sheykh. His politeness is overstrained and unnatural, reminding one rather of city than of desert manners; there are also ugly stories of his want of faith, which one finds no difficulty in believing when one sees him. He affected, however, great pleasure at seeing us again, and professed an entire devotion to our welfare and our plans. He would himself accompany us on the first stages of our road, or at least send his sons or some of his men; offers which dwindled, till at last they resulted in his merely writing some letters of recommendation for us, and giving us a large amount of good advice. As regards the latter, he informed us that a journey such as we proposed outside the Hauran would not at the present moment be practicable. No rain had fallen during the autumn, and the Hamád was without water; indeed, except in the Wady Sirhán, where the wells were never dry, there was no watering place southwards at any distance from the hills. He advised us, therefore, to leave Damascus by the pilgrim road, which keeps inside the Hauran, and follow it till we came across the Beni Sokkhr, whom we should find encamped not far to the east of it. There was besides a capital opportunity for us of doing this in company with the *Jerdeh*, now on the point of starting for Mezárib, a station on the Haj road. The *Jerdeh*, he explained, for the name was new to us, are a kind of relief party sent every

year from Damascus, to meet the pilgrims on their homeward route, carrying with them supplies of all the necessities of life, provisions, and extra camels to replace those broken down. The party is escorted by Mohammed Dukhi, or rather by his men, and the idea of joining them seemed exactly suited to our purpose, though when we came to put it in practice, it turned out to be of as little value as the rest of the smooth-spoken Sheykh's offers. It was something, however, to have a plan, good or bad, and letters from so great a man as Ibn Smeyr were of value, even though addressed to the wrong people.

Accordingly, on the 12th we bade good-bye to our Damascus friends, wrote our last letters to our friends in England, and said a long farewell to the pleasures and pains of European life. On the 13th we started.

December 13. – We have started at last, and on a Friday, the 13th of the month. I have no personal objection to any particular day of the week, or of the month. But, as a matter of fact, the only seriously unfortunate journey we ever made was begun on a Friday, and Wilfrid professes himself to be superstitious and full of dark foreboding. He, however, insisted on starting this Friday, and with some inconsistency argues that forebodings are lucky, or that at any rate the absence of them is unlucky, and that it would not be safe to begin a journey in a cheerful frame of mind.

We were roused in the middle of the night by a cry of thieves in the garden, and running out of our tent found a scuffle going on, which, when lights were brought, proved to have been caused

by two men, one the keeper of the garden and the other a soldier, whom he was taking prisoner. Our servants were standing round them, and Hanna, seeing the man to be securely bound, was belabouring him with a stick, ejaculating at intervals, "O robber, O dog, O pig! O pig, O dog, O robber!" The story told us was that the gardener had found this man prowling about, and had, after a terrible engagement, succeeded in his capture. There were, however, no blood or wounds to show; and, the evidence of the prisoner's wicked designs not being very overwhelming, Wilfrid gave orders that he should be let go as soon as it should be daylight. In the first place, any handing over of the man to justice would have delayed our start, and secondly, it was more than probable that the whole thing had been got up by the gardener with the accused person for the sake of the present the two would receive. Such little comedies are quite common in the East; and when we declined to take it seriously, the two men very good-humouredly let the matter drop.

At the first streak of dawn we struck our tents, loaded our camels, and a little after sunrise were on our mares and well away from the town in marching order for Nejd! At first we skirted the city, passing the gate where St. Paul is said to have entered, and the place where he got over the wall, and then along the suburb of Maidan, which is the quarter occupied by Bedouins when they come to town, and where we had found the Tudmuri and our camels. Here we were to have met the Jerdeh, and we waited some time outside the Bawábat Allah, or "Gates of God,"

while Mohammed went in to make inquiries, and take leave of his Tudmuri friends. It is in front of this gate that the pilgrims assemble on the day of their start for Mecca, and from it the Haj road leads away in a nearly straight line southwards. The Haj road is to be our route as far as Mezárib, and is a broad, well worn track, though of course not a road at all according to English ideas. It has, nevertheless, a sort of romantic interest, one cannot help feeling, going as it does so far and through such desolate lands, a track so many thousand travellers have followed never to return. I suppose in its long history a grave may have been dug for every yard of its course from Damascus to Medina, for, especially on the return journey, there are constantly deaths among the pilgrims from weariness and insufficient food.

