ARABIAN DESTINY

JACQUES BENOIST-MÉCHIN

Translated from the French by

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PART ONE

MOBILITY AND IMMOBILITY OF THE ARABS
(*5000* B.C.–A.D. *1880*)

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[I]

It is difficult to imagine Arabia other than as a barren mass of stone and sand, smouldering like a brazier beneath an all-devouring sun. In contrast to many other countries of the world it is a land where the primary role of the earth has been forfeited for the benefit of the light and the sky. It seems to have been fashioned from immaterial substances and its horizons recall not so much landscapes as those incandescent images which are born in the heart of a fire.

It was not always so, however. For historians assure us that in immemorial times, when Europe lay buried under the white shroud of the Ice Age, Arabia was a green and fertile country, watered by numerous rivers, a smiling land of pasture and forest.

What was life like in this cool and wooded Arabia, where springs murmured in the glades? We do not know, for no evidence has been handed down to us. No doubt its fauna was similar to that of Africa and India, between which it formed a link. Mammoths and aurochs must have been met with there, buffalo and gazelles, eagles and leopards. But all that is no more.

For when the ice retreated northwards, Europe emerged from its lethargy and awoke to life, while Arabia saw its forests devoured by the sun and became a desert. Its parched trees fell in dust; rainfall became rarer; rivers dried up; erosion spread by degrees, and the unhindered wind, the terrible wind from the south, covered its pasture-lands with layers of shifting sand.

For thousands of years conditions remained unchanged. On the fringes of Arabia, like showers of sparks, civilisations took birth, rose to their zenith, shone with a brilliant light, and died. Their rise and fall was so rapid that their splendour is effaced by the memory of their impermanence.

Great kingdoms arose thus and sank to nothing. To the east, on the shores of the Tigris and the Euphrates, Ur, Babylon, Nineveh and Ctesiphon rose successively to greatness, and, around these opulent cities, the empires of the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Assyrians and the Persians. All these collapsed one after the other, leaving on the horizon only a string of dead towns, whose triumphal arches finally decayed under the sun. To the west, in the valley of the Nile, around Thebes and Memphis, the Egypt of the Pharaohs climbed to and achieved the summit of its magnificence. In its turn it too was engulfed, and the shrill cry of the sparrowhawks, hovering over the debris of royal palaces, was all that was heard. To the north, on the shores of the

Mediterranean, Phoenicia, the Greek maritime state and the Roman Empire emerged and flourished.

From these movements Arabia remained apart. Turned in upon herself, immobile and silent, she resisted alike time, change and history. The civilised world could not penetrate the iron curtain which hid her from view. Because she remained unknown she was thought to be happy.

The little that was known was vague and contradictory. From time to time a merchant from India bringing jewels, ivory or myrrh to Tyre or Byblos, spoke with amazement of the kingdoms he had travelled through on his journey and gave enthusiastic descriptions of cities hidden behind the sands of the desert. Scribes and scholars seized upon these legends and without verification gave them the stamp of their authority. Thus, Ptolemy listed 170 fortified places in "Arabia Felix" alone, including six capitals and five royal towns. . . .[1]

Desirous to know what realities were hidden behind these fables, the Emperor Augustus instructed the proconsul of Egypt, Aelius Gallus, to invade the peninsula and seize the citadels of whose wealth he had been told. The proconsul assembled his legions, ordered them to put on their heavy bronze armour and penetrate into the heart of Arabia (24 B.C.). They found only a sterile and desolate land, inhabited by savage tribes of barely human appearance. Most of the legionaries died of thirst in the course of the expedition. The others succumbed to heat and exhaustion. Their remains, grouped in hundreds, were abandoned to the birds of prey. Nomads who passed there, weeks later, found their corpses half covered by sand, still grasping their swords in their fleshless fists.

On the advice of Aelius, Rome renounced the conquest of the peninsula. Arabia remained thus inviolate and isolated from the world, "for it was an arid and inhospitable country, a violent, cruel land, peopled by inhabitants as violent and cruel as their home."

Wherever there was a little water, a round well in the middle of an oasis or on a river bank, some tribes had succeeded in building hamlets of brick and mud. The rest of the population led a wretched existence. It consisted of nomad shepherds who drove their scanty flocks before them in search of a pasture yet more scanty. Hairy, famished and destitute of all culture, their only wealth was their vitality.

But this last was immense, like everything the desert inspires in the heart of man.

[1] Ptolemy: Geography, Books V and VI. See also Strabo, Book XVII.

[II]

THE DESERT is only empty and without movement for those who know nothing of its secrets. Across this inert, petrified scene, where nothing seems to have altered since the origins of the world, flows a slow but continuous stream of human beings whose migrations, starting from the Yemen, at the south-west angle of the peninsula, lose themselves in the north-west, in the more fertile regions of Syria and Mesopotamia.

In the urban settlements of the Mediterranean provinces the birth-rate was low and the death-rate high. The towns easily absorbed the surplus of local peasants, who had therefore no need to emigrate in search of subsistence.

Very different was the position at the other end of Arabia. In the Yemen the less barren soil and more abundant rain had early enabled the inhabitants to devote themselves to agriculture. The population had increased swiftly in consequence. But because the area of cultivated land could not be extended and there were neither towns nor local industries to absorb the surplus, a slow congestion resulted from which the country could free itself only by expelling its excess population.

This excess could not cross the Red Sea to colonise Africa, for the Sudan, which faces the Yemen, is a desert even more inhospitable than Arabia. Neither could it go upwards along the coast, for the seaboard was occupied by peoples of foreign origin, fiercely resolved to bar access to their territory.

There was hence no option but to plunge into the sands by marching north-east. The only solution which offered was the inland desert. Those whom the population density of the Yemen drove into exile pushed before them the small and weaker groups already installed on the fringes of the cultivated lands, forcing them to descend the valleys which converge towards central Arabia and to abandon the abundant springs and fertile oases for rarer water-holes and scantier palm groves. Thrown out towards a region where agricultural life was impossible, these groups could ensure their existence only by raising sheep and camels.

But these peoples, having become almost wholly pastoral, were not at the end of their wanderings. Under the pressure of the multitudes which thronged behind them, they ended by being driven out of the last wretched oases and so entered the desert proper, where they became nomads.

"This process, to be watched today with individual families and tribes to whose marches an exact name and date might be put," says Lawrence, "must have been going on since the first day of full settlement of Yemen. The Widian, below Mecca and Taif, are crowded with the memories and place names of half a hundred tribes which have gone from there and may be found today in the Nejd, in Jebel Shammar, in the Hamad, even on the frontiers of Syria and Mesopotamia. There was the source of the migration, the factory of nomads, the springing of the gulf stream of desert wanderers."[1]

As the congestion in the Yemen was a permanent phenomenon, this discharge of humanity never ceased. Fresh groups were continually pushed out towards the desert, to such an extent that central Arabia—paradoxical though it may seem—also became over-populated. Hence the eddies, backwashes and collisions of the tribes, seeking to destroy each other to ensure their right to life.

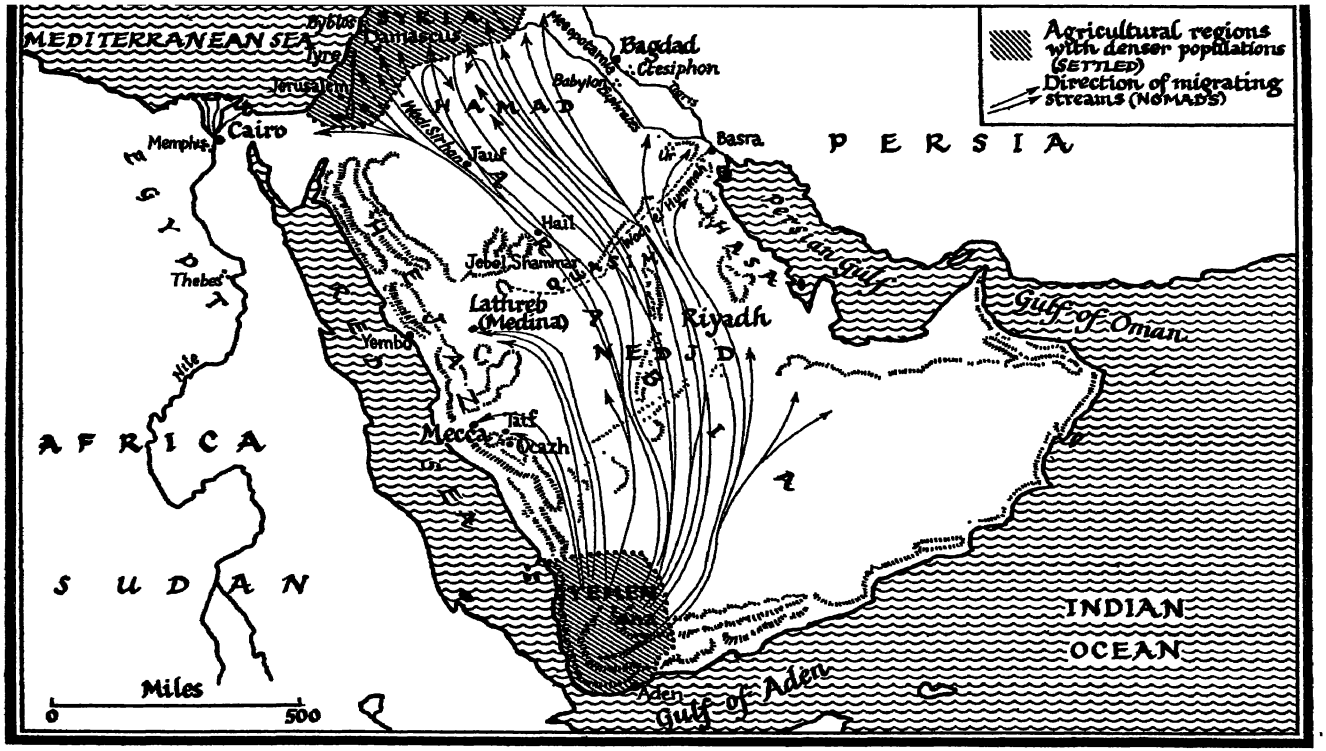
Whither could they go? The south was forbidden them. To go back against the current was impossible, and even if they had succeeded they would have found in that direction only the barren sands or other clans determined to exterminate them. To penetrate into the Hejaz was no more to be recommended, for the steep slopes which form the internal face of this region "were thickly lined with mountain peoples taking full advantage of their defensiveness."[2]

There remained the central oases of Nejd, towards which the wandering tribes turned and where, if their men were active and well armed, they could achieve a partial occupation. But if the desert had nourished their strength insufficiently they were pushed back gradually towards the north, between the cliffs of the Hejaz and the scree of Hasa.

The pressure, meanwhile, never ceased. By a slow but inexorable movement the human Gulf Stream continued its progress towards the north, dragging the tribes from one oasis to the next via Tadmor, Jauf and Wadi Sirhan, as far as the borders of Syria and Mesopotamia. "Opportunity and their bellies persuaded them of the advantages of possessing goats and then sheep; and lastly they began to sow, if only a little barley for their animals. They were now no longer Bedouin and began to suffer like the villagers from the ravages of the nomads behind. Insensibly they made common cause with the peasants already on the soil and found out that they too were peasants."[3]

Thus was completed in the outskirts of Damascus the cycle of evolution begun near Aden. The same pressure which had driven the Arabs from their lands and made nomads of them, now expelled them in their turn from the desert to make them farmers. All without

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 34.
[2] Ibid, p. 34. [3] Ibid, p. 35.



MAP I CURRENTS OF HUMAN MIGRATION ACROSS ARABIA

exception passed this way. Not a family is established in the north whose ancestors did not cross central Arabia at some moment of history. It is there that they received the nomad stamp. And this stamp marked them the more indelibly the longer they stayed in the desert.

"The Bedouin," as one who knows the Islamic world has well noted, "is no gipsy roaming aimlessly for the sake of roaming. He represents the best adaptation of human life to desert conditions. Wherever grass grows there he goes seeking pasture. Nomadism is as much a scientific mode of living as industrialism is in Detroit or Manchester. It is a reasonable and stoic adjustment to an unfriendly environment."[1]

[III]

HOWEVER FAR one goes back into the past of Arabia one finds there this uninterrupted current, flowing from the south to the north. It is the fundamental phenomenon of Arab life, the underlying cause which determines and explains each of its great historical crises. It is this that has sustained life in the interior of a region of the globe where existence, at first sight, appeared impossible. It is this that has preserved and enhanced the vitality of its inhabitants. It has imposed its disciplines upon the elemental forces which unfavourable conditions had created. The desert canalised these forces and transformed them slowly into energy and light. From a rough and undiscriminated raw material it has thrust upwards the three most developed human types in the Arab world: the soldier, the poet and the saint.

Nowhere perhaps so much as in Arabia have external circumstances subjected humanity to such strong pressures, to such severe constraints, to such powerful enthusiasms. "It is only in the desert," says Gerald de Gaury, "that man can taste to the full the pleasure of being man; of escape from the entangling jungles. In the desert every rival is left behind at last. No animal can come upon him unaware; and even those feeble, beautiful failures in the race for life—the trees—are unseen. In the silent wilderness his nerves are calmed, and all property, except an animal or machine on which to move, and the barest means for life, becomes useless and undesired. He is alone, alone with his brother men, upon the earth from which he came, with the greatest tools of his Maker: the sun, the moon, and the stars. The unveiled beauty of the dawns, the glory of the sunsets and the brilliance of the stars tell him again daily of the triumph of his creation. Love of the desert seems at first to be against all reason; but the instinct of the

[1] Philip K. Hitti: *Short History of the Arabs*, p. 7.

healthy man must be for it, and once known it draws him back again for ever."[1]

The desert not only attracts man. It moulds and transforms him. "The desert is too exclusive to be shared," writes T. E. Lawrence, and this theme recurs constantly in his work. "It grasps the man whole and will not let him go without remodelling him from top to bottom. Even the foreigner who is only passing through comes out a different man than he was before. Whatever he may do afterwards he will never forget the time he has lived there and will retain the nostalgia of it to his dying day."

The desert stamped its imprint even more indelibly upon the wandering tribes obliged to dwell in it for centuries. Once they had left their native Yemen they swiftly lost the memory of their place of origin. All that was not desert faded from their minds. Soon they knew nothing else.

Then began a slow fashioning of their souls and bodies which made incomparable fighters of these mediocre farmers. The resources of the desert were so meagre, the tribes so numerous and the will to live so passionate that existence itself became the stake of a merciless competition. In this furnace, where nothing could be got but by violence or trickery, the future belonged to the most able and the most vigorous. By force of circumstances the nomad life ended by organising itself according to a scale of values at the summit of which was found "muruwa," a term which signifies at once honour and virility. The man who possessed "muruwa" to a high degree was recognised as chief, for he was more capable than the others of assuring the survival of his clan. The vigour of his loins compensated for the ravages of an appalling mortality. The vigour of his arm forced access to water-points for his companions. A tribe without "muruwa" was condemned to disappear, either because it died of starvation, or was extinguished without descendants, or—worse still—was reduced to slavery by a more combative tribe.

In this brutal and simple world, constantly visited by famine and death, weapons assumed a role so important that they were not long in acquiring a symbolic virtue. A sort of mystic fusion established itself between them and those who wielded them, whether the man transmitted his virtue to his weapons, or the latter communicated their strength and hardness to him. The sword represented endurance by its temper; ingenuity by its edge; chastity by the flash of its rigid and naked steel. Body and soul, flesh and spirit were one—as the sabre and the arm which wielded it became one—because to divorce the one from the other would have been equivalent to suicide. The sword of the sterile and cowardly man tarnished and broke in his

[1] Gerald de Gaury: *Arabia Phoenix*, p. 105.

hands. He became feeble and his weakness made him lose his pre-eminence in his clan. Every "fallen" warrior was rejected by his fellows and no other tribe would take him in. "No worse calamity could befall a Bedouin than the loss of his tribal affiliation," says Philip K. Hitti, "for a tribeless man is practically helpless. His status is that of an outlaw beyond the pale of protection and safety."[1]

Thus from generation to generation a severe selection operated which excluded the weak to the profit of the strong and raised to the rank of chief the most "virile" men, which meant the most fertile, the most inventive and the most courageous.

[IV]

NEVERTHELESS THESE tribes, which lust for life drove to fight with each other, continued to feel themselves related because they spoke the same language. And they felt a great pride in this.

Unfortunately, this language had a tendency to evolve in different directions, according to the route followed by the tribe. People of two clans descended from the same stock, whom the vicissitudes of nomad life had separated and who had journeyed apart for several generations, noticed with astonishment, when they met again around a well, that they no longer used the same terms to mean the same things. More serious still: the warriors of the Hejaz or Hasa began no longer to understand those of Nejd or Hail. The Arabs were proud. They wanted their deeds to be known to the whole peninsula. Corruption of their language placed a limit to their fame.

The desert which had engendered the warrior now engendered the poet. The latter rapidly assumed an ascendancy over a people thirsty for fabulous tales and heroic poems. It was to the "chahir"—to "him who knows"—that fell the mission of resolving linguistic difficulties, of settling which expression was right and which to be rejected, and of fixing what words were henceforth to represent what things. When two families used two different words to express the same thought the one the poet had chosen was adopted. His judgment was without appeal and applied to all. Thus, little by little, there emerged a single language which the Arabs adopted with such enthusiasm that they finished by considering it as their second source of patriotism. "No people in the world," writes Philip K. Hitti, "has such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and is so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs. Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as

[1] Philip K. Hitti: op. cit., p. 14.

Arabic. Modern audiences in Bagdad, Damascus and Cairo can be stirred to the highest degree by the recital of poems only vaguely comprehended and by the delivery of orations in the classical tongue, though only partially understood. The rhythm, the rhyme, the music produce on them the effect of what they call lawful magic."[1]

This is why—a significant fact—the first tangible manifestations of Arab unity should be looked for not in a state or form of government, but in an institution of a poetical kind.

From the third century of our era, at regular intervals, the tribes acquired the habit of calling a general truce and of assembling at Ocazh, a small town between Taif and Nakhla, to hear poets declaim their works and match the "chahirs" of the different tribes. These reunions held a place in the life of the Arabs comparable with that of the Olympic games among the Greeks and lasted for several days together. They were veritable tournaments of eloquence, where the palm fell to him "who had sung the bravest exploit in the purest language."

On the last day of the assembly, before an immense audience, the poet whose work had obtained most votes mounted a hillock and began to declaim.

"Now he would sing the great deeds of his tribe and the nobleness of its chief; now he would describe the joys of vengeance; sometimes tell of courage, always of honour. At other times he stopped to describe the wonders of nature, the solitude of the desert, the scents of the oasis and the freshness of cool springs. Hanging on his words, his hearers surrendered to all the emotions which the poet wished to inspire. On their attentive faces was reflected admiration for a hero, contempt for a coward, and the poet, drawing added lyricism from this evidence of his power, resumed his narrative with renewed vehemence."[2]

The poet talked a long time, carried away by his inspiration. Often night had fallen before the tournament was ended. As the stars climbed in the sky the multitudes stirring in the shadows could be heard rather than seen. Finally, when the last "chahir" had finished, a herald proclaimed the name of the winner. His poem was then inscribed in letters of gold on a strip of precious cloth and hung up in the Kaaba to be preserved for posterity.[3]

Then the truce ended. The tribes took up their arms and returned to the desert where the old rivalries and struggles began again. But they brought back from the Ocazh assemblies a new sentiment: that of owning in common an inestimable treasure of words, one which they would defend together if it should ever be threatened.

[1] Philip K. Hitti: op. cit., p. 20. [2] L. A. Sédillot: *Histoire des Arabes*, p. 82.

[3] Thanks to this precaution seven "gilded poems" or "mouallakas" have been handed down to us and the names of their authors have remained famous. Several of them relate to battles in the Nejd and describe the struggles of the ancient Temim tribe against the Amirs (A.D. 579) and the Bacrites (A.D. 602–630). cf. Sédillot, op. cit., p. 32.

[V]

GUIDED BY the poets towards the manifestations of the spirit, the Arabs were not long in taking a further step and discovering in addition to poetry a third patriotism: religion.

At the outset the nomad tribes had begun by adoring a naked sword, planted in the ground, to fix in its centre the circle of demons. Little by little the circle disappeared; only the naked sword remained, testimony of the effort to progress from concrete image to abstract thought. Thus primitive polytheism gave place to the conception of One God, eternal and absolute, conceived by analogy with the nakedness of the desert.

This nakedness was too harsh and desolate to attract foreign allegiance. It filled strangers with a sense of fear and aversion. But the Bedouin welcomed it with all his soul. Was it not in the desert, freed from all material bonds, that he achieved absolute personal liberty? Was it not there that he felt the most intense emotions and the richest joys?

There "he had air and winds, sun and light, open spaces and great emptiness. There was no human effort, no fecundity in Nature: just the heaven above and the unspotted earth beneath. There unconsciously he came near God. God was to him not anthropomorphic, not tangible, not ethical, not concerned with the world or with him; he was the Being without colour, without face and without voice, a comprehending being, the egg of all activity. Nature and matter were just a glass reflecting Him. The Bedouin could not look for God within him: he was too sure that he was within God. He could not conceive anything which was or was not God, Who alone was great; yet there was a homelessness, an everyday-ness of this climatic Arab God who was their eating and their fighting and their lusting, the commonest of their thoughts, their familiar resource and companion."[1]

From generation to generation the Arabs strove to approach their God by setting aside his attributes in order to reach him in his essence. But they succeeded with difficulty. Their thought sank under the weight of their imagination, and their natural tendency to express themselves by images, rather than by concepts, hampered them. Their impulse retained from this something at once infirm and incomplete. But above these efforts, like a cry too shrill to be perceived by human ear, a tormenting obsession hovered persistently.

Now it was that after having engendered the warrior and the poet,

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 38.

the desert engendered the prophet. "The Arabs are a people of spasms, of upheavals, of ideas, the race of the individual genius," says Lawrence. "Their movements are the more shocking by contrast with the quietude of every day, their great men greater by contrast with the humanity of their mass. Their convictions are by instinct, their activities intuitional. Their largest manufacture is of creeds."[1]

The Arabs take pride in having furnished 40,000 prophets to the world and we possess historic evidence for at least a hundred of these. Examination of their lives reveals a striking similarity: all reproduce the same development with an obstinate monotony.

These men, marked out by a religious vocation, were all born, not in the solitude, but in the heart of a human settlement: an oasis, a village or a fringe of the desert. Suddenly a passionate, unreasoning impulse took hold of them and drove them towards the silence of the sands, where they heard more clearly the living Word, which perhaps they had brought with them. They stayed there for a period, in fasting and prayer. At last, their inspiration taking shape, they returned to their place of origin to share their revelation with their disciples.

Not all of them were strong enough to bear such a tension of the spirit. Many succumbed in the course of the journey, and this is why "the fringe of the Arab deserts is strewn with broken creeds." But some victoriously surmounted the test. "The prophets returned from the desert with their glimpse of God and through their stained medium (as through a dark glass) showed something of the majesty and brilliance whose full vision would blind, deafen, silence us."[2]

Just as the warrior was at the van of the physical struggle, so the prophet was the pioneer of the spiritual. Because he was dogged by real dangers—of madness or epilepsy—the Arabs accorded him a special veneration. When he reappeared in public, staggering and exhausted less by the effect of his fasting than by the violence of his internal struggle, the Bedouins pressed around him to learn from his lips what light had flashed from his tussle with the absolute, what progress had been accomplished in his wrestle with the Lord.

The most celebrated prophets of the pre-Islamic period—Waraga, Othman-ben-Houwarith, Obaid Allah, Zaid-ben-Amr—aroused a passionate enthusiasm. They fought against ancient superstitions, suppressed local worship, taught the Arabs to pray in common and furthered the idea of a single God. But if they were capable of saying, more clearly than their predecessors, what God was not, they did not succeed any better in saying what He is. In their powerlessness to build up a new concept they limited themselves to announcing "that a messenger of heaven would soon appear on earth, to bring the Law

[1] T. E. Lawrence: Preface to *Arabia Deserta*, by Charles M. Doughty, p. 22.
[2] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 40.

to the Arabs and to open to them the gates of Paradise." It was enough to ensure that all should await the Messiah with a thrill of impatience.

Such was the work accomplished from the earliest days in the depths of this desert which the civilised world believed to be inert and empty. A race of tameless warriors had been forged. The unity of their language had been safeguarded. Progress to monotheism approached its fulfilment.

Arabia awaited only the man of genius, who, binding all these separate forces into a single sheaf, brought to it, in a sudden illumination, the consciousness of racial unity.

[VI]

THIS MAN was Mohammed (A.D. 570–632).

If the son of Abdullah the Hashimite could thus seize the whole soul of his fellows and impose a single law upon the warring tribes, it was because he was at once prophet, poet and warrior and united in himself, to a superlative degree, the characteristic virtues of these three types of man. He was a living synthesis of all the Arab aspirations.

As prophet he brought to the Bedouins the religion they awaited, Islam, or "surrender to the divine will," and made of them Moslems, which means Believers. Thanks to him the Kaaba, that cube of masonry which was believed to be the vacant habitation of an unknown god, was filled by a supernatural presence and became the abode of Allah, the one God, infinite, eternal and yet exclusively Arab. As poet he drew up the Koran in a language so pure that in its purity itself its divine origin could be seen. As warrior he created the armies which were to carry his doctrine from the shores of the Ganges to those of the Guadalquivir.

In composing his book, Mohammed's main object was not to give to humanity a morality superior to that of the Gospel, nor to impose uniform laws upon the peoples of the East, but to provoke among them a great movement of national unification. This thought, which was his central preoccupation, dominated not merely the Koran but all the acts of his life.

From the age of twenty-five, when he withdrew to the mountain of Hira, near Mecca, to pray in the solitude, he meditated upon the destinies of his country and sorrowed to see the clans dissipate their energy in fratricidal wars. Would not all this blood, uselessly poured out in the desert, be more agreeable to God if it were shed for the spreading of His Word?

For that it was necessary to create among the tribes a solidarity

strong enough to make them set aside their internal quarrels and knit themselves into a single national body. Mohammed knew that he could accomplish this by fusing their private antagonisms into a wider passion, which alone a religious doctrine could arouse. But knowing his compatriots, he knew also that this doctrine would be fully adopted by them only if it brought with it victory on the battlefield. It was there and there alone that it would be recognised as true and would draw the unquestioning adherence of the Faithful. This is why so many passages of the sacred text are concerned with the conduct of war and the organisation of the army.

Accustomed to the vivid contrasts of the desert, the Arabs have a simple and clear-cut vision of things. "They are a people of primary colours, especially of black and white, who see the world always in line. They are a certain people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns. They do not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our self-questionings. They know only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief, without our hesitating retinue of finer shades.

"Semites are black and white not only in vision but in their inner furnishing; black and white not merely in clarity, but in apposition. Their thoughts live easiest among extremes. They inhabit superlatives by choice. Sometimes the great inconsistents seem to possess them jointly. They exclude compromise, and pursue the logic of their ideas to its absurd ends, without seeing incongruity in their opposed conclusions. They oscillate with cool head and tranquil judgment from asymptote to asymptote, so imperturbably that they would seem hardly conscious of their giddy flight."[1]

The universe which Mohammed brought them corresponded to this psychology. Mankind was divided into two clear-cut categories: on the one side, the Arabs, believers and repositories of the divine truth; on the other, infidel pagans who denied the existence of Allah, the immortality of the flesh and the mission of the Prophet. The duty of every Moslem towards the latter was simple: they should strive to rally them to Islam or, if they should refuse to be converted, exterminate them without mercy.

Every war was therefore holy which had for its object to propagate "the true religion," and God reserved his especial favours for those who devoted their lives to it. Armed service assumed the character of a sacred obligation. All should participate in the fight, even the blind and the crippled. Dispensation was given only to children of tender age, lunatics and women. Even these last had the duty of "putting to the sword every Moslem whom they should see running away." For of all sins flight was the most abominable, one of those which could merit eternal damnation. All the Koran's commandments laid down to

[1] T. E. Lawrence: Preface to *Arabia Deserta*, by Charles M. Doughty, p. 21.

inflame the zeal of the Arabs culminated in this affirmation, which became their rallying cry: "Paradise lies before you, and Hell behind."

Mohammed did not confine himself to precepts of this general kind. Descending to the details of practical organisation, he promulgated a law on the sharing of booty, which proves that he did not underestimate the importance of propaganda: four-fifths of the conquered treasures should go to the army, while the last fifth should be shared out among the poets, moralists and schoolmasters "to encourage them to celebrate the fame of the combatants." He also issued regulations for camp discipline. Life there assumed a serious, even austere, character. Games of chance, frivolous pastimes, profane conversations were forbidden to the soldier. In the midst of the clash of arms men should devote themselves to religious worship. The intervals between actions should be devoted to prayers, meditation and the study of the Koran. An extreme frugality became compulsory. The drinking of wine was punished. Finally, he dealt with recruitment, armament and the composition of troop units. Each horseman should bring with him his horses, his weapons and provisions for a week. Further, no new volunteer was to be admitted without careful investigation of his conduct, his antecedents and his motives for enrolling in the army. "The glory of our standards must be without blemish," said Mohammed, "for it is this which will convert the unbelieving."

But it was only in A.D. 621, when he was over the age of fifty, that Mohammed decided to pass from pacific prophecy to proselytising with the sword. Gathering his disciples around him in the little town of Akaba, he made his decision known to them and asked if they were ready to follow him in this new path. The disciples having answered in the affirmative, the Prophet made them swear to remain faithful to him and to fight to the death for the triumph of the faith.

"Henceforward," he told them, "I shall live and die among you. My life is your life, your blood is my blood; your ruin will be mine and my victory will be yours."

"But if we are slain for you," one of them asked, "what will be our recompense?"

"Paradise!" Mohammed replied unhesitatingly.

Those present, numbering about forty, thereupon declared themselves an "Ikwan," or brotherhood of warriors, and Mohammed gave them his blessing. This little handful of men, united by a common faith, was the nucleus of the Islamic legions.

News of the founding of the Ikwan spread in the land. It was said that Allah would give it the shield of his protection and that a long series of victories was promised it. Volunteers converted to Islam by the fiery sermons of the Prophet came hastening from the neighbouring villages and swelled the total strength of the little band to 200 men.

An impartial historian, visiting Arabia at that time, would have been struck by the tendency to unity which was already showing itself among the varied peoples of the peninsula. But he would have predicted that this unity would be to the advantage of the tribe of the Koreish, for everything seemed to point to it as designated for the sovereignty of Arabia. This family, the richest and most honoured of the Hejaz, had made some headway in the work of political unification. It was this family which guaranteed the truce of the Assemblies of Ocazh, assured peace to Mecca and furnished the pontiffs and functionaries of the Temple. Beside it Mohammed, though a Koreish himself, was a mere adventurer without a past, without wealth and above all without traditions.

But the Koreish, wealthy and cultivated though they were, and holders of all the most influential posts in the Hejaz, lacked the burning passion which alone could ensure a great political destiny. Liberal and sceptical, perhaps even pagan, they had permitted the erection of a crowd of statues round the Kaaba, to be sure of angering no god by excluding his worship. They attached their followers to them by what they had to give: material presents and administrative preferments.

Mohammed had one crushing advantage over them: he carried a divine revelation within himself. He spoke "in the name of the One God" who moreover was "the God of the Arabs"; he could affirm to his countrymen that this god had given them the world as their share and that they would enjoy celestial joys if they died in combat for his sake. Now it is normal that men—and above all Bedouins—should rally in the end to him who promises them a harder but more exciting life. "What the flower of the world desires," says an Islamic poet, "is not material security, but danger surmounted in good company; love and laughter, contrast and conquest."

Fearing that their pre-eminence would be endangered if they permitted the activities of the Prophet to develop, the Koreish refused to recognise the sacred character of his mission. They fomented a plot against him and obliged him to flee precipitately from Mecca (Hegira, July 16, 622).

With confidence in his little troop, Mohammed declared war. He fell upon his enemies without warning, at the head of 314 foot soldiers and horsemen, and utterly defeated them on the outskirts of Beder (624). As he had foreseen, this first victory did more for Islam than the most eloquent prophecies. "The believers were confirmed in their faith; the waverers decided; the unbelievers were shaken." The victory brought the Ikwan fresh volunteers. Within a few months Mohammed had a force of 1,500 horsemen at his disposal.

Determined to be finished with the son of Abdullah, the Koreish then leagued themselves with a dozen tribes and besieged Medina.

Mohammed entrenched himself behind a deep ditch and waited (626). Reduced to inaction the assailants lost no time in quarrelling among themselves. Mohammed took advantage of this to break the circle of his enemies, resume the offensive and defeat the hostile tribes one after the other. These impored his pardon and became converts to Islam (627).

Victor of the "ditch war," the author of the Koran concluded a ten years' truce with the Koreish (Hodaibiyah Convention, A.D. 629). Next, turning against the Jews, some of whose forces had advanced southward and intercepted caravans leaving Medina, he seized from them successively Khaibar, Fadac, Wadil-Kora and Taima. Afterwards, to give thanks to the Lord who had granted these victories, he resolved to show himself once again to the people of Mecca and made his entry into the town, as a pilgrim, escorted by a troop of 2,000 horsemen (629).

The fame of the Prophet now began to spread beyond the boundaries of the Hejaz. The tribes of Nejd, impressed by his success, came to salute him as "the lord of Arabia." They gave him absolute authority over themselves and asked that they might follow him in all the wars he should undertake.

This was more than the Koreish could bear. Alarmed to see the authority of their enemy growing hand in hand with the strength of his army, they rashly broke the Hodaibiyah Convention. Mohammed profited by this to seize Mecca and install himself there definitely. The possession of the sacred city was essential to the spreading of his religious doctrine and the consolidation of his political power. He appeared before the ramparts with 10,000 armed horsemen. This demonstration of force was convincing. A section of the inhabitants, seized with panic, fled towards the coast, and the defenders, commanded by Abu-Sofian, surrendered without further resistance (January 11, 630). Abu-Sofian asked Mohammed as a favour to take with him his son Moawiah, and the Prophet agreed. This decision had important consequences, for Moawiah was to become one of the most brilliant generals of the Moslem army and the founder of the glorious dynasty of the Omayyads.

After receiving the surrender of the garrison, the Prophet entered the sanctuary, threw down the statues which encumbered it, cleansed the Kaaba of all the filth which a negligent priesthood had allowed to accumulate, restored order in the House of God and arranged the rites for future pilgrimages. All the dignities of pagan origin were abolished. "Truth has come to pass," cried Mohammed. "Let falsehood disappear."

The conquest of Mecca added greatly to Mohammed's prestige and multiplied the fighting spirit of his troops tenfold. No one could doubt it any longer: Allah protected the Ikwan. The vanquished Koreish, shorn of their prerogatives, were converted to Islam, as were

Harem windows of houses in a street in Jedda.

A dwelling near Jedda with the family's "moke".

General view of the city of Anaiza in Central Arabia.

The kitchen of the King's camp at Arafat during the pilgrimage.

the last hostile Hejaz clans. The celebrated tribe of Temim likewise professed Moslem faith following a "contest of glory"—a kind of spectacular tournament in which the competitors strove to "outdo each other in generosity."

And then, from all the corners of Arabia, the tribes came hurrying to render homage to the Prophet. The year 630–631, known as the "Year of the Embassies," saw the chiefs of Taif, Hadramout, Oman, Hasa, Bahrein and Hail offer Mohammed their oath of allegiance. All undertook to respect the commandments of the Koran and to furnish sizeable contingents to the Ikwan. Those of Yemen, who displayed a tendency to refuse, were rapidly brought to reason by Ali, a young cousin of the Prophet. The forces of Islam were now so large that Mohammed could divide them into several army corps.

By the end of A.D. 631 Mohammed had arrived at the peak of his fame. His spiritual and temporal authority was undisputed. The Koran had become the common law of the tribes. Invested with all royal and sacerdotal attributes, his person was the object of an absolute respect. "I have admired Caesar[1] and Chosroes[2] in all the pomp of their power," declared a member of the Koreish, "but I have never seen a sovereign venerated by his companions as is Mohammed."

At the mosque, his back against the trunk of a palm tree or in a chair devoid of any ornament, he continually made comments on the text of the Koran and stimulated the warlike spirit of the faithful. "When I was besieged at Medina," he told them, "I myself swung a pick to dig the ditch. My pick struck three sparks; the first announced to me the submission of Yemen; the second, the conquest of Persia and the east; the third, the conquest of Egypt and the west. Soldiers, judge by that what triumphs await you!"

Already he had sent out "to the kings of the earth" letters summoning them to be converted to Islam, failing which he would come to exterminate them. His messengers were received with smiles of condescension. Who was this presumptuous little Bedouin who dared to speak thus to the King of Persia and the Emperor of the East? Chosroes II tore up the letter. When he learned this Mohammed cried: "May his kingdom be torn asunder likewise." The Sassanid princes of the outskirts of Damascus replied in contemptuous terms and challenged him to fulfil his threat.

The Prophet made a last pilgrimage to Mecca, assembled all his forces at Medina to the number of 140,000 men, and was preparing to invade Syria to punish the insolent Sassanids when he fell ill and died (June 8, 632).

He bequeathed to his lieutenants the task of continuing his work "in carrying the word of God to the utmost limits of the earth." He left

[1] Heraclius, Emperor of the East. [2] The King of Persia.

them also the instruments necessary to the execution of this mission: a unified Arabia of which all the tribes grouped one beside the other now formed a single people; an army, fanatical, trained and experienced by ten years of battles.

Nothing could now prevent these compressed energies, heated to incandescence by the promise of Paradise, from exploding. Led by their generals, the Moslem legions swarmed out to conquer the world.

[VII]

THEY PROGRESSED the more rapidly because they attacked decadent nations already falling into disorder and anarchy. No adversary was of a stature to stem their advance, and so powerful was the impulse which drove them on that they were never in fact to be halted until they had reached the Himalayas in the east and Burgundy in the west.

Mohammed's first successor, Abu-Bekr (632–634) called the whole nation to arms and flung it upon Syria. This was the first objective assigned by the Prophet; but it was also the direction of the current which for centuries had been thrusting the southern tribes towards the more fertile lands of the north. Thus the impetus of nature reinforced that of religious fervour.

Abu-Bekr gave command of the troops to Khalid, a general who had won his spurs during the siege of Medina. Khalid began by seizing Jauf and Hamran, which opened the way to the Jordan and the Orontes. Then, at the head of 20,000 horsemen, he fell upon the combined armies of Heraclius II, Emperor of the East, and the Christian Sassanid princes, 60,000 strong, and crushed them in the plain of Ajnadain. Despite their numerical superiority the Greeks could not stand against the furious Moslem charges and retreated after losing 40,000 men. This first victory of the Islamic legions opened the road to Damascus. Khalid at once laid siege. The city ended by surrendering after suffering several assaults (633). Khalid installed his headquarters there. The last Sassanid princes, expelled from the country, took refuge at Byzantium.

Abu-Bekr died the following year. Omar succeeded him (634–644). An outstanding soldier, the second Rashidite caliph devoted the ten years of his reign to "the propagation of the law." He commissioned Abu-Obaid to complete the submission of Syria, while Amru, Yezid and Moawiah, the son of Abu-Sofian, received orders to reduce Palestine.

Abu-Obaid took the offensive, rolling back the Graeco-Byzantine forces in Cilicia and Cappadocia and capturing the coastal towns.

Then, turning south, he laid siege to Jerusalem which fell after a desperate resistance. Omar came specially from Mecca to receive the keys of the Holy Sepulchre and make his solemn entry into the town. He at once laid the foundations of a mosque. Islam was installed at the tomb of Christ.

Against Mesopotamia, Armenia and Georgia, the campaign was equally swift and decisive. By 642 the Islamic forces had reached the Caucasus.

Abu-Obaid then turned upon the Persia of Chosroes, whose kingdom Mohammed had ordered to be "torn asunder." Since that time Chosroes II had been assassinated by his son Siroes and replaced by his grandson Yezdedgerd III. Crossing the Euphrates, Abu-Obaid met the bulk of the enemy army in the plain of Kadisiya. The Persians were forced back in disorder towards the heart of the country. Yezdedgerd shut himself up in Istakhar (Persepolis), carrying with him the sacred fire of Zoroaster. But Abu-Obaid later caught up with him at Nehavend, to the south of Ecbatana, and reduced his army to dust. This resounding success, which the Arabs called the "victory of victories," opened the East to them. Kurdistan and Azerbaijan fell rapidly into their hands.

As may well be thought, this succession of victories raised the fervour of the Moslem legions to white heat. They swept across the steppe "like a fiery whirlwind." Asia was stunned by the vehemence of the Arab simoom.

Beside the Indus, Ahnaf completed the work of Abu-Obaid by repulsing Hindu forces which had come too late from Sind to help Yezdedgerd, and consolidating the conquest of Persia. He planned to cross the Oxus, but the passage of the river was too fiercely defended. For the first time the Arab formations came up against tougher people than any with whom they had had so far to deal: the Turks. Ahnaf was confined to glimpsing the towns of Bokhara and Samarkand on the horizon and then he withdrew behind the Oxus to await reinforcements.

While the Islamic legions were thus striking into Central Asia, Moawiah had built a powerful fleet in the shipyards of Tyre and Sidon. Naval operations were a novelty for the Arabs and it may well be asked how they set about them. They showed themselves just as enterprising and courageous as they had done on land. Under the direction of its admirals—this is the first time the term appears in history—the "Saracen fleet," as the Greeks called it, was soon strong enough to inspire terror among its enemies and to plant the Prophet's standard upon the principal islands of the Aegean Sea. Fifteen years after having reached the Syrian shores, Islam was master of the eastern Mediterranean.

But Omar aspired not only to the conquest of the East. The West

also must learn the Law of the Prophet. Had not its fall been foretold to Mohammed by the third spark struck from his pick at the ditch of Medina? He commissioned Amru to "conquer with the faith" both Egypt and Africa.

Starting from Jerusalem, Amru crossed the Sinai Peninsula and the isthmus of Suez, marched at once upon Middle Egypt, and, having taken Memphis (640), laid siege to Alexandria.

Aided on several occasions by the Byzantine fleet, the city resisted for fourteen months, inflicting severe losses upon the invaders. Despite the heroic defence of the garrison it finally capitulated. The Arabs entered in a rush on December 21, 641.

The news of the fall of Alexandria came as a profound shock to the whole civilised world. The conquest of this superb city was to have a strong influence upon the later growth of Arab civilisation, for in the seventh century nearly all the cultural heritage of antiquity had been concentrated there.

The taking of Messah (Cairo) in the following spring and the submission of Nubia triumphantly concluded the conquest of Egypt. The power of the Ptolemies was annihilated.

Just as the Moslem legions had burst into Central Asia, so now they swarmed with irresistible force along the coast of Africa, quickly mastering Libya, Tripolitania and Byzacene.

Akbah-ibn-Nazi founded Kairouan a few miles from Carthage. Then, not troubling to invest that redoubtable fortress, he drove across the Maghreb, peopled at that time by a mixture of Greeks, Vandals and Moors.

Cutting through the hostile populations, he carried out a lightning raid which took him to the Atlantic coast (675). His soldiers exulted at seeing this unknown ocean and believed that they had arrived at the edge of the universe. Akbah rode his horse into the midst of the waves and, pointing his sword at the horizon, cried out in an acme of exaltation:

"God of Mohammed! If I were not held back by these waves I would carry the glory of thy name to the uttermost limits of the world!"

[VIII]

MEANWHILE OTHMAN (644–655) had succeeded to Omar and Ali (655–660) to Othman. But the empire had become too vast for an elective system which put everything in question at the death of each Caliph. After Ali's death a violent quarrel broke out between the candidates to the succession. This created serious troubles all over the

peninsula. An energetic general, named Hegiage, had recourse to the most brutal methods to maintain unity. The revolt, which for a moment had mastered Mecca, was mercilessly repressed.

These disorders interrupted development of the conquest for thirty years (675–705). It was not resumed until Moawiah and his successors, the founders of the Omayyad dynasty, were substituted for the Rashidite Caliphs and had gathered hereditary power in their family.

But these thirty years were not lost for Islam. When the Arab armies stirred afresh they had achieved considerable progress in military art. At the outset they had been merely hordes of horsemen who drew their strength from their rapidity, endurance and religious fanaticism. Now they had acquired a more supple knowledge of the art of war and their forces were better co-ordinated. The composition and armament of units had been varied and their generals, grown up upon the field of battle, had become the best strategists of their time. When Walid I (705–715) came to power, the armies resumed their assault upon the world with an enhanced dynamism.

The new sovereign, who had moved his capital to Damascus, inaugurated the second phase of the conquest by ordering Kotaiba and Mohammed-ibn-Cassem to resume the offensive in Central Asia. Kotaiba crossed the Oxus for the second time and turned towards Afghanistan and China. Not content with burning the idols of Bokhara and entering Samarkand as a conqueror, he seized Kashgar, Cherchen and Khotan, and sent a dozen ambassadors to the Emperor of China to exhort him to embrace the Islamic religion. The Emperor sought to gain time by making dilatory promises to the "Envoys of the Prophet" and by loading them with gold. The King of Afghanistan did not come off so cheaply and was obliged to pay the conqueror a regular tribute. A Moslem garrison was established at Kabul.