Our caravan, waiting at the gate, presented a very picturesque appearance. Each of the delúls carries a gay pair of saddle-bags in carpet-work, with long worsted tassels hanging down on each side half way to the ground; and they have ornamented *reshmehs* or headstalls to match. The camels, too, though less decorated, have a gay look; and Wilfrid on the chestnut mare ridden in a halter wants nothing but a long lance to make him a complete Bedouin. The rest of our party consists, besides Mohammed and Hanna, who have each of them a delúl to ride, of Mohammed's "cousin" Abdallah, whom we call Sheykh of the camels, with his two Agheyl assistants, Awwad, a negro, and a nice-looking boy named Abd er-Rahman. These, with Mohammed, occupy one of the servants' tents, while Hanna and his "brother" Ibrahim have

another, for even in the desert distinctions of religious caste will have to be preserved. It is a great advantage in travelling that the servants should be as much as possible strangers to each other, and of different race or creed, as this prevents any combination among them for mutiny or disobedience. The Agheyls will be one clique, the Tudmuri another, and the Christians a third, so that though they may quarrel with one another, they are never likely to unite against us. Not that there is any prospect of difficulty from such a cause; but three months is a long period for a journey, and everything must be thought of beforehand.

Mohammed was not long in the Maidan, and came back with the news that the Jerdeh has not been seen there, but might be at a khan some miles on the road called Khan Denún. It was useless to wait for them there, and so, wishing our friend, Mr. Siouffi, good-bye (for he had accompanied us thus far) we rode on. Nothing remarkable has marked our first day's journey; a gazelle crossing the track, and a rather curious squabble between a kite, a buzzard, and a raven, in which the raven got all the profit, being the only events. From the crest of a low ridge we looked back and saw our last of Damascus, with its minarets and houses imbedded in green. We shall see no more buildings, I suppose, for many a day. Mount Hermon to the left of it rose, an imposing mass, hazy in the hot sun, for, December though it is, the summer is far from over. Indeed, we have suffered from the heat today more than we did during the whole of our last journey.

At Denún no sign or knowledge of the Jerdeh, so we have

decided to do without them. On a road like this we cannot want an escort. There are plenty of people passing all day long, most of them, like ourselves, going to Mezáríb for the annual fair which takes place there on the occasion of the Jerdeh visit. Among them, too, are zaptiehs and even soldiers; and there are to be several villages on the way. We filled our goat-skins at Denún and camped for this our first night on some rising ground looking towards Hermon. It is a still, delightful evening, but there is no moon. The sun is setting at five o'clock.

December 14. – Still on the Haj road and through cultivated land, very rich for wheat or barley, Mohammed says, though it has a fine covering of stones. These are black and volcanic, very shiny and smooth, just as they were shot up from the Hauran when the Hauran was a volcano. The soil looks as if it ought to grow splendid grapes, and some say the bunches the spies brought to Joshua came from near here. The villages, of which we have passed through several, are black and shiny too, dreary looking places even in the sunshine, without trees or anything pleasant to look at round them. The fields at this time of year are of course bare of crops, and it is so long since there was any rain that even the weeds are gone. This is part of what is called the Leja, a district entirely of black boulders, and interesting to archæologists as being the land of Og, king of Basan, whose cities some have supposed to exist in ruins to the present day.

In the middle of the day we passed a small ruin, about which Mohammed, who has been this road before, as his father was at

one time camel-contractor for the Haj, told us a curious story. Once upon a time there were two children, left orphans at a very early age. The elder, a boy, went out into the world to seek his fortune, while the other, a girl, was brought up by a charitable family in Damascus. In course of time the brother and sister came together by accident, and, without knowing their relationship, married, for according to eastern usage the marriage had been arranged for them by others. Then, on comparing notes, they discovered the mistake which had been made; and the young man, anxious to atone for the guilt they had inadvertently incurred, consulted a wise man as to what he should do in penance. He was told to make the pilgrimage to Mecca seven times, and then to live seven years more in some desert place on the Haj road offering water to the pilgrims. This he did, and chose the place we passed for the latter part of his penance. When the seven years were over, however, he returned to Damascus, and the little house he had built and the fig-trees he had planted remain as a record of his story. Mohammed could not tell me what became of the girl, and seemed to think it did not matter.

He has been talking a great deal to us on the duties of brotherhood, which seemed a little like a suggestion. The rich brother, it would seem, should make the poor one presents, not only of fine clothes, but of a fine mare, a fine delúl, or a score of sheep, – while the poor brother should be very careful to protect the life of his sworn ally, or, if need be, to avenge his death. Wilfrid asked him how he should set about this last, if the

case occurred. "First of all," said Mohammed, "I should inquire who the shedder of blood was. I should hear, for instance, that you had been travelling in the Hauran and had been killed, but I should not know by whom. I should then leave Tudmur, and, taking a couple of camels so as to seem to be on business, should go to the place where you had died, under a feigned name, and should pretend to wish to buy corn of the nearest villagers. I should make acquaintance with the old women, who are always the greatest talkers, and should sooner or later hear all about it. Then, when I had found out the real person, I should watch carefully all his goings out and comings in, and should choose a good opportunity of taking him unawares, and run my sword through him. Then I should go back to Tudmur as fast as my delú could carry me." Wilfrid objected that in England we thought it more honourable to give an enemy the chance of defending himself; but Mohammed would not hear of this. "It would not be right. My duty," he said, "would be to avenge your blood, not to fight with the man; and if I got the opportunity, I should come upon him asleep or unarmed. If he was some poor wretch, of no consequence, I should take one of his relations instead, if possible the head of his family. I cannot approve of your way of doing these things. Ours is the best." Mohammed might have reasoned (only Arabs never reason), that there were others besides himself concerned in the deed being secretly and certainly done. An avenger of blood carries not only his own life but the lives of his family in his hand; and if he bungles over his vengeance,

and himself gets killed, he entails on them a further debt of blood. To Mohammed, however, on such a point, reasoning was unnecessary. What he had described was the custom, and that was enough.

We are now a little to the south of the village of Gunayeh where we have sent Abdallah with a delúl to buy straw. There is no camel pasture here nor anything the horses can eat. To the east we can see the blue line of the Hauran range, and to the west the Syrian hills from Hermon to Ajalon. I told Mohammed the story of the sun standing still over Gibeon and the moon over Ajalon, which he took quite as a matter of course, merely mentioning that he had never heard it before.

I forgot to say that we crossed the old Roman road several times to-day. It is in fair preservation, but the modern caravan track avoids it. Perhaps in old days wheeled carriages were common and required a stone road. Now there is no such necessity. At Ghabaghat, a village we passed about eleven o'clock, we found a tank supplied with water from a spring, and while we were waiting there watering the camels a fox ran by pursued by two greyhounds, who soon came up with and killed him. One of the dogs, a blue or silver grey, was very handsome and we tried to buy him of his owner, a soldier, but he would not take the money. After that we had a bit of a gallop in which we were pleased with our new mares. But we are both tired with even this short gallop, being as yet not in training, and we feel the heat of the sun.

Sunday, December 15. – We have left the Leja country and are now in bare open fields, a fine district for farmers, but as uninteresting as the plains of Germany or northern France. These fields are better watered than the Leja, and we crossed several streams to-day by old stone bridges belonging to the Roman road. The streams run, I believe, eventually into the Jordan, and in one place form a marsh to the right of the road which Mohammed declared to be infested by robbers, men who lurk about in the tall reeds and when they have made a capture run off with their booty into it and cannot be followed. We saw nothing suspicious, however, nor anything of interest but a huge flock of sand grouse, of which we got four as they passed overhead. There were also immense clouds of starlings, and we started a hare. We passed many villages, the principal one being Shemskin, where there are the ruins of an old town. Our road then bore away to the right, leaving the Roman road for good. This goes on straight to Bozra, the chief town of the Hauran in former days.