The Arabs turned then towards India (707). This campaign, carried out by Mohammed-ibn-Cassem, was bloody and swift. All Sind was conquered. The Indus became "the bulwark of Islam in the east."

In 715, Mohammed-ibn-Cassem, crossing the first spurs of the Himalayas, prepared to invade the Punjab. His advance guards had already reached the Ganges when he received an order from Damascus enjoining him to halt. Suliman, the new Caliph, having learned of the fabulous wealth of the cities conquered by his general, had become jealous and feared lest he should wish to carve out a personal empire in Asia.

During this time the Saracen fleet had not remained inactive. It also had been reinforced considerably since the first phase of conquest. In a series of "algarades" (lightning raids) it had obtained a footing in Sicily (720), Sardinia (724), Corsica and the Balearics, thus giving the Arabs the mastery of the whole Mediterranean.

Even more spectacular were the successes achieved in the West.

The lightning advance of Akbah to the Atlantic in 675 had been only a raid without sequel. Attacked by the Greeks and the Moors, the Islamic forces had had to evacuate the whole of the Mahgreb and fall back upon Barcah. Carthage, powerfully fortified, still represented a formidable defence line whose possession barred access to the Mahgreb.

The first mission Hassan assigned his troops was therefore to reduce this fortress, cost what it might. The soldiers acquitted themselves of this task with extraordinary vigour.

"Swept along by their frenzied pace," a chronicler tells us, "even the dead fell inside the town, upon the defenders. Half crazed, their eyes starting from their heads, their mouths yelling, their hands clenched upon their bloody scimitars or upon the hafts of their lances whence hung strips of human flesh, the Islamic warriors scattered in the enclosure in a frenzy of murder and booty, in quest of heads to sever and bellies to disembowel." The town was swept as by a tidal wave and its riches passed into the hands of the conqueror (707). Hassan razed it to the ground to prevent it from competing with Kairouan, founded by Akbah in 674.

Hassan's successor, Moussa-ibn-Noseir, was one of the greatest figures of the Islamic epic. Breaking with the policy of his predecessor, he rallied the conquered Moors to himself and inspired them with confidence by measures of clemency. He secured their allegiance, incorporated them within his own troops and invited them to "follow whither he led" (709).

In acting thus, Moussa was working for the realisation of a plan which had long been ripening in his mind. From the African coast he saw spread on the horizon another shore which exercised a strange fascination over him: Spain. He resolved to conquer it.

Walid's consent once obtained, Moussa hastened his preparations. But, not wishing to engage his best troops in an endeavour which involved many risks, he decided to send an advance guard of Moorish regiments under the command of their leader, Tarik. The latter crossed the strait, disembarked on the Spanish coast and set up his camp at the foot of a steep cliff which he baptised Jebel-al-Tarik (Gibraltar). Then he burnt his boats to show them that the adventure in which he was engaging was without return, and struck into the interior of the country (710).

The Visigoths, who occupied the Iberian peninsula at that time, had lost much of their primitive vigour. Their king, Roderick, was a prince of refinement, of great elevation of mind, but emasculated by the flabbiness and luxury of his court.

The decisive battle was fought in the plains of Guadalete, not far from Xerez. For seven days the two armies exhausted themselves in

skirmishes and single combats. At last, to force a decision, Tarik impetuously charged the Visigoths at the head of his cavalry and succeeded in cutting the enemy forces into several portions. At once the Visigoths gave ground. Seeing them break ranks, the Bishop of Seville and the troops which he commanded took sides with the invaders. Roderick was carried away in the general rout and perished in the waters of the Guadalquivir (711).

Tarik took the fullest advantage of this brilliant victory. He struck at Toledo, the capital of the kingdom, after seizing Malaga, Elvira, Granada and Cordoba. Deprived of defenders, Toledo capitulated. Tarik pursued his march northward and reached Giron, on the Bay of Biscay, via Saragossa and Pamplona.

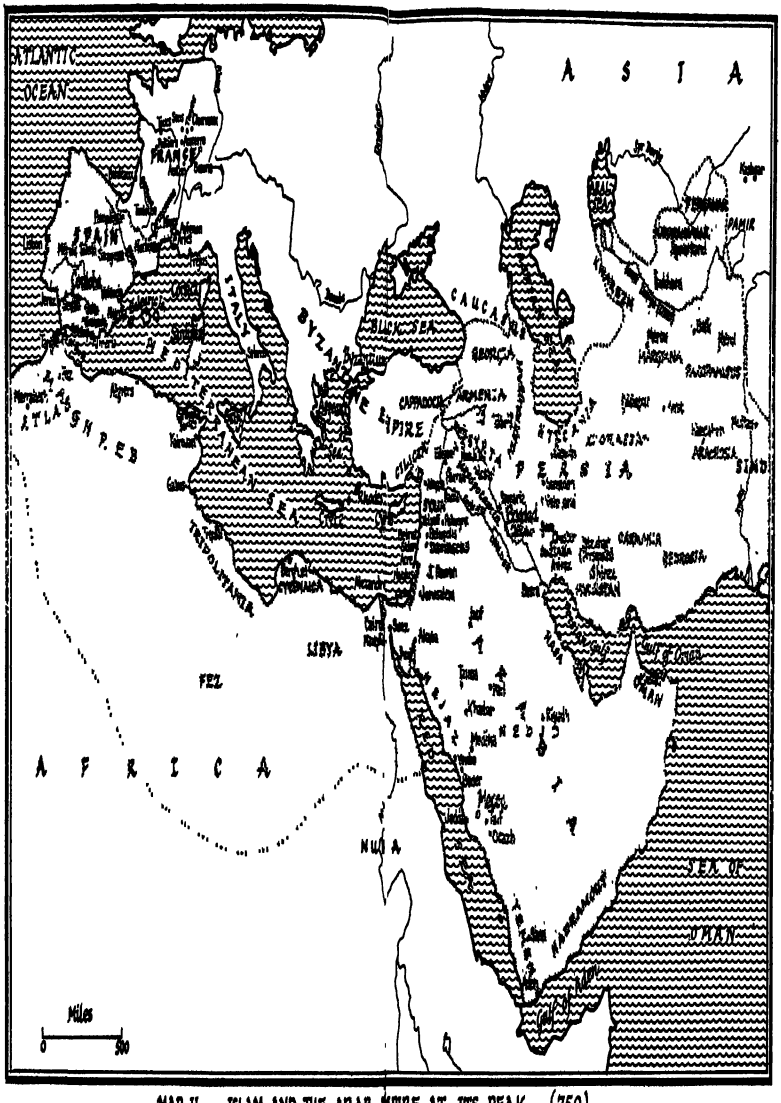
Not wishing to leave his lieutenant all the fruits of this campaign, Moussa hastened in his turn to cross the Strait of Gibraltar and penetrated into Andalusia, which had not yet been entirely subjugated. He captured Merida, Carmona and Seville, and went on to join forces with Tarik at Toledo, while his young son, Abdelaziz, who had brought reinforcement of 7,000 men from Africa, made himself master of Lusitania and Estremadura.

All Spain was now in the hands of Islam. This splendid prize was divided among the victorious legions.

But for Moussa the conquest of Spain was only a beginning. Leaving his son Abdelaziz to administer the country with sufficient garrisons to ensure order, he left for the north with the remainder of his troops. When he reached the summit of the Pyrenees and saw the rich plains of Narbonne spread at his feet, Moussa conceived an ambitious plan: he would march overland to the Bosphorus and take Constantinople from the rear, subjugating all the peoples he met with on the way. This project was inspired by "an overweening pride and by his old nomad instinct for which distance did not count."

He detached an advance guard under the command of the Emir Alsamah and instructed him to conquer Septimania. Narbonne was occupied in 719. Alsamah having been killed in combat, his successor, Ambizah, seized Carcassonne, Agde, Béziers and Nîmes, but encountered a vigorous resistance from Eudes, Duke of Aquitaine, which barred him access to Toulouse (721). Ambizah and his horsemen then turned off towards the valley of the Rhône, which they ascended by stages. Pursuing their advance along the Sâone, the Moslems entered Burgundy. Autun was taken by siege and pillaged (725). Auxerre nearly suffered the same fate. The Arabs camped in the valleys of the Aube and the Absinthe at approximately the spot at which the Abbey of Clairvaux was later to be built. Troyes barricaded its gates in anticipation of a siege.

These operations coincided with a landing carried out by the Saracen



MAP II ISLAM AND THE ARAB EMPIRE AT ITS PEAK (750)

fleet in the region of Fréjus (Fraxinet). The Moslem squadrons established themselves in force in the mountain range now known as the Maures. From there they spread out into Provence, where they occupied Arles and Avignon (730).

Emboldened by this success, Moussa ordered another of his generals, the Emir Abdur-Rahman, to conquer the rest of Gaul. At the head of a large army Abdur-Rahman crossed the Puygcerda Pass. This time the Duke of Aquitaine could not hold back the invader. Defeated on the banks of the Garonne, Eudes was forced to withdraw in haste towards the north-east, opening to the Arabs the road to Bordeaux, which was taken by storm. Once again victorious at the passage of the Dordogne, Abdur-Rahman made towards Tours with the intention of seizing the Abbey of Saint Martin, which was at that time the sanctuary of the Franks.

News that the Arabs had arrived on the banks of the Loire caused alarm all over Gaul. Was Europe about to become Moslem? Charles, son of Pépin d'Héristal, whose family was rising in power, resolved to save Christianity from this threat. All men of fighting age answered his appeal. Abdur-Rahman withdrew from the Loire and awaited his enemy at Vouillé, between Tours and Poitiers. It was there that the fate of the West was to be decided (732).

"The Arabs had counted on a second battle of Xerez and were disappointed in their hopes. The Franks of eastern Gaul did not resemble the degenerate Visigoths. They wore no gold upon their garments and appeared for battle clad in steel. There no slaves fought for a detested master, but comrades shoulder to shoulder with a chief who called himself their equal. Throughout the first six days there were only partial engagements, in which the Moslems had the advantage. On the seventh the action became general; it was grim and determined. The Arabs, overwhelmed by the strength and stature of the Franks, were put to flight by the gallantry of Charles, who won in this battle his name of Martel."[1]

Abdur-Rahman was killed in the battle. In the night which followed, the Arabs, deprived of their leader, lost in a country which they did not know, were seized with panic and quarrelled among themselves. Then, in the forest clearings of Poitou the tribes of the Hejaz, Yemen and Nejd turned their arms against one another. The army disintegrated under the impact of the disaster. Its fragments turned back painfully towards Septimania, harassed by Charles Martel and his brother Childebrand. Not until they were behind the ramparts of Narbonne and Carcassonne were they once more in safety.

Halted in the west by the victory of Charles Martel, blocked before Byzantium by the resistance of Leon III and Justinian II, the Arab

[1] L. A. Sédillot: op. cit., p. 158.

expansion had by 743 reached limits beyond which it was never to pass. Thanks to the strength of the Franks and the tenacity of the Greeks, Europe was to remain outside its sway. But the Moslem dominion nevertheless extended from Narbonne to Kashgar; and the Caliph, "that image of divinity upon earth," found himself at the head of an empire vaster than that of Darius or Alexander the Great.

[IX]

"PARADISE IS in front of you and Hell behind." It was with this battle-cry that the Arab generals had launched their legions to assail the world and had obtained from them prodigies of valour. Hell? The Moslem nobles could easily imagine it. It was the burning furnace of the desert which they had left behind them. Paradise? To picture it they had but to open the Koran.

"After having slaked his thirst at the bowl of the Prophet," they read, "the Believer penetrates into Paradise where riches and immense possessions are his. An eternal dawn maintains the greenness of the gardens where murmur springs of every kind: streams of delicious water, streams of milk, streams of wine, streams of honey flowing beneath the thick shade of trees. These, at the will of the master, yield cool shadows and all kinds of fruit. Scented groves invite the Blessed Ones to dream to the murmur of a fountain, unless they prefer to rest within a pavilion of mother-of-pearl, rubies and hyacinth. Dressed in silk and with legs crossed upon a soft carpet, in the midst of flowers, the servant of God commands. Instantly he is brought a splendid repast laid out upon plates of massive gold. Exquisite meats and rare fruits—three hundred dishes to each service—nourish him without satiety. Three hundred youths, who resemble in procession a necklace of fine pearls, bring him cups and vases of rock crystal and pour him beverages of paradise, delicious liquors which rejoice his soul without unseating his reason. 'Eat and drink at your ease,' has said the Lord, 'in recompense for your deeds on earth.' "

When the ride of conquest was halted, the Arabs came to give their battle-cry a literal meaning, concrete and immediate. The desert, that is Hell, had vanished from their sight. And Paradise, which their leaders had told them ceaselessly lay "before them," was it not these lands which lay about them, whose luxuriant vegetation contrasted with the barren lands they had left behind? Why not transform them at once into places of delight, without waiting for the eternal gardens promised by Allah?

Everything within and around them encouraged this rationalisation

of their desires. First their sensuality, suppressed for generations, which was but waiting to burst out and make amends for so many centuries of asceticism; then the fact that the Koran represented the next world to them as an exact transposition of this one. Mohammed in effect had promised his disciples that at the Day of Judgment "man would be reborn integrally in the two principles of which he was composed—the soul and the body—for God who has created all things can also make all things live again." No shadow, no malediction could weigh thus upon the flesh and nothing forbade man from satisfying his desires. Finally their pride inspired them to a growing taste for luxury, for if the Caliph was "the image of divinity upon earth," did he not owe it to himself to live "in an anticipation of Paradise"?

The first successors of Mohammed had been remarkable for the extreme simplicity of their morals. Abu-Bekr at his death had left as his sole belongings a tunic, a slave and a camel; Omar had slept among the poor on the steps of the Temple; Ali had nourished himself with a handful of dates and given to the poor, each Friday, all the money he had earned during the week. But when a hundred years later the empire had split into several portions (752) and independent dynasties had established themselves one after another at Bagdad, Cairo, Cordoba and Toledo, these, revising the ancient "glory contests," now made it a point of honour to surpass one another in ostentation and magnificence. Honour went to him who most faithfully reproduced Paradise, drawing inspiration from the description which the Prophet had given. Architecture, poetry, dance and music were carried to an unsurpassed degree of perfection. Everywhere, in Spain, in Morocco, in Egypt, in the East, arose towns and mosques, citadels (Al Kasbah) and palaces (Al Ksar) of an undreamed-of splendour, to which the Christian West could as yet offer nothing comparable.

The Arab writers have boasted to us of the beauties of the Alcazars which then were celebrated. The Moor Rasis describes a "palace upon the sea" at Mirviedro. Others, that of Al Mostanzir at Valencia; the palace of Al Hizem at Toledo; that of Zahair at Almeria. At Cordoba the palaces of Rissafah, of Mogueit, Merivan and Dimisch; that of the governor Abu-Yahgha "which rested upon arcades over the Guadalquivir."[1]

"The mosque of Cordoba," says one of the old chroniclers, "built to celebrate the glory of the Omayyads, measured 600 feet long by 250 feet wide. Its thirty-eight naves were supported by 1,093 marble pillars. It was entered on the south side by nineteen gates covered with sheets of bronze, exquisitely chased. The centre gate was encrusted with sheets of gold. At its summit rose three gilded cupolas, surmounted by

[1] Georges Pillement: *Palais et châteaux arabes en Andalousie*, p 14. It seems that it is the ruins of this last that can still be seen on the bed of the river.

a golden pomegranate. This spacious building was lighted at night by 4,700 lamps. The lamp in the sanctuary was of massive gold."

Around the mosque extended a superb city which soon stood out as the most cultivated in Europe, and, with Byzantium and Alexandria, as one of the three great cultural centres of the Mediterranean world. With its 113,000 private houses, its twenty-one suburbs, its seventy libraries, its numerous bookshops, mosques and palaces, Cordoba achieved an international renown by its arsenals and its leather industry. "It enjoyed miles of paved streets illuminated by lights from the bordering houses, whereas seven hundred years after this time there was not so much as one public lamp in London, and in Paris, centuries subsequently, whoever stepped over his threshold on a rainy day stepped up to his ankles in mud."[1]

Not far away on the banks of the Guadalquivir lay the palace of Az-Zahra, which served Abdur-Rahman II as a residence. Here is what another chronicler said of it: "This palace was inhabited by the Caliph, his wives and the people of his household. The ceiling, supported by 4,312 marble pillars of varied colours, brought from Africa, France, Greece and Italy, was of inlaid marquetry, as was the floor, and was painted in the blue colour of the sky, set off with powdered gold. The principal room, that of the Caliphs, was entirely of marble. Its walls and ceiling, richly encrusted with fine pearls, diamonds and other precious stones, was adorned with bas-reliefs and arabesques of exquisite workmanship. At its centre rose a fountain with a basin of jasper whence sprang a limpid water, abundant and perfumed, which scented and refreshed the soul and the senses. Innumerable precious stones strewn at the bottom of the basin imitated, in lifelike fashion, grottos whence sprang natural springs, often rich in bizarre crystallisations and capricious beauties. Around this fountain twelve animals of massive gold, life size, seemed to keep watch. From their mouths gushed water, eternally cool, thanks to the winds of the Sierra Morena, which glinted during the daytime under the rays of the splendid sun of Andalusia and at night was changed into a rain of diamonds and emeralds by the fantastic clarity of the moonlight, filtering through the garden trellises. . . . Everywhere were precious hangings from Damascus, sumptuous Persian carpets, and gold, gold in profusion, birds, landscapes and flowers, imitated with such rare perfection that the beholder seemed to hear their warbling, the murmur of the breeze through foliage and to feel intoxicated by the scent of the flowers."

In addition to the cities, the Alcazars and mosques, the Omayyad princes devoted themselves to great irrigation works. They caused aqueducts to be constructed with the object of rendering Nature yet

[1] Philip K. Hitti: op. cit., p. 29.

more luxuriant and fertile. Thanks to these, immense gardens could be laid out around the palace of Rissafah where were accumulated plants and shrubs of all kinds, gathered by envoys sent to the most distant lands: orange trees, lemon trees, pomegranates and terebinths, Persian lilies, camelias from Shiraz and cedars from Afghanistan. Boat bridges were flung across the Tagus and the Guadalquivir, whose banks were fitted with quays and balustrades of marble. As for the fêtes of Cordoba, "nothing can convey any idea of the luxury and general intoxication which reigned there. All night the city was lit up: the streets were carpeted with flowers; everywhere upon the esplanades and public squares the sound of musical instruments vibrated in the air and the population abandoned itself to joyous dance."[1]

When, at the end of the twelfth century, the Almohads and the Almoravids transferred the capital of the kingdom to Granada, they strove to eclipse the work of their predecessors. "Moorish" art attained its peak and the Alhambra was its loftiest expression.

The exterior of the palace, imposing and austere, was so made, according to tradition, "to turn aside the stranger's eye." The entrance was no more than an immense arch, simply decorated with a few emblems. But on the inside the architects had given free rein to all the resources of their imagination. "Spacious galleries painted and gilded, ornamented with arcades of all kinds, were adorned with festoons and stalactites, and covered with stucco lacework. The apartments, pierced with latticed windows, the Hall of Ambassadors, that of the Two Sisters, the small rooms of the Infantes, the tower of Comares, the court and fountain of Alberca, beneath which were the baths copied from antiquity, offered astonishing visual effects. Here, water gushed amid thousands of elegant miniature columns; there it flowed through channels of marble. At times it formed cascades, at times it spurted in jets and supplied the basins in the patios shaded with pomegranate trees and oleanders. Everywhere inscriptions, cunningly combined with decorative sculpture, praised the glory of the Abencerrages. To set off still further this fairyland of bronze, of marble and of gold, porcelain displayed in profusion provided a symphony of blue and vermilion, of yellow and green."[2]

In Egypt the Fatimids and Talumids strove to rival the Iberian dynasties by the erection of sumptuous buildings, notably the great mosques of Cairo and Alexandria. Khomarouyah, son of Tulun, had a huge menagerie built at Messah where all kinds of wild animals were kept; lions, panthers, elephants and leopards.

But the palm for magnificence goes incontestably to the dynasty of the Abassids, whose most notable representatives—Abul-Abbas, the Bloody (752–775), Haroun-al-Rashid, the Just (786–809), and

[1] L. A. Sédillot: op cit., p. 273. [2] L. A. Sédillot: op. cit., p. 432.

Al Mamoun, the August of Islam (813–833)—far surpassed all that we have described. Having founded Bagdad in 762 they raised themselves to the dignity of Caliphs and acquired the status of demi-gods in the eyes of their Iraqi and Persian subjects.

Governors of all the provinces situated to the east of the Euphrates, sole depositories of the riches of the Orient and with no standing armies to maintain, the Abassids disposed of fabulous incomes which they employed themselves in dissipating in unparalleled extravagance. "There were," writes Sédillot, "profusions without measure, prodigious gifts, gold and pearls distributed by the handful in the palace, in the gardens and in the mosques. Zobeida, the wife of Haroun, had an aqueduct built at Mecca in order to bring the water from the neighbouring hills into the town at a cost of 700,000 dinars. . . . When the Caliph founded Samana he had the ground raised before it was built, regardless of the cost which this gigantic labour involved."[1]

No doubt he was right, for the foundation of Bagdad remains one of this dynasty's chief claims to fame. Constructed on the banks of the Tigris, near ancient Seleucis, this town, in the building of which 100,000 workers, artisans and architects laboured for four years, became immediately prosperous and in a short time "a metropolis whose renown extended so far that it was spoken of in China and at the court of Charlemagne."

In contact with India and Syria, Byzantium and Persia, the artists of the Abassid era were able to infuse into the Arab style an audacious and refined exuberance, an airy lightness and unbridled fantasy which is not to be found in the heavier and more severe buildings of Morocco and Spain. Mosaics of gold, ceramics of bright colours, festoons and astragals, slender arches and graceful naves expressed the joy of life of the conquerors. Those who saw "this glory which was Bagdad" in the ninth century declare that "everything there was shimmering with life."

The city was of circular form, with a double rampart of brick, separated by a deep moat. A third wall, seventy-five feet high, served as a supplementary enclosure to the central quarters. The walls had four gates whence issued four main roads, like the spokes of a wheel, leading to the four corners of the empire. The whole formed a series of concentric circles around the palace of the Caliphs, called the Green Dome, which was the hub. Near the palace stood the great mosque.

[1] L. A. Sédillot· op cit., pp. 185–186. Later, Arab military architecture was to have a considerable influence upon the West, where "the fortresses of the eleventh century were still built according to a rudimentary technique, without the improvements introduced into them a century later by the Crusades." (Saint Bernard de Clairvaux: *Livre du VIIIme Centenaire*, 1953, p. 6. See also on this interesting subject, G. Deschamps: *Les Châteaux des Croisés en Terre Sainte*, Paris, 1939, 2 vols.).

The dome of the audience chamber which had given its name to the palace was 120 feet high. It was surmounted by the equestrian statue of a man holding a lance; in times of peril, it was said, this "pointed of itself in the direction whence the enemy could be expected."

All along the quays, docks and warehouses of the city, to a length of nearly twenty miles, were moored hundreds of vessels ranging from warships to pleasure boats, from Chinese junks to simple rafts of inflated sheepskins which can still be seen today. In the *souks* of the city arrived porcelain, silk and musk from China; spices, minerals and dyes from India and Malaya; rubies, lapis-lazuli, cloth and slaves from the Turkish countries of Central Asia; honey, wax, furs and white slaves from Russia and Scandinavia; ivory, powdered gold and black slaves from East Africa. A special quarter of the bazaar was reserved for trade in Chinese merchandise. The various provinces of the empire sent their products also by sea or by caravan: rice, wheat and linen cloth from Egypt; glassware, ironmongery and fruits from Syria; brocade, pearls and weapons from Arabia; silks, perfumes, fruits and vegetables from Persia.

At the beginning of the tenth century Bagdad boasted of possessing 27,000 public baths and later as many as 60,000—figures which appear greatly exaggerated. But a Moorish traveller who visited Bagdad in 1327 found in each of the thirteen quarters of the city two or three public baths all having running hot and cold water.

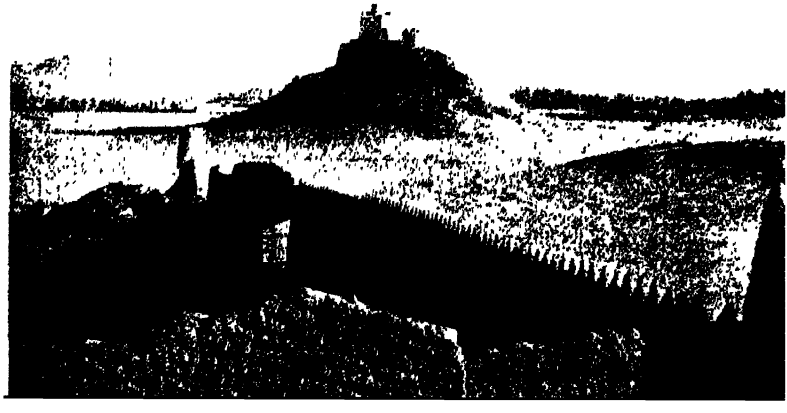
The Abassid Caliphs did not limit the display of their ostentation and prodigality to fêtes and receptions; anxious for their popularity, they neglected nothing, from year's end to year's end, to keep their subjects contented. Orchestras of lutes, hautboys, guitars and lyres played constantly in the public gardens. Now a troupe of dancers passed through the town, accompanied by trumpets, sistrums and tambourines. Now a poet, mounted on a rostrum set up in a square, would recall in verse the magnificence of the conquest and acclaim "the proud honour of the Bedouin Muruwa in a resounding fanfare of words, rhythms and rhymes."[1]

It was in this fairylike world that Haroun-al-Rashid and Al Mamoun lived, in the midst of a populace careless of the morrow. In this capital of gay scholarship, the poet Montanebbi tells us, "each day produced more exquisite pleasures, each night rarer delights." When dusk fell and a grateful coolness rose from the river, the sovereign's palace was lit up. This was the hour when Haroun received his guests. A strange assembly, the Caliph's court! There were met with, higgledy-piggledy at the caprice of the master, theologians and singers, judges and poets, ambassadors and knights errant, astronomers and jugglers. "After prayers had been piously said in the evening, verses were intoned and

[1] M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes: *Les institutions musulmanes*, p. 204.

The Governor of Abha, capital of the Asir Province, on his way to prayers.

One of the outer forts and the old town wall of Hail, former capital of northern Arabia.



great part of the heritage of antiquity. Thus were known to them, from the seventh century onwards and long before their works reached the west, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Democritus, Zeno and the Eleates, Antisthenes, Plato,[1] Aristotle,[2] Diogenes and Cynic, Aristippes, Epicurus and the Stoics, Plotinus, Proclus, Apollonius, Ammonius and Porphyry; Hippocrates and Galen; Dioscorides, Euclid, Archimedes, Diophantes, Hero, Ptolemy, Theodosius and Hypsicles.

The discovery of these authors set their imaginations on fire and produced a stir which was felt to the ends of the empire. Scribes and scholars set themselves to decipher the Greek texts with a curiosity which rapidly turned into a passionate enthusiasm. The Abassid Caliphs did their best to encourage them in this and showered rewards upon them. Honain received from Al Mamoun a weight in gold equal to that of each of the Greek volumes which he succeeded in transcribing. The first translation of Aristotle was paid for with its weight in diamonds. Arzachel received 10,000 dinars, two falcons and a racehorse as recompense for his work on the precession of the equinoxes.

A fever of learning consumed Islam. Beside the palaces and mosques, in all the large cities, notably at Bagdad, Damascus, Cairo, Ceuta, Tangier, Fez, Marrakesh, Seville, Cordoba, Granada, Murcia, Toledo and finally Salerno, arose academies, universities, observatories and schools, where teams of scholars interpreted the ancient texts and taught mathematics, medicine and chemistry. After the physical explosion which marked the period of military offensives, and the artistic explosion which accompanied the building of monuments and the founding of cities, there took place a veritable intellectual explosion. Investigators and scholars set about the conquest of science as the Moslem legions had set about the conquest of the world.

What prevented the Arab philosophers and mathematicians from being purely and simply commentators of the Greeks was the fact that they quickly achieved the notion of method and understood that science had no value unless it was experimental. "To proceed from the known to the unknown, to form an exact notion of phenomena, to work thereafter from effects to causes, to accept only what had been demonstrated by experiment, these were the principles taught by the school of Bagdad."[3]

Thus it is not enough to say, like Lawrence, that the Arabs preserved "something of a classical past for a Mediaeval future."[4]

They were more than agents of transmission: they were continuers and in several fields even creators. Passing from commentary to observation, from observation to experiment and the deduction of

[1] The *Phaedo*, the *Cratylus* and the *Laws*. [2] Almost entire.
[3] L. A. Sédillot: op. cit., p. 341. [4] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 44.

general laws, Humboldt tells us, they raised themselves "to a level of knowledge unknown to the ancients and should be regarded as the real founders of physical science, in the sense in which we understand it today."

It was the school of Bagdad, founded by Abu-Jaffar, which gave impetus to this movement, and the first science which developed was astronomy. For centuries the nomads of the desert had lived in the contemplation of the stars. It was these which had given them the idea of a divine majesty. Their successors, seeking to advance in the "vision of God," were naturally brought to interrogate the firmament. But now they did not limit themselves to contemplating the stars; they strove to measure their trajectories, to predict their orbits and decipher the laws which governed their movements.

Haroun-al-Rashid built an observatory on the great bridge of Bagdad where under his aegis a whole constellation of scholars worked. It was there that Yahya-ben-Khaled carried out the revision of the Almagest of Ptolemy and Hegia-ben-Yusef completed the translation of Euclid.

Astronomy there received a brilliant and rapid impulse. Measurement of the degree of the meridian, by Send-ben-Ali (853); study of the differences of the greatest latitude of the moon, by Ahmed and Hasan; correction of the table of the precession of the equinoxes and observation of the sun's eccentric by Al-Battani (929); descriptions of the solstices of the summer and autumn equinoxes of the year 1000 by Alkuhi-ben-Vastem; discovery of the "third lunar inequality" by Abul-Wefa (937–998) carried the knowledge of the Arabs beyond the limits attained by Hipparchus and Ptolemy. Thanks to this harvest of observations Omar Khayyám—who was not merely a great poet but a renowned astronomer—could undertake the reform of the Persian calendar in 1079, "achieving an accuracy which has not been surpassed by our modern tables."[1]

Progress in astronomy brought about a parallel development in mathematics. It was a race in audacity and ingenuity as to who should first discover a new theorem or a new method of calculation. The invention of algebra (of which Diophantes had developed only a few elements) by Mohammed-ben-Musa Al-Kwarizmi;[2] the application of algebra to geometry by his disciple Thebit-ben-Corrah (who died in 900); solution of third-degree equations; the foundation of spherical trigonometry by Al-Battani; adjustment of the fifth of the six formulas for the solution of right angles by Geber (1050),[3] filled their contemporaries with admiration and obtained princely rewards for their authors.

[1] See *Annuaire du Bureau des Longitudes* for 1850.
[2] In his celebrated Algorithms.
[3] The sixth was not known until Viète (1540–1603).

When the fortunes of Bagdad declined, from the tenth century onwards, the school of Cairo took up the torch and, under the aegis of the Fatimid Caliphs Aziz and Hakem, continued the work begun under the Abassids. It won fame especially from the observations of Alotki and Ibn-Younis (978–1008). Successor to Abul-Wefa at the observatory of Mount Mocattam, the latter compiled the "Grand Hashimite Table" which replaced the Almagest of Ptolemy all over the East and similar treatises of the school of Bagdad. Creator of the first sexagesimal tables, Ibn-Younis revolutionised mathematics in his day by calculating subsidiary arcs, which considerably simplified the methods used until then.[1] His successor, Hassan-ben-Haithem (died 1038), wrote more than eighty works, including a commentary of the Almagest, another which offers a certain analogy with the Porisms of Euclid; a treatise on optics in which he studied direct, reflected and refracted light, and burning mirrors; and a short work on geometry in which he boasted of having set out "things absolutely new of which even the classification was unknown to the ancients."

Fez and Marrakesh also had their "schools." It was in the latter city that Alpetragius (1150), "revolted," in the reading of Ptolemy, by "this complicated system of eccentrics and epicycles turning around empty centres and themselves mobile," himself observed the obliquity of the ecliptic and proposed a "new planetary system" which approaches the heliocentric theory of Aristarchus of Samos.[2] Abul-Hasan, who lived in North Africa at the beginning of the twelfth century, travelled widely in Southern Spain and the Mahgreb. He calculated the height of the Pole in forty-one towns from the Atlantic to Cairo and compiled a treatise on conic sections and another on "beginnings and endings" which foreshadowed the discoveries of Copernicus and Tycho Brahe.

But the most brilliant centres of learning and those which first carried the fame of Arab science to the West were the universities of Spain. The magnificent botanical gardens planted by the Almohads and the Almoravids at Rissafah and Granada not only enabled the "herbarium" of Dioscorides at Alexandria to be enriched by 2,000 new plants, but encouraged the study of medicinal substances, pharmacopoeia, chemistry and in a general way all the natural sciences. Less exclusively linked with astronomy and mathematics than the schools of Bagdad and Cairo, the universities of Cordoba, Toledo and Granada made themselves celebrated all over the world for the progress for which they were responsible in medicine, anatomy, surgery, chemistry

[1] These were not to be known in Europe until 700 years later, thanks to the work of the Englishman R. Simpson.

[2] It is interesting to speculate what the astronomy of the Arabs would have been if chance, instead of letting the geocentric works of Ptolemy fall into their hands, had made Aristarchus and the school of Samos known to them instead.

and optics and in so doing developed an individual style which distinguished them from their rivals in Egypt and the Orient.

Geber, the "father of chemistry," who is thought to have lived in the eighth century, left writings in which can be found the compositions of sulphuric acid, nitric acid and *aqua regia*, the preparation of mercury and other metallic oxides, as well as advanced notes on alcoholic fermentation. Rhazes (850–923) established the diagnosis of smallpox and measles. An excellent anatomist and a surgeon of repute, he was the first to distinguish the laryngeal nerve and performed several operations for cataract. Abulcasis (913–1003) diagnosed goitre and Pott's disease and described the operation of lithotomy (for stone), advising incision at the spot used by modern surgeons. Alhazen (965–1039) studied the phenomenon of refraction, the apparent position of the image in curved and spherical mirrors—which presumes knowledge of fourth-degree equations—and discovered the principle of the *camera obscura*. Applying his discoveries to anatomy, he published the first accurate description of the eye, with the watery humour, the cornea, the crystalline lens and the retina.[1]

Arzachel (1080) made 402 observations to determine the sun's apogee and made clocks which were the admiration of his contemporaries. The Arab Emirs of Andalusia could be proud of their universities where erudite scholars were already studying the works of Aristotle while Charlemagne and his contemporaries could hardly write their names.[2]

Such was the high degree of development to which Arab science had attained when there emerged a new race of scholars, veritable giants of thought, who surpassed all that had been done before them. Endowed with a knowledge such that the Christians suspected them of having concluded a pact with the Devil, great travellers who voyaged over all the empire to augment their store of observation and knowledge, these Moslem "Fausts" were at once astronomers, mathematicians, geometrists, physicians, architects and poets—and were all these with genius. One can imagine them walking in the gardens of Shiraz or Granada with their sunburnt faces, their glowing eyes, their aquiline profiles and dressed in those great white robes which were later to be assumed by the Knights Templar and Frederick II of Hohenstaufen.

The first among these, Avicenna (980–1037), surnamed the "prince of science," was without a doubt one of the most extraordinary men of his century. He wrote on all sciences and for 600 years exercised an absolute domination over Islamic thought. His Canons (or Rules) were studied in all the great universities of the West, at Padua, Ferrara,

[1] Philarète Chasles, in his *Mémoire sur les méthodes en géométrie*, does not hesitate to declare "that Alhazen should be considered the originator of our optical knowledge."

[2] Philip K. Hitti: op. cit., p. 10.

Salerno, Chartres, Oxford and Paris. He stands out for his very advanced studies in chemistry, wherein he made experiments with phosphorus and discovered the formula for several explosives. Continuing the work of Eristratus he specialised in medicine in the study of the heart, the arteries and the veins. His greatest title to fame is that, 500 years before Servet and Harvey, he produced the first theory of the circulation of the blood.

Avicenna does not seem to have come to the West. It was his disciple Ibn-Zoar (died 1161) who made the discoveries of his master known in Spain. Believing that medicine should be based exclusively upon the data of observation, he was the first to link surgery and pharmacy with it. To him is due the first bronchotomy and some excellent guidance upon dislocations and fractures, new descriptions of several diseases, such as inflammation of the pericardium and oedema of the lungs. . . .

His pupil was Mohammed-ben-Roshd, or Averroës (1120–1198), a universal genius the extent of whose knowledge amazes us even today. As a philosopher imbued with the wisdom of antiquity, he translated Aristotle and transmitted him to the West. As a geometrist, he drew up a remarkable treatise on conic sections and another on spherical trigonometry. As an astronomer, he observed two eclipses of Mercury. As a doctor, we owe to him treatises on poisons and fevers as well as a commentary on Galen. As a chemist, he discovered the solvent properties of sulphuric acid and produced numerous amalgams and alloys. As a physicist, he foreshadowed the concept of energy and carried out the first experiments in magnetism. All these works did not prevent him from devoting a part of his time to the irrigation of Andalusia, the construction of three aqueducts and the composition of several books of poems.

Finally, Aben-Bithar (died 1248) corrected the works of Dioscorides, Galen and Oribaze and, under the title of "Simple Medicaments" left a kind of encyclopaedia of the medical knowledge of his time.

This was the last blaze, but it was also the finest. So great was the reputation of the schools of Toledo and Cordoba in the twelfth century that these attracted scholars from all the countries of the West. Gerbert, who was to become Pope under the name of Sylvester II, Adelhard of Oxford, Rodolphe of Bruges, Leonard of Pisa, Gerard of Cremona, Vitellion of Cracow and many others came to learn from them a science which the masters of their own countries could not provide and bring back to their homes in the sombre Middle Ages something of this astonishing civilisation to which we owe our knowledge of the thought of Aristotle, the measurement of the sun's apogee, the laws of the circulation of the blood, the poetic rhyme and the fifth string of the lute. . . .

[XI]

IT WAS the last blaze. Although there were still historians and geographers, doctors and rhetoricians, the creative period, properly so called, had passed.

For 300 years the Arabs had lived in a perpetual fairyland of the senses and the mind. Not merely had they squandered material treasures. They had also dissipated their vitality. Their strength had been sapped by excess. Of all the fires which the incandescence of the desert had concentrated within them there remained nothing but a handful of ashes. They experienced a kind of disillusioned bitterness and the sensation of having emptied the cup of life to the bottom.

When Abdur-Rahman III, who had remained in power in Spain for half a century, died, a note was found among his papers containing these words: "Fifty years have elapsed since I became Caliph. Treasures, honours, pleasures—I have enjoyed all these and have exhausted everything. The kings my rivals esteem me, fear me and envy me. All that man can desire has been granted me by heaven. In this long period of apparent felicity I have counted the number of days when I have been happy: the number is fourteen. Mortals, learn from this the meaning of greatness, of the world and of life. . . ."

This longing for an impossible happiness produced a feeling of frustration among the Arabs. From being ardent and exalted they became cynical and grasping. The frenzy of pleasure to which they had surrendered themselves had not only sapped the physical strength of the race. It had deprived it of its moral fibre. Here also there was no "vague continuity of intermediate nuances," but a kind of general reversal of values. Avarice, luxury, deceit and guile little by little replaced pride, generosity and honour.

The degradation of character was reflected in public morals. Already there was no longer the same respect for the precepts of Mohammed and less and less hesitation in breaking his commandments. How could it have been otherwise when the Caliphs themselves set an example of corruption and impiety? Did not Yezid drink wine, despite the strict prohibition of the Prophet, and had not Abdel-Melek—although forbidden by the Koran to reproduce the human face—struck coinage on which he was represented, like a pagan emperor, girded with a sword and crowned with a tiara?

Once the enthusiasm of the outset was extinguished, the lack of perseverance and organising ability of the Arabs became apparent. Accustomed to live in an atmosphere of raids, cavalcades and mirages,

they had never known the meaning of a state, a government, a nation. They were so destitute of political sense that they did not even aspire to these things. Because they continued to recite the same prayers and the same poems at the same hours they believed themselves still subjects of a strong and united empire.

But their religion was now no more than a rigid formalism; their poetry and exercises in rhetoric were valueless and lifeless. As for the empire, it was neither united nor strong. It had split into several fragments after the Omayyad dynasty, and each fragment had remained extremely fragile. Without military armament, without administrative cadres, without serious economic bases, the countries which constituted it were in danger of collapsing at the first shock.

All the symptoms of decadence could have been surmounted. They assumed an irrevocable character only because the vitality of the Arabs was not being renewed. The tribes which had emigrated had cut themselves off from their sources. No new reinforcements from Nejd or Hasa arrived to reinvigorate the Spanish or Persian garrisons. By force of circumstances the race of the early conquerors had been replaced by new generations, born on the banks of the Euphrates or the Oxus, the Ebro or the Guadalquivir, who had never known their country of origin nor learned the rigid discipline of the desert. Avicenna was born near Shiraz; Ibn-Zoat at Peñaflor; Aben-Bithar in the environs of Malaga, and it was the same for the emirs, generals and governors of provinces. All the important posts were filled by the sons of "the new families."

These elegant young men, often effeminate, brought up in the shadow of Bagdad or Cordoba, felt no attraction towards Arabia, whose implacable simplicity they would have found unbearable. They had even forgotten the very names of their ancestors. They were decadents. Amazed to perceive the extent of the Islamic world and not knowing to what to attribute its formation, they made themselves out to be the descendants of more or less mythical conquerors—like Tobba Jul-Carnein, who was none other than Alexander the Great, or that "Africous" who defeated the Berbers in 50 B.C.

The Arab Empire had become estranged from Arabia. . . .

[XII]

And Arabia on its side had become wholly estranged from the empire. Never had a conquest so little profited the country which gave it birth. In proportion as military operations developed, the centre of gravity of Islam had been shifted. The capital had been transferred to Damascus, then to Bagdad and to Cairo, and the Caliphs had

lost interest in all that was not included in their own kingdoms. They no longer spoke of Yemen or of Nejd except in contemptuous terms.

From the tenth century onwards Arabia had turned in upon itself once more and had isolated itself from the rest of the world. The conquest, by and large, had been no more than an aberration. It had attained none of the objectives assigned to it by the Prophet, since it had not carried the word of God to the ends of the earth, nor ensured the unity of Arabia. This flight from the desert had ended only in a terrible wastage of strength. Only a return to the desert could enable it to be revived.

Exhausted by this terrible parturition which had led it to pour out the best of its blood upon the slopes of the Himalayas and on the plains of Poitiers, Arabia returned to the state of lethargy which it had known before the coming of Mohammed and which was neither mediaeval nor antique but a sort of latent life upon the margin of history. The depopulated desert had become silent once again. The tribes no longer even fought among themselves, for the peninsula now offered sufficient resources for its scanty population.

Not merely had the desert become silent once more, but—something which had never been known before—it had become immobile. It could almost be said that a wind of death had blown over its sands, spreading emptiness and desolation. The heart of Arabia had nearly ceased to beat.

And then, slowly, by almost imperceptible degrees, the level of humanity began once more to rise. The population began to increase. Disequilibrium began once more to show itself between the tribes and the insufficiency of their resources. Nomad life resumed its rhythm.

Again Yemen was repeopled and again it expelled the excess of its populations towards the north. Again the "human Gulf Stream" took hold of the wandering peoples and pushed them across the furnace of Nejd and Quasim. Again the desert assumed its essential function, bruising the tribes against each other and forcing them to accumulate new stores of vitality. As before, there was a bitter struggle for water-holes. The creative inequalities reappeared, thanks to the elimination of the weak. . . .

Arabia had resumed its natural vocation, which is the creation and development of prophets and warriors.

[XIII]

IN THE meanwhile the decline in Arab strength had enabled the West to take its revenge. In 1097 the vanguard of the Crusaders appeared in the Taurus passes, led by Godfrey of Bouillon, Baldwin of Bologna and a great host of nobles from Champagne and Belgium. Descending the coast, the Frankish barons seized Aleppo, Syria, Palestine and Transjordania. They set up Christian principalities and kingdoms at Antioch, Edessa, Tripoli and Jerusalem (1099), while the Genoese and Venetian fleets made themselves masters of Rhodes and Cyprus.

Like the Emperor Augustus of old, the new arrivals were not long in hearing of the fabulous riches hidden in the heart of Arabia. One of the most enterprising of the Christian warriors, Renaud de Châtillon, lord of Kerat and Montreal in Transjordania, resolved to lay hands upon it. Had not merchants coming from the south assured him that Medina contained incalculable treasure and that the tomb of the Prophet was bursting with gold and precious stones?

Leaving his castle at Kerat in the year 1182 at the head of an army of more than 1,500 knights, Renaud took Ailat at the top of the Gulf of Akaba, and organised it as a base for the expedition he projected.

A few preliminary skirmishes, carried out by small detachments of Frankish troops against caravans bound for Tebuk and Muwailuh, alarmed the Caliph of Egypt and showed him the extent of the danger. He hastily assembled a fleet on the Egyptian coast of the Red Sea in order to attack the enemy base.

It was only just in time. For in January 1183 the Frankish forces crossed the arm of the sea which cuts in between the Hejaz and the Sinai Peninsula, and obtained a footing on the opposite shore in the port from which the expedition of Aelius Gallus had set sail ten centuries before. Already the Crusaders were approaching Medina by forced marches. Already they had passed Khaibar and were no more than a day's journey from the Holy City. Victory seemed to be within their grasp and they were preparing to enter the city of the Prophet in triumph. . . .

Suddenly they were assailed on all sides by clouds of Moslem cavalry, who, making their appearance without warning, charged the Christian columns and vanished again in a whirlwind of dust.

Hampered by their helmets, coats of mail and heavy triangular shields, the knights were powerless to resist the Islamic attack. Three hundred of them were killed or taken prisoner and the rest of the army was wiped out. Renaud de Châtillon, who was not on the scene, owed his escape from the massacre to this fact. But his death was only postponed. Captured four years later at the battle of Hattin, he was decapitated by order of Saladin.

After this ill-starred attempt the Franks never again tried to penetrate into Arabia. They renounced their plan to adventure into those burning regions over which God's curse seemed to float.

This expedition coincided with the decline of the Christian kingdoms and sounded the knell of Frankish power in the Levant. A few years later (1250) Syria had fallen wholly into the hands of the Moslems.

[XIV]

WHILE THESE struggles were going on between Arabs and Europeans other conquerors from the depths of Asia had appeared on the peninsula's northern borders. Towards 1055 the Seljuks from the Turanian steppe conquered the kingdoms of Bagdad and Asia Minor, smashing the last vestiges of the Abassid power and menacing Byzantium, while awaiting their own turn to be crushed (1154). Then, Jenghis Khan and his Mongolian horsemen ravaged the Khorassan to disappear afterwards behind a curtain of fire (1220). Following them, Tamerlane burst into Anatolia with his Tartar hordes, wheeled south, devastated Smyrna, Aleppo and Damascus and turned off abruptly eastward at the moment of completing his triumphal course (1402).

Finally it was the turn of the Ottoman Turks. Better organised than their predecessors, these established themselves in the whole periphery of the eastern Mediterranean. Having conquered Byzantium (1453) and annexed the Balkans, their sultans revived the title of Caliph for themselves and forced the majority of the Islamic countries to recognise their sovereignty.

But Arabia remained apart from these events. No doubt the Turks occupied all the provinces on the borders of the peninsula. No doubt they had established governors and garrisons at Jerusalem, Damascus, Bagdad and Basra. But although they proclaimed themselves sovereigns of all Arabia, they never dared to cross the edges of the desert.

Towards 1550 Suliman the Magnificent wished to be done with the

Bedouins, of whose quarrelsome spirit his generals constantly complained. He summoned the Pasha of Damascus to Stamboul and commissioned him to invade Nejd and Hail to impose an oath of allegiance upon the tribes in the interior.

The governor of Damascus feared this undertaking, for he knew that a defeat would cost him his life. He therefore asked the Sultan to place some of the best troops in the empire at his disposal, hoping that this would be refused. Suliman granted his request. Assuming command of several regiments of janissaries, he assembled them at Damascus, ordered them to put on their fighting gear and with them struck into the heart of Arabia. Massed in dense columns, the janissaries began their march and disappeared over the horizon.

Never had Arab independence been so gravely threatened. To the Bedouin tribes the Sultan's janissaries represented a danger altogether more serious than the knights of Renaud de Châtillon or the centurions of Aelius Gallus. The Turkish soldiers were not only disciplined and trained in warfare; they were accustomed to fight in the harshest climates and their equipment was well adapted to desert warfare.

But all these advantages were cancelled out by one capital disadvantage: they knew nothing whatever of the country into which they were venturing. They knew neither the paths nor the direction of the winds. They had to put themselves into the hands of Arab guides who purposely led them astray into a region which was completely arid and where there was no well nor trace of water. Crazed by thirst, overcome by sunstroke, the janissaries scattered in the dunes in search of shade and water. Fever struck down a certain number. Others wandered in circles, under a burning sky which had the pale colour of molten metal. Some of the soldiers, in a fit of madness, turned their weapons against their leaders and then killed themselves. The remainder dispersed and died in horrible suffering, without having seen a trace of their enemy. Not one escaped. It was always the same story, from the beginning of the ages: foreign armies marched into the desert and there disappeared without trace, like a river swallowed in the sand.

Warned by the dramatic outcome of this expedition the Turks renounced the notion of conquering the peninsula and contented themselves with exercising a nominal sovereignty over it. Central Arabia remained independent and the tribes continued to lead their lives there as in the past.

[XV]

THE CHIEFS of the clans of Hail and Hasa, Nejd and Hejaz, now considered themselves the aristocracy of Arabia, for they were the only ones who had never suffered foreign tutelage. They drew an exalted pride from their independence—a pride in proportion to all that they had sacrificed for it. With what haughty disdain they treated the Arabs of Egypt and Syria who had accepted the Ottoman yoke! They felt contempt for these Damascans and Cairoese, talkers and liars, who had not merely allowed their race to degenerate, but had sold their souls for temporal things. They were hypocrites and heretics, unworthy of bearing the proud name of "Believers."

The true, the strict Believers were to be looked for in the depths of the desert, in Nejd, shimmering and silent, which was the heart of Arabia. It was through Nejd that flowed the endless stream of nomads and its pulsations supplied movement and life. Yemen furnished the raw material. But Nejd gave it its temper and transmuted base metal into flawless steel. Was it not in Nejd that were to be found the greatest men, the bravest warriors, the swiftest camels and the purest language? The others could boast of their "civilisation," their luxurious cafés and their music kiosks. The lords of Nejd knew nothing of such things. They wished to know nothing of them. They preferred to remain the keepers of a great heritage where terrestrial appetites no longer held sway, the possessors of a moral and spiritual nakedness where nothing came to disturb the contemplation of God.

By dint of fighting and killing one another, the tribes began to feel the stirrings of a fresh wave of exaltation. As always their strength manifested itself in a double aspiration towards unity and transcendence. Through the ordeals they inflicted upon each other they strove to attain an absolute renunciation and to "rediscover Paradise in the depths of their own hell."

Once more the centuries had accomplished their slow work of creation and Arabia had once more become a reservoir of energy awaiting only the opportunity to burst its banks. The time was ripe for a fresh Islamic epic. The tribes lived in expectation of a man who should restore their faith and reforge their unity. Anxiously they awaited a sign, a presage, and asked themselves whether he who would take their destinies in hand would be, as a thousand years earlier, a prophet or a warrior.

It was a prophet: he was called Mohammed-ibn-Abdul-Wahab.

[XVI]

BORN AT Azaina, in Nejd, in 1696, Abdul-Wahab was a member of the glorious Temim tribe, whose prowess had been celebrated in the "golden poems" of Ocazh and which had been one of the first to rally to Mohammed. Early initiated in letters and science—he knew the Koran by heart at the age of ten—he had made several journeys to Damascus, Bagdad, Basra and Persia, learning thus to know the various religious sects which were contesting for pre-eminence at the heart of the Moslem world. After which, faithful to the habitual destiny of prophets, he had retired into the desert to pray and meditate.

In the solitary and silent immensity of his retreat he had reflected upon the future of Islam and had been afflicted to see the deep corruption into which it had fallen. Through the fault of the Ottoman Caliphs and the Doctors of Law, serious idolatries and heresies had spread, stifling the true belief under a mass of idle interpretations. An ostentatious luxury had everywhere replaced the primitive austerity. Worship of Mohammed and the saints had supplanted that of Allah. The commandments of the Koran were broken daily.

On the political plane the spectacle was perhaps even more depressing. Almost all the Arabs living outside the peninsula who were subservient to the Turks and those of the central desert who had escaped their tutelage were using their independence to kill each other instead of working for the liberation of their brothers. Like Mohammed of old, Abdul-Wahab considered that the most urgent task was to unify the nomadic tribes and regroup them in the name of a religious idea. But what could this idea be? A new revelation? Assuredly not. The Prophet, once for all, had given truth to the world and nothing of it could be altered. There could be no alternative but a return to the original sources. The Law must be restored in its ancient purity.

Things had reached such a point of laxity that the Arabs no longer understood the deep significance of their own doctrine.

What did the word "Islam" mean? Absolute submission to the divine will. Why had the Prophet chosen this name? Because God in His omnipotence had created this world out of time and it was out of time that God decided human destiny. The Arab language knows this well, since for it past, present and future do not exist, and it gives to the verb an aspect of action accomplished, independently of the notion of time. God rules the destiny of man by showing him the "huda," which means the "right path." This the Arabs had lost.

Now nothing—neither the speculations of men of science nor the exhortations of poets, nor the quarrels of theologians—could give it back to them unless they returned to the sources of revelation, that is, to strict observance of the rules of the Koran. These were very simple. "In what does Islamism consist?" a Bedouin had once asked Mohammed. "In professing that there is but one God of whom I am the Prophet," he had replied, "in observing strictly the hours of prayer, in giving alms, in fasting during the month of Ramadan and in accomplishing if possible the pilgrimage to Mecca." These were the rules of life which must be observed without restriction or weakness. Only prayer, fasting and almsgiving would lead Believers to God. All the rest was hypocrisy, idolatry and blasphemy.

In formulating this doctrine Abdul-Wahab had no intention to found a new sect, nor bring his followers a personal interpretation of the sacred word. He was content to preach Islam integrally, that is purified, regenerated and restored to itself. Abolishing with a gesture a thousand years of Arab history, he returned to the exact point from which Mohammed had started.

As could be foreseen, his teaching came in conflict with the high priests of Mecca. These could not tolerate such a revolutionary doctrine whose rigour was at once a threat to their privileges and an insult to their mode of life. They persecuted the reformer cruelly and rejected him with stones. Realising then—as Mohammed had done—that his teaching would prevail only if it were imposed by force, he fled to Daraya, the Nejd capital, and asked protection of a chief of the Nejd Bedouins, Mohammed-ibn-Saud (1749).

Abdul-Wahab soon perceived that Mohammed had exceptional soldierly qualities. Mohammed, on his side, was struck by the flaming eloquence of Abdul-Wahab. The warrior sought a doctrine; the prophet sought a sword. They agreed to place their forces in common "to accomplish the divine will and restore its lost unity to the Arab people." To seal the compact Abdul-Wahab gave Mohammed his daughter in marriage and entrusted him with the political and military management of the enterprise. This was to be accomplished in two stages. First it was necessary to rally to Wahabism the tribes of central Arabia and to conquer Nejd. Once master of Nejd, Mohammed and Abdul-Wahab planned to extend the reform to the rest of Arabia.

Soon the most energetic men of Nejd, inspired by the reformer's sermons, rallied to the standard of Mohammed-ibn-Saud, and the Turkish governments of Damascus and Basra learned one day with surprise that "the tribes of Nejd, hitherto divided, had united under a single leadership; that they had adopted a more austere religion than the orthodox Moslems; that a legislator was directing application of

the reforms while a valiant warrior was imposing them upon the refractory by force of arms."[1]

Already a part of Nejd had embraced the new doctrine. The sheiks of Hasa, hostile to the reform, had been crushed, and Wahabi horsemen —as they were called at that time—were making incursions upon the confines of the Hejaz and Syria to proclaim the "awakening of Arabia" to the Bedouins.

Alarmed by the rapid progress of Wahabism, the Sultan of Constantinople, Mahmoud I, ordered the governors of Basra, Bagdad and Jedda as well as the Pashas of Egypt and Syria, to do everything possible to exterminate the "heretics" and prevent them from seizing the Holy Cities—Medina and Mecca—possession of which would confer upon them a dangerous prestige.

But nothing happened. The second Arab wave was launched and seemed about to spread over the peninsula with an impetus almost comparable to that of the first. Despite the counter-measures of the Porte, Mohammed-ibn-Saud continued to gain ground. The towns of Anaizah and Buraida rallied to his cause and their fighters swelled the forces of his army. When he died in 1765 he left a power which was strengthened still further by his son, Abdul-Aziz, who profited by it to complete the conquest of Nejd and to proclaim himself its king (1765–1803). The first part of the plan was realised.

Abdul-Wahab died in 1792. When Saud succeeded Abdul-Aziz in 1803 the new doctrines were already solidly implanted in the central provinces. Grandson of Mohammed by his father and of Abdul-Wahab by his mother, Saud—who was to be known as Saud the Great—took the titles of Emir of the Nejd and Imam of the Wahabis. At once political and religious chief of the movement, upon which he succeeded in stamping an extraordinary cohesion and dynamism, he assembled all his troops on the Daraya plateau, harangued them in the presence of the Wahabi priesthood and went on to accomplish the second part of the plan: the conquest of Arabia.

Descending upon the Hejaz "like a tempest," he swiftly made himself master of the province and entered Medina, Taif, Mecca and Jedda at the end of a series of victorious battles. As the Sultan had foreseen, the possession of the Holy Cities considerably enhanced his prestige in the eyes of his compatriots. Penetrating into the sanctuaries, he smashed the tombs of the saints and all the forbidden ornaments which the "idolatrous" leaders had erected, and restored the Kaaba to its primitive simplicity (1804).

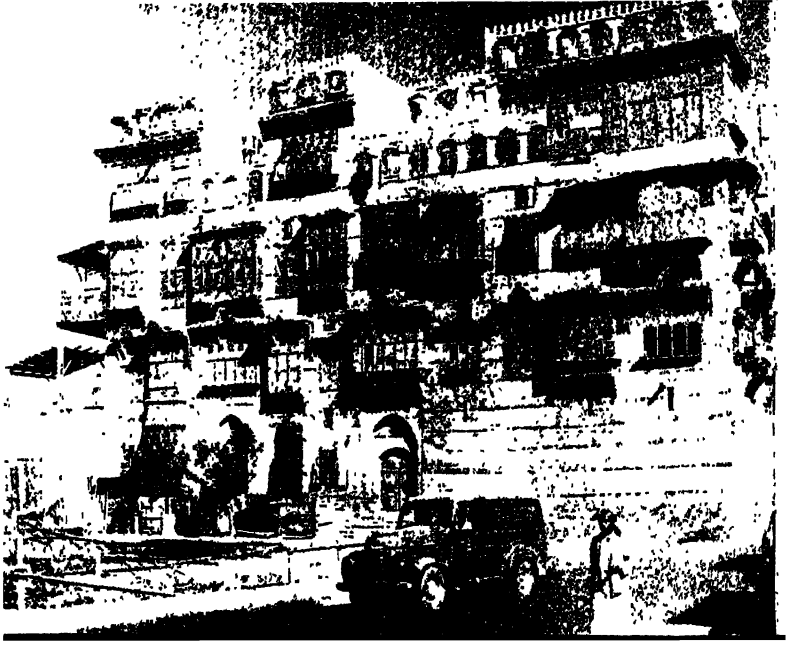
Then he burst into Asir, which submitted without resistance, and from there into the Yemen, of which the capital, Sana, was taken after a struggle. This last victory set the seal upon the exaltation of his

[1] L. A. Sédillot: op. cit., p. 458.

Pilgrims' camp in the valley of Mena, outside Mecca.

Main street in Jedda.

The ancient palace of the Hashimite kings in Jedda.



soldiers. Nothing now seemed able to halt their advance. By 1808 Saud the Great had practically completed the conquest of the peninsula. Besides Nejd, his kingdom included the Hejaz, Asir and Yemen, Hadramout, Hasa, Bahrein and Basra. Once more Arabia was ready to take fire. Wholly united in the hands of a single master, it had found again the "huda"—the right path. . . .

[XVII]

WHILE THESE events were taking place in Arabia, the armies of Napoleon were shaking Europe. The conflict which had set France and England against each other was causing repercussions in the Mediterranean and even in the Middle East.

During the Egyptian campaign (1798–1799) Napoleon had come into collision with the double resistance of the Turks and the British. His precipitate return to France, the assassination of Kléber, whom he had left behind him, and the signature of the Treaty of Paris (June 25, 1802), by which he restored an evacuated Egypt to the Porte, had put a provisional end to French expansion in the Levant.

But Napoleon had not forgotten the dream which he had had in the shadow of the Pyramids—the conquest of India—by which he hoped to strike a mortal blow at British power. With this project still in mind, he had sent Colonel Sébastiani into Syria "to evaluate the English and Ottoman forces" (1802), General Decaen to India "to attempt to reach an understanding with the son of Tippoo-Sahib and the princes of the country" (1803), and declared to the German princes the following year: "There is nothing left to be done in Europe. It is only in the East that one can go to work on the grand scale; it is only there that great reputations, great fortunes, can be made." Still more significant: after vainly trying to drag the Sultan Selim III into a coalition against Britain, he had proposed to the Czar Alexander, on the raft of the Niemen, that they should share Turkey between them "to open the gates of the East" (1807).

These projects—which the Emperor was still thinking about at St. Helena—would naturally have entailed the occupation of Arabia. The kingdom of Saud had assumed too great an importance to be ignored. Napoleon sent there a diplomatic agent, M. de Lascaris. This agent reached Daraya at the end of 1811 and had a number of secret meetings with the Imam of the Wahabis.

Lascaris arrived at Daraya in a "favourable atmosphere." When Napoleon's emissary asked Saud to help his master to crush the Ottoman power and facilitate the access of French regiments to India,

the Imam of the Wahabis listened with all the more interest because these projects corresponded with his personal aims. To invade Syria would be to obey the thousand-year-old impulse which had driven the Arabs from the desert towards the fertile lands of the north-east. In brief, this campaign appeared to him as the crowning of his desires.

But the English were on the watch. They had agents at Suez, Jedda, Muscat and Aden, who were not long in learning of the negotiations in the Nejd capital. The London cabinet, not wishing to see Arabia range itself in Napoleon's camp, hurriedly sent agents to Saud in its turn to urge him not to make common cause with the French. Lord Castlereagh even went so far as to promise to get Saud's sovereignty recognised by the Sultan if he would promise not to attack Turkey.

Saud hesitated a long time between these contrary propositions. Finally he rallied to the Lascaris plan as "most conforming to the aspirations of the Arab people" (1811).

The accord once concluded, Saud gave his troops orders to prepare for battle. The offensive was launched at the end of 1812, amid general enthusiasm. The Wahabi horsemen entered Mesopotamia, where they destroyed the town of Karbala. Then they attacked Aleppo, seizing this stronghold and forcing its inhabitants to pay them tribute, while another column, going up the Wadi Sirhan, ravaged the outskirts of Damascus.

This daring offensive might have succeeded if it had been undertaken a few years earlier. In 1812 it was already too late. The disastrous outcome of the campaign in Russia had just inflicted a mortal blow to Napoleon's power. The burning of Moscow and the snowstorms of the Beresina, reducing all the Emperor's hopes to nothing, had marked a turning-point in the history of the world whose consequences were to be felt in the heart of Arabia.

[XVIII]

SAUD'S PROGRESS had been greatly aided by the presence of French troops at Cairo from 1798 to 1801. During this time the Turks had not dared to react, and even after the evacuation of Egypt had remained on the watch, fearing a new landing by Napoleon's generals.

But when all danger had been set aside—and the retreat from Russia ruled out any further French intervention in the East—the Turks were free to devote the greater part of their forces to repressing the "Arab revolt." In 1813 the Sultan gave orders to his viceroy in Egypt, Mehemet-Ali, to deal with Saud and his partisans once for all.

Mehemet-Ali instructed Toussoun Pasha to undertake a first

expedition. Saud reacted vigorously and forced his adversary to take refuge in Yenbo. Mehemet-Ali then organised a second expedition which he commanded in person. This campaign had little more success than the first. Defeated at Tarabey, driven out of Qunfidha, he made the mistake of letting the Wahabis block the important strategic point of Taif. Discouraged by this series of setbacks, he was on the point of abandoning the task when Saud was accidentally killed under the walls of Taif (December 1814).

This death came at a crucial moment and was a catastrophe for Arabia. The King of Nejd left twelve sons, but none of these was of the stature to take his place. Power passed to the hands of his uncle Abdullah, a colourless, pusillanimous character, quite incapable of governing Arabia in such critical circumstances.

Mehemet-Ali resumed his offensive and was not long in gaining the advantage. After a series of bitter battles, he relieved Taif and beat the Wahabis at Koulakh, near Qunfidha (January 10, 1815). Mehemet had all the captured chiefs decapitated. Terrified by this, Abdullah laid down his arms and concluded a humiliating treaty with Toussoun.

Under the pretext that Abdullah was not scrupulously observing the treaty stipulations, Mehemet-Ali launched yet a third expedition the following year, conferring the command upon his son Ibrahim Pasha. Ibrahim subdued the whole of Nejd in less than eighteen months. After conquering successively Anaizah, Buraida, Shagra and Dorama, he pitched his camp under the walls of Daraya on March 22, 1818.

Abdullah stood the siege for seven months. Finally at the end of his strength, he capitulated. The Sultan Mahmoud II gave orders for him to be sent to Constantinople. There he was loaded with chains, forced to march for three days through the city and was then decapitated in front of the mosque of Saint Sophia. His body was exposed in public for a week and was then abandoned to stray dogs. At the end of September Daraya was destroyed.

But this was not all.

A few years later Feisal, Abdullah's grandson, wishing to avenge the injury done to his family, began to assemble some tribes around him. Mehemet-Ali did not give him time to raise his head. While the Egyptians were taking the Mecca pilgrimages under their protection and the English were establishing themselves definitely in Aden, he sent four armies into the peninsula to drown this revolt in blood.

The first army, commanded by Kourshid Pasha, struck at Nejd, came up with Feisal in the plain of Dilam, utterly defeated him and reached the Persian Gulf after crossing Arabia. The second, under Kultschuk Ibrahim Pasha, marched into the Yemen, took Sana and forced the Imam of Yemen to abdicate in favour of the Sultan. The

third and fourth, commanded respectively by Ahmed Pasha and Selim Pasha, reduced the discontented peoples of Asir and the Hejaz to obedience (1836–1837) by putting all prisoners to the sword.

After which, not wishing to stay in such an inhospitable land, which they had now turned into a chaos of blood, the Turks retired, leaving Arabia eviscerated, its towns in ruins, its villages burnt and its palm groves to remain devastated for several generations.

[XIX]

"IT WAS in this way that the power which seemed destined to renew the great days of Islamism was defeated, and relegated to the deserts from which it had so gloriously emerged."[1]

The first Moslem wave, with Mohammed, Omar and Abu-Bekr, had ended in triumph. The second, with Abdul-Wahab and Saud the Great, had ended in disaster. Daraya was dismantled and its broken ramparts bore witness to the fury of the Turkish onslaught.

Arabia relapsed into immobility. Wandering poets, prophets, dead kingdoms, violence, horsemanship, defunct magnificence—all was abolished, or reduced to the status of a dream.

There was now nothing more in the great dim silence than the dull merry-go-round of the tribes, struggling for a foothold around the water-holes with no strong hand to govern them. From time to time a shot, a hoarse cry, or the sound of galloping at night showed that Arabia was not utterly dead. Its inhabitants were afraid to show themselves by daylight.

Once again there was only the emptiness and eternity of the desert; only the rising and setting of the sun; only the wind, the terrible wind of sand, which blocked the trails, covered all the traces of the past and effaced even the memory of the needless acts by which men had tried to calm their fever for greatness.

[1] L. A. Sédillot: op. cit., p. 463.

PART TWO

CONQUEST OF THE NEJD
(1880–1905)

XX *Birth and youth of Abdul-Aziz*

XXI *The Rashidites seize Nejd*

XXII *Massacre in the palace of Riyadh*

XXIII *Flight of Abdur-Rahman*

XXIV *First retreat into Rub-al-Khali. The vision in the desert*

XXV *Abdul-Aziz at Kuweit*

XXVI *Mubarrak's coup*

XXVII *Mubarrak's offensive and defeat. Intervention of the British*

XXVIII *Rivalry of the Powers in the Persian Gulf*

XXIX *Abdul-Aziz starts for the great adventure*

XXX *The oath of Jabryn*

XXXI *Second stay in Rub-al-Khali*

XXXII *Abdul-Aziz's attack on Riyadh*

XXXIII *Abdul-Aziz conquers his capital*

XXXIV *Abdul-Aziz, Emir of Riyadh*

XXXV *Rashid's counter-offensive*

XXXVI *Conquest of Quasim. Execution of Obaid*

XXXVII *Intervention of the Turks. Defeat of Abdul-Aziz at Bukarya*

XXXVIII *Abdul-Aziz victorious at Shinanah. Collapse of the Turks*

XXXIX *Negotiations with Muklis Pasha*

XL *The Turks evacuate Central Arabia*

XLI *Death of Rashid*

XLII *Abdul-Aziz, King of Nejd and Imam of the Wahabis*

[XX]

SUCH WAS the situation in Arabia when there was born at Riyadh, in the year 1298 of the Hegira, in the month of Rabia-al-Aoual, otherwise a November morning in 1880, at the hour when the muezzins were calling the Believers to prayer, a boy to whom his parents gave the name of Abdul-Aziz.

His mother, Sara Sudairi, was the daughter of Ahmed, chief of the Dawasirs, a southern tribe noted for the great stature of its fighting men. She herself had a proud heart and a strong, big-built frame. From his birth Abdul-Aziz was unusually robust, as were the three other boys his mother bore after him: Mohammed, Abdullah and Sad.

Her husband, Abdur-Rahman, father of Abdul-Aziz, was the son of the Feisal who had been crushed by Kourshid Pasha in the plain of Dilam. A nephew of Saud the Great and a direct descendant of Mohammed-ibn-Saud and the daughter of Abdul-Wahab, he was by this fact the Imam of the Wahabis, that is, the chief of all the Believers of this sect.

Under the impact of the persecutions they had suffered at the hands of the Turks, the Wahabi "ulemas"—or Doctors of Law—had taken refuge in a sulky arrogance and an increased rigidity of doctrine.

"They were dour men," Armstrong tells us, "lean in body and outlook, who saw all life with the uncompromising eyes of the fanatic. They allowed themselves no luxury or even comfort. Their houses were bare and drab, their mosques without minarets, domes or any decorations. They refused all the pleasant things: wine, fine food, tobacco, soft clothes. They forbade singing and music and even frowned on laughter. They stamped out of life all joy, lest their thoughts might be led away from concentration on God. Their only indulgence was sex and their women. Their God was a stern God, demanding absolute service of them. To those who served Him He was kind and merciful, but to the froward and unrepentant He was hard and merciless. They were His devoted people, lifted up over the heads of all mankind, with a mission to make all men His servants, even by the sword."[1]

The little Abdul-Aziz who was born in that year 1298 of the Hegira thus belonged to a very old family, and the blood which flowed in his veins could sustain comparison with that of the most noble Arabian families. Having a prophet and several kings among his ancestors he could go back—through his ancestress, the daughter of Abdul-Wahab—through twenty-four generations of warriors, as far as that ancient

[1] H. C. Armstrong: *Lord of Arabia*, p. 20.

tribe of Temim, whose fame was mingled with the dawn of Islamism and inscribed upon a misty background of poetry and legend. Through his paternal ancestors he could claim to go back even farther, since learned men had established his direct descent, through Adnan, with Ishmael, son of Abraham![1]

Among the clans, tribes and royal dynasties, each prouder than the next of the antiquity of their lines, whose interplay had woven the web of Arabian history, there were few, apart from the Hashimites, whom he could not rival. The latter held a rank apart, from the fact that they descended in direct line from Ibn-Qitada, keeper of the temple of Mecca, who himself descended from Hashim, grandfather of the Prophet, so that they belonged to the same family as Mohammed.

The young prince who had just come into the world had little heritage beyond this fabulous family tree. In other respects fortune had not much favoured him. His family had been decimated and impoverished by defeat and its authority was disputed. He saw the light, moreover, in the depths of a crumbling castle in a town still partially destroyed.

Riyadh—the word means "the gardens" in Arabic—had replaced Daraya, the old capital of Nejd, razed by order of the Turks some sixty years before. But could this wretched village, whose cracked walls still bore witness to the fury of Ibrahim, be termed a capital? Its ramparts had indeed been rebuilt since that time, but no order had prevailed at this restoration. The restorers had been content to fill in gaps, rebuild a tower here, a postern there, and add a certain number of new defence works. And could the word "palace" be used to describe that unlovely, ramshackle pile of buildings linked unsuitably by a labyrinth of corridors and sentry walks? There, too, work had been limited to the most urgent repairs, adding new dwelling quarters haphazardly to old ones, so that the edifice finally filled the whole centre of the town.

At first, Abdul-Aziz was fed by his mother in the quarters reserved to the women. But once he was weaned he was transferred to the men's quarters and placed in the charge of a Sudanese slave. He lived there amid a band of turbulent children, the sons of his cousins and the members of the palace staff.

When he was of an age to learn to read, his father took him in hand and made himself responsible for his education. As Imam of the Wahabis, Abdur-Rahman could not show more favour to his son than to the rest of his charges. He sent him to the seminary of Riyadh. There, on a plain strip of board coated with white clay—according to a practice which had scarcely altered since the times of the Chaldeans—the little Abdul-Aziz strove to copy out sections of the Koran with

[1] See pp. 288-289, the genealogy of the Saudi dynasty.

a style, and learned them afterwards by heart, no one undertaking to explain their meaning to him.

The child showed no special aptitude for study. Intellectual work did not seem to be his forte. He passed the greater part of his time in day-dreaming or in fighting with his comrades in class. The "ulemas" —themselves for the most part somewhat uncultivated—did little to stimulate his zeal. The only point upon which they showed themselves inflexible was that of religious instruction. In this field they would tolerate no deviation or negligence. Thus, from the age of seven, Abdul-Aziz attended all religious services punctually. He accompanied his father five times a day to the mosque to recite public prayers, scrupulously observed the fasts commanded by the Prophet and was soon able even to intone alone the principal verses of the Koran.

Abdur-Rahman was a pious rather than a fighting man. But he nourished a secret ambition, nevertheless, to re-establish the power of his family and to extend the Wahabi doctrine to all the tribes of Arabia.

As soon as he could he told Abdul-Aziz of these plans and strove to make him understand that this was the task for which God had created him. "This is a great honour which has been shown you by the Almighty," he told him, "but it is necessary first that you should know the duties which it involves. Many obstacles lie between you and the unification of Arabia. You must fit yourself for a life of privation and struggle and concentrate all your thoughts upon this single aim. Never let yourself be discouraged by adversity. And when your path shall seem to lose itself in shadows, learn then to be patient until God shall give you inspiration."

Foreseeing that his children would have to face ordeals without number, Abdur-Rahman gave particular care to their military instruction. At the age of eight, Abdul-Aziz could handle the sabre, shoot and leap a horse at the gallop without saddle or stirrups. To harden him to endure fatigue, his father entrusted him to caravan leaders and made him undertake long journeys in the desert. He made him get up regularly two hours before dawn, even in December, when an icy wind was blowing round the high plateaux. He made him walk barefoot, in the height of summer, over rocks scorched by the midday sun. He encouraged him to develop his physical strength by competing with other youths in the town. Finally, he taught him to increase his endurance by accustoming himself to a severe rationing.

"A real Bedouin," he told him, "should be content with a handful of dates, a mouthful of water and three hours' sleep. It was with these that our ancestors conquered an empire."

Abdul-Aziz grew rapidly and became a slim and graceful youth. He was rarely still. His favourite exercises were wrestling and riding. In these he displayed a catlike agility and suppleness. That he had a

violent temper early became evident, for when his will was opposed his eyes became bloodshot and he had spasms of terrible fury. But these fits were not lasting. As soon as his anger was abated he regained control of himself and became as calm and amiable as before.

As yet, however, he knew nothing of life. His gaze did not extend beyond the ramparts of the town. What went on in the dark winding alleys of Riyadh was enough to absorb all his attention.

[XXI]

FOR THERE death lurked. In ambush at every street corner, in the shadow of shuttered windows, even in the silent corridors of the palace, there was danger everywhere, invisible but menacing. Everyone was at the mercy of denunciation or vengeance. Security was a word unknown. As if the devastations of the Turks had not been enough, civil war was rife in the heart of the town.

Abdur-Rahman was not the eldest of the family. He had two brothers older than himself, Mohammed and Abdullah,[1] who disputed the power between them and spent their time wresting it from each other. As always in such cases, the population was riven into two rival clans, grouped each around one of the brothers.

These factions hated each other and carried on a bitter, continuous struggle. Thus the Nejd capital was the scene of conflicts and bloody exchanges in which the partisans of Mohammed and Abdullah fought with and slew each other even up to the very steps of the great mosque.

Abdur-Rahman kept himself carefully out of these quarrels and lived in isolation with his family in a wing of the palace, where he devoted himself wholly to his religious functions. But his life was a veritable nightmare, none the less. He was surrounded by a cloud of spies, who had orders to report his slightest word or gesture to his brothers. Mohammed and Abdullah accused him in turn of plotting to assassinate them. More than once Abdur-Rahman was attacked in his apartments and had to defend himself, weapon in hand.

The melodramatic atmosphere created by these rivalries forced everyone to keep alert. Nerves and minds had never time to relax. The least slip would have been fatal. This was a splendid forcing-ground for initiative, and its savour for a robust and combative boy like Abdul-Aziz may well be imagined.

All the more was this the case because to these internal perils were added others from outside which were not less dramatic or less to be feared.

[1] The third, Sad, had died of typhus.

To the north-west of Riyadh was a town called Hail, which served as a rallying centre for the Shammar Bedouins. A certain Mohammed-ibn-Rashid, an ambitious and unscrupulous man, had succeeded in grouping these under his authority. A secular enmity existed between the tribes of Shammar and the tribes of Nejd. Ibn-Rashid planned to exploit this hostility and to profit by the discords which reigned in Riyadh to make himself master of the town, drive out the Saudis, annex Nejd to Hail and "smash the infernal arrogance of the Wahabis." What made Rashid especially dangerous was that for this operation he had the full support of the Turks. Constantinople counted on him to crush the Saudis and to this end furnished him with subsidies and arms.

Rashid started his campaign in the spring of 1890. The Nejd tribes, enfeebled by their internal quarrels, were unable to offer a serious resistance. Aided by his cousin Obaid, who commanded the right wing of his army, Rashid took Riyadh by storm after a fierce battle. Abdur-Rahman's two brothers were killed in the fighting: Abdullah by Rashid himself, and Mohammed by Obaid. The conqueror placed one of his friends, Salim, in command of the town, with orders to put the population to the sword at the slightest sign of revolt.

However, by a gesture of clemency—of which he was to repent before long—he permitted Abdur-Rahman and his family to stay in the wing of the palace they already occupied. Doubtless he thought them beaten and harmless.

[XXII]

RASHID'S VICTORY was to have one unexpected consequence: by eliminating the two brothers of Abdur-Rahman, it made him chief of the Saudi dynasty. The heritage he received, however, was derisory. He had no power in his own capital. He lived as a stranger in the palace of his fathers. He maintained himself at Riyadh only by the tolerance of the conqueror. Formerly he had been spied upon by his brothers; now he was under the surveillance of his enemy.

Abdur-Rahman could bear this humiliating situation no longer. Resolved to break the yoke of Rashid, he fomented a revolt among the people. Salim subdued it without difficulty and hanged forty of the rebels from the minarets—as a warning.

Abdur-Rahman was not discouraged. He renewed his intrigues. Rashid got wind of them. He gave orders to Salim to end the activities of the Saudis once for all and to inflict an exemplary punishment upon the town.

Salim was only waiting for the chance. War in the desert is

unremitting; the vanquished can never count upon the mercy of the conqueror. Rashid had wished to spare Abdur-Rahman; once more experience showed that he was wrong.

As Ramadan was in progress, Salim decided to await the end of this time of fasting. At this period the Arabs are accustomed to exchange courtesy visits. "He would pay Abdur-Rahman a formal visit," Armstrong tells us. "He would take his guards with him and after he had talked for a while he would ask for the males of the Saud family to be called so that he might speak to them all. As soon as they were assembled his guards should surround and kill them." It was the only way to finish with this nest of vipers.

But Abdur-Rahman was warned in time of his enemy's intentions. On the morning of the visit he summoned some devoted followers to the palace, explained the situation to them, armed them and told them to hold themselves in readiness to intervene at a given signal.

Escorted by his guards, Salim arrived at noon. Abdur-Rahman received him with much deference, thanked him for the goodwill he was showing and ushered him into the audience chamber. To make his visitor suppose that he suspected nothing, he had assembled several members of his family in the room, including Abdul-Aziz, then aged eleven. The boy sat between the thighs of a gigantic black slave.

Abdur-Rahman and Salim exchanged innumerable compliments and congratulated each other upon the excellent state of their health.

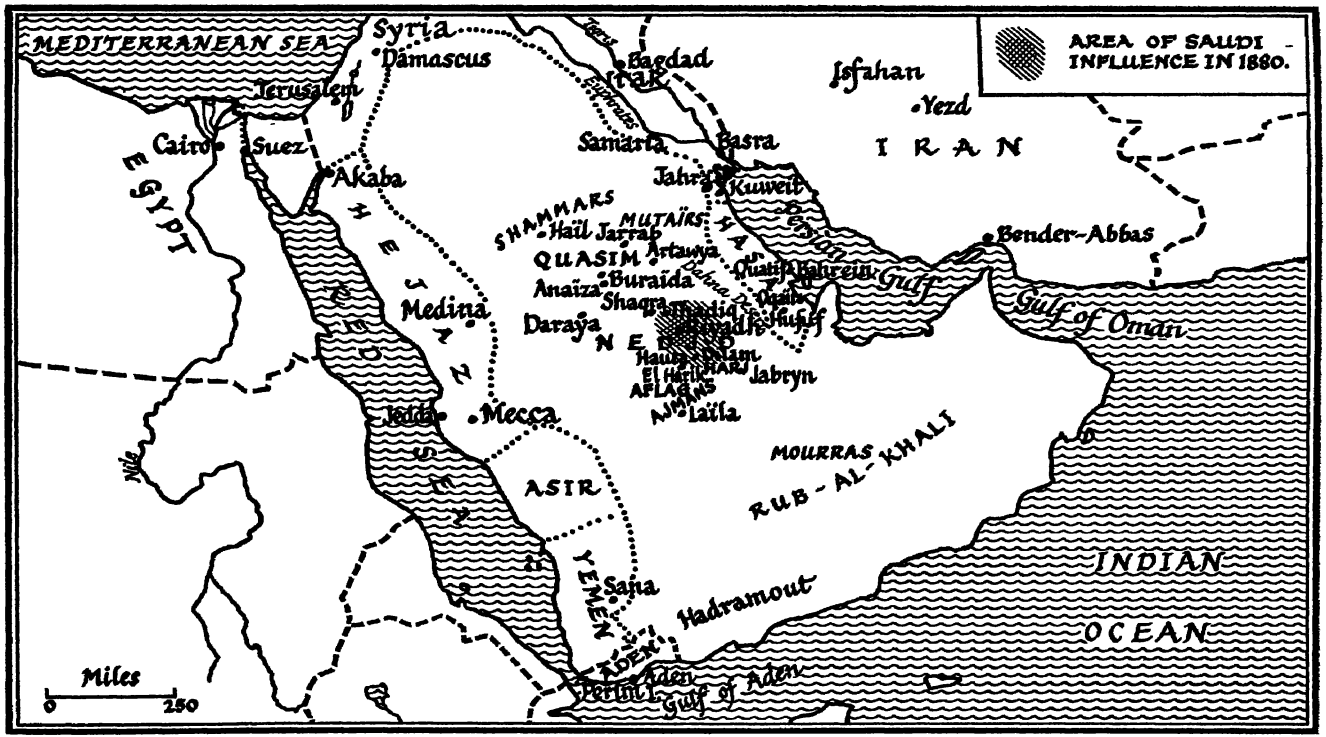
Furtively they watched each other, drinking coffee the while, and preparing to leap at each other's throat. After having made conversation in an amiable fashion, Salim suddenly said to Abdur-Rahman:

"Lord, I see only a part of your family here. Can you not have the others brought in? It would give me great pleasure to greet them also."

At the same moment Abdur-Rahman unsheathed his dagger. This was the awaited signal. His supporters came quickly into the room. Sabres in hand, they overcame Salim, binding him firmly hand and foot and throwing him into a well, after massacring his guards. It was a scene of terrible carnage. His eyes wide with horror, Abdul-Aziz watched the scene from between the legs of the black slave, who had placed himself in front to protect him. He was spattered with blood and the sight of it engraved itself deeply upon his memory.

"It is there," he said afterwards, "that I learned that when you are threatened you must be the first to strike."

As soon as news of the massacre became known in the town, all the



MAP III ARABIA BEFORE 1914

population rushed to arms. They drove out Salim's garrison, barricaded the gates of Riyadh and prepared to resist a counter-attack by Rashid. The inhabitants of neighbouring villages joined in the insurrection.

When Rashid learned of Salim's death he was filled with rage. Hastily assembling all his forces he left Hail and marched on Riyadh, determined to annihilate Abdur-Rahman, his family and all his progeniture—"this accursed spawn which will give Arabia no peace as long as a single member of it is left alive."

On his side Abdur-Rahman called his supporters, distributed among them the arms left behind by the Rashid garrison, and went out to meet the enemy. For several weeks Nejdis and Shammars fought fiercely hand-to-hand in the plain south-east of Anaizah. Finally, Rashid, who was better armed, had the upper hand and Abdur-Rahman was forced to withdraw behind the ramparts.

Rashid laid siege to Riyadh. The Shammars cut down the palm trees, destroyed the irrigation canals, poisoned the wells and devastated the gardens which surrounded the town. Food and water began to be short. Starving and thirsty, the inhabitants begged the Imam to capitulate. Abdur-Rahman refused. To surrender would mean sentencing his whole family to death.

To force him to submit, the people threatened mutiny. His supporters, who feared Rashid's reprisals, abandoned him one after the other. Soon he had only a handful left.

Not wishing to fall alive into the hands of his enemy, the Saudi chief decided on flight. He collected some camels and a score of his partisans, packed his baggage quickly and took farewell of his friends. The little caravan left Riyadh under cover of night and succeeded in passing the enemy lines unobserved. On the leading camel rode young Abdul-Aziz and his brother, Mohammed.

When Rashid entered the Nejd capital at the head of his horsemen, he galloped to the palace, mounted the stairs four at a time, but found that the Saudis had fled and that he was robbed of his vengeance.

[XXIII]

ABDUR-RAHMAN made for the south and sought shelter of the chief of the Ajman tribes. This was granted—for the law of the desert made it an obligation—but these tribes were reputed for their dishonesty, as Abdur-Rahman knew.

To cut short his stay in a hostile country, he split his caravan in two, sent his wife to Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf, and with Abdul-Aziz resumed the road south. It was well that he did so, for the Ajman

chief had been preparing to cut off his head and send it to Rashid, hoping thus to obtain favour with the victor.

The abrupt departure frustrated this plan and caused lively disappointment. The Ajman swore to kill Abdur-Rahman at the first opportunity.

At the end of a few days' march, the Saudi chief halted at the oasis of El-Harik, where a fresh surprise awaited him. He had been there barely a few days when he received a visit from a stranger who asked to speak to him privately. It was an emissary of the Turks, sent to him by the governor of the Hasa.

Rashid's insolent attitude was beginning to disturb the Constantinople authorities. The chief of the Shammar, whose success had gone to his head, was showing a tiresome spirit of independence and was talking of throwing off the Turkish tutelage. Faithful to the policy of balance they practised in Arabia, the Turks now offered Abdur-Rahman their help to regain Riyadh, on condition that he would agree to let them establish an Ottoman garrison there and recognise himself as a vassal of the Sultan.

Abdur-Rahman had nothing left, not even a roof to shelter his own. But to suppose that he would consent to acknowledge those who had ravaged his country, ruined his father and decapitated his ancestor before the mosque of Saint Sophia seemed to him an unpardonable outrage. Unable to master his anger, he spat in the emissary's face, threatened to kill him on sight if he renewed his offer and told him to tell his masters that his honour was not for sale.

The Turkish emissary made his report to Constantinople. The Sultan declared Abdur-Rahman an outlaw and had his name added to the list of those who might be put to death without further trial for threatening the security of the empire.

In itself this order was purely formal, for the Turkish Government was in no position to enforce it. But it added one more to the perils which surrounded the Saudis and made their lives still more precarious. Whoever should henceforth attempt the life of Abdur-Rahman, if only to satisfy a private vengeance, could do so with impunity as the instrument of an imperial decree. At one of the most critical turning-points of his life, the father of Abdul-Aziz had recklessly gathered against himself the anger of Rashid, the hatred of the Ajman and the hostility of the governor of Constantinople.

This was a great deal for a man alone, without weapons and without friends.