At Tafazz we stopped to pay a visit to some Tudmuri settled there, relations of Mohammed's but not on the Ibn Arûk side, very worthy people though hardly respectable as relations. Tafazz from the outside looks like a heap of ruins half smothered in dunghills. There has been a murrain among the cattle this year, and dead cows lay about in every stage of decomposition. We had some difficulty in groping our way through them to the wretched little mud hovel where the Tudmuri lived. The family consisted of two middle-aged men, brothers, with their mother,

their wives, and a pretty daughter named Shemseh (sunshine), some children, and an old man, uncle or grandfather of the others. These were all presently clustering round us, and hugging and kissing Mohammed who, I must say, showed a complete absence of false pride in spite of his fine clothes and noble appearance. Their welcome to us, poor people, was very hearty; and in a few minutes coffee was being pounded, and a breakfast of unleavened loaves, thin and good, an omelette, buttermilk (lebben), and a sweet kind of treacle (dibs), made of raisins, prepared. While we were at breakfast a little starved colt looked in at the door from the yard; and some chickens and a pretty fawn greyhound, all equally hungry I thought, watched us eagerly. The people were very doleful about the want of rain, and the loss of their yoke-oxen, which makes their next year's prospects gloomily uncertain. They told us, however, that they had a good stock of wheat in their underground granaries, sufficient for a year or even more, which shows a greater amount of forethought than I should have expected of them. In these countries it is quite necessary to provide against the famines which happen every few years, and in ancient times I believe it was a universal practice to keep a year's harvest in store.

After many entreaties that we would stay the night under their roof they at last suffered us to depart, promising that the men of the party would rejoin us the following day at Mezárib, for Mezárib was close by. There we arrived about three o'clock and are encamped on the piece of desert ground where the fair is

held. The view from our tents is extremely pretty, a fine range of distant hills, the Ajlun to the south-west, and about a mile off a little lake looking very blue and bright, with a rather handsome ruined khan or castle in the foreground. To the left the tents of the Suk, mostly white and of the Turkish pattern. There are about a hundred and fifty of them in four rows, making a kind of street. The village of Mezáríb stands on an island in the lake, connected by a stone causeway with the shore, but the Suk is on the mainland. There is a great concourse of people with horses, and donkeys, and camels, and more are constantly coming from each quarter of the compass. They have not as yet paid much attention to us, so that we have been able to make ourselves comfortable. There is a fresh wind blowing from the south, and there is a look in the clouds of something like rain. I have never before wished for rain on a journey, but I do so heartily now; these poor people want it badly.

December 16. – To-day we have done nothing but receive visits. First there came a Haurani, who announced himself as a sheykh, and gave us the information that Sotamm ibn Shaalan and the Roala are somewhere near Ezrak. If this be true it will be a great piece of good luck for us, but other accounts have made it doubtful. A more interesting visitor was a young man, a native of Bereydeh in Nejd, who, hearing that we were on our way to Jôf, came to make friends with us. Though a well-mannered youth, he is evidently nothing particular in the way of position at home, and admits having been somebody's servant at Bagdad, but on the

strength of a supposed descent from the Beni Laam in Nejd, he has claimed kinship with Mohammed and they have been sitting together affectionately all the morning, holding each an end of Mohammed's rosary. We have cross-questioned him about Nejd; but though he knows Haïl and Kasim and other places, he can give us little real information. He seems to have left it as a boy. We are cheered, however, by the little he has had to tell us, as he seems to take it for granted that everybody in Nejd will be delighted to see us, and he has given us the name and address of his relations there.

Mohammed went last night to find out whether any of the Beni Sokkhr Sheykhs were at the Suk, for it is to them that we have letters from Mohammed Dukhi, and in the middle of the day Sákhñ, a son of Fendi el-Faiz, the nominal head of the tribe, was introduced. He was a not ill-looking youth, and when we had shewn him our letter to his father informed us that the Sheykh had just arrived, so we sent him to fetch him. While Hanna was preparing coffee, the old man came to our tent. In person he is very different from any of the Ánazeh Sheykhs we have seen, reminding one rather of the Jiburi, or other Euphrates Arabs. The Beni Sokkhr are in fact of Shimali or Northern race, which is quite distinct from the Nejdi, to which both Ánazeh and Shammar belong. He is a fine picturesque old man, with rugged features and grey beard and an immense nose, which put us in mind of the conventional Arab types of Scripture picture books, and seemed to correspond with a suggestion I have heard made,

that the Beni Sokkhr⁶ are really the Beni Issachar, a lost tribe.