[XXIV]

HUNTED ON all sides, surrounded by spies and enemies, having no longer anyone of whom he could ask asylum, Abdur-Rahman, Abdul-Aziz and their little escort resumed their march towards the south to seek refuge in the great stony desert of Rub-al-Khali.

They made one last halt at the palm grove of Jabryn and then left civilisation behind them and entered that burning country which the Bedouins call the "Empty Quarter" of Arabia.

This region, wherein no caravan ventures, is more than a desert; it is a formless chaos of rocks and stones strewn by some prehistoric cataclysm, a kingdom of minerals where no bush, or even grass, masks the ravished face of the earth. Water, already rare, is here so saturated with magnesium that it is undrinkable. On this torrid plateau, totally arid, the traveller is menaced perpetually by thirst and sunstroke, madness and death.

But although this land is one of the most inhospitable in the world, it is inhabited, by one of the most primitive people of Arabia: the Mourras. These must have been driven out of Yemen in immemorial times, like all the tribes of the peninsula. But having been unable to maintain themselves in the great ascending current, the "human Gulf Stream," they were driven off towards the south. Too weak to hold their own in the struggle for water-holes, dispossessed by rivals more vigorous than themselves and "dishonoured" by some unknown and irrevocable defeats, they have had to content themselves with this empty space which no one disputes with them and where everything conspires to hasten their degeneration.

Tall and bony, hairy and with haggard faces, seeming more beasts than men, the Mourras were sad specimens of humanity. Their food was just sufficient to keep them from starving: a few dates, lizards grilled on stones, rats, ostrich eggs found in the sand and, at long intervals, a stray gazelle.

When hunger seized them they would make long journeys, covering as much as 200 miles at a time, to pillage the flocks of more favoured tribes living on the fringes of this land of death.

It was among these people that Abdur-Rahman and his son now found refuge, certain that their enemies would not follow them. Abdul-Aziz travelled with the Mourras on some of their raids and by contact with them became a perfect Bedouin. Riyadh had given him strength and agility. His travels in the desert gave him self-mastery

Pilgrims on the way from Arafat towards Mecca.

Rock drawing and inscription in the Sabean country.

Public letter-writer outside the Post Office in Mecca.

A shop in Jedda

and endurance. He learned to sustain himself upon a handful of dates and a little curdled milk, contained in a goatskin bottle.

"From a boy he became an unkempt Bedouin youth. The constant danger, the everlasting alarms, and the hardships toughened his body and taught him reliance. It made him as lean as leather and at all times ready for action."[1]

But this existence was torture for the young Abdul-Aziz. Ever since his childhood his father had repeated to him that one day he would be called to reign over all Arabia. Now he had but to look around him to see that he was nothing but a proscribed fugitive, without roof, home, friends or weapons, and obliged to hide himself to avoid his enemies.

Although he took part in their expeditions Abdul-Aziz felt a deep revulsion for the Mourras. Physically they were of a revolting dirtiness and morally they were not much better. Brought up according to the strict principle of the "ulemas," the young Wahabi hated to see them so dissolute, so fundamentally irreligious, worse in fact than infidels. The Mourras respected no law, constantly broke their word and had no sense of honour. They had never suffered the discipline of the "muruwa." They were the scum of Arabia.

Often he fled their company to retire into the desert to pray and meditate. Was it not from the solitudes that from century to century the best sons of Islam had drawn their highest inspirations? In the midst of this landscape devoured by fire, where all things were consumed in a blind combustion, he quarried into the depths of his being to escape his sufferings. It had been constantly affirmed that he had been born for great things. Great in truth was this pariah life among barely human companions.

Had he lost the "huda"—the right path, that he should be condemned to this outcast existence? Was he one of those to whom God had stopped their ears that they should not hear His commandments? At the hour of sunset, when a dark purple light stains the motionless sea of sand, Abdul-Aziz, kneeling upon a stone, bared his soul. He prayed to God to hear his voice, to give him a sign to prove to him at last that he was not one of the damned. Turning towards Mecca he repeated the prayer of the "Telbiye":

> "I am here, O God, at Thy Command.
> Praise and grace and power be unto Thee
> Thou art one and alone. I am here in Thy hand. . . ."

By constantly repeating these incantations he felt a strange exaltation take birth within him. In the depth of his distress something told him not to lose courage. Was he not young and strong and bubbling with life?

One evening when he was praying thus he had suddenly the

[1] H. C. Armstrong: op. cit., p. 33.

impression of being drawn out of himself. By the light of the expiring sun he saw huge shapes rising in the horizon . . . Saud the Great and Abdul-Wahab. Behind them were the still greater images of Mohammed and Omar, followed by their invincible legions, their heads bound in white turbans, holding shining sabres aloft. . . .

Oh, to be like them, the servants of the Faith, the leaders of peoples and founders of kingdoms. To seize in a strong embrace this multitude of tribes which were decimating each other and forge again with them the unity of Arabia. . . . Within himself young Abdul-Aziz felt the strength to accomplish his vocation if Allah would have confidence in him and let him grow to become a man. With God's grace he would vanquish both with arms and with the word: he would wield the sword and the law-book together. To bring about Arab unity he would gather in his hands the two supreme sources of power: the political and the religious, and would put each of his footsteps in those of the Prophet. . . .

But these moments of exaltation could not last. They were only the dreams of a boy of thirteen, feverish and emaciated by privation and thirst. Very soon the present reassumed its sway and his mind once more confronted the necessities of every day.

Autumn came. The wind, the terrible wind of sand, began to sweep the desert and drive all before it beneath a crackling storm of dust. The last bushes wilted around the water-holes. The bruised alfa roots ceased to be edible. Game vanished. Provisions were exhausted. A few more weeks and their journey would reach its end. Hunger, thirst and fever would be left to do their work. . . .

Abdur-Rahman was at the point of despair. Man had not been able to break his will. But the desert was stronger than man: it would win in the end. Was the destiny of the Saudis to end here like a dried-up river? Would their bones be found in the spring, scattered, bleached by the sun? No one would ever know what their dream had been. . . .

One evening, at the end of his strength, Abdur-Rahman assembled in his tent his son and the three men of his escort who had remained with him.

"It is my duty to speak frankly to you," he said in a grave voice. "God in His wisdom has willed, it seems, that we should die here. It is not for us to dispute His will and still less to contend against it. All that He does is well done and He must be given thanks. We will say together the prayer of those about to die."

"No!" replied Abdul-Aziz. "We shall not die here."

"What gives you such assurance?"

"When I am a grown man I shall rule over Arabia!"

Abdur-Rahman looked long at his son. He was surprised to perceive in his gaze a radiance he had never seen before. . . .

[XXV]

ON THE next day—after a night spent in prayer—Abdur-Rahman saw on the horizon a small troop of horsemen, sent to find him by the Emir of Kuweit. The Emir had invited him and his family to come and settle in his town. He offered to give them lodging, to assure them a standard of life suitable to their rank and to subsidise their needs. This dramatic development seemed miraculous. At the eleventh hour the Saudis were saved. What could be the reason for this unexpected proposal?

While Abdur-Rahman had been wandering in the Rub-al-Khali, Rashid, who believed himself henceforth master of central Arabia, had broken his oath of allegiance to Constantinople. The ministers of Abdul Hamid concluded that they had made a mistake in allowing the Saudis to be so completely crushed, for nothing now could check Rashid's ambitions. They had decided therefore to reverse their policy and to help Abdur-Rahman to recover his property so that he could combat his enemy. The death sentence against him had been revoked. But as they knew his stormy pride and did not wish to provoke a second refusal from him, they had decided to act through an intermediary.

The Emir of Kuweit, Mohammed, was a liege-man of the Turks. Nevertheless he was an Arab. Abdur-Rahman had no reason to reject his help. The Turkish authorities had therefore begged Mohammed to offer hospitality to Abdur-Rahman and his family at the expense of the Porte. Needless to say, Mohammed also expected to obtain advantage from this.

It goes without saying also that Abdur-Rahman knew nothing of these negotiations. He accepted the Emir's proposal eagerly and shortly after was established with his family at Kuweit (1895).

Kuweit. Here were no longer the narrow, winding streets of Riyadh, nor the immense desolation of the Rub-al-Khali. Kuweit was an important seaport, situated not far from the mouth of the Euphrates, the "Marseilles of the East" as it was called, not without reason, by the coastal sailors of the Persian Gulf.

The population of Kuweit was a mixed and friendly one. Its streets and quays buzzed with a picturesque activity. There, elbow to elbow, were merchants from Teheran and Bombay, Persians and Hindus, Syrians from Aleppo and Damascus, Armenians, Turks, Jews and Europeans. From Kuweit started caravans for Persia, central Arabia, Egypt and Syria. Trade flourished; espionage also. Most of the great

Powers maintained representatives there—consuls or secret agents—camouflaged as traders, missionaries or archaeologists.

In the midst of this bustle of life, so new to him, Abdul-Aziz led the life of the young Arabs of his age. He strolled on the quays, listened to the talk of the sailors and traders from Perim or Aden, Goa or Ceylon. Avidly he absorbed the tales of travellers and picked up scraps of news from Bagdad, Damascus or Constantinople. He felt himself in the centre of the universe. But all this did not make him lose sight of his central objective: the conquest of Arabia. God had spared him for this task. How else could Mohammed's providential intervention be explained?

In the cafés of the port Abdul-Aziz struck up acquaintance with a group of the town's "gilded youth." They sought to dazzle him by describing the wealth of the shops and warehouses their fathers were to bequeath to them. So much fatuity ended by irritating him. To impress them in his turn he declared that he too was not the first-comer, that he was the grand-nephew of Saud the Great, and that one day his own name would eclipse his ancestor's. The youths laughed at him. In vexation he preached them a long sermon, adorned with quotations from the Koran, affirming that one day he would re-establish the unity of Arabia and impose Wahabi rule. This was received with yet more laughter. Trembling with rage, Abdul-Aziz cursed them, prophesying that they would go to Hell if they did not renounce their idle ways and dissolute morals. The youths sent him to Coventry. Decidedly these Wahabis were not sociable. Some were fanatics, others believers in myths. Abdul-Aziz seemed to be both.

The young Saudi determined to teach them a lesson they would remember and show them what he could do. In the market, a few days before, he had met some shepherds with a caravan from Nejd. Asked for news of his country they had told him under the seal of secrecy that the people of Riyadh were groaning under the yoke of Rashid and awaiting only the return of the Saudis to rise in their support.

Impulsively Abdul-Aziz borrowed a camel from one of his friends and set off alone to conquer a kingdom. Alas! Things did not turn out as he expected. Either his informants had been over-optimistic or they had taken advantage of his credulity. No tribes rose at his approach. His camel was old and wasted with mange. At the end of three days it began to limp, sprained a foot, lay down in the sand and refused to move. In tears of rage and resentment Abdul-Aziz saw himself forced to return on foot. After wandering a whole day in the desert he met a caravan which consented to take him home, and he made his re-entry at Kuweit astride a baggage donkey. Here was a fine plight for a self-styled conqueror of Arabia. All Kuweit heard of it and laughed. The story was told in Constantinople where it was judged ridiculous.

This episode dealt the prestige of the Saudis a serious blow. If this was all they could do, it was said in the Seraglio, then they did not deserve the sums spent upon them. . . .

Abdul-Aziz resumed his strolling in the streets and cafés of the port. But he did not find this so attractive as formerly. He no longer felt the same thrill in watching the ships manœuvre in the anchorage nor in hearing the sailors' adventures. There was something heavy and putrid in the air which made him long for the desert and its clean austerity. When storms brooded over the Persian Gulf Kuweit was oppressively clammy and a fetid odour rose from the drains and graving docks. His idleness also began to weigh upon him. He felt himself filled with vigour and fighting spirit and fretted to see his strength without employ. He had the impression of reaching the end of an impasse.

At about this time the situation of Abdur-Rahman also became complicated. The Turkish Government had such serious difficulties to contend with that it dropped all interest in the rivalries of desert clans. Greece had revived the Crete question. The great Powers were showing their teeth. The Ottoman treasury was empty. No one in Constantinople had time to think about the conflict between Rashid and the Saudis. The subsidies promised to Mohammed to compensate him no longer arrived. Abruptly the Emir stopped supplies to Abdur-Rahman and washed his hands of him. Poverty threatened in the home. The last savings were soon spent. Abdul-Aziz had been married in 1895—at the age of fifteen—to the Princess Jauhara, a great-grand-niece of Abdul-Wahab. She had borne him a first son, Turki, in 1899 and in the second year another, Khalid. All this added to the burden upon Abdur-Rahman, for Jauhara—despite her illustrious birth—was as poor as her husband. What was to be done? The future looked black. After escaping destruction in the sands was the destiny of the Saudis now to be swallowed in the mud of a little port in the Persian Gulf?

Abdul-Aziz was already thinking of seeking work as a docker to lighten the family budget when there took place a second dramatic event even more surprising than the arrival of Mohammed's horsemen in the desert of Rub-al-Khali.

[XXVI]

THE EMIR OF KUWEIT had a brother named Mubarrak, with whom he was not on good terms. A gambler and a debauchee, Mubarrak had squandered his share of the paternal inheritance. After this, quarrelling with Mohammed, he had left for Bombay, where he had lived for several years, engaged "in business." This must have been profitable

for it had enabled him since then to lose several fortunes at gambling. Where did he obtain this money? No one precisely knew; but one thing was certain: he always found more. When he was asked where he got it he would lower his eyes and reply modestly: "Allah is great and His generosity is infinite."

Mubarrak had returned to Kuweit in 1897. But Mohammed, who had never ceased to hate him, refused to receive him at the Residence and subjected him to all kinds of persecutions and vexations. Mubarrak suffered this ill treatment with an unwearying patience which elicited universal admiration.

A subtle and many-sided personality, Mubarrak seemed not to know what to do with his leisure time. He came often to visit Abdur-Rahman and questioned him at length about the problems of central Arabia. Despite this, Abdur-Rahman disliked the man. What he had been told of his past, his known immorality and liking for drink shocked his Wahabi puritanism. He feared, too, that these repeated visits would bring down upon him the disfavour of Mohammed.

Very different was the reaction of the young Abdul-Aziz. He found Mubarrak witty and amusing with a rich store of experiences to relate. Mubarrak was an excellent raconteur, and Abdul-Aziz, eager to learn, listened to him for hours.

Flattered at having found so "understanding" a listener, Mubarrak was not long in discerning exceptional qualities in the son of Abdur-Rahman. He was especially attracted by the young man's reflective nature and a kind of radiant energy which flowed from his person. "This boy has a quality," he said to himself, "of which something might be made."

Abdul-Aziz was now eighteen. Since leaving Riyadh he had not been to school and he was therefore considerably behind other youths of his age. But the difficult life he had led since childhood had steeled his character and ripened his judgment. Mubarrak suggested that the lost time might now be made up, and, after agreement, he took the youth to his own home to complete his education. He taught him history, geography, mathematics and a little English. After this he offered him work as his secretary.

Beneath an outward idleness Mubarrak led a most active life. He began by explaining some of his transactions to Abdul-Aziz; then arranged for him to be present at his private conferences.

In Mubarrak's house Abdul-Aziz learned a host of new things, ways of acting and thinking which were unknown or forbidden at Riyadh. He rubbed shoulders with men of all professions and origins: traders, speculators, explorers, bankers, civil servants, politicians and adventurers, and also with the agents of foreign Powers, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans and Russians. He was amazed to discover the

importance and extent of Mubarrak's contacts. He seemed to have friends in all the capitals of the world.

It was not for nothing that Mubarrak had so long endured without complaint the humiliating treatment inflicted by his brother: he was biding his time. At the end of 1899 he felt that the moment had come to take his revenge. One day Mohammed insulted his brother publicly and more grossly than usual. On a pretext of avenging this insult, Mubarrak with two slaves obtained entrance into the palace at night, murdered his brother in his bed and proclaimed himself Emir of Kuweit. The people greeted the brutal coup with the utmost indifference. Mohammed had loaded them with taxes. They hoped that Mubarrak would be more liberal.

This palace revolution changed the situation of the Saudis overnight. Mohammed had lodged them at the order of Constantinople. Mubarrak protected them out of personal liking. And the person to whom his protection went first and foremost was not Abdur-Rahman, but his son Abdul-Aziz. Mubarrak had been conquered by him; he believed in his destiny.

As soon as the new Emir was installed in the Residence he restored their pension to the Saudis and brought Abdul-Aziz to the palace to complete his education still further. While Mubarrak held his audiences, the young man remained seated in a corner, draped in a burnous, silently fingering the amber beads of his chaplet, in appearance indifferent to the conversations going on around him but in reality supremely attentive to all he saw and heard, mentally noting each gesture, each intonation, and learning daily to know better the complex springs of local politics and those, still more complex, of international problems.

But the reaction of the Turks was not long in coming. Mohammed had been their representative at Kuweit. Mubarrak had murdered him and enthroned himself without asking their consent. Such an outrage could not remain unpunished.

For this purpose the Turks had need of an auxiliary, for they had no troops available to be sent to Kuweit. Feeling their way, unsure and pressed by necessity, they turned again to Rashid and explained to him that he who possessed Riyadh and Nejd ought also to possess Kuweit and the outlet to the sea. They promised to abandon the port to him if he would expel Mubarrak and recognise their sovereignty once more.

Rashid was always in agreement whenever the question of enlarging his dominions was involved. Having obtained this Turkish support he assembled his forces and marched upon Kuweit, to drive out the "usurper."

[XXVII]

WHEN MUBARRAK learned that Rashid had taken the field he recruited 10,000 volunteers and marched out to meet him. His army was composed of men belonging to the most widely different tribes. It included Mountafiq, Ajman and many warriors who had come individually from Nejd in the hope of breaking the tutelage of Rashid.

Mubarrak entrusted the main body of his forces to Abdur-Rahman and put Abdul-Aziz in command of a small independent contingent, with the mission of carrying out a diversionary manœuvre. The latter was to advance on Riyadh from the south and provoke a rising among the Nejd tribes in order to sow trouble in the enemy's rear. The two columns were to join forces near the capital. Nejd once liberated of its Rashid garrisons, the Saudis could be re-established in all their prerogatives. The Emir was full of optimism and declared himself certain of victory.

Abdul-Aziz exulted in the idea of exercising his first command and showing at last what he could do. He was not sorry either to have a chance to efface the smarting memory of his earlier escapade, and he acquitted himself brilliantly in his present task. Fired by his dash and youthful verve all the tribes rose and furnished him with volunteers. By the time he reached the southern outskirts of Riyadh he found himself at the head of a respectable number of warriors.

Suddenly there came alarming news from the north, where the main action was taking place. Mubarrak had met Rashid's forces near the village of Sarif and had immediately attacked. In the midst of the battle the Emir's allies had deserted him. The Mountafiq had fled and the Ajman, untrustworthy as ever, had suddenly changed sides. Mubarrak had been defeated. Only a sudden storm had prevented his army from being completely destroyed. His troops were in full retreat and falling back upon Kuweit.

When they heard of this disaster Abdul-Aziz's forces defected in their turn. In fear of Rashid's reprisals the tribes which had risen at first now hastened to get back to their villages. Abandoned on all sides, Abdul-Aziz soon had no one left with him but a handful of faithful supporters. He too returned hurriedly to Kuweit, where he found Mubarrak and his father hastily organising resistance.

Rashid advanced by short stages, burning villages and oases in his path. In Buraida, which had rallied to the Saudi cause, he hanged eighty of the town notables from the minarets and imposed a heavy

fine upon the population. Then, turning upon Kuweit, he crushed the last remnants of Mubarrak's forces at Jahra, a few miles from the coast, and made preparations to attack the port (August 1901).

Mubarrak had now neither troops nor arms. His town was not fortified. His allies had deserted him. Kuweit seemed about to fall without a fight. The disaster was complete.

Once again the destiny of the Saudis was gravely compromised. They had believed that they were about to re-enter Riyadh in triumph. But they had played the wrong cards and all their hopes were dashed. For Abdur-Rahman and his family there was only one way out: flight, flight once more, to avoid being captured and put to death.

Abdul-Aziz and his father were already saddling their camels when yet a third dramatic development occurred, even more unexpectedly than the others: at the moment when all seemed irretrievably lost a British cruiser appeared off Kuweit. It dropped anchor a few cable lengths from the port and turned its guns in the direction of the town. The British commander sent a boat ashore and made it known officially that Mubarrak was the "friend" of Her Britannic Majesty; that England had taken him under her protection and would not tolerate his expulsion from the town. The British commander then sent plenipotentiaries to Rashid requiring him to withdraw his troops from the province. At the same time the London cabinet informed the Sultan that the British decision was final.

The Turkish Government could not do other than yield in face of this ultimatum. It counselled Rashid not to insist. With rage in his heart Rashid evacuated the territory forthwith. The people of Kuweit breathed a sigh of relief. Mubarrak was saved. So were the Saudis.

[XXVIII]

ABDUL-AZIZ would probably not have understood what had happened until much later if Mubarrak had not given him the explanation.

In the course of recent months and without any of the local inhabitants being aware of it, the little town of Kuweit had become one of the nerve centres of the Middle East. Over these few acres of sand, which had been disputed through the centuries by Assyrians and Babylonians, Romans and Persians, Turks and Arabs, the great modern Powers were now at loggerheads and were ready to come to blows. These Powers were Germany, Britain and Russia.

Shortly before, in April 1899, the German Government had concluded an agreement with the Ottoman Government upon the

building of a great trunk railway, the Berlin-Constantinople-Bagdad line, whose point of exit was to be Kuweit.[1]

This Berlin-Bagdad railway project was causing lively anxiety in Britain, for such a railway would cut across the land route to India, which London had a prime interest in preventing from falling into the hands of a rival nation. Great Britain controlled all the sea routes to the East: that which rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and that which passed via Suez and Aden across the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Only the land route through the territories of the Ottoman Empire remained out of reach and Britain was determined to control this also sooner or later.

Russia, on her side, planned to build a railway via Baku, Isfahan and Yezd, the "Trans-Persian," which would end at Bender-Abbas on the Persian Gulf. With aims of her own in these regions, she had thus no interest in seeing the Germans install themselves in the Persian Gulf. But she had no interest in seeing the British there either.

The German axis of penetration ran from the north-west to the south-east. The Russian axis ran north and south. The British axis started not from Britain but from India. It ran from the south-east to the north-west across the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman. All these axes crossed and intersected at the same place: Kuweit. Hence the importance which this point of the globe had suddenly assumed.

Foreseeing the crisis which was now breaking out in the summer of 1901, Britain had been closely watching events on the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf, and seeking by various means to conciliate the minor rulers who held power there.

The former Emir of Kuweit, Mohammed, had governed the town for the Turks, allies of Germany. To leave him there was equivalent to leaving the door open to German aims. This was why the British had decided to replace him by his brother Mubarrak, who had been secretly won over to the British cause. During his stay in Bombay, agents of the India Office had got into touch with him and had paid him substantial subsidies in consideration of "services" which he might later render them. This was the origin of the funds he had so gaily spent in gambling and whose provenance he had attributed to the generosity of Allah. These same British agents had prepared the armed coup through which Mubarrak had supplanted his brother. Lastly, it was they who had encouraged him to resist Rashid's invasion and who had promised him British support. This was why Mubarrak had launched out upon this adventure with so much optimism, despite his flagrantly unprepared condition. He was convinced that the British would support him throughout and against everything, for to let him be crushed by Rashid would be to re-establish in Kuweit a governor

[1] cf. Georges Ancel: *La question d'Orient*, pp. 227–229.

in Turkish pay and to cancel out the advantages of Mohammed's "eviction."

But things had not happened exactly as Mubarrak expected. The British had believed that he would easily beat his adversary; his defeat had surprised and even embarrassed them. Accustomed to operate through third parties, they had not wished to intervene openly in the Persian Gulf. This would have been to disclose the interests they had in this area and to provoke a reaction in all the chancelleries of Europe. However, they could not leave their protégé to be crushed or permit his enemies to seize the town. Hence they had hesitated before showing their cards and had finally decided on a naval demonstration.

But once this gesture had been made—and it was of importance since it slammed the door of Kuweit brusquely in the faces of Rashid, the Turks and the Germans simultaneously and forced the last to halt their railway to Bagdad by depriving them of an outlet to the sea—the British stopped short of more for fear of provoking a general conflagration. Their objective once attained they retired from the Persian Gulf and feigned disinterest in Mubarrak, whose military incapacity had cooled them.

This somersault in the situation astonished Abdul-Aziz and gave him much to think about. He perceived that one might lose an army, be trounced on the field of battle and yet emerge without much damage. Such then was the power of politics that it could force the victor to yield to the vanquished. For the first time he understood something of the immense and invisible role of diplomacy in world affairs. To him it seemed like a magic power, which could reverse events in the most unexpected fashion and solve the most paradoxical situations without a blow being struck. . . .

But he realised too for the first time what unsuspected appetites hovered over Arabia. "The Powers sit round the Ottoman Empire awaiting its collapse in order to share its remains." He had heard this said often enough at Mubarrak's conferences, but had not attached special importance to it. Now he understood what it meant and what fearsome problems it posed for the future. For were not the "remains" of Turkey, among other things, the Arab lands? He had lived till now in the illusion that to become independent it would be sufficient for the Arabs to drive out the Turks. All at once he realised that things were not as simple as that and that if the European States were keeping watch around the "Sick Man's" bed, it was but in order to replace his tutelage by their own.

Abdul-Aziz told himself that to succeed in the task he had set himself—the unification and emancipation of Arabia—he would have to play a very close game. To confront these colossal Powers face to face would be to court certain disaster. He would have to dodge

between them and draw advantage from their rivalries, without ever accepting either their promises or their "protection."

The way in which the British had "disinterested" themselves of Mubarrak after using him to bar the road to Turkey showed clearly that they were pursuing only their own interests. Arabia? They cared nothing for it. What had Britain to gain from a unified Arabia?

All this convinced Abdul-Aziz that he would have not only to fight but to deceive, to scheme and lie in wait for favourable moments and circumstances when they came. But it showed him also that Arabia would never achieve unity except through its own efforts—led by a man strong enough to demand it.

[XXIX]

ABDUL-AZIZ was now twenty-one years of age. He was, says Armstrong, a superb athlete, a young giant of over six feet, "a foot taller than the average Arab and broad with a big manner and of great strength. He had brown eyes that usually were steady or smiling but when he was roused were full of fire."[1]

Mubarrak was saved. But Rashid was not defeated. He still occupied Nejd and Riyadh, its capital. This knowledge gave him no rest. He thought of one thing only: to resume the fight. His father strove to dissuade him.

"The time is not yet ripe," he said repeatedly. "We must be patient. Later we will organise a new expedition together."

But Abdul-Aziz could not keep still. Here were now nearly seven years that he had been pottering wretchedly in the *souks* of Kuweit, wasting his time in listening to the recriminations of expatriates. Even Mubarrak's "conferences" began to bore him and seem insipid. This was no life for a Saudi. Abdul-Aziz was neither a trader nor a bureaucrat, but a man of war. The inaction to which events condemned him placed a severe strain upon his nerves. He needed action—action at any cost. His vitality could no longer satisfy itself in the confined space of Kuweit. It needed more space. Ah! to gallop in the desert on a half-tamed stallion! The desert was full of opportunities for a man of his temper. With God's help he was sure to conquer. He had confidence in his star and in the men of Nejd. If he placed himself at their head and proclaimed himself their chief they would follow him and would drive Rashid from the palace of Riyadh. But for that he would need men, arms, camels and gold. And he was forced to recognise that he possessed none of these things. . . .

[1] H. C. Armstrong: op. cit., p. 48.

Abdul-Aziz bombarded Mubarrak with requests. He implored him to resume the struggle against Rashid. But Mubarrak turned a deaf ear. His recent misadventure had made him cautious. He did not wish to engage in a new affair whose failure might lose him the confidence of his protectors once for all.

Abdul-Aziz then turned to the British. He made contact with the British consulate and asked them for help. Mubarrak was their confidential agent in Kuweit. Why not entrust to him, Abdul-Aziz, a similar role in Nejd? Was he not, even more than Mubarrak, the mortal enemy of the Turks? But he received no reply. Young Abdul-Aziz was too insignificant a personage to interest Her Britannic Majesty's representatives.

Still undiscouraged, he tackled Mubarrak again. With tireless obstinacy he begged him to let him try his luck. Mubarrak ended by being exasperated. To get rid of his tormenter he let him have thirty rather mangy camels, thirty old rifles with ammunition, 200 riyals in gold and told him to importune him no more.

Abdul-Aziz asked nothing better. For the first time in his life he had a force, albeit small, which depended upon himself. He determined to show Mubarrak the use he could make of it.

He began by drawing up a plan of campaign. In the first place he would seize the palace of Riyadh. Once master of the palace he would control the town. Once solidly established in the town he would impose his sovereignty upon all the Nejd tribes. He would then have a corner where he could put his foot and could consider operations of larger scope. Then, perhaps, the British authorities would find him sufficiently "interesting" to answer his messages. Then he would have planted in the heart of Arabia the first foundation for his future power. . . .

Refusing to consider his father's objections he resolved to act at once. This uncertain existence had become intolerable to him. He had had enough of being the plaything of events and wandering like a dead leaf at the will of the wind. Henceforward, for better or worse, he would grasp his life in his own hands and direct it himself. At the head of his handful of volunteers he left Kuweit in the autumn of 1901 and entered the desert, leaving in his parents' charge his two sons, Turki and Khalid, and his young wife, who was expecting her third child.

It was the start of a great adventure.

[XXX]

IN ORDER to give his little troop the greatest possible mobility Abdul-Aziz cut equipment down to a minimum: a folded blanket under the saddle, a rifle, ammunition, some dates and curdled milk sufficient for three days.

At first he carried out a series of raids. After journeying across the dunes he would fall unexpectedly upon a caravan or camp, and, followed by his men, galloping and yelling savagely, would seize booty and vanish swiftly again. The following evening he would make a fresh raid thirty miles away.

Accustomed from an early age to sleep only a few hours, Abdul-Aziz was all day in the saddle and at night kept watch while his companions slept. This exhausting life seemed only to increase his endurance. Abdur-Rahman's son was in his element at last.

One day he raided the Ajman tribes, the same who had planned to murder his father during the flight from Riyadh. He pillaged their camp, carrying off a full chest of gold. The news spread throughout the country. It was said that Abdul-Aziz was rich and generous, that he paid liberally all who fought for him. Bedouins from many sides hastened to swell his forces.

But Abdul-Aziz was neither a freebooter nor a bandit and his aim was not to accumulate riches. Rather it was to strike the imagination of the Nejdis, to make his presence known to them and incite them to revolt.

But this time the tribes did not rise. They had answered his appeal at the time of Mubarrak's offensive. Mubarrak had been defeated and there had been terrible reprisals. The new chiefs had no wish to be hanged from the minarets of their towns as their predecessors had been.

"You say you are our chief?" they answered him. "We are willing to believe you. But first you must prove it. Then we will follow you."

There followed weeks of failure and disappointment. Disclosed before they happened, the raids were forestalled and rendered abortive. The tribes were on their guard and would not let him approach. His money melted away. The overworked camels fell ill. Ammunition was running short. With no more booty the Bedouin mercenaries began to desert. Rashid sent out a small, well-armed force that had no difficulty in driving them out of Nejd. Abdul-Aziz then turned to the Hasa tribes, but the Turks sent a battalion which drove them from the province. In despair he asked the Ajman for refuge. But they had not forgotten the raid of which they had been the victims. They forbade him access to their territory, under pain of death. Cursing alike Rashid,

the tribes of Hasa, the Turks and the Ajman, Abdul-Aziz marched south. All other roads were closed to him. He had but one resource, but this was a terrible one: to go back to the great desert of Rub-al-Khali.

The very idea of returning to that stony wilderness where he had so nearly died gave him a shiver of horror. But unless he was to confess himself beaten there was nothing else to be done. With death in his heart, Abdul-Aziz resigned himself and led his troop thither.

He had reached the palm grove of Jabryn, on the edge of the great desert, when a messenger from his father reached him.

"My son," Abdur-Rahman had said, "your fate fills us with anxiety. Return to Kuweit, that is the counsel we give you. The time is not yet ripe for action."

When he received this message Abdul-Aziz gathered about him all the men he had left and explained the situation. He did not hide from them that it was desperate.

"I can guarantee you no booty, no victory," he said. "I can promise you only a long series of trials, fasting and privation. For my part I am resolved to continue the struggle. No power in the world will prevent me, even if I should be reduced to fighting alone, even if my sole victory is to die fighting. With God's help I shall take whatever chance the desert offers me. But since I will force no one to follow me, let those who wish to return go now."

Most of the men decided to leave him. They had lost confidence and were terrified by the grim prospect he had just described. There remained at his side only one brave and taciturn warrior named Jiluwi, his brother Mohammed, the thirty Arabs recruited at Kuweit as the initial nucleus of his troop and ten newer companions from Riyadh: a total of some fifty men, including slaves.

Then, renewing the gesture of the Prophet at the time of the Oath of Akaba, Abdul-Aziz drew his sabre and held the blade out before him.

"Swear on this that you will remain faithful to me whatever may befall," he said to them.

One by one the men passed before him and gave him their oath.

"Now," he said, putting his sabre back in its sheath, "we are all brothers in the Lord. My life is your life and your death shall be my death. We are now linked to one another by an unbreakable pact."

Then he turned to the messenger.

"Return whence you came," he said, "and tell my father what you have seen. Tell him that I can no longer bear to see my country crushed under Rashid's heel, our family scoffed at and dragged in the mud. I am preparing to stake my all against death. I will not return unless I

have been successful. To perish is less bitter than to be always vanquished. All things, here below, are in the hands of God."

Then he assembled his little troop and had the camels saddled. The column moved slowly away towards the south and disappeared from sight, as if absorbed into the sunlight.

[XXXI]

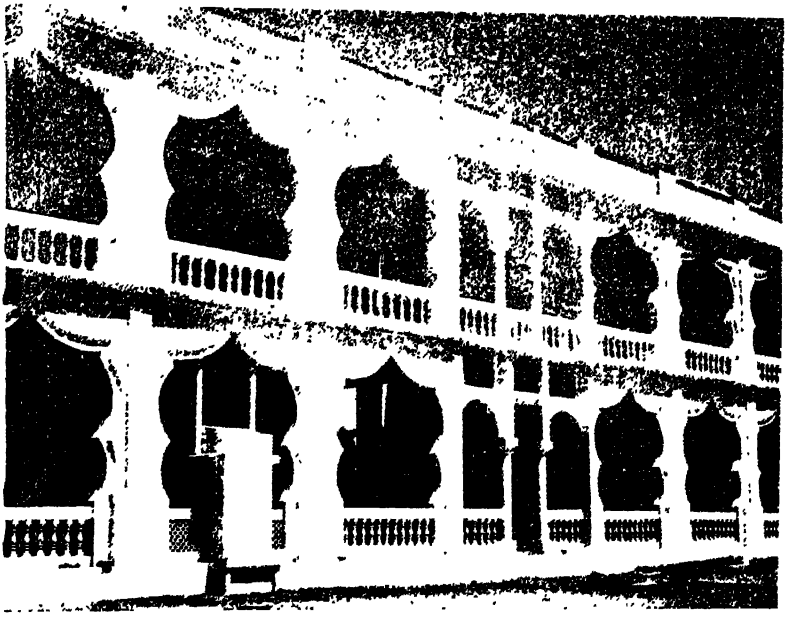
RASHID HAD installed a large garrison at Riyadh. It occupied all the fortified points in the town. Abdul-Aziz could not consider a frontal attack because of the weakness of his force. His only chance was to work by surprise. For that he would have to begin by disappearing, by making himself forgotten and awaiting the moment when Rashid should think him dead.

It was not easy. For fifty days Abdul-Aziz and his companions concealed themselves in the depths of the Rub-al-Khali and those who have lived in the desert know that it is more difficult to pass unseen there than in the middle of a big town. A log still warm, a shadow, a footprint, all these can betray a human presence. For this little troop therefore it was a difficult task.

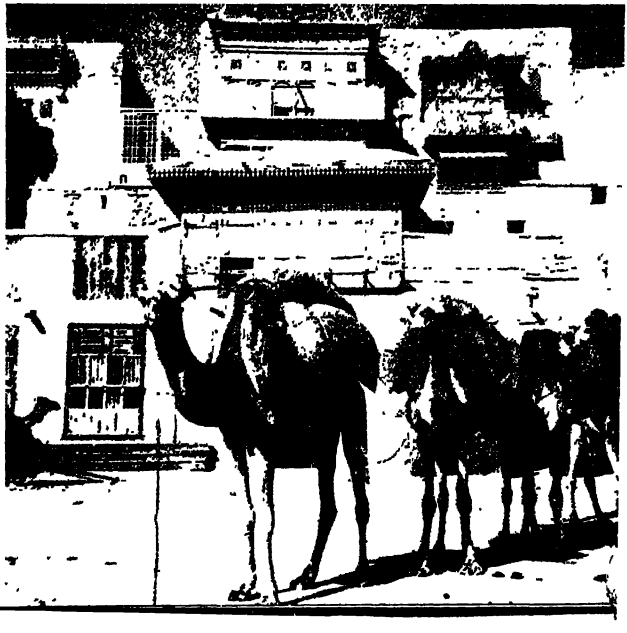
Up till now they had lived in the exhilaration of combat, intoxicating themselves with the smell of powder and feeding upon cattle seized from the enemy. Now they were reduced to famine rations. They could not hunt, for a single rifle-shot might betray their presence. They had to approach the rare water-holes on all fours. Even then they must wait until nightfall. They were obliged to preserve water for several days at a time in goatskins which gave it a bitter taste. The feeding of their animals set almost insoluble problems in this wilderness without grass or bushes. Each day the men had to perform near-miracles to prevent their camels from dying of starvation.

As their stay lengthened the men became restless and discouraged.

"It was one of the most difficult times of my life," Abdul-Aziz said long afterwards. "These men had joined me in order to fight. War was their pastime and their profession. They could not understand why I had condemned them to idleness. This retreat into the desert seemed to them absurd. They wanted either to fight or return to their wives. A life without fighting or women, they said, was not worth the living. Nevertheless, I would not allow them to go home, even for twenty-four hours. I knew that they would talk. And the least indiscretion could be fatal to us, for it would reveal our existence to the enemy. The difficulties I had to confront during that period taught me that what is hardest to obtain from men is not acts of courage, but abnegation."



Palace of the King of Arabia in the desert, two miles from Jedda.



Camel caravan in Jedda.

Arab house among the date-palms.

Day after day Abdul-Aziz exhorted them, strove to raise their morale and reminded them of the oath they had sworn at Jabryn.

"Have you not sworn to stay at my side whatever happens?" he repeated. "Did you not engage yourselves to follow me to the death?"

"Yes," they replied, "and we are still ready to fulfil our promise. But this, O Abdul-Aziz, is worse than death."

Abdul-Aziz appealed to the good sense of some, to the self-respect of others, and put courage into them by his words and his example. This task was the more exhausting because it had to be begun again each morning and be added to an intense physical effort, for he was leading the same life as his soldiers, carrying out the same duties, eating the same short rations, yet mounting guard more often than his share.

Soon the ordeal became even more terrible. The month of Ramadan arrived. Whatever the circumstances the Wahabis could not allow themselves any infraction of the commandment to fast. Despite the privations to which they were already subjected, Abdul-Aziz and his companions imposed on themselves the extra sacrifice of eating nothing and drinking nothing between sunrise and sunset. It was a supreme challenge to human endurance.

But the men bore this addition to their sufferings with greater strength of spirit than before. Recriminations ceased. The exorbitant nature of the ordeal awakened in them a sense of emulation. Yes, it was a challenge. Just as the abstract emptiness of the landscape displayed an unaccustomed breadth of the sky, so the weakening of their bodies put the strength of their will in greater evidence and from this contrast they drew an added pride. The exalted happiness which comes only to those who surpass their own limitations and cross the mysterious threshold beyond which the possible can no longer be distinguished from the impossible, lit a strange flame in the depths of their gaze. Their eyes enlarged by fever and famine, they aspired to the supreme torture which would consummate their triumph.

"If I had cast myself into the pit of hell," Abdul-Aziz said afterwards, "and had ordered my men to follow, they would have done so with a cry of joy. . . ."

[XXXII]

On the twentieth day of Ramadan, after having said the evening prayers, Abdul-Aziz told his companions that their ordeal was ended and gave order to raise camp. The little troop, which had got into the habit of moving only at night, packed baggage and started back to the north. At the well of Jabryn they made a brief halt, observed the

festival of Id, which marks the end of the fast, and on the following night reached a chain of hills six miles to the south of Riyadh.[1]

Once arrived there, Abdul-Aziz left all the animals near a water-hole with twenty men to guard them.

"Do not come to join me until I send for you," he told them. "If within twenty-four hours you have received no signal from me, return to Kuweit and tell Abdur-Rahman that his son is dead."

Accompanied by the thirty men remaining to him, Abdul-Aziz went forward on foot through the palm groves which stretch over a depth of several miles to the south of the Nejd capital. He had prepared no plan. He possessed no ally in the place. He had decided to seize his chance as it came and to act thereafter upon the inspiration of the moment. He left it to God to show him "the right path."

At Shamsieh, where the palm groves end and the gardens which give their name to the town begin, they halted once more. They cut down a palm tree and removed the branches from the trunk. Its rough bark made it a serviceable ladder. Then Abdul-Aziz picked Jiluwi and six others to go with him, leaving the rest of his troop beside a water-tank under the command of Mohammed.

"Remain in contact with the rearguard and await my orders," he told them. "If no message from me reaches you by midday tomorrow make haste to escape, for that will mean that we are all dead. There is no power but in God."

Carrying the palm trunk upon their shoulders, Abdul-Aziz, Jiluwi and the six men threaded their way through the gardens, keeping in the shadows. They halted every hundred yards to take shelter behind a bush or a thicket, lest they should be seen by a sentry. In this fashion they reached the foot of the ramparts not far from the big cemetery which borders the road to Mecca. Lying in the ditch, they listened. A dog was barking in the distance. Over their heads echoed the footsteps of the sentries making their rounds on the top of the ramparts. It was the hour of the change of guard. Two sentries exchanged the password and disappeared in the night. Then everything was silent once more. They had not been seen.

Placing the palm trunk against the wall they climbed it in turn, stepping over the parapet and jumping down into the little lane which bordered the rampart. It was mid-January. The night air was biting. All the inhabitants of Riyadh were in their homes. Holding their weapons beneath their mantles to avoid noise they picked their way

[1] Several versions exist of the capture of Riyadh by Abdul-Aziz. Armstrong's is the best and most complete. It is founded on the recitals of eye-witnesses, notably of Jiluwi, who took an active part in this operation. For this reason it has the value of first-hand evidence. I have followed it here, rejecting other accounts which do not offer the same guarantee of authenticity. (cf. *Lord of Arabia*, pp. 46 et seq.)

along the walls of the deserted street and approached the house of a shepherd named Jowaisir, near that of the governor.

Abdul-Aziz knocked gently. A woman's voice asked from inside:

"Who is that?"

"I come from the governor," replied Abdul-Aziz in a low voice. "I have come to see Jowaisir to buy two cows."

"Go away," the woman cried. "Do you take this house for a brothel? Go away! This is no hour to come knocking at the doors of respectable people."

"If you do not open immediately," replied Abdul-Aziz, "I shall complain tomorrow to the governor and Jowaisir will be punished."

Then he flattened himself along the side of the wall with his men and waited.

Very soon a porter carrying a dark lantern timidly pushed the door ajar. Two men seized him by the throat to prevent him from crying out. Abdul-Aziz, Jiluwi and their companions made their way into the house by the half-open door, which they silently closed behind them.

The man with the lantern was an old servant of the palace who had once served Abdur-Rahman and his family. Pointing to the tallest of his companions Jiluwi said quietly in his ear:

"Abdul-Aziz!"

"It is our master!" cried the man, amazed, falling on his knees. "How great he has grown!"

"He will grow greater still, if you will help him," said Jiluwi.

"What is it you need?"

"Information."

The man was ready to furnish them with this. The Masmak fort, he said, was occupied by Rashid's soldiers. These did not appear to fear an attack, for they were taking no special precautions. The governor who represented Rashid in the Nejd capital was called Ajlan. He usually spent the night at the fort. A little after sunrise his horses were brought to him in the main square for him to inspect. After this he went for a ride and returned to his home on foot. He never went out without being escorted by his guards. His home was two doors farther away. Sentries were never placed there.

Abdul-Aziz went off to reconnoitre. Followed by his companions he crawled over the flat roof of the next-door house. In the next house they came suddenly upon a man and a woman asleep. These they gagged rapidly and bound to their bed.

The governor's house was next to this, but was one floor higher. To climb on its roof they had to use a human ladder. Once arrived on the top they lay down on their bellies and remained a short while motionless, their hearts pounding. They feared they might have been heard. But nothing stirred. No one had given the alarm.

After taking off their boots they entered the house barefoot and descended to the basement. There they found a group of servants whom they locked up in a cellar. Abdul-Aziz posted one of his men before the door. Followed by the others he went up to the second floor, where at length he found the governor's bedroom.

Abdul-Aziz silently slid a cartridge into the breech of his rifle. Leaving his men on the landing he went into the room, accompanied by Jiluwi. Two figures were stretched on the bed. They were the wife of the governor and her sister.

The governor's wife stood up in terror. Abdul-Aziz put his hand over her mouth while Jiluwi bound the other. The wife of Ajlan was a Riyadh woman named Mutliba, whose father had once been in Abdur-Rahman's service. Abdul-Aziz knew her.

"Do not move, Mutliba," he said to her. "Otherwise I shall kill you. I see that you have prostituted yourself and married one of these Rashid swine."

"I am not what you say," protested Mutliba. "I married only after you had left us. What are you doing here?"

"I have come to hang Ajlan," calmly replied Abdul-Aziz.

"Ajlan is strong," said she. "He has at least twenty-four men with him. Go away. If you are found you will be killed."

"When does he come home?" asked Abdul-Aziz, taking no notice of this.

"One hour after dawn."

"Then keep quiet. If you make a single cry we will cut your throat." And Abdul-Aziz had her shut up in the cellar with her sister and the servants.

Most of the night had now passed. It would be sunrise in four hours. Abdul-Aziz made a tour of the house to reconnoitre. All the front part was taken up by one large room with a loggia, lighted by a bay window with a slatted shutter. This window looked out on the main square. On the other side of the square was the silhouette of the Masmak fort, massive and sombre with its heavy gates set in the wall. A sentry was pacing on the top of the rampart. In a flash Abdul-Aziz decided his plan of attack. He would make a rush at the governor the moment he left the citadel and profit by the confusion to break into the fort.

He sent two men to fetch Mohammed and his party, still awaiting his signal at the palm grove. When these small reinforcements arrived he posted sentries behind the shutters with orders to inform him if they saw anything.

Lying down on the ground or crouching on their heels the companions of Abdul-Aziz passed the last hours of the night listening to one of them reciting verses from the Koran in a whisper. Then they

prayed and mutually asked forgiveness of each other for past quarrels. After this they slept.

At the approach of morning the man with the lantern brought them coffee, bread and dates. They ate with a good appetite. Then, turning their foreheads towards Mecca, they recited the dawn prayer, checked their weapons once more and waited for what the day would bring.

[XXXIII]

THE SUN had barely risen when one of the watchers, posted at the shutters, made a signal with his hand. Abdul-Aziz went to the window. In the square slaves were bringing the governor's horses. The garrison of the fort was awakening.

Abdul-Aziz gave his last orders. Four were to remain in ambush, behind the shutters. As soon as they saw him running across the square they were to open fire on the sentries mounting guard at the entrance to the fort. All the others were to follow him.

The great gate of the citadel was flung open. Surrounded by his guards, the governor Ajlan appeared at the top of the steps. Slowly he came down and was about to cross the square to inspect his horses. The decisive moment had arrived.

Calling his men, Abdul-Aziz raced down the stairs four at a time, left the house, crossed the square at a run and leapt upon Ajlan with a wild shout. Swiftly Ajlan turned, whipping out his sabre to strike at his assailant. Abdul-Aziz parried the blow with the butt of his rifle, grasped the governor round the waist and lifted him from the ground. Ajlan tripped him and put him off his balance and the two men, grappling each other, rolled in the dust.

Not understanding what was happening, the guards broke ranks and made for the shelter of the fort. One was laid out by Jiluwi as he raised his arm to cut at Abdul-Aziz with his sabre. Ajlan was fighting like a madman. Breaking his enemy's grip he dashed to the gate, crying "To arms!" Abdul-Aziz raised his rifle and fired at him, breaking his arm and forcing him to drop his sabre. Then Abdul-Aziz made another leap forward and caught Ajlan by the legs just as he reached the gate.

At the same moment his companions, in a compact group, made a rush for the fort. A confused struggle broke out on the steps, a tangled, shouting swarm of men, cutting furiously at each other with sabre and dagger.

From the top of the ramparts some garrison soldiers threw down blocks of stone upon the assailants. Others blazed away through the wall openings. Ajlan succeeded in getting a foot loose and kicked

Abdul-Aziz in the groin. The latter staggered in agony and let go his grip. Half carried by his soldiers the governor was dragged into the fort. Guards tried to shut the door behind him. Jiluwi and three men flung themselves upon them and just managed to keep the gates open. Abdul-Aziz, recovering, dashed into the citadel. He caught sight of Ajlan flying across the inside courtyard leaving a trail of blood. Jiluwi and he threw themselves in pursuit. They caught the governor on the steps of the mosque, where he was seeking refuge. Jiluwi drove his sabre through him. Ajlan gave a hoarse cry and collapsed.

Without losing an instant, Abdul-Aziz and Jiluwi returned to the citadel to aid their men. They were in sore need of help. Two had already been killed; four more were seriously wounded. They fought one against ten with such frenzy that the citadel garrison began to give ground. Galvanised by Abdul-Aziz and Jiluwi they dashed to attack the ramparts, killed or wounded half the Rashid soldiers and threw their bodies over the parapet. The rest of the defenders were forced back into a corridor without outlet and compelled to surrender.

Immediately this operation was complete Abdul-Aziz sent criers to the mosque and ramparts to announce to all that he had seized the citadel and that Ajlan was dead.

On hearing this news the whole population of Riyadh seized weapons, captured the other fortified points in the town, massacred what remained of the Rashid garrison and gave the victor a rousing welcome.

By midday Abdul-Aziz was master of Riyadh.

At the same hour his third son, Saud, was born at Kuweit.[1]

[XXXIV]

While Abdur-Rahman was sending a mounted messenger to Nejd to announce the birth to his son, another messenger from Abdul-Aziz was speeding to Kuweit to tell his father of his success.

"Father," he said, "I have conquered our capital with twenty men. Come quickly to join me; the people await you."

Abdur-Rahman left Kuweit by stealth in order not to arouse the attention of his enemies. Midway to Riyadh he encountered a detachment of 150 horsemen sent by Abdul-Aziz to meet him and protect him against a possible attack by Rashid. A few days later Abdur-Rahman and his escort arrived in the Nejd capital. The whole population massed as his cortège passed to acclaim the Imam of the Wahabis.

[1] Saud Ibn Abdul-Aziz, born in the year 1319 of the Hegira in the month of Rabia-Al-Aoual (November 1901), was to succeed his father on the throne in 1953. He is the present king of Arabia.

Abdur-Rahman had not set foot in Riyadh since 1890. Eleven years had passed since his departure and he now felt tired and weakened. The difficult life he had led during his exile had prematurely aged him. He called the Elders, the Doctors of Law and the notables of the town to the palace to tell them his plans.

"To govern," he told them, "there is need for a man younger and more vigorous than I. You know my son Abdul-Aziz; you have seen him at work and you have been able to appreciate his exceptional qualities. I have decided to resign all my military and political functions in his favour. I shall retain for myself only my religious functions. I wish to spend the rest of life left to me in study, prayer and the contemplation of God."

The "ulemas" and notables consented to this wish.

The ceremony of investiture took place next day. In the main square of the town, in the presence of the assembled people, Abdur-Rahman presented to Abdul-Aziz the sword of his great-uncle Saud the Great, which the Saudis hand down from generation to generation. Saud the Great had received it from Mohammed-ibn-Saud, who had received it from Abdul-Wahab, who himself held it from his Temim ancestors. In this land where weapons have names and genealogies, like the chiefs of tribes and blood-stock animals, this sword named Rahaiyan —the Sharp-edged—was one of the most notable in Arabia. The blade was of fine Damascan steel; the hilt, of solid gold, was inlaid with pearls. It was said that a "baraka" had attached to it since it had belonged to the Wahab—a sacred emanation able to bring its possessor prosperity, happiness and victory.[1]

Abdul-Aziz knelt before his father and kissed the blade. After a moment's silent meditation he stood up, seized Rahaiyan by the hilt and pointed the sword to the sky to render homage to God. Then he lowered it slowly towards the four points of the compass, and swore that no enemy should cross the limits of the town as long as the sabre remained in his hands.

Abdul-Aziz was Emir of Riyadh.

[1] It is usual to see in the Arab "baraka" simply a synonym for chance or luck. In reality the term has a much deeper significance. "Whatever his origin the saint has the baraka or sacred emanation as an essential attribute. By it he confers prosperity, happiness, all the benefits of this world upon his adorers. He can extend these gifts beyond individuals, over a whole country and even beyond this world by his intercession with Allah. It is not even necessary that the will of the saint should operate for the baraka to be effective: his presence and contact with him alone are necessary. Thus the beneficent emanation can be spread and even transmitted by the intermediary of the servants of the saint. It emanates from the saint's body during life; it persists after his death, for his corpse, miraculously preserved, transmits it to the tomb which encloses him, to the shrouds which enfold him and even to the earth which surrounds him." (*Les institutions musulmanes*, p. 59) The same is held to be true of certain objects—weapons especially—which have been in the possession of legendary personages.

[XXXV]

WHEN RASHID learned of the daring coup by which Abdul-Aziz had seized Riyadh, he sneered.

"The starling is caught in the cage," he said.

But Abdul-Aziz was no starling. He knew that the game was far from being won. With a strategic sense surprising in a man of his age, he perceived that he would be beaten if he let himself be blockaded in the town and that he must leave it as soon as possible to preserve his liberty of movement.

Taking with him the élite of Riyadh cavalry, he made for Hauta, in the south of Nejd, and established himself in the district of Aflag among the tribes of Dawasir from which his mother had sprung. From there he rode out harassing the Rashid garrisons by his repeated incursions. Meanwhile, in Riyadh, Abdur-Rahman took measures to prepare the town for a long siege.

Rashid went in pursuit of Abdul-Aziz and made his headquarters at Dilam—where Ibrahim had defeated Feisal. Abdul-Aziz came upon him unawares, defeated him in a palm grove west of the town and drove him back to the north.

The Aflag at once adopted the cause of Abdul-Aziz and recognised his sovereignty. Rashid marched to Kuweit to draw his enemy away from a district where the population was favourable to him and doing its best to support him. In a panic Mubarrak sent a distress call to Abdul-Aziz—that Abdul-Aziz to whom a short while ago he had given thirty mangy camels with others to get out as soon as possible. Generously, Abdul-Aziz now hastened to help his former protector.

But Rashid's manœuvre was only a stratagem. As soon as he was sure that Abdul-Aziz was approaching Kuweit by forced marches he turned abruptly to lay siege to Riyadh. It was well that Abdur-Rahman had taken precautions. The Nejd capital barricaded its gates and prepared to resist.

Abdul-Aziz realised that he had been tricked. Up to now he had always adapted his movements to those of his enemy and these timid tactics had lessened his strength. Now, learning from experience, he resolved to act henceforth according to a plan of his own. Instead of returning to Riyadh to relieve the town he marched west, passed north of the capital, thus cutting his enemy's line of retreat, and set about ravaging the Shammar country where Rashid recruited the majority of his troops.

As soon as these heard that Abdul-Aziz was burning their villages

and harvests they raised the siege and hastened homeward. Rashid tried in vain to keep them back. He had just time to retreat and take refuge at Hail.

Exploiting his success to the full, Abdul-Aziz seized Shaqra, Thamida and Thadiq and expelled their Rashid garrisons. A few weeks later he was in control of all territory for fifteen miles to the north of Riyadh.

[XXXVI]

DURING THE whole of 1903 and 1904 the duel between Abdul-Aziz and Rashid continued without a break, with successes and defeats on each side. For twenty-six months the two adversaries struggled without ever reaching a decisive result.

In 1904 Abdul-Aziz at last got a chance to strike a big blow. Between Riyadh and the Shammar country was to be found the richest territory of Nejd, Quasim, whose chief towns were Anaiza and Buraida. Rashid still held garrisons there. But the people were hostile to him and secretly wished for his defeat.

At the beginning of the rainy season, which usually marked the end of hostilities, Rashid left the region momentarily. Abdul-Aziz profited by this to make a swift incursion into the heart of Quasim. He took Anaiza by storm, killed the Rashid governor and laid siege to Buraida, which was strongly fortified.

Rashid rushed up a troop of Shammar soldiers to dislodge him. They were commanded by his cousin Obaid, the same who had killed Mohammed, brother of Abdur-Rahman, at the taking of Riyadh in 1890. Abdul-Aziz defeated Obaid at Al Baikairiya, routed his troops and took him prisoner.

Abdur-Rahman's son was seated on his great battle camel when Obaid was brought before him.

"So," he said from the saddle, "you are Obaid, who murdered my uncle Mohammed?"

He jumped down and drew his sabre, weighing the blade thoughtfully in his hands.

"Do not kill me!" Obaid implored.

"This is not the hour for mercy," replied Abdul-Aziz. "I am going to do justice. This is the just penalty for an unpunished crime."

With supple wrist Abdul-Aziz made the steel flash in the sunlight. Then swiftly he struck Obaid three times.

The first time he nicked his hip, making him bend forward. The second time he sank the blade into his neck so deeply that a stream of blood spurted from the severed artery. With the third blow he opened

his chest from bottom to top with the point of the sabre and cut out his heart which fell still throbbing to the ground.

Abdur-Rahman's son looked at it in silence until it had ceased to beat. Then he swung his sabre to the sky, kissed the blade, still running with blood, wiped it with his scarf and replaced it in its scabbard. The soldiers who had witnessed this scene stood nailed to the spot with horror. Abdul-Aziz pushed them by the shoulder and in a rough voice ordered them to get back to their posts.

The garrison of Buraida surrendered the same day. All Quasim as far as the boundary of the Shammar country recognised the sovereignty of Abdul-Aziz. The Harj did the same. Abdul-Aziz joined these provinces to the Aflag which he already possessed. Almost the whole of the Nejd kingdom was now re-established in his hands.

[XXXVII]

THE DEATH of Obaid, recalling that of Salim fourteen years before, produced an explosion of rage in Rashid. Decidedly these Saudis were all the same, brutal and bloody, and Arabia would never know peace until they were exterminated. Burning to avenge the defeat he had suffered, Rashid turned to the Turks and asked for their support. Was he not their ally and liege-man?

The Ottoman Government examined his request. They concluded that an end must be put to the career of this young Saudi whose enterprise and thirst for conquest were causing them lively apprehension. In agreement with the Sultan the chief of the Seraskeriat[1] gave orders for the governor of Bagdad to finish off this rebel, capture him dead or alive, and send his head to Constantinople.

At the beginning of 1904 eight Turkish battalions, accompanied by two batteries of mounted artillery, concentrated at Samarra, a village on the Euphrates where Rashid had already called up both regulars and reserves among the Shammars. At the end of the month these forces moved off to the south and marched by short stages towards the frontiers of Quasim.

A few years earlier a mere company would have been enough to deal with Abdul-Aziz. The size of the forces now set in motion by the Turks was a measure of the growth of his power. For the first time his activities had gone beyond a purely local character and had drawn the attention of the Ottoman ministers. All this was flattering.

But it was dangerous also, and Abdul-Aziz was far from underestimating the situation's seriousness. To refuse to fight would be

[1] The Ottoman War Minister.

to lose face and to fall lower than before the taking of Riyadh. He weighed the pros and cons carefully. Finally he decided to accept battle.

His decision once taken, Abdul-Aziz set to work energetically. He called all available fighting men to arms and grouped them on the outskirts of the village of Bukarya. It was there that the decisive encounter was to be expected.

The battle broke out at dawn on July 15, 1904. Although the sun had barely risen, the heat was intense. Conscious of his numerical inferiority Abdul-Aziz resolved to attack first. He concentrated all his effort against the flanks of the enemy army, where the Shammar horsemen were massed. Four times he drove through their lines and forced them to break ranks.

But when he tackled the Turkish infantry it was another matter. Each time his charges broke against the compact square of men and steel, unshakable as a fortress, which served the Shammar Bedouins as a rallying point. The tactics of Abdul-Aziz were the wrong ones, but by the time he realised this it was too late.

Towards the end of the afternoon when the Saudi horsemen were beginning to show signs of fatigue, the Turks opened fire with artillery. The Bedouins were not used to these weapons. The thunder of the cannons terrified them. In an effort to prove to them that cannons caused more noise than damage their leader dismounted and made a rush on the enemy batteries, calling to his men to follow. Suddenly a shell exploded a few yards from him, severing a finger of his left hand and wounding him badly in the knee. Losing blood abundantly, Abdul-Aziz was carried unconscious into his tent.

No longer seeing their chief, his men believed him dead and began to give way. When he recovered consciousness Abdul-Aziz realised that the battle would be lost if he did not immediately show himself. He had himself hastily bandaged, remounted his horse despite the atrocious pain of his knee, and rode into the heart of the mêlée. This unexpected reappearance put heart into his soldiers and prevented the retreat from becoming a rout. Although in agony he succeeded in stopping the panic, rallying the fleeing and maintaining his demoralised formations in a semblance of order. But he could not prevent his army from retreating. Abdul-Aziz was beaten.

Fortunately for him the Turks did not exploit their victory. Rashid, who had lost 1,000 men, did not dare go in pursuit of his enemy, whose capture would have been easy enough. The Turkish infantrymen were overwhelmed by the heat. They let their prey escape and fell back upon the town of Quasim "to establish order"—in other words, to loot.

[XXXVIII]

For Abdul-Aziz there now began a period of adversity. Everything seemed in league against him. His wound, which had not had proper treatment, began to suppurate and gave him a fever. His army had evaporated. The chiefs of tribes from whom he sought support were evasive. And meanwhile the Turks were regrouping to give him a finishing blow.

Fortune seemed to have abandoned him and another man would have given way to discouragement. But he did not. So far from casting him down, adversity seemed but to strengthen his will. He had been brought up in the midst of perils and had already known some desperate moments. But he had never lost confidence in his star. And always fortune had favoured him at the eleventh hour. . . .

Once again he reacted promptly. Although in constant pain from his wounds he refused to rest and instead went off in search of fresh allies. He sent emissaries to the Mutairs, the Ataibas, the Dawasirs and even far to the north to the Mountafiqs and the Anazahs.

As his envoys were not persuasive enough he toured the villages himself, appealing to the clan chiefs to join with him to repel the invader.

"The war I am waging is also yours," he told them. "You must help me to beat Rashid. You cannot stand aside awaiting the issue of the struggle. Rashid has committed an unpardonable crime in bringing the Turks into central Arabia. If they stay here it will mean the final end of freedom for you all. On your feet! Take up your arms and join me!"

But the chiefs were not easy to convince. They were sullen and mistrustful. They told themselves that to take the part of the Saudis was to risk falling under their domination afterwards. Doubtless Arab unity was a fine thing. But the anarchy of the desert had its attraction also. Why not let the Saudis and the Rashids destroy each other and seize advantage from their rivalry?

Abdul-Aziz appealed to them with such vehemence, presented himself to them with such unshakable certainty as the champion of Arab independence, that he ended by making them share his conviction. After weighing the pros and cons a long time the tribal chiefs finally promised their help.

Limping still, and supporting himself with a crutch because his knee was still not healed, the young Emir of Riyadh went from town to

town, explaining that his struggle with Rashid was not a dynastic quarrel but a question of life and death for all the desert tribes.

This demonstration of energy did more for his cause than the most eloquent speeches. Touched by such courage, the Arabs agreed to resume the struggle. Having raised the tribes, mobilised the men and requisitioned horses, Abdul-Aziz served out weapons to everyone old enough to hold a rifle. Before Rashid and the Turks were aware of his strength, he was attacking them once more at the head of a fresh army. This second encounter took place to the north of Riyadh near the village of Shinanah.

This time Abdul-Aziz was careful not to use the same tactics as before. Taught by experience, he resolved to leave the Shammars alone, to strike at once at the Turkish infantry and to profit by the moment when his men had their maximum impetus to dislocate the enemy centre. These were the right tactics.

At the outset the Saudi horsemen charged the Ottoman battalions, yelling their battle-cries. The Turkish line buckled under the shock and then broke. Having driven right through them, Abdul-Aziz wheeled his force swiftly and came at them again from the rear, cutting the enemy formations into several parts. When they saw the Turkish battalions hesitate and lose their footing the Shammars broke and fled.

The Turks were good soldiers. They re-formed the square. Abdul-Aziz encircled them. The Turks broke the circle and began a retreat. This withdrawal continued next day and the day following. At nightfall on the third day the Turks lost their way and began to wander at random. Once separated from the line of the wells their water supplies gave out. The sun blistered their hands and lips. Their eyes burned with the heat and dust. Many lost their boots. Their sore feet left tracks of blood on the sand. Soon the Ottoman battalions were no more than a long line of fleeing stragglers, stumbling across the dunes.

This grim exodus lasted six whole days—six days during which the Saudi horsemen never ceased to harass the stragglers and finish off the dying. Again and again the Bedouins fell upon their enemies, firing their rifles almost point blank and then retiring at the gallop in a cloud of dust. When a Turk fell exhausted beside the road Dawasir women rushed to cut his throat. Many who escaped massacre died of exhaustion. Only twenty survivors succeeded in reaching Basra.

[XXXIX]

THIS HUMILIATION was more than the Turks could endure. The disaster of Shinanah sapped their authority in the entire Arab peninsula. The Sultan severely censured the governor of Bagdad for underestimating the enemy's strength. He ordered him to renew the campaign, this time using several divisions. The Bedouins were overjoyed. Victory had gone to their heads. They could talk of nothing less than of crushing the Turks, marching on Constantinople and ejecting the Sultan and his ministers at the point of the sword.

But Abdul-Aziz had a clearer view and refused to let himself be swayed by the general enthusiasm. He knew what difficulty he had had to defeat Rashid plus a Turkish expeditionary force of only eight battalions. If the Ottoman Empire took the matter seriously and resolved to pay the price, they could mass very considerable forces against him. In that case the result would be certain: he would be crushed. This was not to be thought of. To fight was impossible. He would have to negotiate. But would the Turks agree to negotiate?

Abdul-Aziz made his fears known to Mubarrak and asked him to serve as mediator. Mubarrak had friendly relations with Muklis Pasha, the Turkish governor of Basra. After some discussion the two parties reached agreement upon the following conditions: the Sultan would recognise the sovereignty of Abdul-Aziz over the whole of Nejd. In exchange Abdul-Aziz would agree to an Ottoman force being maintained in Quasim and to the establishment of Turkish garrisons at Anaiza and Buraida.

Abdul-Aziz ratified this accord with some misgivings, but with a feeling of relief. But the Wahabi nobles who advocated war to the knife and some warlike chieftains who felt that they had been robbed of an easy victory were critical of the transaction. They went so far as to accuse the Emir of treason.

"Submission to Constantinople is unworthy of a Saudi," they declared. "This pusillanimous policy will bring us nothing but disappointments. Our ancestors would be ashamed of us."

"Patience," answered Abdul-Aziz. "The game is not finished. This policy will bring greater disappointments to the Turks than to us. The vital thing at this moment is to gain time."

"Patience! You talk always of patience," retorted the "ulemas." "Is this the language of a warrior? A little more of such patience and all will finish ill. . . ."

[XL]

THE TURKISH troops arrived and duly took up their quarters in Quasim. At first all seemed to pass off normally. But very soon the new arrivals found themselves at grips with all sorts of unexpected difficulties. Mysteriously, the roads became infested with elusive bands which pillaged the convoys from Basra. In spite of every effort the Sultan's soldiers could not lay hands on the aggressors. They were obliged to be constantly on the watch and to send out weary patrols on repeated reconnaissances. But the destruction of the Basra convoys continued.

During the month that followed the situation went from bad to worse, causing growing uneasiness in the district. It began to be said that the Turks were incapable of guaranteeing the safety of areas under their protection. Attacks occurred almost nightly. Provisions, arms, ammunition—nothing was reaching its destination. The Ottoman garrisons were being cut off from their base.

At the end of a year the Turkish soldiers were starving and in rags. In certain areas they were reduced to eating the pith of palm trees. In others they sold their rifles to obtain food. An epidemic of dysentery completed their demoralisation. Sorely tried by the climate, for they were mostly Anatolian peasants, the Ottoman soldiers began to desert.

Not knowing what to do, the Government of Constantinople now turned to Abdul-Aziz and asked him to aid their garrisons to put down these acts of brigandage. Abdul-Aziz received this request with a smile. He deplored the lack of security, addressed professions of sympathy to the Turkish commanders and advised them to persevere in their efforts. But he gave them no effective assistance. As if by chance the raids increased during the ensuing months.

The Turkish Government was in an awkward position. The régime was grappling with difficulties of all kinds. Yemen and Hejaz were on the point of revolt. Syria was honeycombed with secret societies. At Cairo, Damascus, Salonika and Monastir revolution was smouldering, awaiting only the right moment to become a blaze.

The Turks were obliged to disperse their forces to the four corners of the empire so that they had only a handful of troops available for intervention in Arabia.

Nor could they contemplate reinforcing their garrisons in Quasim while Armenia and the Balkans were in a state of unrest. All this Abdul-Aziz knew. He could have profited by the chance to attack the Turks, defeat them and drive them from the country. This would have gained him renewed prestige and was what his entourage advised him

to do. But he refused to let himself be turned from the plan he had made. He had sworn to finish with the Turks by simple guerrilla tactics; he would carry the experiment to its conclusion. "Why should I exhaust myself with a full-sized campaign," he said, "to gain what time will bring into my hands of itself?"

In desperation the Turks fell back on a method which had so often served them in the past: corruption. They offered Abdul-Aziz gold in exchange for his help. The Emir of Riyadh was not rich. Gold was a sinew of war. It would have enabled him to buy arms, to recruit men, to bribe allies. But he answered the Sultan that he was not for sale.

His refusal was not due to disinterestedness or pride, but to political calculation. He knew the Ottoman power was on the decline and had no wish to contract obligations towards it.

Perceiving that they had got themselves into a hornets' nest, the Turks progressively reduced their Quasim garrisons. Then, realising at last their complete futility, they withdrew them altogether. Towards the end of 1905 the last Ottoman contingents left the district. The bands of pillagers vanished as if by magic. Abdul-Aziz had won the game without budging from his apparent neutrality.

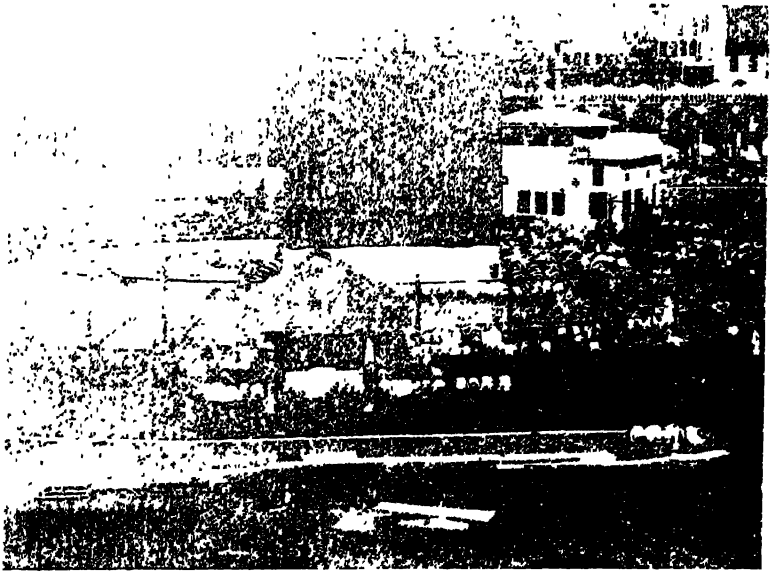
The Wahabi clergy might have given him credit for the skill with which he had come out of the affair. But the "ulemas" were sullen folk who saw everything in dark colours. They had blamed Abdul-Aziz for his accord with the Turks and had prophesied that his policy would lead to disasters. Now that the Turks had gone it seemed that they blamed him because these disasters had not happened. There was an indefinable something in the temperament of Abdul-Aziz which they disliked. His self-confidence, his impulsiveness, his careless fashion of rejecting their counsels, set them against him. What would the future of Nejd be like under the rule of such a man? Their secret conferences revealed their apprehensions, and they gravely shook their heads at what he did.

[XLI]

THE TURKS having gone, Abdul-Aziz found himself once more face to face with Rashid; but this time the balance of strength was reversed. Rashid was alone. His star was waning more and more, while that of Abdul-Aziz shone with an ever-brighter lustre. Moreover, he now found himself at the head of a coalition, for the victory of Shinanah and the discomfiture of the Turks had brought him enhanced prestige. Each day fresh tribes rallied to him. And he was well armed, thanks to the war material he had gained through the pillaging of Turkish convoys.

The procession of the Mahmal (the holy carpet) in Mecca.

The city of tents. Mecca.



The courtyard of the Great Mosque in Mecca. In the centre the Kaaba, containing the sacred Black Stone.

The Pilgrims' Way which runs round the outside of the walls of the Great Mosque.

Nevertheless, the slightest carelessness could still be fatal. Despite his reverse Rashid was still a redoubtable adversary, capable of dealing his enemy shrewd and unexpected blows. The life of the desert is as unstable as the sand. A single setback or false step and the frail fabric of alliances Abdul-Aziz had succeeded in weaving around himself could be torn up overnight.

When the Turks had completed the evacuation of Quasim, Abdul-Aziz began a campaign designed to harass Rashid by forcing him to be constantly on the move. Rashid was growing old. In the long years he had been a fighter he had begun to tire. He no longer had the elasticity or the endurance of his youth.

One evening he pitched his camp near the village of Muhannah. The men were dog-tired by the effort they had made in the previous few days. Knowing that Abdul-Aziz was not in the district, he considered he was running no risk and judged it unnecessary to post sentries.

Abdul-Aziz was in fact more than forty miles away. But when his spies told him that Rashid had camped in open country and had taken no security measures he ordered his men to mount immediately and set off at full speed for Muhannah. All night they galloped without drawing rein. At three o'clock in the morning they reached the outskirts of Rashid's camp.

A little before sunrise the north wind came up and raised a violent sandstorm. Abdul-Aziz and his men dismounted. Camouflaging themselves behind the thick clouds of dust they went forward across the palm grove without being seen and fell upon the enemy camp. Surprised in their sleep, Rashid's soldiers had no time to resist: the majority were stabbed in their tents.

The sun had not yet risen. The wind blew in gusts, making the palm leaves rustle against each other. Rashid could have fled in the general confusion. But he was no coward. Seizing his weapons, he ran out of his tent, bellowing his war-cry to arouse his men. Were they all dead, or was it the wind which prevented the survivors from hearing him? Whatever the reason he found himself alone in the midst of his ruined camp, in the uncertain light of early dawn. Some Saudi horsemen caught sight of him as he sought refuge behind a palm tree. They shot him down in a fusillade almost at point-blank range.

Abdul-Aziz had the head of his enemy cut off and took it back to Riyadh. There he had it paraded through Nejd, stuck on the end of a pike and preceded by forty warriors, beating large drums bound in black crêpe. This funereal drumming, echoing far into the desert, had for its object to convince the population that the Saudis were victorious, that Rashid was dead and that there was now no more need to fear his reprisals.

Rashid's successor was an inexperienced youth. He was murdered

by one of his brothers. The brother was slain in his turn by a cousin. After this all the males in the tribe quarrelled over the inheritance. The tribes of Hail, involved in these quarrels, began to fight among themselves. Anarchy set in. These tribes no longer presented a danger for Nejd.

[XLII]

WHEN ABDUL-AZIZ made his triumphal entry into Riyadh, even the Wahabis who had criticised him most severely ran out before him to give him homage. A thanksgiving ceremony was held in the mosque, at the conclusion of which, in the presence of the Elders, religious dignitaries, local chiefs and military *caids*, Abdul-Aziz, Emir of Riyadh, was proclaimed Imam of the Wahabis by his father. In this way the political and the religious power were united in his hands. The dream of his adolescence was taking shape.

From that day Abdul-Aziz officially adopted the name of Ibn-Saud. But his companions in arms continued to call him familiarly the "Desert Leopard" in memory of the prodigious leap he made at the throat of the governor Ajlan when he retook his capital by the strength of his own arm.

A barbecue of sheep was organised and all the people of Riyadh and its environs feasted for a week. They had well deserved this after so many years of anxiety and struggle.

But Ibn-Saud did not wish to release the spring he had so powerfully coiled. In his eyes the conquest of Nejd was only a first stage. The most glorious and the most difficult remained to be done.

Eight days after his accession to royal dignity, he summoned the pick of his fighting men to the great square of the town to tell them his plans. A little in front of the crowd stood a small band of scarred warriors, commanded by Jiluwi. They were the fifteen survivors of the first group of volunteers who had taken the oath in the palm grove of Jabryn.

Ibn-Saud addressed them from the top of the palace steps and thanked them for having served him with such devotion. He reminded them of all they had accomplished together, the taking of Riyadh, the conquest of Aflag and Harj, the victory of Quasim, the battles of Bukarya and Shinanah, the repulse of the Turks and the final victory over Rashid.

"I have inflicted severe ordeals upon you," he told them. "I know this. But I know also with what courage you have overcome them. What you have done is much. But it is little beside what yet remains for us to do. I will force no man to obey me against his will. But if you

will follow me I promise with Allah's aid to cover you with glory. I will make you a great people and you will enjoy a much wider prosperity than your ancestors knew. You will re-establish the purity of our belief everywhere according to the vow of our master, Abdul-Wahab. I know that you burn to expel the foreigners and exterminate the heretics. That is why I say to you: Do not let your swords rust, but gird your loins for fresh struggles. Forward with God for the restoration of the Faith and the conquest of Arabia."

At once the sabres leapt from their scabbards. A forest of steel shimmered in the sun and a great cry of acclamation rang from every throat.

All night the streets and squares of Riyadh were filled with song and dancing. Then the crowd dispersed back to the villages. And during the days which followed there could be heard echoing, right to the frontiers of Nejd, the impassioned word of command the young king had given to his followers:

"Forward with God for the restoration of the Faith and the conquest of Arabia."

PART THREE

CONQUEST OF ARABIA
(1905–1928)

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XLIV *Crushing of the revolt in the south. Execution of the Assassins*

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[XLIII]

IBN-SAUD WAS now twenty-seven. He was lean and strong and tall, a giant of a man. He had the prestige which derives from victory and no one now disputed his military ability. It was widely known that he had beaten the Turks, crushed Rashid and conquered Nejd at the point of his sword. Nevertheless his power was still precarious.

Accustomed for centuries to the absolute freedom of the nomadic life, the tribes of central Arabia were by no means willing to acknowledge a master, whoever he might be. Discipline of any kind seemed to them an intolerable constraint, an offence against everything they held most sacred.

"The spirit of the clan," writes Hitti, "demands boundless and unconditional loyalty to fellow clansmen, a passionate chauvinism. His allegiance, which is the individualism of the member magnified, assumes that his tribe is a unit by itself, self-sufficient and absolute, and regards every other tribe as its legitimate victim and object of plunder and murder."[1]

In other words the Arab tribes resembled the sand of the desert. Each of them formed a fiercely independent entity. Like the sand they could be held together in a tight grasp, but they were difficult to cement together into a single whole. As soon as the pressure relaxed the grains of sand ran out between the fingers and scattered into small isolated units, as independent as before.

The majority of the Arabs had not supported Ibn-Saud out of loyalty or for an ideal. They had rallied to him from motives of self-interest. They had told themselves that once Rashid was disposed of nothing could henceforward hold them from their customary life of pillage. In their view their rally round the Emir of Riyadh was a temporary thing. Now that their enemy was dead their coalition had no further object.

Ibn-Saud himself had helped to produce this misunderstanding. He had put himself forward as "the champion of Arab independence." What did these words mean if not that he was inviting the emirs and sheiks to join him in a struggle at the end of which they would resume their full right to act as they thought fit?

But Ibn-Saud had no intention of leaving the tribes to relapse into

[1] Philip K. Hitti: op. cit., pp. 21–22. The author adds: "The unsocial features of individualism and the clan spirit were never outgrown by the Arab character as it developed and unfolded itself after the rise of Islam, and were among the determining factors that led to the disintegration and ultimate downfall of the various Islamic states."

their former anarchy and his hand weighed upon them in a manner which seemed to them all the heavier because it was unexpected. When they found the new king forbidding the smallest raid to be carried out without his consent and punishing severely those who persisted in flouting his will, they began to complain, then to become restless and, finally, rebellious.

Between Nejd and Kuweit lay a territory of uncertain boundary in which dwelt the tribes of Mutair. These were particularly unruly. Any attempt to interfere with their liberty of action seemed to them unendurable. At their head was a renowned fighter named Sheik Dawish, who found the control Ibn-Saud wished to impose quite unacceptable. Fiercely jealous of his prerogatives, he reached the conclusion that Ibn-Saud's power must be broken before it had had time to take root. He made contact with the Shammar tribes who lived in Quasim, expressed his view that the pretensions of the new Emir were inadmissible and persuaded the governor of Buraida to repudiate Saudi control.

Ibn-Saud at once saw the danger of this action. As soon as he learned that the governor of Buraida was refusing to carry out his orders and forbidding his representatives access to his town he assembled 1,000 fighting men and marched on Buraida.

Half-way between Riyadh and Buraida Ibn-Saud met a detachment of Shammar rebels who attempted to bar his passage. He attacked forthwith and dispersed them after inflicting severe losses.

Then he turned on the Mutairs, who had come to the aid of the Shammars, defeated them in their turn and drove them back towards their own territory. But as he saw it, matters could not be allowed to stop at that. The dissidents would have to be punished in exemplary fashion to prevent them from recommencing. Too often in the past the Mutairs had changed sides. They must be taught that times had changed.

Ibn-Saud penetrated their territory, burned their villages as far as the frontiers of Kuweit and hanged their leaders. Sheik Dawish owed his escape to flight.

"I will shake my sword in the Bedouins' faces," said Ibn-Saud. "That is the only argument they understand."

He pursued and killed until the survivors came begging for mercy.

After this he marched on Buraida. According to the information he had been given, he found the gates closed and the town prepared for a siege. But he had some friends inside. At the hour of evening prayers, when the whole garrison was assembled in the mosque, these allies opened the gates and the Nejd troops entered the town. The governor, whom he had himself appointed not long before, was dragged before him. He fell on his knees and wept, his forehead in the dust, for he

expected instant death. But Ibn-Saud gave him a contemptuous glance, told him to get up and to quit the town at once, with his family.

The fortress of Buraida was the key to northern Nejd and an important caravan stage. To prevent any further trouble Ibn-Saud named Jiluwi governor of the town.

Jiluwi was both energetic and loyal. He had given his oath to Abdul-Aziz at Jabryn and had followed him since then throughout all the stages of his career. Ibn-Saud could trust him. He inspired such fear in all with whom he had dealings that his word had the force of law, even for the most rebellious Bedouin.

From this day forward there was no further trouble in Quasim. The revolt of the northern provinces had been crushed.

[XLIV]

SCARCELY HAD Quasim been pacified than a similar revolt broke out in the south. This time it was the Ajman who were seeking to throw off Ibn-Saud's influence. The focus of insurrection was at Laila. Its instigators were some militant fanatics of the sect of the Assassins.

This revolt was more serious than the former. In the first place it was much nearer to Riyadh and there was therefore a risk that it would spread to the capital. Secondly, the Assassins had aggravated it by adding to it a religious agitation which was causing uneasiness. Ibn-Saud therefore had to intervene with special vigour. It was the classic struggle between a nascent monarchy and a turbulent feudalism which refused to submit to it.

Ibn-Saud penetrated the Ajman country in force. He had some personal scores to settle with these people. He ravaged their territory systematically and sent two punitive expeditions to the villages of Qoutain and Hauta with orders to raze them after exterminating the population.

"There must be no two stones left one upon the other," he commanded the detachment leaders. "Nothing must be left to show where these towns stood."

These orders were punctually carried out. Then he marched on the town of Laila, took it by storm, forced the garrison to surrender and sentenced the nineteen members of the Assassin sect to have their heads cut off.

Postponing the executions for twenty-four hours, he sent emissaries throughout the province to call the populations to Laila, for he wanted them to witness the punishment of the guilty.

During the night he had a large platform set up outside the ramparts on the open ground where the caravans were accustomed to group. At dawn the townspeople, the villagers from the surrounding country and a great number of Bedouins massed on the square facing the platform. They formed the three sides of a quadrilateral, of which the centre was kept clear by Nejd soldiers.

Ibn-Saud crossed the square in dramatic silence and mounted the platform accompanied by his sheiks and personal bodyguard. His Herculean size and the anger which showed on his features gave him a terrifying aspect.

The gates of the town opened and the nineteen Assassins could be seen approaching slowly, loaded with chains and in single file. One after another they were led to the foot of the platform and forced to kneel.

"There is no power or strength but in God!" said Ibn-Saud, making a signal with his hand.

At the same instant a gigantic black slave, nude to the waist, crossed the square, followed by his two acolytes, and took up position at the end of the line of condemned men. A Wahabi clerk read the accusation, enumerating the reasons why the insurgents had deserved death. All the formalities of an execution were scrupulously observed. Ibn-Saud wished to demonstrate that he was acting not from cruelty or vengeance but to force his subjects to respect the law.

The black headsman lightly cut each man in turn in the neck with the point of his sabre, and at the instant the victim tensed himself shudderingly at the touch of the steel he cut off his head. Eighteen times he performed the same gesture. Eighteen bloody heads rolled in the dust. When the nineteenth condemned man came forward in his turn and knelt, Ibn-Saud gestured to the executioner to stand back.

"You I spare," said he. "Go, and tell everyone what you have just seen. Say to the whole desert how Ibn-Saud does justice."

After the executions the King came forward on the platform and addressed the crowd. He explained the sin of rebellion to them and the terrible punishments to which all who were guilty of it exposed themselves. Then he told his hearers to come nearer, and, lowering his voice, he spoke to them in a more friendly tone.

"You are my well-loved subjects," he told them. "Know that nothing is more painful to me than to punish you in this way. Do not give me cause to begin again. Choose among you a loyal governor in whom I can have confidence. I will give you the right to govern your own affairs on condition that you swear to remain faithful to me."

A murmur of surprise arose from the crowd. They had expected that some of their number would be executed or reduced to slavery, and now here was Ibn-Saud permitting them to choose their own governor. This mark of generosity seized their imaginations vividly.

But for three days the bodies of the eighteen Assassins remained exposed in public, a prey to the dogs and vultures, so that this horrible spectacle might serve as a warning to any who might be tempted to foment a fresh rebellion.

The story of Laila was handed on from village to village. It was told round camp-fires at nightfall. The inexorable punishment inflicted upon the instigators of revolt and the act of unexpected magnanimity struck the imagination of the Bedouins. "Here is a man capable of governing us," they said. "He is a valiant soldier, a judge severe but just, a leader who shoulders his responsibilities and who knows what he wants."

The most distant tribes heard of the execution of the Assassins, and were afraid. "They understood strength and justice. Ibn-Saud gave them both. He was fit to be master and to rule over them."[1]

[XLV]

While Ibn-Saud was grappling with these internal difficulties, the situation abroad had developed considerably. The revolution whose advance signals had led the Turks to withdraw their garrisons from Quasim had finally broken out. In 1908 the Young Turks had seized power. The following year the Sultan Abdul Hamid had been deposed and replaced by Mehemet V. The triumvirate of "Godless Pashas," Enver, Talat and Jemal, which governed Turkey, had promised to break with the errors of the past.

It had drawn up a vast programme of reforms. On one point, however, the new leaders had retained the policy of the old régime: they did not propose to renounce their grip upon the Arab countries. All their decisions showed that, on the contrary, they were preparing to reinforce it.

They had appointed new governors, younger and more energetic, in Mesopotamia, Syria and the coastal provinces of the Red Sea. They had strengthened their garrisons in Hasa. Finally they had named a certain Hussein as Sherif of Mecca.

The Sherif of Mecca was one of the most important figures in the Islamic world, for he possessed extensive religious prerogatives. As keeper of the sanctuaries, he was in a way the complement of the Caliph, who could not declare a "Jihad"—a holy war—without his consent. Thus the appointment of Hussein appeared a particularly happy choice to the leaders of the "Union and Progress" Committee. This Arab prince of noble lineage was a Hashimite, a descendant of Hashim, the

[1] H. C. Armstrong: op. cit., p. 98.

grandfather of the Prophet. But he had married the daughter of an important Turkish functionary and from cupidity had put himself in the pay of Constantinople. The Ottoman authorities had reason to believe that he would serve their ends faithfully.

During these years the European Powers had not remained inactive. Unravelling slowly but surely the complex tangle of interests and rivalries which surrounded Arabia, Britain had substantially consolidated her position in this part of the globe. After the crisis which had broken out in Kuweit in August 1901 she had seemed to lose interest in Mubarrak. But his eclipse had been only brief. In 1903 Lord Curzon had suddenly occupied the port and forced Mubarrak to pay the debts he had incurred towards the British Government in the form of a "special Convention" under the terms of which Britain received a protectorate over Kuweit and the right of "policing the Gulf." After this the British forces had withdrawn.[1]

While all this was being carried out methodically at the northern end of the Arab peninsula, the Foreign Office had begun to lay down some lines in the south. By the agreement of April 11, 1904, it had brushed aside French claims on the Suez Canal by according France control of Morocco, Egypt being left to Britain. Then in 1906, repeating the Kuweit coup almost exactly, London had halted the Turks at Akaba, a Red Sea port not far from Suez, forcing the Sultan to withdraw his troops by a show of naval force.