The Sheykh was very much “en cérémonie,” and we found it difficult to carry on conversation with him. Either he had not much to say, or did not care to say it to us; and the talk went on principally between his second son Tellál, a Christian merchant (here on business), and Mohammed. We did not, ourselves, broach the subject of our journey; but after coffee had been served, Mohammed had a private conversation with the Sheykh, which resulted in an invitation from him to his tents, which he described as being somewhere near Zerka on the Haj road, from which he will send us on to Maan, and ultimately to Jôf. This plan, however, does not at all suit Wilfrid, who is determined on exploring the Wady Sirhán, which no European has ever done, and he insists that we must go first to Ezrak. Fendi, it appears, cannot take us that way, as he is on bad terms with the Kreysheh, a branch of his own tribe who are on the road. Perhaps, too, he is afraid of the Roala. It is very perplexing, as some sort of introduction we must have at starting, and yet we cannot afford to go out of our way or even wait here indefinitely till Fendi is ready. The Jerdeh people are after all not expected for another two days, and it may be a week before they go on.

Later in the day Sottan, Fendi's youngest son, came to us and offered to accompany us himself to Jôf, but at a price which was altogether beyond our ideas. He had travelled once with some English people on the Syrian frontier, and had got foolish notions

⁶ Sakhr, a stone – the real origin of their name.

about money. Five pounds was the sum we had thought of giving; and he talked about a hundred. So we sent him away. Later still, came a Shammar from the Jebel, who said he was willing to go for fifteen mejidies, and a Kreysheh who made similar offers. We have engaged them both, but neither could do more than show us the road. They would be no introduction. The difficulty, by all accounts, of going down the Wady Sirhán, is from the Sherarát, who hang about it, and who having no regular Sheykh, cannot easily be dealt with. They are afraid, however, of the Beni Sokkhr Sheykhs, and of course of Mohammed Dukhi and Ibn Shaalan; and if we could only get a proper representative of one or other of these to go with us, all would be right. But how to get such a one is the question.

It has been very hot and oppressive here to-day, and the appearance of rain is gone. The thermometer about noon stood at 86°.

December 17. – We have decided not to wait here any longer, but to go off to-morrow in the direction of Ezrak, trusting to find some one on the road. We shall have to pass through Bozra, and may have better luck there. Our Shammar seems to think it will be all right; but the Kreysheh came back this morning with a demand for thirty pounds, instead of the two pounds ten shillings, which he informed Mohammed, Fendi had told him to ask. He seems to be with Fendi, although his branch of the tribe are not on terms with their principal chief. He still talks, however, of coming on the original terms, but that will be without Fendi's

permission. It is quite necessary to be, or appear to be stingy with these people, as throwing money away is considered by them the act of a simpleton.

Mohammed has been sent to the Suk to make some last purchases, and inquire about two more camels. Now that it is decided we are to go by the Wady Sirhán, we shall be obliged to buy two extra camels to carry food for the rest. In ordinary seasons this would not be necessary, but this year everybody tells us we shall find no pasture. *Altek*, which is the camel food used at Damascus, is made of a sort of grain, like small misshapen peas or lentils, the husk green and the seed red. It is mixed up into dough with wheaten flour and water, and then kneaded into egg-shaped balls five inches long. Six of these balls are a camel's daily ration, which, if he can pick up any rubbish by the way, will be enough to keep him fat. We are carrying barley for the mares.

Aamar and Selim, our Tafazz relations, have come to pay us their promised visit, and will perhaps accompany us to-morrow. They brought with them a measure of *feríkeh*, wheat crushed very fine, a sort of burghul, some bread, and a couple of fowls; also Mohammed's sheepskin coat, which one of the women has been lining for him; and lastly, the little greyhound we saw at their house, all as a present, or very nearly so, after the fashion of the country.

Mohammed has come back with two camels for our approval, one a very handsome animal, but rather long-legged, the other short and broad-chested like a prize-fighter. We have paid ten

pounds and eleven pounds for them. Nothing is absolutely settled about who is going and who is not going with us. Nothing but this, that we leave Mezáríb to-morrow.

As I write, an immense hubbub and a cry of thieves from the Suk. They are ducking a man in the lake.

CHAPTER III

*"Rather proclaim it
That he which hath no stomach to this fight
Let him depart. His passport shall be made."*

Shakespeare.

Beating about – Bozra – We leave the Turkish dominions – Mohammed vows to kill a sheep – The citadel of Salkhad and the independent Druses – We are received by a Druse chieftain – Historical notice of the Hauran

December 18. – Our caravan has lost some of its members. To begin with the two guides, the Kreysheh and the Shammar have failed to make their appearance. Then Abd er-Rahman, the little Agheyl, came with a petition to be allowed to go home. He was too young, he said, for such a journey, and afraid he might die on the road. He had brought a cousin with him as a substitute, who would do much better than himself, for the cousin was afraid of nothing. The substitute was then introduced, a wild picturesque creature all rags and elf locks and with eyes like jet, armed too with a matchlock rather longer than himself, and evidently no

Agheyl. We have agreed, however, to take him and let the other go. Unwilling hands are worse than useless on a journey. Lastly, the slave Awwad has gone. Like most negroes he had too good an opinion of himself, and insisted on being treated as something more than a servant, and on having a donkey to ride. So we have packed him too off. He was very angry when told to go, and broke a rebab we had given him to play on, for he could both play and sing well. We are now reduced to our two selves, Mohammed, Abdallah, Hanna, Ibrahim and the substitute – seven persons in all, but the Tafazz people are to go the first two days' march with us and help drive the camels.

We were glad to get clear of the dirt and noise of the Suk, and leaving the Haj road, took a cross track to the south-east, which is to lead us to Bozra. All day long we have been passing through a well-inhabited country, with plenty of villages and a rich red soil, already ploughed, every acre of it, and waiting only for rain. The road was full of people travelling on donkey-back and on foot to Mezárib, singing as they went along. In all the numerous villages we saw the effects of the late murrain in the dead cattle strewn about. I counted seventy carcasses in one small place, a terrible loss for the poor villagers, as each working cow or bullock was worth ten pounds. I asked what disease had killed them, and was told it was “min Allah” (from God). Mohammed, however, calls it *abu hadlan* (father of leanness).

This district is said to be the best corn-growing country anywhere, and looks like it, but unless rain falls soon, the year

must be barren. The villages depend almost entirely on rain for their water supply. In each there is an old reservoir hollowed out of the rock. It is difficult to understand how these tanks get filled, for they seem to have no drainage leading to them, being on the contrary perched up generally on high ground. They are now all dry, and the villagers have to send many miles for their drinking water. All this country belongs to the Hauran, and we are now in a Haurani village called Ghízeh. The people are evidently not pure Arabs, as many of them have light eyes.

We are being hospitably entertained by the village Sheykh, who is an old acquaintance of Mohammed's father's, and insists on setting all he has got before us, – coffee, a plate of rice, barley for the mares, and, what is more precious just now, water for them as well as for ourselves. Hassan, for such is his name, has a very pretty wife, who was among the crowd which gathered round us on our arrival at the village. She, like the women of all these villages, made no pretence of shyness, and was running about unveiled as any peasant girl might in Italy. She was evidently a spoilt child, and required more than one command from Hassan before she would go home. The Sheykh has been spending the evening with us. He is in great distress about his village, which is in the last straits for water. The cattle, as I have said, have all died, and now even the beasts of burden which have to go for the water are dying. The nearest spring is at Bozra, twelve miles off; and if the donkeys break down the village must die too of thirst. He told us that a Frank passed this way two

years ago, and had told him that there must be an ancient well somewhere among the ruins of which the village is built, and he has been looking for it ever since. He entreated us to tell him the most likely spot either for finding the old well or digging a new one. We are much distressed at not being engineers enough to do this for him; and I can't help thinking how much a real reformer (not a Midhat) might do in Turkey by attending to such crying wants as these. Ghízeh is within fifty miles from Damascus as the crow flies, and there are scores of villages in like condition throughout the Hauran, which a Syrian governor might relieve at the cost of sending round an engineer. But until tramways and railroads and new bazaars have been made, I suppose there is little chance for mere wells under the present regime.