In this way a double menace was taking shape round Arabia: the first created by the reinforcement of the Turkish garrisons; the second constituted by the tightening of British control.

All this gave Ibn-Saud grounds for anxiety. Master of Nejd since 1905, he was already beginning to feel himself hemmed in. Unless he was to remain blockaded in the sands of central Arabia he would have to open up an outlet on the sea, and the nearest seaboard was the Persian Gulf. But of what use would it be to come in conflict with the Turks, if after defeating them—which was not certain—he was to find himself in conflict with Britain?

Not knowing what course to follow, he applied to Mubarrak and asked him to sound the views of his "protectors" (1911). The Emir of Kuweit got in touch with the British authorities. He put it to them that the interests of Ibn-Saud were not in conflict with their own. Both wanted to drive the Turks from the Persian Gulf. But could the British do this without creating a *casus belli* with the Ottoman Empire and upsetting all the chancelleries of Europe? On the other hand, if the

[1] cf. Georges Ancel: op. cit, p. 230. The London cabinet had then signed an accord with the Czar under which Russia was to receive rights over Turkestan and northern Persia while Britain retained the mastery of southern Persia and the Persian Gulf (August 31, 1907).

King of Nejd performed the task in their place it would seem only a small internal quarrel, easily localised, whose final result would be profitable to all. The British let themselves be convinced by this crafty reasoning. They told Mubarrak that they would not oppose action by his protégé, provided he made no move against Kuweit. This reply was all that Mubarrak desired.

But even with the assurance of British neutrality a campaign against the Turks was a hazardous undertaking. Well informed about what went on in Constantinople, Mubarrak advised Ibn-Saud to wait. The stiffer Ottoman attitude was merely a flash in the pan. Very soon the Young Turks perceived that their Arab policy was too ambitious and that they had not the means to implement it. Mubarrak's prediction was realised even sooner than he expected. Before the end of the year (October 1911) the Italians attacked Tripolitania. Italo-Turkish hostilities were still not ended when the First Balkan War broke out (October 1912). The Serbs marched on Salonika, the Bulgars on Constantinople. The Turks were going to need every one of their soldiers.

Ibn-Saud saw that the moment to act had arrived.

[XLVI]

BETWEEN KUWEIT and Oman the sandy, impoverished and desolate province of Hasa extends along the Persian Gulf. It is a poorly populated region. But when the pearl fishing season begins everything is changed and the land becomes the centre of intense commercial activity. The tribes which normally live in the interior move down towards the sea and make contact with the coast people and the island of Bahrein opposite. Qatif, Oqair, Hufuf and the other ports, normally almost deserted, are filled with a busy, tumultuous crowd. This period over, the tribes withdraw again, the towns empty, the traders go off with their merchandise to the markets of India and Persia, and Hasa becomes a desert once more.

At this time Hasa was administered by a Turkish governor at Hufuf, the capital of the province. Ibn-Saud sent spies there to discover the state of mind of the inhabitants and the strength of the garrison.

When these secret emissaries returned to Riyadh they gave him a most encouraging report. The population of Hufuf was sick of the Turks, whose administration, irritating and inefficient, was making their lives unbearable. The greatest disorder prevailed in the affairs of the town. The country was infested with brigands who pillaged convoys and caravans. No one was safe. The garrisons of Hufuf and

the chief coastal towns had been considerably reduced. Most of the troops had been recalled to Basra, to be re-routed to the Balkans as speedily as possible. Quite recently a strong contingent of infantry had left for the north with arms and baggage.

The spies added that they had met a large number of Wahabis in the province. These had assured them they were ready to join Ibn-Saud if he came with sufficient forces. These items of news convinced the Nejd king that an operation against Hasa could be undertaken.

Mobilising his best troops, Ibn-Saud travelled eastward by non-stop forced marches, in order to arrive before any possible messengers could give the alarm. He crossed the Dahna desert at a stroke, penetrated into Hasa and made straight for Hufuf. At dusk on the third day the troops arrived on the outskirts of the town without their presence being reported.

The night was moonless. Accompanied by 700 men, Ibn-Saud crossed the wooded oasis which surrounded the walls and halted under cover of the palm trees before the Ibrahim Pasha Gate. There they dismounted and advanced on all fours towards the embattled wall. A moat had been dug there recently. The fortified enclosure was overlooked at intervals by high, square towers, posted with sentries.

Without taking time to draw breath twelve soldiers scrambled up the walls with the help of ladders made of palm fibre. They stabbed the sentries and opened a gate to admit the rest of the troops. This *coup* was carried out so rapidly and with so little noise that no alarm was given. Wrapped in silence, the town still slept.

The Wahabi column went down the market street, the Souk-el-Khamis, and made at once for the citadel. This—the "Kut"—was a great square building which dominated the town, surrounded by a ring of auxiliary forts. By chance the grill gate was open and the drawbridge down. The sentries were asleep. The Wahabis killed them and made their way into the fort.

The Turks were taken completely by surprise and were given no time to seize their rifles from their racks. Most of them were massacred with cold steel; the rest surrendered without offering resistance. An hour later the Nejdis were masters of the fortress. The contingent which guarded it had been disarmed and locked up in the cellars.

As soon as the sun appeared on the horizon Ibn-Saud left the citadel and went through the town, all his forces deployed and preceded by his standard-bearer. The Wahabis sang and the shoes of their horses echoed on the paved streets. On hearing this noise the inhabitants ran to their doorways. They were so surprised to see this procession that it was some time before they could recover from their astonishment.

The Turkish governor and the bulk of the garrison had barricaded themselves in the Ibrahim Mosque, convinced that the Nejd king would

never dare to attack the sanctuary. Ibn-Saud sent them a spokesman, bearing the following ultimatum:

"If you persist in resistance I shall place a mine under the mosque and blow you all sky-high. That will make a fine firework display. You have no chance to escape. On the other hand, if you agree to surrender I will guarantee your safety and let you leave the town safe and sound."[1]

The Turkish governor believed Ibn-Saud was bluffing.

"His piety is well known," said he. "The Imam of the Wahabis will never dare to raise his hand against the House of God."

But when he saw the Nejdis start to dig a trench he realised that it was no bluff. On consideration he thought it wisest to accept the conqueror's offer.

Twenty-four hours later the Turks left Hufuf with all military honours. They made for the port and embarked for Basra. They never returned to Hasa.

In the days that followed Ibn-Saud travelled through the province from end to end to receive the act of submission of the tribes. He seized the ports of Qatif and Oqair without striking a blow, as well as the whole coast as far as the frontiers of Kuweit. Withdrawing Jiluwi from Buraida, he named him governor of Hasa, with instructions to establish order in the province and purge it of the bands of robbers which infested it. Jiluwi acquitted himself of this task with his customary thoroughness. Soon the people of Hasa could go about their business in complete safety.

"Saud's sceptre is long," the Arabs said. "Its shadow stretches across the desert and the Bedouins fear it."

The Turks made a virtue of necessity in face of a *fait accompli*. They opened talks with Ibn-Saud and for the first time concluded a formal treaty with him.[2] In it they conceded that Hasa was an integral part of Nejd and that Ibn-Saud was King of the two territories. They decorated him with the Order of the Crescent, handed over all the armaments, they had left at Hufuf and promised to meddle no longer in his affairs. In return Ibn-Saud agreed to recognise nominal Turkish sovereignty. It was a purely formal clause, since the Turks were incapable of enforcing it.

Abiding by their promise, the British did not intervene.

Hasa, poor and desolate in appearance, was in reality one of the richest areas in the world. These meagre acres of sand were worth an empire.

But Ibn-Saud did not yet know this. Nor did the British. Otherwise things might have developed differently.

[1] cf. Gerald de Gaury: "Arabia and the Future" (*Journal of the Royal Asian Society*, Vol. XXXI, 1944).

[2] The Basra Convention, negotiated a few years previously by Muklis Pasha and Abdur-Rahman, was no more than a "gentleman's agreement."

[XLVII]

IBN-SAUD WAS now King of Nejd and Hasa. This last annexation gave him wide access to the sea and considerably increased his standing in Arabia. He was no longer an insignificant minor king, a prisoner in the central desert. He had defeated the Turks at Shinanah; he had forced them to evacuate Quasim; now he had driven them out of Hasa. Behind all these actions reflective minds perceived the presence of a methodical will. From one end of the peninsula to the other, the tribal chiefs viewed the growth of his power with astonishment. The figure of the "Giant King" began to fascinate them.

Some Syrian revolutionaries came to see him at Riyadh. They were members of the "Fetah," a secret society founded at Damascus for the liberation of Syria. "The landowners, the writers, the doctors, the great public servants linked themselves in this society," writes Lawrence, "with a common oath, passwords, signs, a press and a central treasury, to ruin the Turkish empire. With the noisy facility of the Syrian—an ape-like people having much of the Japanese quickness, but shallow—they speedily built up a formidable organisation. They looked outside for help and expected freedom to come by entreaty, not by sacrifice. They corresponded with Egypt, with the Ahad (whose members, with true Mesopotamian dourness, rather despised them), with the Sherif of Mecca and with Great Britain: everywhere seeking the ally to serve their turn."[1]

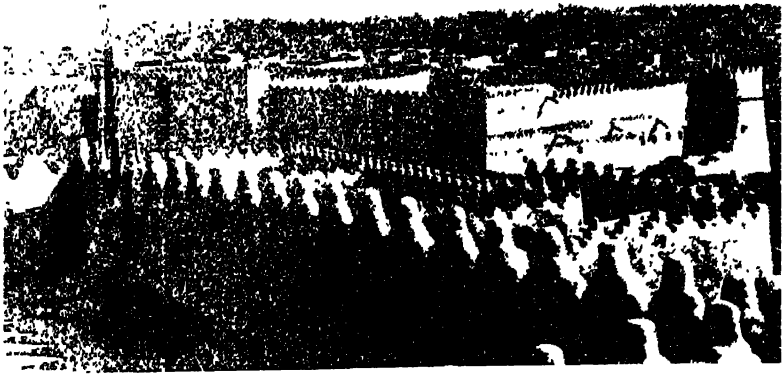
"We are engaged in setting up a vast conspiracy against the Turks," they told Ibn-Saud. "We have already been in touch with Mubarrak at Kuweit and with Hussein at Mecca. These two emirs have promised their support. Why should not the King of Nejd, so unanimously admired for his fighting qualities, not take the head of this crusade? Would not this be a fine title of glory for the grand-nephew of Saud the Great?"

Ibn-Saud heard them with attention. He too was proud to belong to the Arab race and was as opposed as they were to being governed by Turks. But he felt that these were impractical people, fine talkers who took their dreams for realities. That they should have been in contact with Mubarrak did not surprise him. With whom was Mubarrak not in contact? But with Hussein? This Hashimite, married to a Turk, was closely linked with those who governed the empire. Was he not the Sultan's vassal, the Caliph's devoted henchman? Was not one of his sons, Abdullah, vice-president of the Turkish parliament,

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 45.

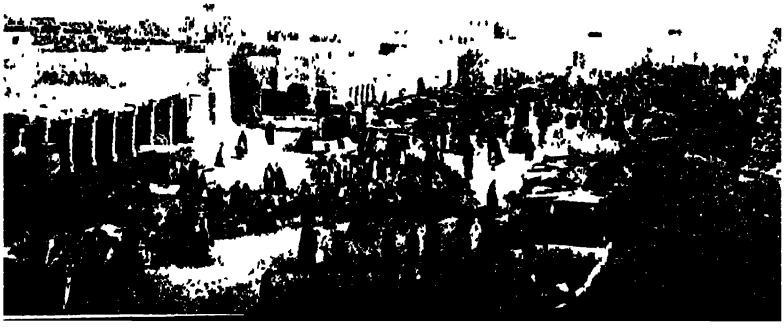
Watering sheep at the desert well of Shari, south of Hail.

Wheat threshing.



Riyadh. The palace of Ibn-Saud.

Market place at Hufuf, the principal city of Eastern Arabia.



and another, Feisal, the representative of Jedda in that same parliament? That he should be conspiring against his masters through the Fetah was an absurd hypothesis. These Damascan lawyers were merely boasters. . . .

As for the liberation of Syria and the Lebanon, this certainly was of burning interest. Ibn-Saud well knew the attraction these fertile lands had had for centuries for the desert tribes. Any campaign undertaken in that direction would be at once assured of popular support. But he considered this project out of reach for the time being.

Moreover, in the present state of affairs, what the Syrian revolutionaries proposed was exactly the sort of temptation to which he must not yield. Twice in the course of history the Bedouins of central Arabia had broken into the Mediterranean basin. The first time, under Abu-Bekr and Omar, the operation had been successful and the Islamic legions had conquered an empire. The second time, under Saud the Great and Abdullah, the operation had failed and had drawn the enemy into the very heart of the peninsula.

But each time—whether the enterprise had been a triumph or a disaster—it had represented a betrayal of Arabia, because all the energy dissipated in the course of the expeditions had been deflected from the essential objective: the building of an Arab nation. Whether in the ninth or the nineteenth century, the Arab people had come out of these adventures bled white, exhausted and poorer than before. After those tremendous explosions of vitality they had fallen back into their ancestral anarchy.

Ibn-Saud was determined not to make the same mistake as his predecessors. He would not throw his country into one of these disastrous ventures wherein its best blood would be poured out without profit. His objective was very different: it was to pull Arabia out of its feudal individualism, to put an end to anarchy and give it unity. If it were the will of Allah—as he hoped sincerely—that he should be at the start of a fresh Islamic wave, he could make use of his kingdom in quest of expansion only when he had unified and organised it. For that he would have to supply it with a government and a ruling class. He would have to equip it and exploit its natural wealth. It was only when he had built this solid platform that he could turn his gaze outwards. Syria? Yes, doubtless. But later, much, much later. . . .

Ibn-Saud got rid of his visitors politely. He had other things to do than to run after a will-o'-the-wisp.

[XLVIII]

THE TASK which filled his thoughts was very different.

Ibn-Saud was now thirty-two. The life of action he had led since his youth had nevertheless given him several opportunities in which to reflect upon the fundamental problems of Arabia. Not that his was by any means a logical and deductive mind. First and foremost it was empirical and intuitive. But his instinct gave him a grasp of reality much stronger and more direct than if he had approached it by analysis or reason.

Most of his subjects could be divided into two kinds. On the one hand were a minority of villagers and townspeople. On the other a majority of Bedouin nomads. The Nejd king could rely on the loyalty of the former. As for the latter, it would have been necessary not to know them to suppose that they would ever bend themselves to a common discipline, so long as they remained in their present state. Since they were always on the move there was nothing with which to pin them down. For them the condition of nomadism was the noblest of all, and they considered themselves to be the perfection of human creation. Civilised men not only seemed to them less happy than they, but also and especially very much their inferior. Inordinately fond of those prodigious genealogies which led back into the past as far as Adam himself, they felt an infinite pride in the purity of their blood, in their eloquence, their poetry, their swords, their horses and, above all, in the nobility of their ancestors.[1]

For their sole wealth they had their tents, their horses, their wives—and liberty. They were bound by no obligation. They were as mobile as the sea and free as the wind.

Hence their unstable and emotional character. A word was enough to change them from laughter to tears and from playfulness to anger. They were incapable of prolonged effort and changed their minds with a discouraging versatility. They were as unpredictable as flies before a storm.

Ibn-Saud knew them well. He knew that they were unreliable as soldiers and deceitful as subjects. They produced little and destroyed a great deal. When the fortune of war was unfavourable they changed sides in the midst of battle and would ally themselves with the victor to pillage the vanquished. It needed a superhuman effort to coalesce them, and their coalitions lasted only an instant. It was their continual change of front that had made the war against Rashid so long and so

[1] cf. Philip K. Hitti: op. cit., p. 22.

murderous. It was their propensity to scatter after each battle which had nearly compromised the operations against the Turks. Several times Ibn-Saud had punished them. But, however severe, the punishment subdued them only for a time. It did not suffice to change their character or their morals.

Ibn-Saud realised that to succeed in stabilising them he would have to change the conditions of their existence root and branch, for it was these, in the last analysis, which determined their conduct. To this end he conceived a daring plan, which no Arab sovereign had dared to try before him. He resolved to undermine nomadism little by little by settling the Bedouins around the water-points, encouraging them to till the land, and so restoring them to the agricultural existence which had been theirs before history forced them to become wanderers. It was an ambitious project and one in which the young king could compromise his prestige. But if it succeeded the whole face of Arabia would be transformed.

What had dominated desert life hitherto had been the scarcity of water-points and the slight area of cultivated land compared with the volume of populations to be fed. At times a certain balance established itself between the two and the desert experienced periods of tranquillity. But only a slight influx of new populations was needed to upset the equilibrium.

When it did so the struggles between the tribes around the sources of Nature would increase in violence. Rivalries would become keener, hatreds more bitter, battles more murderous. The balance would be re-established only when the excess population had been driven northward—or been exterminated.

As long as these conditions persisted, the total population of Arabia could never increase, its level of existence would remain low, and the Bedouins would never renounce their individualism.

Ibn-Saud's plan was to attract at first a small number of Bedouins around judiciously selected water-points, situated away from the caravan routes; to maintain them by means of subsidies and privileges; to increase the area of farmland by works of irrigation and cultivation so that other Bedouins could come and establish themselves in their turn; to multiply these green islands as and when the number of their inhabitants should increase; finally, to induce the Bedouins to take root in these productive areas, won bit by bit from the aridity of the desert.

Once these enterprises began to develop they would not fail to exert a great attraction upon neighbouring tribes. There was no doubt either that Bedouins who had become farmers would have numerous children. Everything therefore tended to the belief that the size of the colonies would rapidly increase. Ibn-Saud determined to draw from these the nucleus of a permanent army, which would have nothing in

common with the undisciplined *harkas* he had commanded in his youth. Attached to the soil, linked to their homes, these Arabs of a new type would be tied to the King by a sentiment of dynastic fidelity quite different from the thirst for adventure and booty which had animated them hitherto. These colonies were destined to produce not only cereals and fruits; they would also be nurseries of soldiers.

But Ibn-Saud knew the character of his countrymen. He knew that his plan would come up against traditions, customs and prejudices a thousand years old. He could overcome these only by appealing to a yet stronger passion: the Bedouins' mystic sense. It was essential that these agricultural and military colonies should be at the same time religious colonies. They would have to be designed as "brotherhoods," whose members would be bound to each other by an oath, like that which Abdul-Aziz had had his companions swear in the palm grove of Jabryn. In this way the centres would become foci of strict Wahabi obedience. They would be "seminaries" of Believers: but of Believers called upon to fight, sword in hand, for the triumph of the true doctrine.

Power and continuity were indispensable to the King. Without these he would never unify Arabia. "Internal colonisation," such as he was now planning, was the only possible way of breaking down the individualism of the clans and finally ending their archaic particularism. He would see to it that the soldiers were taught that tribal duties came after obedience to God and loyalty to the King, that it was a crime for a Moslem to kill another Moslem other than in time of war, but that the starting and ending of hostilities were exclusively royal prerogatives. He would force the Bedouins to put aside their private quarrels to devote themselves to the defence of a common cause.

"I wish," he said, "to give a common direction to the warlike instinct of the Arabs and bring them to consider themselves as members of a single body. This will bring them possibilities of expansion which they do not even suspect. This work will be long, I admit. But it will be already more than half accomplished when the units of my army come to consider their colonies of origin as small green motherlands in the bosom of a great golden one. . . ."

[XLIX]

In the King's mind the whole future of Arabia hung upon this great social, military and religious project. It was for this that he attached so much importance to its success. But he could do nothing in this field without the co-operation of the clergy.

The priests of Nejd constituted a powerful body, in a rigid hierarchy.

At the top were the descendants of Abdul-Wahab, or "Elders," who formed a privileged caste. As Imam, Ibn-Saud was their supreme chief. He had reinforced his position still further in this respect by marrying at Kuweit a great-grandniece of Wahab, Princess Jauhara, by whom he had at present four sons: Turki, Saud, Feisal and Mohammed.[1]

It was from this caste that were chosen the "ulemas," or Doctors of Law, responsible for the observance of rites, the interpretation of the scriptures and the education of the people. Below them were the "muezzins" or keepers of the mosques, who summoned the Believers to prayer five times a day and saw that the "eight attitudes" were respected. At the base of this edifice were the "mutawas" or preachers, militant local gospellers of the Wahabi doctrine, dispersed in the villages and tribes in the proportion of one preacher to about every fifty inhabitants. Around each preacher was a circle of "students."

This organisation was a wonderful propaganda machine, because it thrust roots into the very depths of the population. Through this medium the Elders and the Doctors of Law could propagate their instructions from one end of the peninsula to the other. No group of men could escape their influence; no hour of the day their teaching.

Ibn-Saud decided to interest the priesthood in the accomplishment of his reform. He asked his father to assemble the Doctors of Law and appeared before them to explain his projects.

The "ulemas" heard him with a grave and disapproving air. Ibn-Saud wished to put an end to nomadism, break the frameworks of the ancient tribes, root the Bedouins around water-points and recruit an army among the members of the new agricultural colonies. The Doctors of Law shook their heads. What did all this signify? Whither did he wish to lead them, this Ibn-Saud with extravagant ideas, who moreover took little notice of their counsels?

They examined the King's proposal, turned it inside out, deliberated for several hours and finally gave their verdict: the plan which had been submitted to them could not be approved, for it did not conform to the commandments of the Koran. Had not the Prophet said: "It is by the plough that families are brought to dishonour"?

Ibn-Saud was exasperated. The narrowness of mind of the Doctors of Law, their lack of imagination, their rigid interpretation of the Koran, made him boil with anger. Here was submitted a reform which could change the face of Arabia and assure it a future superior to anything it had yet known; here was a proposal to lift the tribes out of their anarchy and wretchedness to make of them a modern nation, and this was all these limited and backward minds could find to say? What was to be done with these obtuse theologians, for whom

[1] Alfifth, Khalid, died in childhood.

everything must remain exactly as it was in the eighth century for fear of incurring the wrath of Allah? He would have liked to treat them like the Turkish garrison, shut up in the Mosque of Ibrahim. . . .

Fortunately for Ibn-Saud old Abdur-Rahman intervened and managed to prevent an outburst. He calmed his son and showed him that without the support of the "ulemas" his plan, however excellent it might be, could never be realised. He was already in danger of arousing the discontent of the nomads. To add the hostility of the Doctors of Law would be a piece of great clumsiness. Ibn-Saud had no choice: if he held to his reform plan, it was absolutely necessary to rally the priesthood.

Abdur-Rahman's great age, sincere devotion, and total absence of personal ambition gave him great authority in religious circles. It was he who saved the day. He implored the Doctors of Law to lend a favourable ear to his son's declarations and not to regard their present verdict as final. Ibn-Saud, on his side, made an effort at conciliation. Mastering his rage, he flattered the sullen touchiness of the "ulemas," humoured their vanity, and politely refuted their objections one by one.

The argument lasted a week. Not without guile he pointed out to them all the advantages they would obtain from the existence of a Wahabi Legion consecrated to the spreading of their doctrine, which would mean an increase in their influence in the land. He urged that without this the true faith would never spread over Arabia, that Wahabism would be restricted to the central desert and that by their refusal they would become the accomplices of heretics and idolaters. In short he pleaded his case with such skill that he ended by shaking them.

Strongly impressed by Abdur-Rahman's approval of his son's project, the Doctors of Law agreed to rally to it. The King's plan became the "ulemas'" plan. Together they would create an armed militia at the service of God. Upon the example of the first Islamic legions founded by the Prophet, the Bedouins, cemented by a new discipline, would constitute a military "Ikwan," a "Brotherhood of warriors united in the Lord."

Having obtained Ibn-Saud's promise that his new army would be placed at the service of religion the Doctors of Law instructed the "mutawas" and their "students" to go through the land from village to village, from tribe to tribe, to preach sermons with the object of encouraging the creation of the Ikwan. The preachers were to tell the Bedouins that the precepts of the old "muruwa" were outdated, that divine law came before tribal law and obedience to the sovereign before obedience to the clan. They were to recall the words of the Prophet: "Every Moslem who tills the land accomplishes a good action." At

the end of this propaganda tour, intended to arouse a great wave of enthusiasm among the tribes, the "mutawas" were to make an appeal to their hearers, inviting them to take part as volunteers in the founding of the colonies.

[L]

THE PREACHERS set to work—but everywhere they encountered a wall of indifference or hostility. Fiercely attached to their secular traditions, the Bedouins could not easily renounce them from one day to the next. This was the more so because the new mode of life proposed did not attract them in the least. "All the happiness of life is on the back of a horse," said the proverb. Their fathers and ancestors had lived as free men, riding wherever they wished across the desert, obeying only the call of space and sky, and now they were being exhorted to repudiate these lordly habits to become sedentary farmers and small peasants. This was to ask them to sign their own bankruptcy petition. What prince would ever willingly accept a slave's existence? Some bridled at a proposal they found insulting. Others replied with a sneer of disdain. The "new muruwa" had no success at all. In all, only thirty candidates were forthcoming.

But they had at least found thirty, and that was all that Ibn-Saud demanded. Had not the first Islamic legions, which had carried the Prophet's standard from the Indus to the Guadalquivir, grown out of a tiny handful of warriors? Had not he himself conquered a kingdom at the head of a force which at first had not exceeded twenty companions? By relying upon these examples Ibn-Saud was subscribing to a universal law: that all that is great that is done in the world is the work at the outset of a small group of humanity.

Ibn-Saud established his little squad of volunteers in the oasis of Artawiya, situated half-way between Nejd and Hasa. It was a wild and desolate spot where there were but four or five shallow wells. These were used only by wandering tribes or travellers who had lost their way. In normal times they were concealed with branches to keep the wind from covering them with sand. Around these water-holes were a few acres of fallow land and about fifty palm trees. That was all. Not a hut, not a hovel. An uninviting place, indeed, in which to start a new life. . . .

But Ibn-Saud had not forgotten his second stay in the desert of Rub-al-Khali. He knew that his countrymen gave of their best only when the work placed before them to accomplish had the character of a challenge.

The leader of the little cohort was called Mutib. He set himself

courageously to the task with his team of volunteers. Since his friends and he were constantly the objects of annoyances at the hands of nearby tribes, the King came to visit them to mark his approval and declared that anyone who caused them any trouble would have to deal with him. He gave them a little money—very little, for he did not want other Bedouins to join them merely to obtain profit—and brought them some villagers to teach them to till and irrigate. He shared out the land and water rights among them and helped them to build a mosque and some brick houses.

To build! This was an entirely new sensation for these men who hitherto had lived wholly by pillage and looting. It filled them with astonishment and modified their view of things imperceptibly. They were primitive beings, but full of good will, upon whom hope of a better future worked mysteriously. They had been told that the King had need of them to transform Arabia. They had replied, "Present," with a blind confidence.

Ibn-Saud acquired a genuine affection for them and came often to see them to encourage them in their efforts and explain to them the deep significance of their work.

"You are the pioneers of a great reform," he told them. "The fate of Arabia is in your hands. That is why no setback, no obstacle must be allowed to discourage you. Are you surprised that so great a task can depend upon so small a number of men? It is not numbers that are important. They will come in due course. What counts is the intensity and purity of your faith. Those who mock you, those who did not wish to answer my appeal, will one day repent. They believed that I wished to lower them to the rank of slaves, whereas my sole desire was to free them from hunger, ignorance and chaos. Let them sneer, for you are more free than they, and they will sneer no more on the day of your victory when they compare their poverty with your riches. Watch jealously that no dissensions compromise your unity. That is the only risk you run. For the rest, fear nothing, for you are under my protection and that of the Lord."

The King spent whole nights in conversation with them, examining their difficulties one by one. Seated in a semicircle round a fire of pinewood, the colonists put their questions to him and asked his advice. In simple words, which came from his heart, Ibn-Saud bit by bit communicated his own enthusiasm to them and their eyes shone with a sparkle which was not only the reflection of the flames. Ah! this was a marvellous adventure—to be a man and to inspire other men with such complete confidence. There was no more king, no more subjects. There was only a little group of Arabs, lost in the immensity of the desert, fascinated by the same task and believing in the same future. . . .

When the night was nearly ended they recited the dawn prayers

together and each man departed to where his work called him. With what dazzled eyes they then saluted the first rays of the sun which gilded the bushy heads of the palm trees and made the irrigation canals glisten like so many promises. . . .

Six months after the arrival of the first Bedouins at Artawiya Ibn-Saud was invited to a ceremony which was very simple, but to which the participants had tried to give all possible solemnity. After having sworn an oath of allegiance to the King the colonists abandoned their goatskin tents as symbols of nomadism and began to live in the brick houses they had built for themselves. As they crossed the thresholds of their new homes they were performing an act of incalculable consequence: they were walking out of the Middle Ages and entering modern times.

The experiment began well. Without giving the colonists' enthusiasm time to cool, Ibn-Saud sent them an Elder, with several preachers, to found a school and stimulate their zeal. Then he sent them a little more money, some wheat and barley seed, and promised a rifle and ammunition to each man whose name should be inscribed in the mosque.

The colony grew. Naturally there were disappointments and setbacks. The Bedouins had difficulty in adapting themselves to manual labour. In the spring many of them were seized with a longing for the desert. They found it hard to resist the instinct to migrate which gripped them all at this season. Others, having placed themselves under "Allah's protection," thought it needless to cultivate their plots, convinced that Providence would do it for them. There were defections, dissensions, even quarrels. . . .

But in spite of everything Artawiya prospered. Despite appearances, the siting of the colony had been well chosen. Once irrigated, the soil revealed itself to be exceptionally fertile. Alfa, barley and wheat grew in profusion. Under Mutib's firm and intelligent management the little group of the outset became a large village, then a township, finally a town. Its inhabitants took pride in being the most devout Moslems in Nejd. They showed themselves so unbending in all that had to do with worship that non-Wahabi Arabs dared not visit them. They gave up their tribal head-dresses and would wear nothing but the white turban of Abdul-Wahab, the symbol of purity. They gloried in the name of "Ikwan," which Ibn-Saud had given them in memory of the victorious legions of the Prophet, and came to consider other Bedouins as inferior beings, still plunged in the darkness of ignorance and sin. These austere Puritans were redoubtable fighters, always ready to go to war. They had adopted this rallying cry: "We are the Knights of Unity, Brothers in the Will of God."

The number of volunteers increased. The Mutair tribe, which had

been in revolt a few years earlier and which Ibn-Saud had had to punish severely, came to visit Artawiya. Roused to enthusiasm by the sight of the result accomplished, they asked to be allowed to join the colony *en bloc*. Their chief, Sheik Dawish, enlisted in the Ikwan.

This adhesion was final proof that the experiment had succeeded. For Dawish, leader of the rebels who had escaped the justice and anger of Ibn-Saud, was not merely a valiant fighter, he was one of the Arabs most fiercely attached to independence and tradition, a Bedouin for whom the honour of his tribe came before everything. His support for the cause was a priceless moral victory for Ibn-Saud.

The King of Nejd made the most of this opportunity. Was not one of the objects of his reform to induce the tribes to drop their personal quarrels? He owed it to himself, therefore, not to perpetuate his own. With a remarkable breadth of mind he publicly reconciled himself with Dawish. Then he appointed him commander-in-chief of the Ikwan and governor of Artawiya. In entrusting this post to his former enemy Ibn-Saud wished to show the tribes that all earlier dissensions should be forgotten in face of the work of unification he had undertaken.

In consequence of the mass recruitment of the Mutairs the colony became too small to contain all its inhabitants. A part of its population left it to form other centres, conceived on the same model. In this way the garrisons of Dilam, Thadiq and Shaqra were formed. Ibn-Saud placed members of the original volunteers at the head of these new groups. He took care to mingle the tribes represented in them so as to prevent them from regrouping and splitting up into rival clans again. Finally he bound the colonies to each other by a system of privileges which enabled them to feel that they formed a special community, distinct from and superior to the other tribes of the desert. A new Arabian aristocracy was in process of being formed. . . .

When the colonists had achieved a sufficient degree of development, Ibn-Saud began to recruit soldiers from them. The contingents he obtained were both physically and morally far superior to those from other provinces of the kingdom.

Five years after the founding of the first colony, the Ikwan consisted of 50,000 members. This was no longer an incongruous medley of nomads, but a permanent army whose solidly fashioned units did honour to their creator.

Up to now Ibn-Saud had had at his command a military instrument limited by the dimensions of Nejd. That which he now possessed had the dimensions of Arabia.

[LI]

IT WAS now that religious difficulties began.

The Doctors of Law had always had a secret mistrust of Ibn-Saud. In some of them this feeling amounted to animosity. It was certainly not that he failed in his religious duties. On this score none could voice the slightest criticism. He prayed, fasted and distributed alms. He drank no wine; he never smoked; he used no blasphemous oaths and he observed the commandments of the Koran irreproachably.

But the "Giant King's" overbrimming vitality troubled them. He was too jovial, too exuberant, for these morose men, with sullen faces, who never smiled and who were shocked even by a burst of laughter. He was too preoccupied with earthly success to fulfil his obligations to heaven. "Too much an emir," they said, "and not Imam enough." He spurned their advice in far too cavalier a fashion. Had he not authorised the soldiers to sing on the march? Had he not given permission for the Anaizas to smoke in public? What lay behind his friendship for Mubarrak, whose private life was a scandal, who was notoriously impious, and who, worst of all, had foreigners lodging at his home? The tale of his threat to blow up the Ibrahim Mosque smelt of sacrilege. True, he had not put his threat into execution. But the mere fact of contemplating it was sufficiently disquieting. In all these things there were signs of a personality who must be vigilantly watched. . . .

In reality all these arguments were no more than a mask behind which the "ulemas" dissimulated their real thoughts. Their discontent had another cause: it was the success of the Ikwan. At first they had opposed the project and had declared it impracticable in order that they should not be associated with a reform which could arouse the people's anger. Then they had rallied to it at the plea of Abdur-Rahman, but they had done so only with their lips and in the hope that the hostility of the tribes would be enough to check it. Now they disapproved of it because it had succeeded too well. A military instrument of this kind, entirely at the service of the King, was enough to disquiet the members of the high priesthood. Was there not a risk that in his hands it could become a powerful means of government? Suppose that Ibn-Saud should make use of it one day to take their privileges away from them? They preferred a weak monarch, docile to their wishes, to a powerful sovereign, able to impose his will upon them.

Accordingly, they began a campaign of systematic denigration against Ibn-Saud, all over the country. Cleverly spread by the

"muezzins" of the mosques and the "mutawas" of the schools, these slanders whispered from mouth to mouth aroused uneasiness among the people. The "ulemas" played in Arabia the role of newspapers in the West. Thanks to the propaganda machine they had at their disposal they were able to influence opinion and bend it to their will.

Ibn-Saud knew not how to begin to defend himself against this insidious danger, so different from those he had hitherto confronted. He could not attack the clergy directly, for their power was at once everywhere and nowhere. He decided that the best way to reduce the "ulemas" to silence and affirm his religious authority over the peoples of Arabia would be to make himself master of the Holy Cities, Medina and Mecca. "I will set my feet in the steps of the Prophet," he had sworn when he left the great stone desert. Had not Mohammed begun in the same way?

The more he thought about it the more this operation attracted him. In the first place it would open up an outlet for him in the Red Sea, like that he already possessed in the Persian Gulf. Astride the peninsula, he would be able to control the passage of the caravans and the whole commercial existence of the country. Next, it would enable him to drive Hussein from the Hejaz and throw this abject traitor, who had made himself a mercenary and a vassal of the Turks, out of the sanctuary. Finally it would give his religious power a basis so solid that even the most hostile "ulemas" would no longer dare to attack him. Once Sherif of Mecca ("Sherif of Sherifs") and master of the pilgrimages, his influence would radiate to the farthest limits of the Islamic world.

The ease with which he had driven the Turks out of Hasa gave him cause to think that he would easily overcome the resistance of Hussein. Had he not meanwhile forged a military weapon which assured him superiority over the other armies in the peninsula? The vital thing, once again, was to assure himself of British neutrality.

The King of Nejd was already mobilising his troops and preparing to leap upon the Hejaz capital when an unforeseen event occurred to upset all his plans: the first world war had just broken out.

[LII]

AUGUST 2, 1914. This fateful date in the history of Europe echoed like a thunder-clap into the depths of the East. For some it was a signal of death; for others a promise of life. From Cairo to Basra and from Aden to Bagdad the Arabs cocked their ears, hoping that the war which was beginning would sound the knell of the Ottoman Empire.

Ibn-Saud should have received warning of what was preparing. For months past Arabia had been riddled with secret agents. There had been British, German, French, Turks, Italians, Russians and even Japanese. They had come from everywhere: from Suez, Basra, Bombay and Teheran, seeking to enlist allies for the coming conflict. But Ibn-Saud, absorbed by the problems of internal Arabia, had not felt the tempest coming. The world conflagration caught him completely unprepared.

At first he thought that Turkey's entry into the war would favour his plans. This time London was in open conflict with Constantinople. Was this not the moment to repeat in Mecca the stroke which had so well succeeded in Hasa? But if he drove Hussein and the Turkish guards from Hejaz, would Britain acquiesce? Or would she refuse to recognise his sovereignty over this province?

As before, Ibn-Saud decided to consult Mubarrak. He had acquired the habit of following his counsels in this field and had always been glad that he had done so.

It was never without emotion that the King of Nejd crossed the threshold of the palace at Kuweit where, while still young, he had received his first lessons in politics. But when he now entered the office of his former protector he had difficulty in recognising him, so greatly had he aged since their last meeting. He saw coming towards him an obese old man, with dull eyes and ravaged features. His fallen cheeks gave him the look of an old owl; he had large pockets under his eyes; his hair and beard were dyed with henna and his podgy fingers were covered with enormous rings. His face had acquired a strange expression, at once avaricious and lascivious. Worn out by a long life of debauchery, Mubarrak had handed over the government of Kuweit to his son, Selim. But if his body was a wreck, his brain had retained all its lucidity. He still kept abreast of all that happened in the world. If Ibn-Saud was shocked to see how much time had diminished his former protector, Mubarrak on his side was alarmed to see how time had increased the stature of his old pupil. His sovereignty extended now along the whole Persian Gulf, and Mubarrak now repented having helped him, for this increase in power caused him apprehension. What would happen if Ibn-Saud, after digesting Hasa, should take a fancy to absorb Kuweit also? Would the British prevent him? Yes, if they were enemies. But if they were allies? Might not the ministers in London have an interest in replacing Selim, who was nothing but an idle young man without character, by a more capable and energetic governor? At all costs he must prevent any accord between Ibn-Saud and the representatives of His Majesty. . . .

The King of Nejd, who knew nothing of these secret thoughts, told Mubarrak of his aims on the Hejaz and innocently asked him to plead

his cause with the British Government. Mubarrak lifted his arms to heaven and uttered a cluck of reprobation:

"You are mad, my young friend," he answered him. "For you to attack the Hejaz would be the worst imprudence. Above all keep your hands off Hussein. Are you not well off as you are? Keep quiet. Are you in such a hurry to throw yourself into the jaws of the wolf? In your place I would limit my ambitions to central Arabia and follow a policy of neutrality until the storm has passed."

Ibn-Saud returned to Riyadh irritated and disappointed by this interview. Mubarrak's honeyed words, his frightened look, his old-womanish cluckings, his veiled allusions to one knew not what perils when he had spoken of Hejaz and Hussein, left an unpleasant taste in his mouth. What game was he playing? At one time the young Abdul-Aziz had seen the Emir of Kuweit following precisely these tactics with one he wished to dupe. The King of Nejd went back to his capital even more perplexed than he had been before. His journey had taught him only one thing: that henceforward he would be wrong to trust his former patron. The days of friendship were past. In foreign politics, as in home politics, he must take counsel only with himself.

Such were his reflections when he received visits one after the other from German agents who had come from Basra and from British agents who had come from Kuweit. The first asked him to support the cause of the Turks; the second to make war on them.

[LIII]

THE KING of Nejd was confronted with an embarrassing dilemma. "A policy of neutrality" Mubarrak had advised. But to remain neutral was to remain alone, and to remain alone was to expose himself without defence to all the ambitions of his neighbours. The emirs and governors of the provinces surrounding Nejd understood this very well. They lost no time in taking sides and in allying themselves according to their preferences to the one camp or the other.

Who would win the war—the Turks or the British? There was the whole question, and in this first phase of hostilities it was difficult to answer it. The Turks represented the nearest and therefore the most dangerous Power. They were the allies of the Germans, who were rich and powerful. But Ibn-Saud found it repugnant to ally himself with them. Were they not one and all his declared enemies? Whatever promises they made him, their victory would mean the collapse of his dreams: it would be the end of the emancipation of Arabia. As for the British, their policy also was far from clear. What would they do with

the peninsula if they should be victorious? What were their real feelings towards the Saudis?

The British had modified their opinion of Ibn-Saud considerably since the time when they had thought him too insignificant a personage for them to reply to his messages. He now dominated a great part of the seaboard of the Persian Gulf. He was a force to be reckoned with. Accordingly, they sent him their consul in Kuweit, Captain Shakespeare, to seek his alliance, or in default of alliance, his benevolent neutrality.

Shakespeare came to see Ibn-Saud at Riyadh and urged him to declare war on the Turks immediately.[1] This was approximately the language M. de Lascaris had used to Saud the Great a hundred years earlier. But Ibn-Saud knew the frightful disaster that had befallen his ancestor because he had launched himself prematurely into an enterprise of this kind. He had no desire to make the same mistake. So he refused to commit himself. He proposed to support the British cause in indirect fashion—by marching on the Hejaz and driving Hussein out of it.

Shakespeare protested that this was out of the question and intimated sharply that he should renounce the project. The discussions dragged on for several weeks without result, Ibn-Saud turning a deaf ear to the British pleas and Shakespeare feigning not to understand the aims of Ibn-Saud. Suddenly the Turks, alerted by Mubarrak, who was much disturbed by these talks, abruptly put an end to the discussion. Having provoked some of the Shammar tribes of Hail to disaffection, they marched upon Riyadh with them in order to prevent an accord of which they feared to be the victims. This time Mubarrak had shown his cards: his treachery was flagrant.

Cutting short the talks, Ibn-Saud hastily called up a large contingent of the Ikwan and faced the Turks. The encounter took place at Jarrab, to the north of Artawiya. Apart from the Shammar horsemen, the enemy forces comprised several battalions of the Turkish regular army with supporting artillery. The battle began at dawn and raged all day. The Ikwan formations, who were receiving their baptism of fire, acquitted themselves magnificently. They charged the Turkish troops eighteen times in succession. Captain Shakespeare, who had wanted to check the fighting quality of the new Saudi units, had ridden to the field of battle against the King's advice. He was watching the operations, seated on a camp stool, calmly drinking his tea, when he was surrounded by a group of Shammar horsemen, who struck him down together with his secretary.

At dusk the harassed Turks finally gave way and withdrew towards the north. Ibn-Saud had extricated himself from the affair. But he was far from having won a victory, for his troops had suffered considerable

[1] cf. "Captain Shakespeare's Last Journey," *Geographical Journal*, Vol. LIX, 1922.

losses. The news spread in the desert that the Ikwan's reputation had been exaggerated and that a single Turkish battalion, stiffened with Germans, had been enough to put it to flight.

More than ever Ibn-Saud realised that he could not remain alone. What had he to expect from the Turks and the Germans? Had they not just shown their real sentiments towards him? He resumed his interrupted talks with the British and travelled to Oqair, a Hasa port, to meet Mr. Cox, Shakespeare's successor as British consul in Kuweit.

This time the two negotiators reached agreement quickly. Ibn-Saud said nothing of his aims in the Hejaz. He signed a convention with the British plenipotentiary in which he declared himself officially on the British side and engaged himself formally "not to attack their allies or aid their enemies." At the same time he was not called upon to "participate actively in military operations." The British, on their side, recognised the rule of Ibn-Saud over Nejd and Hasa, independently of Turkey. They promised that the possession of these territories would not be put in question when the Ottoman Empire came to be shared out. They presented him with a decoration, undertook to pay him a monthly subsidy of £5,000 in gold, furnished him with arms and engaged themselves to give him help if he should be the object of a new aggression.

Ibn-Saud left Oqair delighted with this agreement. While not being obliged to make war on the Turks he was protected against a return offensive on their part. Moreover the terms in which he undertook "not to attack the allies of Great Britain or aid her enemies" left the door open for operations against Hussein. He had obtained in fact all that he desired. He told himself that the British could not be so sure of themselves as they pretended, otherwise they would not have accorded him such favourable conditions.

[LIV]

THE WORLD war, begun in Masuria and the plains of Flanders, had spread rapidly to the Mediterranean's eastern basin. By December 1914 the Turks had made the Levant a turntable whence their military thrusts could be directed simultaneously towards the east, the south-east and the south. Jemal Pasha, one of the triumvirate of the committee of "Union and Progress," had been appointed governor of Syria with extensive powers amounting to vice-royalty. On January 11, 1915, Jemal had marched on the Suez Canal at the head of an army of 40,000 men commanded by German officers, Colonels Kress von Kressenstein and Von Seeckt. They had attacked the Toussoun

waterway near Ismailia but had been thrown back from the Canal Zone by British artillery and warships (February 3).