Besides meat and drink, Hassan has given us useful advice. He has reminded Mohammed of another old friend of his father's, who he thinks might be of more service to us than anybody else could be, and he advises us to go first to him. This is Huseyn ibn Nejm el-Atrash, a powerful Druse Sheykh, who lives somewhere beyond the Hauran mountains. He must certainly have relations with some of the Bedouin tribes beyond, for it appears he lives in a little town quite on the extreme edge of the inhabited country towards the Wady Sirhán. We have always heard of this Druse country as unsafe, but what country is not called unsafe outside the regular Turkish authority? The Ghízeh Sheykh's suggestion seems worth following, and we shall make for the Druse town.

The little greyhound Shiekhah (so called from a plant of that

name) is very docile and well-behaved. She is a regular desert dog, and likes dates better than anything else. I have made her a coat to wear at night for she is chilly.

December 19. – Hassan with true hospitality did not leave his house this morning, but let us depart quietly. His coming to wish us good-bye would have looked like asking for a present, and he evidently did not wish for anything of the sort. This is the first time we have received hospitality absolutely gratis in a town, for even when staying with Mohammed's father at Tudmur, the women of the family had eagerly asked for money. In the desert, Hassan's behaviour would not have needed remark.

Before leaving Ghízeh we went to look at a house where there is a mosaic floor of old Roman work, scrolls with orange trees and pomegranates, vines with grapes on them, vases and baskets, all coloured on a white ground. It speaks well for the quality of the workmanship that it has so long stood the weather and the wear, for it is out of doors, and forms the pavement in the courtyard of a house.

Three and a half hours of steady marching brought us to Bozra, where we now are. The entrance of the town is rather striking, as the old Roman road, which has run in a straight line for miles, terminates in a gateway of the regular classic style, beyond which lie a mass of ruins and pillars, and to the right a fine old castle. A raven was sitting on the gateway, and as we rode through solemnly said "caw."

Bozra is, I have no doubt, described by Mr. Murray, so I

won't waste my time in writing about the ruins, which indeed we have not yet examined. They seem to be Roman, and in tolerable preservation. The castle is more modern, probably Saracenic, a huge pile built up out of older fragments. It is occupied by a small garrison of Turkish regulars, the last, I hope, we shall see for many a day, for Bozra is the frontier town of the Hauran, and beyond it the Sultan is not acknowledged. I believe that its occupation is not of older date than fifteen to twenty years ago, the time when Turkey made its last flicker as a progressing state, and that before that time the people of Bozra paid tribute to Ibn Shaalan, as they once had to the Wahhabis of Nejd. The Roala still keep up some connection with the town, however, for a shepherd we met at the springs just outside it assured us that Ibn Shaalan had watered his camels at them not two months ago. It was somewhere not far from Bozra that the forty days battle between the Mesenneh and the Roala, described by Fatalla,⁷ was fought. Though the details are no doubt exaggerated, Mohammed knows of the battle by tradition. Wilfrid asked him particularly about it to-day, and he fully confirms the account given by Fatalla of the downfall of the Mesenneh. He has added too some interesting details of their recent history. We are encamped outside the town at the edge of a great square tank of ancient masonry, now out of repair and dry. Here would be another excellent occupation for Midhat and his Circassians.

December 20. – We were disturbed all night by the barking

⁷ This is a mistake, as the battle was fought on the banks of the Orontes.

of dogs, and the strange echoes from the ruined places round. I never heard anything so unearthly – a cold night – and melancholy too, as nights are when the moon rises late, and is then mixed up in a haggard light with the dawn.

The Tafazz relations are gone, very sorrowful to wish us good-bye. Selim, the elder of the two, told me that he has been thirty years now in the Hauran, and has no idea of going back to Tudmur. The land at Tafazz is so good that it will grow anything, while at Tudmur there are only the few gardens the stream waters. He is a *fellah* and likes ploughing and sowing better than camel driving. To Tafazz they are gone, Selim on his chestnut mare, old, worn, and one-eyed, but *asil*; Aamar on his bay Kehîleh from the Roala, also old and very lame. They went with tears in their eyes, wishing us all possible blessings for the road.