During this time a British army from India, commanded by General Townshend, had landed at the top of the Persian Gulf and seized Basra. From there it had gone up the course of the Tigris towards Bagdad. But the British forces had been defeated in the ruins of Ctesiphon on November 22, 1915, and been forced to retreat. Surrounded at Kut-el-Amara, they had finally capitulated (April 29, 1916).

Coming after the setback of the Dardanelles, the Kut surrender dealt a heavy blow to British prestige in the Middle East. In an effort to repair the damage of this defeat the British had then launched a new offensive. An army from Egypt under General Sir Archibald Murray was to seize the Sinai Peninsula and march through Palestine upon Jerusalem and Damascus. This was a delicate operation because the troops following the coast would be exposed to a flank attack by the Turkish garrisons at Medina and in the Hejaz. This was the moment Ibn-Saud had been waiting for to attack Mecca and drive out Hussein. He told himself that the British would have nothing against such an operation, since, in conjunction with their own, it would have the effect of safeguarding their rear. As for the Turks, they could hardly oppose any resistance because the bulk of their forces would be engaged in fighting the British.

Suddenly, on November 6, 1916, at the very moment when Ibn-Saud was putting the finishing touches to his preparations, Hussein proclaimed the independence of the Hejaz, broke the oath of allegiance which bound him to the Sultan, and declared himself officially an ally of Britain. Simultaneously he published a resounding manifesto announcing himself leader of a general crusade in favour of Arab independence and inviting all the chiefs in the peninsula to join him.

This volte-face had been long prepared by Sir Henry MacMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, and the Arab Bureau of the Intelligence Service at Cairo.[1]

The outcome of the military operations had made Hussein one of the key-pieces on the Middle Eastern chessboard. Accordingly the British had set everything in motion to wean him from the Turks. They had undertaken to recognise his sovereignty over the Hejaz and to pay him a monthly subsidy of £20,000 in gold. They had flattered his vanity by promising to create after the war a grand Arab Confederation of which he was to be the leader. This was more than

[1] Sir Henry MacMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, had received secret approaches from Hussein in the summer of 1915. In reply to these overtures Sir Henry announced on October 24, 1915, that the British "were ready to support the independence of the Arabs in the wide domain comprised between the Taurus, Persia, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean."

sufficient to cause this avaricious old man to part company with Constantinople.

Hussein's volte-face profoundly altered the strategic position in Arabia. The British had found in him a valuable tool. They counted on him to drive the Turkish garrisons out of the Hejaz and protect the right flank of the army of Sinai. Henceforth the east coast of the Red Sea would be in the hands of an ally. Neither the Turks nor the Germans could now establish submarine bases along this strip of water through which passed all convoys coming from India.

In his lifetime Ibn-Saud had witnessed many startling turns of events, but none had surprised him as much as this. That Hussein had betrayed the Arabs by selling himself to the Turks he knew already. But that he should have betrayed the Turks in turn by selling himself to the British seemed to him stupefying. What astonished him still more was that nothing should have come out about a matter which had clearly been in train a long time. It made him understand many things hitherto obscure. . . .

This, then, was why the Syrian revolutionaries who had come to see him after his conquest of Hasa had assured him that Hussein was secretly with them; he was already intriguing against Constantinople. This was why Mubarrak had urged him so strongly not to attack the Hejaz. This also was why Shakespeare had so sharply ruled out any discussion on the subject. He saw now why Cox had given him such advantageous conditions at Oqair: the main object of the treaty had been to protect his enemy. Ibn-Saud had solemnly engaged himself "not to attack the allies of Britain." This formula, which had seemed vague enough at the time, now had a precise meaning: Hussein had become the ally of Britain. The Nejd King could no longer attack him. He himself had slammed the door of the Hejaz.

He had thought to have had the advantage in the negotiations, and he now perceived that he had been treated like a babe in arms. Even now he did not know everything. He did not know that he had unwittingly played a positive role in the affair, and that the British had used the Oqair treaty itself to overcome Hussein's last hesitations. They had been able to prove to him that the Nejd King was "their friend," that it depended on them whether he invaded the Hejaz. In such a case the Sherif of Mecca would be crushed between the Ikwan of Ibn-Saud and the divisions of Sir Archibald Murray. The only solution for him was to change sides at once. Once an ally of the British he would be protected by them and would be invulnerable. . . . And everything had happened as the British desired.

While the Desert Leopard was roaring with rage in his palace at Riyadh, Hussein had begun by expelling the Turkish garrisons from the Hejaz, aided by his three sons, Ali, Abdullah and Feisal. The Turks

had retorted with a vigorous counter-offensive. At the moment when the fortunes of arms began to turn against the Hashimites the British had sent warships into the ports of Jedda, Yenbo and Rabigh. They had landed rifles and cannons, quantities of munitions, cases filled with gold, a handful of energetic officers, Storrs, Wilson, Young, Cochrane, and a certain Captain Thomas Edward Lawrence, who was to become better known.

Stimulated by the British officers, the Arabs of the Hejaz had regained their confidence. Thanks to British gold Hussein was able to recruit troops among the inland tribes—including those of Nejd—and considerably augment the strength of his forces.

Going back towards the north along the railway line which runs from Medina to Damascus, Hussein's forces had seized Akaba. Then, led by Feisal and Lawrence, recently promoted to the rank of colonel, they had effected a junction with the British army coming to meet them across the Sinai peninsula. Together they had driven the Turks back upon Bir-es-Seba and Gaza (January 9, 1917).

Simultaneously a third British army, better equipped than the first, had landed at Basra at the top of the Persian Gulf. Using the same itinerary as that of General Townshend, it had followed the course of the Tigris. The Turks, besieged in their turn in Kut-el-Amara, had finally surrendered (February 1917). This victory wiped out the disaster of the year before and opened the road to Bagdad and Mosul to the Allies.

On all the Eastern fronts the British had repulsed the Ottoman forces and were now concentrating their divisions for a final offensive. General Allenby had replaced Sir Archibald Murray at Cairo. The great, jovial, rubicund figure was filled with optimism. The army of Sinai, from the south, and the army of Basra, from the east, were to make their junction in the environs of Aleppo and march on Constantinople together. Facing them, the Turks, short of arms, equipment, munitions and provisions, were dying like flies of hunger and dysentery. The final decision seemed within reach.

[LV]

For this final assault the British wished to ensure the co-operation of all the Arab chiefs. The advance of Allenby's troops would be made easier if the harassing attacks carried out on the Turks' right flank by Bedouin horsemen were vigorously and effectively performed. With this object, the British Government sent a diplomatic mission to Riyadh to urge the King of Nejd to become at last a belligerent. The

two leaders of this mission were St. John Philby and Lord Bellhaven.

Ibn-Saud received the British emissaries with the highest honours. He lodged them in his palace, although the "ulemas" and minor officials were scandalised to see him thus offer hospitality to "infidel dogs." He heard with interest all that Philby and Bellhaven had to say to him, but refused to move from his position of neutrality. None of their arguments could shake him. He was convinced that for the time being neutrality was the best policy. To launch himself prematurely into the war offered no valid advantages for him.

This was all the more so because what the British were asking him for—active participation in the "Islamic Crusade"—was equivalent to enrolling himself under the banner of Hussein, and he would rather have cut off his right hand than contribute, to however small an extent, to his rival's victory. He was not deceived by the project for an Arab Confederation; but even if this project should materialise one day he would never tolerate Hussein as its leader.

The Hashimites embodied everything he most detested. They were men of cultivation, refinement and artistry, but degenerated and bastardised by prolonged contact with foreign civilisations. By what right had Hussein, the husband of a Turk and the son of a Circassian, set himself up as the spokesman of the Arabs? What did he know of independence, he who had always bowed his neck under the Turkish heel and had but the one policy: to sell himself to the highest bidder? To the extent that the creation of the Islamic Empire—that flight from the desert and that fall into sin and error—had been a treason to God and a catastrophe for Arabia, Hussein and his line, who belonged to the type of men the empire had known in its decline, were but the perpetuation of that treason and that catastrophe. Sceptical and dishonest, they had let the true faith be corrupted, turned the pilgrimages into money-making enterprises and introduced all sorts of infamous practices into the Holy Cities. No sooner was the name of this vicious old man, who had prostituted the sacred title of Sherif of Mecca, mentioned in his presence than the Imam of the Wahabis choked with anger and fulminated imprecations against him. He identified himself with the revolt of internal Arabia, strong and austere, against the flabby and corrupt Arabia outside. In the clammy face of Hussein's Islam he brandished the shining sword of the desert thoroughbred.

When he thought of the enormous sums the London Government was paying to the "King of the Hejaz"—enabling him to recruit soldiers even in the Nejd provinces, which meant inside his own territories—his blood boiled with anger.

"You are making a mistake," he told the British envoys haughtily, "in supporting Hussein. As soon as your subsidies cease to flow into

Mecca I shall swallow him in a single mouthful and you will see all the Hejaz tribes turn to me as their liberator."

Bellhaven and Philby left Riyadh without having induced Ibn-Saud to change his mind. But they took with them the conviction that the King of Nejd was by far the strongest personality in Arabia and that Britain had probably been wrong in basing all its Arab policy upon Hussein.

[LVI]

MEANWHILE MILITARY operations were marking time. Allenby had had several times to postpone the date of his grand offensive. Despite their pitiful condition and defective weapons, the Turkish soldiers had put up a stubborn resistance. Successive offensives had placed the British in possession of Jaffa (November 17, 1917) and of Jerusalem (December 9), but, having reached these, the British forces had had to halt once more and dig in behind a line running from the north of Jaffa to Amman.[1]

1918 arrived. Relations between Ibn-Saud and Hussein had deteriorated. They no longer spoke of each other except with insult. Wishing to avoid a final break between the two adversaries, the British ordered Philby to return to Riyadh and establish himself there permanently at the head of a small delegation.

Suddenly, in the spring of 1918, an unforeseen incident set fire to the powder train. The town of Kurma became converted to Wahabism and placed itself spontaneously under the protection of Ibn-Saud. Desert frontiers are always imprecise. Kurma, situated at the border between Ataiba and the Hejaz, lay in a sort of "no man's land" whose ownership was ill defined. But this locality was an important market where Bedouins from the interior came to sell their flocks to merchants from the coast. Hussein could not tolerate that this cross-roads should pass under the domination of his rival. He sent troops to Kurma to re-establish his rights. The besieged inhabitants displayed a heroic resistance but finally surrendered to superior numbers. Some were massacred by Hejaz infantry.

This act of brutality aroused a wave of indignation all over Nejd. The Wahabis and the Ikwan demanded an immediate march on Kurma to avenge their brothers.

"The Sherif Hussein is our mortal enemy!" they cried. "He is a traitor and an idolater. It is scandalous that a man so unclean should be the keeper of the Holy Cities. Are we to let him molest those of our

[1] For fuller details on the campaign in Palestine see Benoist-Méchin: *Mustapha Kemal ou la mort d'un empire*, pp. 172 et seq.

belief with impunity? Up, O Ibn-Saud! Gird your sword and lead us to the fight to snatch our brothers from the clutches of these heretics."

"What you say is true," Ibn-Saud replied. "Hussein and the people of Mecca are 'muskrehins'—heretics. They are a living abomination and poison my nostrils. But for larger reasons we must still be patient."

Ibn-Saud was perplexed. His instincts, his interests, his pride, even his people, drove him to attack Hussein. But Philby, who was watching his slightest acts and gestures and who had frequent talks with him, continually reminded him of the Oqair Convention.

"Do not forget that Hussein is Britain's ally," he repeated. "To attack him would be to violate the terms of our agreement and would bring about evil consequences for Nejd and for yourself."

To dissuade Ibn-Saud from an operation against the Hejaz, Philby suggested rather one against Damascus—which would help Allenby's offensive—or, instead, in the north-west direction, on the province of Hail where the Turks had just installed a certain Mohammed-ibn-Rashid, a nephew of the old Rashid whose named recalled for Ibn-Saud all the struggles of his youth.

But Ibn-Saud hesitated to follow this advice. In the hope of forcing Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kurma he wrote him a letter protesting in strong terms against the iniquitous treatment inflicted on his co-religionists and summoning the Sherif of Mecca to evacuate the town. This was a clumsy gesture since it could not be supported by any military action.

Hussein, sure of British support, returned his letter without even having read it.

"Return to Riyadh," he said to the messenger who had brought it, "and say to Ibn-Saud that I, Hussein, will soon march on Nejd to drive out his family, and exterminate all the Wahabis, that progeny of worm-eaten swine."

This declaration had been made publicly so that all could hear it. The insult was flagrant. It might have been thought that the King of the Hejaz was doing all in his power to bring Ibn-Saud's exasperation to breaking-point.

The Nejd King could not understand the attitude of the British. That they should have prevented him from attacking Hussein, since he was their ally, was in the order of things. But, since they had every means of exerting pressure upon him, why did they not prevent him from grossly insulting Ibn-Saud, whom they also acknowledged to be their ally? What was the meaning of this imbroglio where everyone declared their "friendship" but lived at daggers drawn?

To be just, what Ibn-Saud could not understand was also not understood by many of the British, for they did not know then what we know today.

Major St. John Philby, who supported Ibn-Saud, represented the India Office. Colonel Lawrence, who supported Hussein, was attached to the Arab Bureau at Cairo, which was responsible to the Foreign Office in London. These two offices followed a policy independent of each other. Their action was not only different; it was often contradictory.

The interests of the India Office gravitated round Mesopotamia and the land route to India. This was why its leaders were trying to conciliate the littoral potentates along the Persian Gulf. They had made contact with Mubarrak during his stay in Bombay, and thanks to him had established a protectorate over Kuweit. It was through him that they had come in contact with Ibn-Saud, whom they had allowed to carry out the conquest of Hasa. It was in their interest to support and enhance his power.

The leaders of the Arab Bureau, on their side, were chiefly concerned with Suez, Aden and the sea route to India. This was why they were seeking to increase their influence over the littoral princes along the Red Sea. It was they who had negotiated Hussein's switch of allegiance. It was important to them at the present time to satisfy his ambitions. In time the policies guiding the two British departments had become antagonistic to the extent that their interests were linked with the incompatible claims of the rival dynasties.

In 1916 Lawrence, in agreement with Sir Henry MacMahon, had promised Hussein the leadership of the Arab Confederation which was to be established after the war, and had undertaken to have Iraq and Syria given to his son Feisal, and Transjordania and Palestine to his son Abdullah. But, since then, the Foreign Office, in agreement with Allenby, had signed a protocol with the French Government on the subject of Syria which contradicted the undertaking given to Feisal;[1] and Lord Balfour had published a declaration announcing the creation of a "Jewish national home" in Palestine, which violated the promises made to Abdullah.[2]

Caught between these cross-fires the author of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* knew not what to do. "I was one of Allenby's officers," he writes, "and in his confidence; in return he expected me to do the best I could for him. I was also Feisal's adviser, and Feisal relied upon the honesty and competence of my advice so far as often to take it without argument. Yet I could not explain to Allenby the whole Arab situation, nor disclose the full British plan to Feisal."[3]

But this was not all. "Conveniently at this juncture the British Cabinet, in joyous style, gave with the left hand also. They promised

[1] The Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 16, 1916.
[2] Declaration of Balfour to Lord Rothschild, November 2, 1917.
[3] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 395.

to the Arabs, or rather to an unauthorised committee of seven Gothamites in Cairo, that the Arabs should keep, for their own, the territory they conquered from Turkey in the war. . . .

"Then, to show us that it could give as many promises as there were parties, the British finally countered document A to the Sherif, B to the Allies, C to the Arab Committee, by document D to Lord Rothschild, a new power whose race was promised something equivocal in Palestine."[1]

Finally, to crown this edifice of questionable architecture, the British had opened talks for a separate peace with the Turks, "which," adds Lawrence incidentally, "would have been fatal to so many of the Arabs in arms on our side."[2]

All these entangled promises were the beginnings of as many conflicts about whose outcome the Downing Street experts seemed quite unworried, believing that victory would settle everything. But the quarrels which flowed from them nevertheless ran the risk of transforming the Middle East into a regular bear-garden. And as happens so often in such circumstances, the rival departments had ended by espousing the quarrels of their respective protégés. Lawrence would consider only the Sherif of Mecca; Philby swore by the King of Nejd. While relations worsened between Hussein and Ibn-Saud, a growing hostility grew up between Lawrence and Philby.

"In truth," said Ibn-Saud with a sigh of regret, "if an attack against Hussein did not mean that I should break my agreement with Britain it would have taken place long ago. For I loathe Hussein more than anyone in the world. As for Ali, Abdullah and Feisal his sons, I would like to crush them with my heel like a nest of scorpions."

[LVII]

THE KURMA incident surged up again. In a fit of despair the inhabitants had expelled the Hussein garrison and were preparing to recommence their resistance. For the second time they implored Ibn-Saud to come to their aid. As before Ibn-Saud made no move.

The "ulemas" and the Ikwan began to murmur. What was the meaning of this inexplicable passivity? Wahabis were being slain and Ibn-Saud was watching the massacre without flying to their help, without even a word of sympathy. What had the British, those miscreant dogs, who were to be seen wandering in the palace corridors at all hours and who held interminable conversations with the King, done to their leader?

[1] T. E Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 572. [2] Ibid., p. 573.

For the third time the people of Kurma sent a cry of distress to their co-religionists in Nejd. They sent an emissary in haste to Ibn-Saud, bearing this message:

"If it be to preserve the flow of dirty gold thrust down your throat by foreigners that you do not come to our help, then tell us so, O Ibn-Saud. We will forgive you, for we know the weakness of men in face of temptation. We have sent you soldiers to tell you of our sufferings. But it was wasted effort, for you did not budge. Next time we shall send you our mothers and wives. They will raise the whole of Nejd. For if your heart of stone remains deaf to our appeals the generous heart of your people will hear our cry for help."

This message aroused deep resentment throughout the country. This resentment swiftly turned to anger, an anger now directed against the King. By his abstention Ibn-Saud began to be unpopular. Everywhere in the towns and villages his inaction was blamed. In the mosques and schools the "ulemas" and "mutawas" made no bones about accusing him of selling his birthright for a mess of pottage, becoming the willing confederate of a foreign Power. Stirred up by the Wahabi priesthood, the Ikwan was at boiling-point. The soldiers spontaneously seized arms to make war on Hussein—with or without the King. Discontent grew from day to day. Ibn-Saud felt his power slipping from his grasp.

Mute and silent in his palace, the Desert Leopard was paralysed by uncertainty. What was he to do? To bow to the will of his troops was to tear up the covenant of Oqair. The British reaction would be immediate. The Ikwan would be destroyed. He would be driven from Nejd and from Hasa. His territories would be parcelled out to others at the conclusion of the peace. The peoples of his kingdom would be ruthlessly handed over to a foreign domination; or else, abandoned to themselves, would return to chaos.

But to stay inactive was to confirm in all his subjects' minds the false allegations of those who claimed that he sacrificed his people and his religion to his love of gold. This would unleash an internal crisis which would drive him from the throne. It would mean shame and dishonour, the collapse of all his work, the final end to all his dreams. . . . Ibn-Saud had known some difficult moments in his life. But he had rarely found himself faced by a dilemma so cruel.

Suddenly he learned that Mohammed-ibn-Rashid, believing that the defeat of the Turks was inevitable, had abruptly joined the Allied camp. Hussein had been in touch with him secretly and had furnished him with arms with which to march on Riyadh.

At once Ibn-Saud recovered all his vigour. The Leopard bared his claws and prepared to spring. Since he had been attacked the British would be bound to support him. Moreover, had they not

themselves urged him to get rid of Rashid? And since the Ikwan was spoiling for a fight, why not put himself at their head and destroy his people's traditional enemy? This campaign would satisfy their zeal. . . .

[LVIII]

THE KING of Nejd resolved to summon a grand assembly at Shaqra, one of the chief Ikwan colonies, and sent out an urgent call to all the army leaders. They responded the more promptly because they wished for war and believed that Ibn-Saud was summoning them to announce the opening of hostilities against Hussein.

One after another the generals and their escorts arrived at Shaqra. Ibn-Saud received them at the gates of the town and had them conducted to the places reserved for them. Each sheik pitched his tent, planted his standard at the entrance, and installed his followers and horses around it.

Next day the people of Shaqra, the neighbouring villagers, the chiefs and their escorts assembled in a sandy plain north of the town. The King took his seat in front of them, flanked by his bodyguard. In living memory central Arabia had never seen so great a parade of armed forces.

Ibn-Saud rose, gazed long at the assembly and declared:

"I have summoned you," he said, "because I have need of you. After long reflection, I have decided to go to war. . . ."

A tremendous acclamation greeted these words. At last there was to be something definite. At last there was to be an end to inaction and shame.

"I have decided to go to war," Ibn-Saud repeated, "and the enemy I ask you to defeat is Mohammed-ibn-Rashid. . . ."

At these words there were darkened faces. A murmur of discontent replaced the applause.

The military chiefs rose and asked leave to speak.

"What is the meaning of this?" they demanded one after another. "What does Mohammed-ibn-Rashid matter to us? It is not he, but Hussein, against whom we should make war."

As Ibn-Saud made no reply, Sheik Dawish, commander-in-chief of the Ikwan, spoke in the name of the whole army.

"We insist," said he in imperious tone, "upon fighting Sherif Hussein, who is torturing our brothers of Kurma and whom the English have armed. We insist that we should fight the enemies of the Faith. Was it not for this that you recruited us, taught us and trained us for war? You have but to say the word, O Ibn-Saud, and we will follow you to death, on condition that it be against the Sherif Hussein,

who defiles our Holy Cities. For the rest, know that we will never obey the orders of the foreigner. In speaking thus I voice the feeling of every one of your soldiers."

Ibn-Saud listened to Dawish without interruption. He knew what was passing in the mind of the commander-in-chief. He had been told that the campaign against Rashid was inspired by the British and for their advantage. The old soldier was criticising the King's attitude and his apparent willingness to satisfy the wishes of the Infidels. Dawish had a fierce hatred of Christians, especially the British, whom he accused of having "castrated" Ibn-Saud.

Behind Dawish stood the generals and colonels of the Ikwan, their faces dark and menacing. Undisguised hostility could be read in their looks.

Their numbers had greatly increased during the last few years. They constituted a power in the land, and they knew it. Therefore they intended to have their way.

What an irony for Ibn-Saud! It was he who had conceived the organisation of the Ikwan and who had literally built it out of nothing. Since the day, already distant, when it had consisted of only a handful of volunteers, he had cherished it, encouraged it and covered it with his protection. Against winds and tides he had brought it to success. He had wished to make of it the first army of Arabia, and now that this result had been achieved his work was turned against him and his appeal was answered with a growl of anger.

Ibn-Saud knew his army officers too well not to feel that they were on the edge of revolt. The speech of Dawish had inflamed their xenophobia. If he did not take them in hand immediately he would lose them for ever. But this was a highly delicate operation. One word ill understood, one gesture misinterpreted and they would not hesitate to sweep aside their sovereign to march on Mecca and destroy Hussein.

Then the catastrophe would be irremediable. For the British with their cannons, machine guns and aeroplanes would destroy them to the last man. It would be an appalling carnage. At this crucial moment Ibn-Saud had not only to save himself but to save his dynasty. He had also to save all these men blinded by passion, by preventing them from launching themselves into an adventure which would be equivalent to suicide.

For a whole minute he remained silent. Then he rose:

"Listen to me!" he said in a low voice which rose in volume as he became more animated. "You are called my soldiers and those who have seen us together on the field of battle know what that means. But the feelings I have for you are not only those of a chief for his subordinates. They are also those of a brother for his brothers, those of a father for his children. It is to that sentiment that I wish to appeal now. I have no army, no power, outside God and yourselves. Together we

can accomplish all things. Separated we are nothing. Do not believe that I am neglecting my duties. Those who have told you this abuse your good faith and do not understand the responsibilities which weigh on my shoulders. Do you think the sufferings of our brothers do not move me as much as they move you? But I know what is necessary. Cease to concern yourselves with the Sherif of Mecca, for, I swear it"—and here his voice took on a solemn note—"either the British will prevent him from renewing his attacks on Kurma, or we ourselves will march against him, to punish him as he deserves."

These last words relaxed the tension among his hearers. Ibn-Saud began to regain ground. "He knew how to handle these men. He understood how to get into their hearts and convince and rouse them. He had all the art and personality of a great orator to reach out to them and fill them with himself."[1] It made an amazing spectacle, this strange and unequal struggle in which Ibn-Saud, alone and unarmed, confronted the multitude and finally prevailed over it.

"As for Mohammed-ibn-Rashid," he continued, "it is true that the British have pressed me to attack him. Why should I hide this from you? But it is not the British who will obtain the benefit from it. They will furnish me for this task with munitions and arms and we shall be better placed afterwards to settle our account with Hussein. Moreover, if we conquer the province of Hail the British will abandon all the desert tribes to me and the chiefs who govern on the fringes of the land will bow to our strength and let us live in peace. . . ."

For two hours Ibn-Saud talked to them in this strain, and when he had finished speaking the chiefs and officers of the Ikwan were so moved that they changed without transition from mistrust to enthusiasm. They fell on their knees and touched the ground with their foreheads, asking Ibn-Saud to pardon their misguidedness.

"We have doubted you, O Ibn-Saud," they said. "We were deceived by evil minds which had sought to throw suspicion on your conduct. But we understand now how much we were wrong. It is you who are the wisest, and it is not for us to dispute your orders. You alone know how to lead us in the path of honour. We will march with you, O Ibn-Saud, whither you lead us: today against Rashid, since you ask it; tomorrow against Hussein, since you have promised it."

To mark their agreement they prayed together. Then, in a strong voice, the thousands intoned together the first chapter of the Koran:

"In the name of God, forbearing and merciful,
Praise be to God, lord of the Universe,
The forbearing, the merciful,
The sovereign at the Day of Judgment!

[1] H C Armstrong· op. cit., p 168

We adore thee and implore thy help.
Lead us in the right path,
In the path of those thou hast covered with benefits,
And not of those who have deserved thy wrath
And who lose their way in darkness. . . ."

When they had finished reciting the majestic verses the King took farewell of the Ikwan, saying to them:

"I have never doubted of your loyalty. Do not let evil minds again spread discord between you and me. Return to your garrisons and assemble your men. I give you rendezvous at the new moon in the district of Buraida. May Allah in his goodness give us victory."

[LIX]

A MONTH later, leading the advance guard of the army himself, Ibn-Saud penetrated the province of Hail. The campaign was a short one. With lightning speed he fell upon the Shammar tribes, crushed them and dispersed the forces of Mohammed-ibn-Rashid, who fled to Iraq. Ibn-Saud placed loyal governors in the chief towns of the region. Then, having given rich presents to the Ikwan fighters who had distinguished themselves in the course of the operations, he returned to Riyadh, where the people gave him a warm welcome.

This swift offensive, crowned with success and with the annexation of a new province to the territory under Saudi authority, restored the King's prestige in the eyes of his subjects. Since Saud the Great no member of his dynasty had governed Hail.

Feeling that the wind had turned and that opinion was once more favourable to the conqueror, the "ulemas" were not the last to give him homage. They organised a ceremony of thanksgiving at the great mosque of Riyadh and proclaimed Ibn-Saud "Sultan of Nejd and all its dependencies."

[LX]

THE CONQUEST of Hail had enlarged the territories of Ibn-Saud by one-third. It had brought him more subjects and more honours. Above all it had provided a respite from his quarrel with Hussein.

But the Sherif of Mecca was more arrogant than ever and lost no opportunity of goading the Wahabis. The people of Kurma having risen for the third time, he ordered his son Abdullah to march on the town and exterminate the rebels.

This time Ibn-Saud could no longer evade the issue on penalty of losing the confidence of the Ikwan. Had he not sworn to his chiefs at the Shaqra assembly that if Hussein again attacked Kurma he would go and punish him at the head of his troops? This new aggression forced him to keep his promise. So much the worse for the Oqair Convention: these provocations had lasted long enough.

While Ibn-Saud and Hussein were getting ready to come to blows the British intervened. They were out of patience with this ridiculous quarrel around an unknown oasis which was sapping all the energy of the Arab sovereigns at the moment when it was urgent to give Turkey the finishing stroke. They called a conference at Cairo to which they invited the King of Nejd.

In the Egyptian capital Lawrence and the leaders of the Arab Bureau were all-powerful. Only their views prevailed. "Hussein," they said, "is the ally of Great Britain. The war is not yet ended and there may still be need of him. It is important therefore to be careful of his susceptibilities. As for Ibn-Saud, he is only a presumptuous adventurer, favoured by luck. If he attacked Hussein there is no doubt that the latter would drive him back without difficulty into central Arabia, thanks to his army trained by British instructors and officered by Syrians. But it is better to prevent than to cure. Since the King of Nejd is so obstinately determined we will give him a lesson he will remember."

They invited Ibn-Saud to appear before them and made known to him in haughty tone that they would tolerate no indiscretion on his part. They told him to abandon Kurma to the King of the Hejaz, adding that if he did not conform "they would cease to subsidise him and would lend the Emir Hussein all the assistance in their power."

This time it was too much for Ibn-Saud's pride.

"Success," he replied, proudly wrapping his burnous around him, "comes from God alone. I do not deserve that you should outrage me in this way. For a long time now I have prevented my troops from attacking this dog of a Hussein, in order to remain faithful to the pact I concluded with you. I have acted thus not from cupidity but from respect of my word. If you suppress the subsidies you have paid me up to now, God be praised, for my honour will be safe. I shall at last be free to act as I think fit."

He returned to Riyadh, wounded to the quick by this affront and determined to ignore the British "veto."

[LXI]

FULLY ASSURED of British support, Hussein's eldest son, Abdullah, set off for Kurma from the west at the head of a regular army of 4,000 infantry and 10,000 Bedouin cavalry. At the same hour, Ibn-Saud was advancing from the east at the head of the Ikwan. His soldiers were exultant: their leader was keeping his promise at last. While the two opposing armies were approaching Kurma, Luwai, the Wahabi chief of the town, who had been the soul of the resistance during the past months, resolved to act on his own initiative.

Wahabi spies had told him that the Hashimite forces were bivouacked in an oasis near Turaba and that Abdullah, believing himself safe from surprise, had judged it unnecessary to post sentinels round the camp. The night was very dark. A big storm had broken out at the end of the day. The landscape was shrouded in a thick mist.

For some time past a number of Ikwan soldiers had gone individually to Kurma in order to lend a hand to the besieged population. They were about 400 in number. Luwai assembled them, made a night march and took Abdullah's camp by surprise. The enemy was asleep, the officers were undressed or in bed. Under cover of the mist the Ikwan volunteers slipped silently into the tents and stabbed their occupants. Abdullah had barely time to leap half naked on his horse and make his escape.

Trembling with cold and fear he galloped all the way to Mecca, ran up the palace stairs, woke his father and told him of the disaster. Of the 4,000 men of the regular force, only 100 had escaped alive. All the arms, ammunition, provisions and horses had been captured. Hussein's army had been wiped out (June 13, 1918).

This news plunged Mecca into consternation. At this season the city was filled with pilgrims. Reports of the imminent arrival of Ibn-Saud and the Wahabi cavalry spread panic amongst them. They swarmed out on to the Jedda road to board ship. Hussein, in a fit of hysterical rage, drove Abdullah from the palace, forbade him to come back into his presence and sent a distress signal to the British imploring them to come urgently to his assistance.

In the morning Ibn-Saud entered Turaba with the bulk of his army and went on foot over the field of battle. The landscape was dotted with bodies, scattered ammunition boxes, piles of provisions and abandoned weapons. The enemy forces had been destroyed not by an army but by a detachment of 400 volunteers. Clearly the Ikwan was a fine fighting instrument. No other force in Arabia could be compared

with it. The road to Mecca now lay wide open to Ibn-Saud. All the Hejaz, now disarmed, lay at his mercy.

The King of Nejd savoured his triumph. It needed now only a slight effort to seize the Holy Cities. After which his armies could go down to the sea, singing in triumph. . . .

At this moment a British ultimatum arrived. It gave him six hours to assemble his troops, turn and go back to the central desert, in default of which they would send an Australian division against him, with motorised formations and several squadrons of aircraft.

When he read this message Ibn-Saud started as if struck in the face. He saw that there was nothing for it but to obey. To clean up Hussein's remaining troops would have been easy. But he could not fight the British Empire.

With rage in his heart Ibn-Saud reassembled the Ikwan chiefs and ordered them to turn back. The pill was a bitter one to swallow. However, he now had his army so well in hand that all obeyed without protest. The Ikwan soldiers now understood why their chief had hesitated so long before starting the campaign. It was not, as they had thought, because he had an understanding with the British. Leaving a small garrison at Kurma to protect it against a counter-offensive by the enemy, Ibn-Saud and his troops turned their backs on Mecca and in silence resumed the road to the central desert.

At the eleventh hour the King of Nejd found himself frustrated of the conquest of the Holy Cities. But it was a *coup* postponed. "Patience," he said to himself. "The British will not be always there to protect Hussein. The day will come when I will find the means to leap at his throat."

And each of his soldiers turned the same thought silently over in his mind. . . .

[LXII]

After marking time for nearly a year before the Turkish lines, which since December 1917 had held the front running from the north of Jaffa to Amman, the Anglo-Arab forces of Lawrence and Allenby now began their final assault (September 19, 1918).

The British forces included British, Australian, New Zealand and Indian regiments. They were fresh, well fed and magnificently equipped. Confronting them were the 8th, 7th and 4th Turkish Armies, now reduced to near-skeletons and lacking nearly everything. At Nablus, shortly before, Mustapha Kemal had made superhuman efforts to fortify his positions and revive the low morale of his troops. But it had been all in vain.

Twenty-four hours after the launching of the offensive, the Turkish front had been broken along the seaboard; the 8th Army, commanded by Colonel Refet, had been encircled and the defeat was assuming the proportions of a general collapse. Driven back to the Jordan, bombed by British aircraft, ceaselessly harassed by Feisal's Bedouins, the Turkish regiments disintegrated one after the other and fell back in disorder towards the north. The road to Syria lay open to the British.

Having taken more than 50,000 prisoners, the British entered Damascus on September 30. Allenby and Lawrence were received there by "a wall of acclamation" and carried in triumph by a delirious crowd. All the Arab countries were in a fever of excitement: the hour of liberation had come.

While the last Turkish troops, reassembled by the "Grey Wolf," put their backs against the Taurus for a final stand, the Sultan's Government signed an armistice (at Moudros on October 30), which recognised his defeat and the victory of the Allies.

Twelve days later Germany laid down her arms. The first world war was over.

[LXIII]

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE had fallen to pieces. In its place had arisen a mosaic of little principalities, "independent," "autonomous" or "semi-autonomous" (according to the promises that had been made to them) which confronted the heads of Western States with a Chinese puzzle. The representatives of the victorious Powers, seated around the green-topped table of the Paris Conference, sought as best they might to stick this debris of a shattered world together. Armenia, Kurdistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordania, the Hejaz, Yemen, Central Arabia; Suez, Aden, Akaba, Mosul, Kuweit—there were as many problems as there were territories. Each frontier concealed secret ambitions, each province was the pretext for interminable bargaining; each township could be the cause of a fresh conflict. The Allies had inherited not only the remains of the Ottoman Empire: they had inherited its problems, also.

For the time being all the countries of the Near and Middle East were held together by the cement of British influence. Now at her peak of power, Britain maintained garrisons at Cairo, Constantinople, Bagdad, Aleppo, Damascus, Mosul, Jerusalem and Basra. Her zone of influence stretched from the Pyramids to the Bosporus and from the Balkans to India. At the start of hostilities the London cabinet had proclaimed a protectorate over Egypt (December 18, 1914). At the end of the conflict, Sir Percy Cox, former British consul at Kuweit,

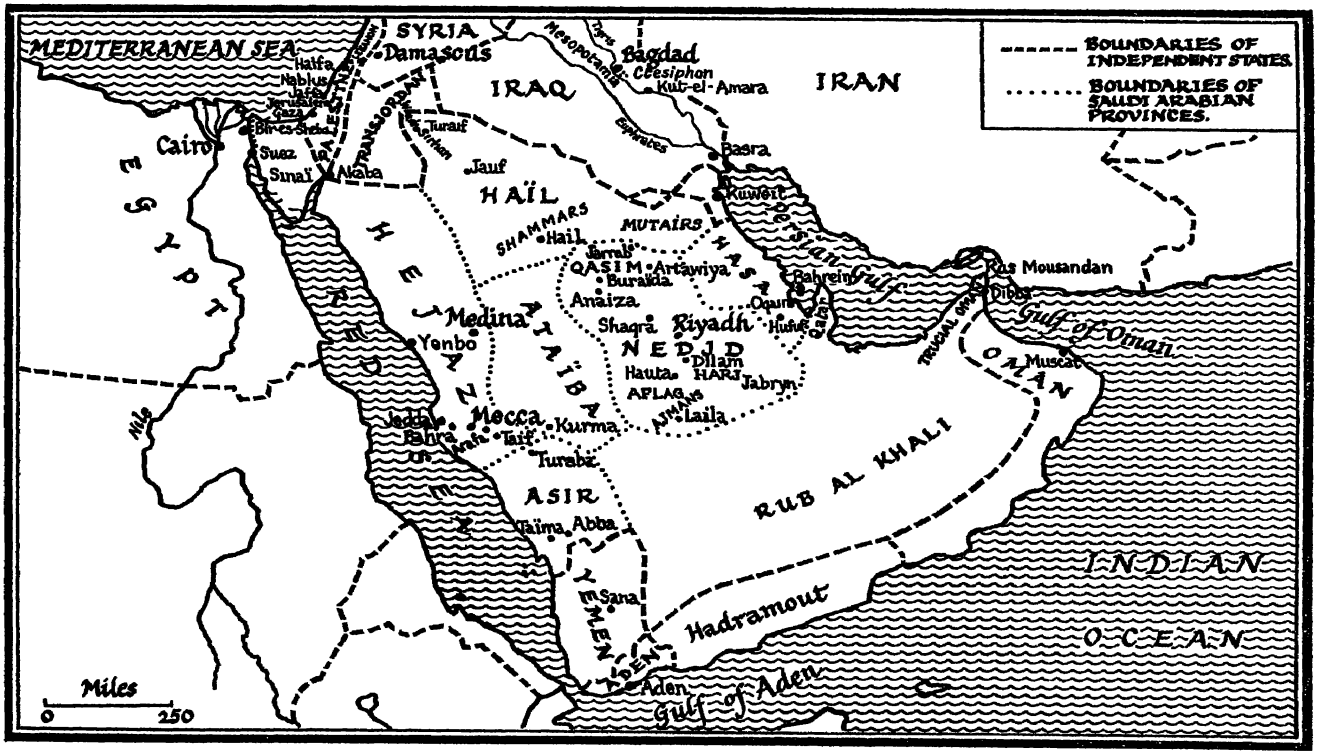
promoted in the interval to be High Commissioner at Bagdad, had taken advantage of Russia's eviction to declare null and void the Anglo-Russian accord of 1907 and to impose upon Teheran a protectorate treaty extending to the whole of Persia (August 9, 1919). Thus that "Middle Eastern Empire" of which Disraeli, Gladstone, Palmerston and Chamberlain had dreamed, and which was to have made a link between the eastern Mediterranean and India—between Cyprus and Bombay—now seemed to be taking shape.

But now that Britain could glimpse at last the realisation of the hopes she had caressed for more than a century, the London Government perceived that it could not hold the territories it occupied. To do so would have needed immense armies, cost fabulous sums and meant the introduction of conscription. But the British soldiers were tired of war, and were demanding to be demobilised. Crowds paraded in the Strand, wearing armlets on which were inscribed the whole nation's wish: "Bring the boys home." In Great Britain itself the taxpayers, crushed with burdens, demanded that the Government should cut its expenditure, reduce costs to a minimum and liquidate foreign commitments as soon as possible. The war was over. The British people were reluctant to continue the sacrifice of men and money in order to swell an empire which already covered a fifth of the globe.

Would the fruits of so many years of diplomatic and military effort have to be renounced? "No," replied Lawrence, who thought the moment had come for the triumph of his policy.

Since Britain herself could neither occupy nor govern the Middle Eastern territories, why not get native rulers to administer them for her? In this way Great Britain could continue to control these countries politically and economically through intermediaries. The vital thing was to choose these rulers with care. The Hashimites offered precisely what was wanted. Had they not been promised, since October 1915, all the territories lying between Egypt and the line Aleppo–Mosul–Bagdad–Basra? Abdullah could be made King of Transjordania and his brother Feisal King of Iraq and Syria. The confederation would be led by their father Hussein, King of the Hejaz. As this last was already Sherif of Mecca it would be easy to make him Caliph of Islam. No doubt that title was still held by the Sultan of Constantinople; but he was so weakened by his defeat that it would be easy to remove him. To be able to exercise direct influence over the Caliph's decisions—and Lawrence was convinced that Hussein would be at once "pliable and understanding"—meant no small advantage, for his spiritual power stretched from India to Malaya and over a population of more than 100,000,000 Moslems.

Lawrence was now at the height of his fame. He was the lion of the London salons. The lovely ladies of Mayfair never tired of hearing the



MAP IV ARABIA AFTER 1918

tale of his deeds. Bernard Shaw, who had been allowed to read the original manuscript of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, did not hesitate to say that a more splendid prose had never seen the light of day in England. Lowell Thomas declared that these brilliant adventures would furnish golden themes for future historians, just as the troubadours and the legends of Ulysses, King Arthur and Richard Cœur de Lion had done for the poets.[1]

Others compared him with Raleigh, Drake, Clive and Gordon, adding that his amazing knowledge of the Eastern peoples made him at least the peer of Marco Polo. Churchill himself, who had not yet lived down the setback of the Dardanelles, masked in dithyrambic praises the envy he felt for this young rival whose popularity bid fair to eclipse his own.

Exploiting the halo of myth which his battles, begun at the foot of Sinai and ended in the apotheosis of Damascus, had won for him, the "uncrowned King of Arabia" walked in Hyde Park in a burnous and red boots, the curved golden dagger of the princes of Mecca hung carelessly from his belt, an *iqal* with silken tassels on his head. The sentries on duty outside Buckingham Palace presented arms in astonishment to this blue-eyed Bedouin who wore the highest British decorations and talked with an Oxford accent. Lawrence pursued his canvassing in London, Paris and Versailles, repeating that the time had come to fulfil the solemn pledges made to Hussein and his family.

[LXIV]

BUT THERE was another side to the medal. Behind his haughty assurance Lawrence was in reality profoundly confused.

"The Arab Revolt had begun on false pretences," he writes. "To gain the Sherif's help our Cabinet had offered, through Sir Henry MacMahon, to support the establishment of native governments in parts of Syria and Mesopotamia, 'saving the interests of our ally, France.' The last modest clause concealed a treaty (kept secret, till too late, from MacMahon, and therefore from the Sherif) by which France, England and Russia agreed to annex some of these promised areas, and to establish their respective spheres of influence over all the rest.

"Rumours of the fraud reached Arab ears, from Turkey. In the East persons were more trusted than institutions. I had had no previous or inner knowledge of the MacMahon pledges and the Sykes-Picot treaty, which were both framed by war-time branches of the Foreign

[1] cf Lowell Thomas *With Lawrence in Arabia*

Office. But not being a perfect fool, I could see that if we won the war the promises to the Arabs were dead paper. Had I been an honourable adviser I would have sent my men home and not let them risk their lives for such stuff. Yet the Arab inspiration was our main tool in winning the Eastern war. So I assured them that England kept her word in letter and spirit. In this comfort they performed their fine things: but, of course, instead of being proud of what we did together, I was continually and bitterly ashamed. . . .

"In revenge I vowed to make the Arab Revolt the engine of its own success, as well as handmaid to our Egyptian campaign: and vowed to lead it so madly in the final victory that expediency should counsel to the Powers a fair settlement of the Arabs' moral claims. This presumed my surviving the war, to win the later battle of the Council Chamber —immodest presumptions, which still balance in fulfilment. Yet the issue of the fraud was beside the point.

"Clearly I had no shadow of leave to engage the Arabs, unknowing, in a gamble of life and death. Inevitably and justly we should reap bitterness, a sorry fruit of heroic endeavour. So in resentment at my false place (did ever second lieutenant so lie abroad for his betters?) I undertook this long, dangerous ride. . . ."[1]

If Lawrence defended the interests of Hussein and his sons so passionately it was because he was himself, as he says, about to fight his "last battle." On the decisions which would be taken in the council chamber would depend ultimately the significance of his acts. According as the promises made to the Hashimites were kept or not he would know whether he had been a hero or a mere adventurer, a prophet or an impostor. Not that that mattered to him in the eyes of posterity. He knew the changing hearts of men too well not to despise public opinion. But it was important to him before his conscience and the judgment of his former companions in arms.