The consequence is, we have to do more than our share of work, and have had a hard day loading and reloading the camels, for we were among the hills, and the roads were bad. The beasts have not yet become accustomed to each other, and the old camel we bought at Mezârib shows every sign of wishing to return there. He is an artful old wretch, and chose his moment for wandering off whenever we were looking the other way, and wherever a bit of uneven ground favoured his escape. Once or twice he very nearly gave us the slip. He wants to get back to his family, Abdallah says, for we bought him out of a herd where he was lord and master, a sultan among camels. Our road to-day has been

very rough. We were told to make our way to Salkhad, a point on the far horizon, just on the ridge of the Hauran, and the only road there was the old Roman one. This went in an absolutely straight line over hill and dale, and as two out of every three of the stones paving it were missing, and the rest turned upside down, it was a long stumble from beginning to end. We had been warned to keep a good look-out for robbers, so Wilfrid and I rode ahead, reconnoitering every rock and heap. We passed one or two ruined villages, but met nobody all day long, still following the pointed hill of Salkhad, which, as we got nearer it, we could see was crowned by a huge fortress. The country had now become a mass of boulders, which in places had been rolled into heaps, making gigantic cairns, not recently, but perhaps in ancient days, when there were giants in the land. The soil thus uncovered was a rich red earth, and here and there it had been cultivated. There was now a little pasture, for on the hills rain had fallen, and once we saw some goats in the distance.

As we approached Salkhad the road got so bad that Mohammed made a vow of killing a sheep if ever we got safe to Huseyn el-Atrash. We were amused at this and asked him what it meant; and he told us the story of the prophet Ibrahim who made a vow to kill his son, and who was prevented from doing so by the prophet Musa, who appeared to him and stopped him, and showed him two rams which he said would do instead. These vows the Arabs make are very curious, and are certainly a relic of the ancient sacrifices. Mohammed explained them to us. "The

Bedouins," he said, "always do this when they are in difficulties," he could not say why, but it was an old custom; and when they go back home they kill the sheep, and eat it with their friends. He does not seem to consider it a religious ceremony, only a custom, but it is very singular.

Nine and a half hours' march from seven o'clock brought us to the foot of the conical hill, on which the fortress of Salkhad stands. This is a very ancient building, resembling not a little the fortress of Aleppo, a cone partly artificial and surrounded by a moat, cased with smooth stone and surmounted by walls still nearly perfect. We remarked on some of them the same device as at Aleppo, a rampant lion, the emblem of the Persian Monarchy. The fortress itself, however, is probably of much older date, and may have existed at the time the children of Israel conquered the country. Wilfrid and I, who had gone on in front, agreed to separate here, and ride round the citadel, he to the right, and I to the left, and I was to wait on the top of the ridge till he gave me some signal. This I did and waited so long, that at last the camels came up. He in the meantime had found a little town just under the fortress on the other side and had ridden down into it. At first he saw nobody, and thought the place deserted, but presently people in white turbans began to appear on the house-tops, very much astonished to see this horseman come riding down upon them, for the road was like a stair. He saluted them, and they saluted politely in return, and answered his inquiry for Huseyn el-Atrash, by pointing out a path which led down across the hills to

a town called Melakh, where they said Huseyn lived. They asked where he was going, and he said Bussora, Bussora of Bagdad, at which they laughed, and showing him the Roman road, which from Salkhad still goes on in a straight line about south-east, said that that would take him to it. This is curious, for it certainly is exactly the direction, and yet it is impossible there can ever have really been a road there. It probably goes to Ezrak but we hope to find out all about this in a day or two. At the bottom of the hill Wilfrid beckoned to me, and I found him at a large artificial pool or reservoir, still containing a fair supply of water, and there, when the rest had joined us, we watered the camels and horses. Mohammed in the meanwhile had been also on a voyage of discovery, and came back with the news that Huseyn el-Atrash was really at Melakh, and Melakh was only two hours and a half further on.

Salkhad is a very picturesque town. It hangs something like a honeycomb under the old fortress on an extremely steep slope, the houses looking black from the colour of the volcanic stone of which they are built. Many of them are very ancient, and the rest are built up of ancient materials, and there is a square tower like the belfry of a church.⁸

⁸ The Hauran was among the first districts conquered by the Caliph Omar. It shared for some centuries the prosperity of the Arabian Empire, but suffered severely during the Crusades. There is no reason, however, to doubt that it continued to be well inhabited until the conquest of Tamerlane in 1400, when all the lands on the desert frontier were depopulated.

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