During this time St. John Philby, who had watched the collapse of the Turkish Empire from Riyadh, went to see him and assured him that he was making a big mistake in basing all his Arab policy upon Hussein and his family and in refusing to take into consideration the central Arabia of Ibn-Saud. Nejd was at once the mainspring and the controlling hand of Arab life. Unless this was taken into account the edifice he was seeking to construct risked finding itself in the air. The Hashimites would never have the stature to carry the weight of an Arab Confederation upon their feeble shoulders. Apart from Feisal they were intriguers, cultivated, certainly, but without strength of character, who sought only to enrich themselves at the expense of their subjects and who were neither loved nor respected by the peoples of the peninsula. As soon as Britain was no longer there to sustain them they would

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, pp. 282–284.

collapse of themselves like clay figures. The strong man was not Hussein: it was Ibn-Saud, the Desert Leopard, the Cromwell of Arabia. . . .

The interview was a stormy one. Lawrence had great qualities, but he did not like contradiction. Moreover, he was not in a state of mind to listen calmly to advice of this nature. Engaged in a tragic struggle, he clung to his position the more obstinately because he felt it to be threatened. Worst of all he knew that Philby was right about Hussein. Had he not himself written that he was "an obstinate, narrow-minded suspicious character, little likely to sacrifice to anyone" his "precious vanity,"[1] an avaricious and cunning old man "whose lust for power had grown uncontrollable."[2] Had he not been shocked to see "how easily mischief-makers could corrode the king."[3]

Had he not been unpleasantly surprised to note that the Hashimites "were curiously isolated in their world"; that the three brothers—Ali, Abdullah and Feisal—were "natives of no country, lovers of no private plot of ground. They had no real confidants or ministers; no one of them seemed open to another, or to the father, of whom they stood in awe."[4]

Had he not found for himself that Riyadh was "the true centre of Arabia, the preserve of its native spirit and its most conscious individuality"?[5]

But he was too deeply involved to withdraw. His honour was at stake. He had preached Hussein and his underlings too much not to be obliged to support them to the end.

Taking a high line, he told Philby that he knew nothing of the problems of the Middle East and that in this field he, Lawrence, would take lessons from no one. Ibn-Saud the Cromwell of Arabia? Preposterous. He was nothing but a small intriguer, without credit or future, who irritated everyone with his exaggerated puritanism and ridiculous pretensions. The Wahabis? Fanatical iconoclasts, peasants without culture or education who would destroy the noblest monuments of Arab art and put the peninsula to fire and sword, if they were allowed to. The battle of Turaba? Simply a lucky stroke which proved absolutely nothing. No, no. His opinion was formed and he would not change it: the Saudis were unscrupulous adventurers. There was not, and never would be as long as he lived, any place for them in the Arab Confederation.

Philby tried to correct some of these judgments and to bring his interlocutor to a more moderate view, but Lawrence made him understand that he was wasting his time and that the interview had already lasted too long.

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 332. [2] Ibid., p. 595.
[3] Ibid., p. 333. [4] Ibid., p. 101. [5] Ibid., p. 32.

Philby withdrew, unpleasantly impressed by Lawrence's impatience and the weakness of his arguments. The future indeed was not long in demonstrating that in calling Ibn-Saud an "unscrupulous adventurer" the author of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* had made the same mistake as Lord Balfour when he treated Mustapha Kemal as a "brigand chief"—an error which was to cost England dear.

[LXV]

IBN-SAUD learned from Philby the negative outcome of this interview. But was Lawrence's point of view that of the British Government? In order to have his conscience clear the King of Nejd went to visit Sir Percy Cox, with whom he had negotiated the convention of Oqair, and asked him what Britain planned for him.

The British High Commissioner in Mesopotamia did not share the opinions of Lawrence. He appreciated Ibn-Saud at his true value and gave him credit for the efforts he had made to remain faithful to their agreement, despite Hussein's provocations. But he could not go counter to his Government's instructions. And these were definite: Ibn-Saud was not to be admitted to the Arab Confederation. "An adventurer could not sit at table with princes." Despite Philby's warnings, Lawrence's policy carried the day.[1]

The Wahabi chief found himself unrewarded with any part of the remains of the Ottoman Empire. He had to be content to retain what he already possessed—Nejd, Hasa and Hail.

Ibn-Saud returned to Riyadh, deeply wounded. He looked at the map: everywhere where there had formerly been Turkish governors Britain was now engaged in setting up vassal States, whose chiefs were hostile to him. At Kuweit, Mubarrak had died. But before dying he had advised his son Selim to beware of the Saudis. Iraq, with Bagdad and Basra, was to go to Feisal, who hated Ibn-Saud. Farther afield, Transjordania was to be given to Abdullah, the Wahabis' mortal enemy. The Hejaz belonged to Hussein. Asir, Yemen, Aden, the Hadramout, Oman, all the coasts of Arabia except Hasa were in the hands of Britain or its satellites. To the east, north, west and south, Ibn-Saud was encircled. He realised bitterly that if the Turkish Empire was dead, Great Britain, as its successor, was following the same policy. . . .

How was he to break this encirclement, before all London's satellites had time to consolidate?

[1] In March 1921 Lawrence had become counsellor for Arab affairs at the Colonial Office under Churchill. (See Leon Boussard: *Le secret du colonel Lawrence*, Paris, 1946, p. 115).

[LXVI]

To the north-west of Hail is a kind of "no man's land" where the Shammar tribes feed their flocks. This area, a corner of which projects into Transjordania, was the vulnerable sector of the wall which the British were setting up around central Arabia. Ibn-Saud sent a contingent of the Ikwan, which occupied this district without meeting resistance. Then he awaited the British reaction.

Unfortunately several Ikwan formations, carried away by their enthusiasm, crossed the limit which the King had laid down for them. Singing their war songs, the Wahabis penetrated into Jauf, thirty miles inside the Transjordan frontier. The governor of Jauf was a Wahabi. He at once rallied to the new arrivals and opened the town gates to the Ikwan advance guard.

The British saw the danger at once. Jauf was an important commercial centre through which passed the caravans from Bagdad to Egypt. Whoever held this oasis could threaten Syria and Palestine simultaneously. All inland Arabia was in danger of catching fire and invading the Mediterranean basin.

"Ibn-Saud is upsetting the whole balance of the Middle East," the Foreign Office experts declared with a serious air. "If he goes on like this he will destroy our plans for an Arab Confederation. He must be brought to reason urgently."

The British authorities again summoned the King of Nejd to Cairo to ask him for an explanation.

Ibn-Saud's advisers, excited by the Ikwan's swift advance, implored him not to accept this invitation, but to exploit his advantage by pushing on to Bagdad and the Mediterranean. "No power in the world can halt us," said they. "The British are finished. See how the Kemalists are making them dance to their tune."

But Ibn-Saud was wary. These same men had told him long ago that Turkey was finished and yet the Turkish armies had contained the combined British, French and Russian forces for four years. He had not forgotten the humiliation of Turaba. He knew that Britain was far from being "finished" and that it would be dangerous to risk her reprisals. He agreed therefore to go to Cairo and talk with the British. His plan was to barter evacuation of Jauf against admission to the Arab Confederation.

Perhaps he would have been successful if an unfortunate incident had not upset his calculations. Imbued with the spirit of emulation by the taking of Jauf, a second Ikwan detachment, 1,500 strong, had marched

through 400 miles of desert in the middle of August and, crossing the Transjordan frontier in their turn, had sacked the village of Turaif. Nearly all the population had been massacred, including women and children.

Turaif was fifty leagues from Amman, the new capital of Transjordania. King Abdullah had established his residence there and the British maintained a small garrison.

The British could not tolerate such an affront. The violation of the frontier, the atrocities committed by the Wahabis; all this was inadmissible. From Amman they dispatched a column of motorised machine guns and from Jerusalem three squadrons of aircraft. The Ikwan soldiers learned for the first time what an aerial bombardment was like. Those who were not blown to pieces by bombs were riddled with bullets from automatic guns. Of the 1,500 men of the detachment only eight escaped. The bodies of the remainder were left to the vultures.

When Ibn-Saud learned this he broke off the talks and went back in haste to Shaqra, whence the ill-starred expedition had set out. The eight survivors of Turaif had just arrived, at the end of their strength and still terrified by the sound of bombs. Ibn-Saud condemned all eight to death and had them executed on the spot to teach the other Ikwan units what it meant to disobey him.

The British summoned him back to the conference. Ibn-Saud, resigned to the inevitable, retook the road to Cairo. He hoped that the punishment he had just inflicted on the guilty would impress his interlocutors and show them that he intended to have his authority respected. But this time it was the British who misunderstood the situation. The swift destruction of a formation of the Ikwan by their machine guns and aeroplanes had given them the impression that the Nejd King was a negligible quantity and that his military strength had been greatly overestimated. They treated him without ceremony and loaded him with sarcasms throughout an entire afternoon. At the end Ibn-Saud rebelled under the insults.

"Yes," cried the Wahabi leader, "it is true that I have been a friend of the British. But I promised to go with them only as far as my honour, my religion and my pride would permit. Now my honour, religion and my pride are exhausted. One day you will regret having treated me in this way."

Then, draping his great white *gandurah* around him, he left the conference room without another word.

His plan having misfired, Ibn-Saud evacuated the north-west territories and returned to Riyadh, resolved, once more, to wait.

[LXVII]

1920, 1921, 1922 passed without any change in the situation in Nejd. But during this time the face of the Middle East altered profoundly. Travellers who visited this part of the world two and a half years after the end of the war could not help being struck by the diminution of British power. "After the high tide of 1919," writes Wickham Steed, "there came the ebb, but an ebb of such proportions that it had the appearance of a retreat in the eyes of the local populations." Forced to a policy of strict economy, the London Government had had to demobilise a great part of its troops. Australians, New Zealanders and Indians had returned home. Garrisons were withdrawn from Basra, Bagdad, Amman and Jerusalem. Apart from a few troops maintained at Constantinople, British domination rested now only on air and sea power: twenty squadrons of aircraft at various points in Mesopotamia and on the shores of the Bosporus, and a squadron stationed at Smyrna and in the Straits.

The progressive withdrawal of the occupation troops had naturally influenced the political climate. In Persia the local parliament had repudiated the British protectorate and replaced it by a treaty with Russia which left the British only a part of the oil exploitation (October 6, 1921). In Trans-Caucasia and Armenia the last Anglo-Saxon contingents had withdrawn under pressure from a double offensive by Kemal Pasha and the Soviets. In Egypt the Government had also thrown off the protectorate and King Fuad had proclaimed his independence (March 15, 1922). In Iraq, Sir Percy Cox had been molested by the crowd in the streets of Bagdad (July 1922). Everywhere the British Empire was in difficulties.

These events were but little favourable to the formation of the Arab Confederation. Despite Lawrence's efforts it refused to take shape. The peoples turned away from the sovereigns who owed their thrones to the favour of London and whose personal conduct had not increased their popularity.

In growing older the King of the Hejaz had become more megalomaniac than ever. His irritable temperament had worsened. He would no longer tolerate the slightest remark and at the least provocation would fall into fits of fury which made life impossible for his collaborators. Now too he was no longer surrounded by obsequious functionaries who flattered him in order the better to rob him. At the court of Mecca incompetence and cupidity were now plain to see. "Gold, ever more gold" seemed to be the motto of the Sherifian

Government, which had recourse to the most dubious shifts to obtain it. Fines and taxes burdened the population. Taxes grew yearly heavier. Always short of money, Hussein tried to put pressure on the Bedouins by exacting a tax on their flocks. Then he had the unfortunate idea of obtaining an extra profit from the Holy Cities by inflicting a "residence tax" upon pilgrims and exorbitant charges for lodging and water. Most of the pilgrims were poor. Some died of thirst in the course of their pilgrimage. This news, spread right into the desert, aroused angry disapproval.

While Hussein's star was waning in the Hejaz, that of his most ardent champion, Colonel Lawrence, was declining in Britain. Arrogant, stand-offish and of an almost clinical touchiness, the "uncrowned King of Arabia" had ended by putting everyone against him by his constant interventions. Clemenceau, Wilson, Lloyd-George and Orlando would no longer see him. On his own authority he brought Feisal to Paris, where the latter caused a scandal at the Supreme Council by abruptly demanding the restitution of Syria occupied by the French and affirming that Sir Henry MacMahon had solemnly promised it to him. This undiplomatic fashion of revealing the duplicities of chancelleries embarrassed everyone. The "Big Four" told him that his request could not be entertained.

On learning this news Hussein began an outcry in his turn, declaring that he was being despoiled and that Britain had kept none of her promises. He demanded to be recognised immediately as "King of all the Arab countries" and wrote an impertinent letter to Lloyd-George in which he insisted that the French be driven at once out of Syria and the Jews out of Palestine. The mere word "mandate" made him foam with rage. "The airy birds of promise so freely sent to the Arabs in England's day of need were homing now, to her confusion," writes Lawrence.[1]

Receiving no response, Hussein went to Amman, to his son Abdullah, where the British maintained a military mission. He drove the British officers from the palace with blows of his stick, tartly reproached his son for tolerating their presence, threatened to disinherit him if he persisted in this error and declared that the English would not be long in turning the Hejaz into a British mandate.

"I would rather this swine Ibn-Saud ruled the whole of Arabia," he cried, "than see it under the filthy yoke of the English."

The Foreign Office sent Lawrence to try to calm him down. At the sight of him the Hashimite chief lost all control of himself.

"Get out!" he cried. "You are nothing but a scoundrel and an *agent provocateur*. It is you who have dragged me into this stupid

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 670.

adventure with your vile promises. You have lied to me ever since the first day I saw you."

The old man, mad with rage, had to be held back to keep him from throwing Lawrence down the stairs. The King of the Hejaz had completely lost his head.

Prowling in his palace at Riyadh like a leopard on the watch Ibn-Saud observed these events with a smile of satisfaction. Hussein's folly served his designs admirably. The way things were going it would not be long before he could pluck the fruits of his patience. . . .

In March 1924 the National Assembly at Ankara decreed the abolition of the Caliphate and expelled Abdul-Mejid from Constantinople. Without consulting anyone, Hussein proclaimed himself Caliph of all the Moslems and successor of the Prophet. At this news a growl of anger rose all over Arabia. This time it was too much; Hussein had passed all bounds. Piling mistake upon mistake he had managed to break with the British and make himself accursed by the Arabs.

[LXVIII]

WITHOUT LOSING a moment the King of Nejd summoned the "ulemas" and religious leaders to the mosque of Riyadh and told them:

"It is time to put an end to the follies of him who calls himself the Sherif of Mecca. Never in the history of Islam has a man so corrupt dared to clothe himself with the dignity of Caliph. It is a sacrilege which no Believer can endure without dishonour. I am resolved to cleanse the Holy Cities of this man who has turned them into places of pestilence. I shall carry out the mission for which God has chosen me. Let us thank Allah for granting us this opportunity."

Then he mobilised regulars and reserves of the Ikwan and divided his forces into three army groups. The first he sent to the Iraq frontier and the second to Transjordania to prevent Feisal and Abdullah from coming to their father's assistance. Having thus isolated Hussein he sent a third corps—by far the largest—towards Hejaz with orders to march straight to Mecca, breaking all resistance it might find on the way.

Since the defeat of Turaba Hussein had not troubled to reorganise his army. Soldiers cost money and he relied on the British to protect him in case of danger. "They will have to come to my help if I am attacked," he told himself. "It is better to leave it to them; that is so much saved."

As a result he did not take Ibn-Saud's mobilisation seriously. But when he saw that the Ikwan was on the move and that the British seemed to be doing nothing to stop them, he began to be afraid.

Rapidly assembling the meagre formations remaining to him, he placed them under the command of his youngest son, Ali, a man of indisputable courage, who, however, had no experience of command.

Ali took position at Taif across the road from Nejd to Hejaz. The Ikwan brushed him aside like a handful of dead leaves and continued its advance on Mecca without even slowing down. The exaltation of the Wahabi warriors rose in proportion as they drew nearer to the sacred territories.

The news of the defeat of Taif produced a general panic in Mecca. As after the disaster of Turaba, the pilgrims, traders and inhabitants of the town fled in all directions in search of safety, crying that the Wahabis were coming and that they would massacre the people. Some piled their belongings into carts and fled to the coast to find refuge there. Meanwhile the Wahabis, all banners flying, arrived within a few miles of the town.

Ali hurried breathlessly to the royal palace to bring his father news of the disaster. Hussein drove him out with blows of his stick and sent messengers in haste to all the neighbouring tribes, imploring them to come to the aid of their King. None responded. At this moment the Hejaz King received a telephone call. It was Tawil, head of the Jedda customs office—one of the few men he trusted—urging him to abdicate in favour of his son Ali. This, he said, was the only way of avoiding the worst and obtaining the intervention of Britain *in extremis*. The Queen added her pleas to those of Tawil. Haggard, his features distorted, Hussein ran up and down the great hall of the palace, not knowing what to do.

Report of Hussein's indecision spread in the town, where rioting had broken out. A hostile crowd gathered before the royal residence. Cries could be heard: "Defend us! Or go!"

Some demonstrators tried to get into the palace to pillage the cellars in which Hussein kept his treasures. Growing more unruly, the crowd started to break down the gates. Hussein at last perceived that he had no choice left and would have to yield. He abdicated in favour of Ali and gave his servants orders to pack his bags.

In the whole of the Hejaz there were not more than a dozen motor cars. All of them belonged to the King. He had them all assembled in the palace courtyard and piled into them his carpets, bedding, gold and silver trinkets and his boxes filled with gold sterling. Then, accompanied by his family and escorted by a handful of guards, he went off at full speed towards Jedda.[1]

The luxurious yacht given him by the British was anchored in the port. Hussein had his belongings taken on board, after checking them meticulously one by one. Then he embarked in his turn and without

[1] Year 1343 of the Hegira, month of Rajab (1925)

another word set sail for Suez, then for Cyprus, where a few years afterwards he was sentenced for non-payment of debts.

He was no more than a decrepit old man who spent his days and nights in counting and re-counting his gold.[1]

[LXIX]

WHILE THESE regrettable scenes were taking place, oddly recalling the flight of Mehemet VI, the Ikwan advance guard was waiting, arms in readiness, at the gates of Mecca. Ibn-Saud was still unsure of the British attitude. Now that Hussein had gone it was still possible that they might intervene in favour of his son.

Profiting by this unexpected respite in the development of events, Ali had returned to the Holy City to organise resistance. As Ibn-Saud had foreseen, his first move was to ask for help from the British.

"Send me aeroplanes, money and, above all, arms," he cabled to London through the British consul in Jedda.

But the British had lost all patience with the incessant demands of Hussein and the Hashimites. They replied that "the quarrel between Hussein and Ibn-Saud was of a religious nature, that its object appeared to be the settlement of certain disputes created by the succession of the Caliphate and that it was contrary to British practice to intervene in such matters." No one could misunderstand the significance of this answer.

Feeling himself lost, Ali then turned to Ibn-Saud and asked him his terms. The King of Nejd at once realised that the British had abandoned Ali. He answered stiffly that he would disarm his men only when the last Hashimite had left the Hejaz. Then he ordered the Ikwan to enter the town.

Ali left Mecca in haste and barricaded himself in Jedda. At the same time 10,000 Ikwan warriors, commanded by Luwai, the victor of Turaba, for whom Ibn-Saud had preserved this supreme vengeance, passed through the rampart gates and defiled in close ranks through the city.

Mecca, normally so full of animation, seemed dead. The streets were deserted, the shops closed, the shutters drawn, their doors tightly shut. The wind blew a pungent dust over the silent squares; the people in fear had taken refuge in the cellars, convinced that their last hour had come.

Luwai's soldiers went through all the streets of the city and met the same petrified atmosphere everywhere. He posted heralds at the main cross-roads. These announced to the sound of trumpets that the city

[1] He returned in 1931 to die in Transjordania and his son Abdullah had him buried at Jerusalem

was henceforth under the double protection of Allah and of Ibn-Saud and that the King of Nejd guaranteed the safety of everyone in it. But the population still did not dare to come out of shelter, so legendary was the ferocity of the Ikwan.

For a whole week the Ikwan soldiers tore down the decorations in the mosques, smashed the sacrilegious ornaments, broke up the tombs of the saints, cleared the sanctuary courtyards of a pile of filth which had accumulated, and restored the buildings to their original austerity. Luwai permitted no persecution or looting. No one was molested.

Amazed by the discipline of the Saudi army, the inhabitants finally took courage and came out one by one from their cellars. A fortnight after Hussein's departure the city had reassumed its normal appearance.

[LXX]

IBN-SAUD, who had remained at Taif, now returned to Riyadh and sent messengers to the ends of the desert to announce his victory. He made it known to the tribes that he had driven out Hussein, the usurper; that he was now master of the Holy Cities, but that he would retain these only as the representative of all Believers.

"Now that the reign of injustice and corruption is ended," said the royal decree, "our dearest wish is that access to the sacred territory of Islam should be open to all Moslems without distinction and that they should themselves take the administration of the Holy Places in their hands. We shall shortly go to Mecca and we invite all our brothers in the world to send us delegates so that we may consider together the measures which should be taken."

Then, assembling around him his ministers and governors and civil and religious advisers, he mounted his great battle camel and left Riyadh on the Mecca road.

With music in the van and escorted by a whole regiment of the Ikwan, he slowly crossed the Nejd plateau until he reached the first limits of the Hejaz. This triumphal journey lasted fourteen days. All along the route the villagers and Bedouins of nearby tribes massed on both sides to acclaim the cortège and pay homage to the King.

On the fifteenth day the conqueror of Taif crossed the last ring of mountains surrounding the Holy City. At the entrance to a wide valley, at the foot of which the whole city could be seen bathed in a golden light, he dismounted and pitched his tent. From that point onward he wished to be not a conqueror, but a simple pilgrim. He laid aside all his insignia of royalty, his sabre, the golden tassels which hung at his temples and his royal robes. He put on the traditional costume of

the pilgrim formed of two pieces of white linen without seam. He draped one around his loins, threw the other over his shoulder, and put on sandals of leather. Then he mounted a horse. Bareheaded and unarmed, he crossed the hill of Abtah and set out upon the wide, sandy Muadbda road, which leads to the sanctuary. On the way he continually repeated the prayer of the "Telbiye":

"I am here, O God, at thy command.
To thee belong praise and grace and power;
Thou art one and alone. I am here in thy hands. . . ."

Since his childhood he had repeated these words and they were associated with all the solemn acts of his life. But chiefly they recalled to him his first stay in the desert of Rub-al-Khali, when, driven from his home and without weapons, friends or supporters, he had nearly given way to despair. They recalled to him the night of distress and exaltation when, having invoked the Most High, he had seen appear in the flaming sunset Abdul-Wahab and Saud the Great, Omar and Mohammed, flanked by their legions flourishing their swords of light. . . . Lastly, they recalled to him the oath he had sworn to himself to unite Arabia, to restore the Faith and to put each of his steps in those of the Prophet. . . .

Luwai came out to meet him at the cemetery of Maala, just outside the ramparts. There Ibn-Saud dismounted, took off his sandals and entered the city barefoot, followed by a little escort of Ikwan soldiers.

When he reached the threshold of the Great Mosque the gates of the sanctuary were opened wide before him. He penetrated alone into the courtyard. The house of God stood, massive and square, before him. He felt that he had reached the culminating point of his life.

In a strong voice he intoned the ritual invocation:

"O God,
Here is thy holy place.
He who enters thy temple finds safety there.
The temple is thy house, thy dwelling place, thy sanctuary;
It is the abode of safety
O God,
Save me from the fires of eternity.
Preserve my flesh and blood from the fire.
Spare me thy wrath
At the day of resurrection of them who are thy servants."

He approached the Kaaba and kissed the black stone embedded there. Then, very humbly, like the least of the Believers, he knelt, sprinkled a handful of dust upon his forehead and remained in meditation until nightfall.

[LXXI]

THE NEXT day Ibn-Saud received the delegations he had invited to join him at Mecca. In the great hall of the palace, where the throne of Hussein still stood, were assembled the representatives of all the Moslem countries: delegates from Iraq, Persia and Egypt; the chief of the Senoussis of Tripolitania; envoys from Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Azerbajdan and Malaya. There were also representatives from India.

All these delegations had not come to Mecca without some lively apprehensions. They wondered how they were going to be received and expected to find the Holy Places sacked from top to bottom by the iconoclastic fury of the Wahabis.

In consequence they were agreeably surprised to find the city peaceful and the sanctuaries cleared of the piles of dirt which had disfigured them in Hussein's time. Moreover, the thoughtful welcome prepared for them by the conqueror completed their reassurance.

However, arguments over precedence were not long in arising among the delegations. To whom was the administration of the Holy Places to be entrusted? The Indians declared that they had the right to this honour because they alone represented more Moslems than all the other delegates put together. The Egyptians protested and countered with arguments based on tradition and antiquity. They it was who had had control of the pilgrimages after the dislocation of the empire of Saud the Great. Perceiving that the discussion would become endless and that it was impossible to reach agreement, Ibn-Saud rose and said in a firm voice:

"Gentlemen, be sure of one thing: I will not tolerate any foreign authority over my territories. With God's help I shall know how to maintain their independence. In my opinion none of the Moslems represented here can be in a position to guarantee the liberty of the Hejaz, for none among them is free. The Indians are under British domination, as are the Moslems of Iraq, Transjordania and Egypt. The Syrians and Lebanese are dependent on France; those from Tripolitania upon the Italians. To confer the administration of the Holy Cities upon any of these peoples would be to hand it over, indirectly, to the Christian Power to which they are subject.

"I have conquered the Holy Cities by the will of Allah, thanks to the strength of my arm and the loyalty of my people. I alone here am free. I alone, then, am in position to maintain the Holy Territory as an independent State of Islam. It is my absolute right and my duty to act here as King.

"Not that I propose to exercise a personal domination over the Hejaz. That is far from my thought. The Hejaz is a sacred spot which has been entrusted to me by God. I shall preserve it in my hands until the people of this country are able to elect a governor themselves—but a free governor who can be the exclusive servant of Islam."

[LXXII]

"A FREE governor who can be the exclusive servant of Islam"—it is clear that in using this formula Ibn-Saud intended to describe himself. But it would be a mistake to see in this no more than a political move; these words were the expression of a sincere conviction. In the same way that it is impossible to understand the reactions of Mustapha Kemal if it is forgotten that his thought was formed by the reading of Voltaire, Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists, so Ibn-Saud's psychology cannot be grasped if the mystic and religious side of his nature is ignored.

Brought up by his father in strict observance of the precepts of the Koran, it would never have entered his head to rebel against them. A spirit of religious revolt was wholly unknown to him. Such an attitude would have been inconceivable at the heart of a religion whose very name means "submission." Certainly he reacted often against the pretensions and abuses of a backward priesthood and its too rigid interpretations of the Law; but he never contested its intrinsic truth. For him Islam was not—as for the Ghazi—a foreign importation which was slowly suffocating his people. It was the essence itself of the Arab genius, a necessary discipline without which the Bedouins would founder irremediably into corruption and anarchy.

Nor did Ibn-Saud see in religion nothing but a collection of precepts imbued with purely pragmatical values. Ibn-Saud was not simply a devout person, solely attached to the outward forms of worship. He was a mystic. The great impulse of his life had not been given to him by books or by the spectacle of social injustice. Sprung from the solitude, it flowed from the vision which he had had in the desert. From that day on he had felt himself invested with a divine mission and this certainty gave him an unshakeable confidence in himself. A revelation or a mirage—whatever name be given to it—this vision was for him a reflection of truth. His whole life can be seen and explained only in this sense.

"God was for him a living personality ever behind his shoulder," writes Armstrong, "when he was in public audience before his people or alone in the privacy of his own rooms, when he was in the heave and

uproar of battle, or when he was sitting in conference—in the palace, in the open desert, in his tent on the march, beside him, always guiding him, directing him in all his judgments and actions.

"Before he considered any problem or difficulty he always first prayed in silence. As he came to the moment for decision, instinctively and automatically he hesitated for a space, made his mind void and empty, waiting for Divine Guidance."[1]

To believe that such a state of mind could be incompatible with the sharp realism of which he showed proof in policy would be a gross error. In all religions there have been mystics and saints who have also been great statesmen and great administrators. Ibn-Saud was not a saint, far from it, and the "ulemas" reminded him of it too often for him to be able to forget it. But neither was he a cynic, for whom religion is nothing but a convenient mask for hypocrisy. He once told Sir Percy Cox: "I am first a Moslem, secondly an Arab, but always a servant of God." An authentic representative of a race which has never drawn a distinction between the spiritual and the temporal, with him political and religious action were interpenetrated in so close a fashion that he himself would have had difficulty in distinguishing them.

Why indeed should he have done so, since each served the other as an auxiliary? The growth of his territories and the propagation of the Wahabi doctrine were, properly speaking, one and the same thing. His political ambitions and his religious proselytism both converged towards the same goal. It was there, as he had shown in his duel with Hussein, that his great strength lay.

The King had gained advantage, since by conquering the Hejaz he had given his kingdom an outlet on the Red Sea, made one more step towards the unification of Arabia and broken the circle of his enemies of which the Hashimite chief was the most notable representative.

But the Believer had gained also, since Hussein had shown himself to be unworthy of assuring protection of the Holy Cities and had outraged all the commandments of the Koran. Had he not taxed prayers and persecuted the pilgrims? Had he not allowed the mosques to be decorated with profane ornaments and transformed Mecca into a place of prostitution? In his unclean hands the religion of Islam could only wither. The mission of Ibn-Saud was to regenerate it.

"I wish to make the Holy Places into intense centres of Moslem life and culture," he was to tell the members of the Pan-Islamic Congress in 1926. "It is my wish that they should become territories in which every Believer may have a legitimate pride and whose influence will bear witness throughout the world to the imperishable youth and vitality of Islam."

[1] H. C. Armstrong: op. cit., p. 213.

[LXXIII]

THE COLLAPSE and flight of Hussein had surprised the British. His resistance had lasted only twenty-four hours. Despite all his faults, they had believed that the King of the Hejaz would have defended himself more energetically.

The Foreign Office considered that nothing was to be gained by going back upon a *fait accompli* and that contact should immediately be made with Ibn-Saud before he became as arrogant as his predecessor. They sent him a diplomatic mission, headed by General Sir Gilbert Clayton, Lawrence's former chief at the Arab Bureau in Cairo.

Ibn-Saud went out to meet Clayton in the little town of Bahra, half-way between Jedda and Mecca. His last contacts with the British had left him with a bitter impression and it was not without apprehensions that he engaged in these talks. What new demands was he to meet with this time?

At the moment when Sir Gilbert Clayton was setting off for Bahra the British had occupied Akaba, a port in the extreme north of the Hejaz at the extremity of a small arm of the sea east of the Sinai Peninsula. Akaba, with Kuweit and Aden, was one of the most important strategic points of the peninsula. The British were resolved not to let it go.

But Ibn-Saud had made a pledge also—a pledge which the British found very inconvenient. While all eyes were centred on Mecca, he had sent orders to the second army corps of the Ikwan, stationed on the frontier of Transjordania, to push forward along the Wadi Sirhan. This manœuvre had passed unnoticed, for the attention of the chancelleries had been entirely taken up by events in the Hejaz. It put the King of Nejd in possession of a corridor which stuck like a wedge between Transjordania and Iraq and penetrated as far as the neighbourhood of the Syrian frontier.

This operation was the outcome of a subtle calculation: "Since the British have decided not to support Hussein," thought Ibn-Saud, "perhaps they will also abandon Feisal and Abdullah? In that case the Ikwan will be able to beat them one after the other and finish with the Hashimites for ever. If not, then the evacuation of this corridor can be bargained for against substantial advantages in the Hejaz or elsewhere."

One of the constant preoccupations of the Foreign Office was to prevent the forces of central Arabia from penetrating into the coastal territories. They knew only too well the repercussions a movement of this kind could bring about because of their effects on Persia and

Egypt. Consequently they became very nervous each time Ibn-Saud's troops approached the Mediterranean seaboard. This time the thrust was particularly worrying because the strip of land occupied by the Ikwan separated Transjordania from Iraq, cut the land routes linking Cairo with Bagdad and could prevent the building of the pipeline which was to bring petrol from Mosul to Haifa, where the Admiralty was engaged in establishing a strong naval base. If Ibn-Saud remained there, all British policy in these regions would have to be revised. The occupation of this territory by the Ikwan raised problems in Downing Street and Whitehall compared with which those raised by the conquest of the Hejaz were but secondary.

Ibn-Saud believed that Clayton was coming to Bahra to demand the evacuation of the Hejaz. In reality the British negotiator was mainly concerned to obtain the evacuation of the Wadi Sirhan. To the King's great surprise all the conversation turned upon Akaba and the corridor, without the question of Mecca being raised at all. Convinced that Clayton was playing a double game, Ibn-Saud strove to hide his own. The discussion, which was very close, went on for six days —days during which each tried to guess the secret intentions of the other.

Ibn-Saud was the commander-in-chief of an army in the field, for the conquest of the Hejaz was not terminated. Jedda and Medina were still resisting and the King had not wished to interrupt the operations during the conference and so give the towns time to reinforce their defences. He had established his headquarters at Bahra and continued to direct military operations while carrying on diplomatic negotiations with the British.

Intense animation reigned in the little town, where large contingents of the Saudi army were concentrated. From all sides came Hejaz mountain tribes or lone volunteers asking to be enlisted in the Ikwan. New units had to be constituted, and armed with war material taken from the enemy, captured villages had to be fed, order assured in Mecca, and the sieges of Jedda and Medina actively pushed forward. At each instant Ibn-Saud was obliged to suspend the sittings to receive a tribal chief, take tactical decisions, settle questions of precedence and give instructions to his staff.

But these interruptions, says Armstrong, did not worry him in the least. After each one he came back to sit at the conference table and resume the discussion with an impenetrable calm exactly at the point at which he had left it.

Nevertheless this constant disturbance of arms and horses, the roaring of the camels, the blowing of trumpets, the clouds of dust raised by marching columns, the comings and goings of messengers and staff officers, added to the periodical absences of his interlocutor, ended by

exasperating the British representative. Sir Gilbert had the impression that Ibn-Saud was making fun of him. Did he think he could intimidate him with this deployment of forces?

On the morning of the seventh day Clayton declared in a sharp tone that he was bringing the conversations to an end and that since it appeared impossible to reach a friendly conclusion, it would be war—a war waged with all the resources of modern technology and in which the French troops in Syria would take part beside the British.

Clayton's outburst was partly bluff. The French, involved with a revolt of the Druses, had no desire to take on yet another adversary. As for the British, their garrisons in Palestine were far too reduced for them to go to war without the help of their ally.

This Ibn-Saud knew. He considered momentarily whether he should accept the challenge, but then he reconsidered. Such an act would risk putting in question all he had so far gained. The prey should not be let go for the shadow, nor the essential sacrificed for the satisfaction of personal vanity. Since Clayton had raised no claims over the Hejaz they had but to reach agreement on the subject of Wadi Sirhan.

Not wishing to appear to cede to force, Ibn-Saud asked for twenty-four hours to consider. The next day he told Sir Gilbert Clayton that he would accept his conditions. An accord was concluded, by the terms of which the Nejd King would evacuate Wadi Sirhan while retaining a right of sovereignty over the tribes in that area; as for the port of Akaba, he renounced for the time being any claim upon it as an integral part of the Hejaz; its statute would be the object of subsequent negotiation.

Clayton had thus achieved his object. He had re-established the junction between Iraq and Transjordania, set aside the threat which hung over Palestine, cleared the routes from Cairo to Bagdad and saved the pipeline from Mosul to Haifa. It was a great deal.

But Ibn-Saud retained a free hand in all the territories which had belonged until then to Hussein. The silence maintained on this subject during the talks meant that the British had washed their hands of this affair.

[LXXIV]

THERE REMAINED only to complete the conquest of the Hejaz. Ali had barricaded himself in Jedda and had reinforced the garrison with the help of Turkish mercenaries, recruited among workers in the port. Medina and Yenbo had done the same. Ibn-Saud ordered the Ikwan to reduce these strongholds in the shortest possible time.

But despite furious attacks the siege of these towns dragged on for months. The garrison of Jedda resisted heroically. Built around the Tomb of Eve, the town had been strongly fortified by the Egyptians and later by the governors of the Sultan. In normal times it was a flourishing commercial centre. But, despite severe rationing, first water and then food began to lack.

Shut in behind the high walls, the inhabitants died by hundreds. It was impossible to bury them because the cemeteries were outside the walls and in the hands of the Wahabis. The famine became terrible. A host of beggars, covered with sores, crawled in the streets, too feeble to walk, and collapsed of starvation in the squares and streets. Men and women, driven mad by thirst and hunger, fought over the bodies of the dead with dogs and vultures. The alleys of the port became so many charnel houses. The autumn was particularly hot. A pitiless sun blazed down on these scenes of horror. Filled with bodies in putrefaction, the town exuded an odour so horrible that ships at sea gave it a wide berth.

Towards the end of November 1926 the Ikwan prepared to make the final assault. During this time Ali, with Tawil's encouragement, had hoped against hope that the British would take pity on them and come to their help. It would have been easy to provision them from the sea. But neither the British nor Hussein, nor Feisal nor Abdullah, made the least gesture in their favour. Weary of waiting and feeling that the game was irremediably over he decided to capitulate, to spare the town from complete extermination.

At the beginning of December he embarked in a British cargo boat which took him to Aden. From there he took refuge in Bagdad with his brother Feisal. The last Hashimite had left the Hejaz.

When they learned of the surrender of Jedda and the departure of Ali, Medina and Yenbo surrendered in their turn.

[LXXV]

THE NEJD King now made his second entry into Mecca. The first time he had presented himself as a pilgrim, alone, bareheaded and unarmed, to preserve a strictly religious character to the occasion.

This time he wished to appear as a conqueror, amid a large display of strength, to give the event a political significance.

Swords bared, preceded by their fanfares and with all banners flying, 15,000 men of the Ikwan paraded through the town. Escorted by his dignitaries, his generals and governors, Ibn-Saud took official possession of the palace and showed himself to the crowd from the sherifian

balcony, while a hundred guns, fired from the ramparts, echoed back from the circle of hills which surrounds the Holy City.

Then he entered the throne room, where he found a hundred priests and notables of the land assembled to announce that the people of the Hejaz had proclaimed him King (January 4, 1927).

[LXXVI]

WHEN LAWRENCE learned of the fall of Hussein and the way in which the British Government had abandoned him, the despair which had been growing within him for some time now took complete possession of him. All the promises he had made to the Hashimites had now been trodden underfoot. When he heard the details of their exodus and that Clayton—with whom he had worked hand in glove when they were together in the Arab Bureau in Cairo—had neither demanded from the Saudis the evacuation of the Hejaz nor insisted upon the establishment of Ali upon his father's throne, he had the impression that everything was collapsing within and around him.

Ten years before he had set out to conquer the desert, sustained by a feeling of exalted pride, and the way in which the Arabs had answered his appeal had given him unlimited confidence in his genius:

> "I loved you, so I drew the tides of men into my hands
> And wrote my will across the sky in stars. . . ."

When he re-read these lines which he had placed at the head of the book in which he told of his adventure, they seemed to him like a mockery. Where were they, these tides of men? Vanished like smoke. At the hour of peril Hussein had found himself alone and Ali had had to flee to escape death. The uncrowned King of Arabia had thought to work for eternity and his will had not survived even in the sand. What remained of his great Arab Confederation? The kingdom of Iraq and this miserable shred of Transjordania, squeezed between Palestine and the desert, without access to the sea, with a palace like a suburban railway station and a territory so tiny that the tribes there had not even space to turn their flocks. Of the work which he had undertaken, nothing now remained.

> "Men prayed me that I set our work, the inviolate house,
> as a memory of you.
> But for fit monument I shattered it, unfinished: and now
> The little things creep out to patch themselves hovels
> in the marred shadow
> Of your gift . ."

He sent an indignant letter to King George V, refused to receive the Prime Minister, who came bringing "appeasement," and returned to the War Office a box containing his colonel's badge and all his decorations.

He had lost the last battle and now hoped for nothing more. His fall was profound. He wished to make it profounder, turning against himself that cruel lucidity which was one of the essential traits of his character. He wrote:

"Anyone who pushed through to success a rebellion of the weak against the masters must come out of it so stained in estimation that afterward nothing in the world would make him feel clean."[1]

How often had he not wished to strip himself of his usurped titles, of his fraudulent command? But "the unperceived sham looked so well-fitting and becoming a dress for a shoddy man . . . [the Arabs] were our dupes, wholeheartedly fighting the enemy. They blew before our intentions like chaff, being not chaff, but the bravest, simplest and merriest of men. . . . It might have been heroic to have offered up my own life for a cause in which I could not believe: but it was a theft of souls to make others die in sincerity for my graven image. . . .[2]

"I must have had some tendency, some aptitude for deceit, or I would not have deceived men so well and persisted two years in bringing to success a deceit which others had framed and set afoot. I had had no concern with the Arab Revolt in the beginning. In the end I was responsible for its being an embarrassment to its inventors. Where exactly in the interim my guilt passed from accessory to principal, upon what headings I should be condemned, were not for me to say. Suffice it that since the march to Akaba I bitterly repented my entanglements in the movement, with a bitterness sufficient to corrode my inactive hours, but insufficient to make me cut myself clear of it. Hence the wobbling of my will, and endless, vapid complainings."[3]

Soon these complaints were not enough. The thought of his moral bankruptcy burned him like an acid and began to inspire thoughts of suicide. "I was busy compartmenting-up my mind, finding instinct and reason as ever at strong war. Instinct said 'Die,' but reason said that was only to cut the mind's tether, and loose it into freedom: better to seek some mental death, some slow wasting of the brain to sink it below these puzzlements. An accident was meaner than deliberate fault. If I did not hesitate to risk my life, why fuss to dirty it? Yet life and honour seemed in different categories, not able to be sold one for another: and for honour, had I not lost that a year ago when I assured

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 682.
[2] Ibid., pp 566, 567. [3] Ibid., p 569.

the Arabs that England kept her plighted word? . . . The debauch of physical work yet ended in a craving for more, while the everlasting doubt, the questioning, bound up my mind in a giddy spiral and left me never space for thought."[1]

In an effort to drown his moral bankruptcy in a physical degradation as great as possible, he surrendered himself for a time to the lowest duties, to the most sordid tasks. In succession he was stable boy, dustman, pig-farm assistant, bottle-washer. "I liked inferior things," he affirms, "it was towards the low that I sought my pleasure and my adventures. There seemed to be in degradation a certainty, a final security."[2]

"I liked the things underneath me and took my pleasures and adventures downward. There seemed a certainty in degradation, a final safety. Man could rise to any height, but there was an animal level beneath which he could not fall."[3]

He hoped to find there that happy liberty he had known in the depths of Port Said, in the time of his youth, when he spent his days coaling steamers with other outcasts of three continents, and his nights sleeping on the breakwater at the foot of the statue of De Lesseps, with the sea surging past. . . .

But nothing, not even the passing of the years, could assuage his torment. Still seeking a "mental death" which would deliver him from himself, he finally enlisted in the Royal Air Force as an ordinary aircraftman and under assumed names.[4] There, in the anonymity of the ranks, caught up in the mechanical cog-wheels of barrack life among men who knew neither his identity nor his past—or who, if they knew, respected his silence—perhaps he would find rest? "One can be only either commander-in-chief or plain soldier," he wrote to one of his friends. "Everything between is but treason and deceit. If one cannot have the absolute of command, one must take refuge in the absolute of obedience."[5]

On May 13, 1935, he was the victim of a terrible motor-cycle accident. He was picked up with broken legs and his chest smashed in by the handlebar of his machine. He was taken to the little hospital of Bovington Camp, where he died after forty-two hours in a coma. A few of his friends, who had come to the bedside and who had not seen him for several years, had difficulty in recognising him, so greatly had he changed. Had he found peace at last? It may be doubted, for after death his face kept still an expression of inexpressible sadness.

Pious hands laid on his trestle bed the manuscript of the *Seven Pillars*, the dagger with the golden sheath given him by Feisal, and a

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, pp. 561–562.
[2] T. E. Lawrence: *Letters* (cf. Letter 187).
[3] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 581.
[4] First Ross, then T. E. Shaw. [5] *Letters*.

handful of red roses in memory of a poem he had written in the desert:

> "For Lord I was free of all Thy flowers, but I chose the world's sad roses,
> And that is why my feet are torn and mine eyes are blind with sweat."

Some voices—notably that of Lord Allenby—were raised to urge that he should be buried in Westminster Abbey. But there were difficulties. It was not known precisely whether his death was due to an accident or to suicide. And then, should he be placed among the soldiers, or among the poets?

In the meantime they buried him in the little military cemetery of Bovington, in Dorset, among his regimental comrades. According to his wish, his tomb bore only this inscription:

T. E. Shaw
1888–1935

[LXXVII]

THE IKWAN was exultant. The conquest of the Hejaz had set the seal upon their fighting spirit. The Wahabi soldiers urged the King to resume the campaign. Stimulated by Dawish, their commander-in-chief, who had distinguished himself by gallantry at the siege of Medina, they demanded "new victories."

In order to exploit this spirit before it had time to dissipate, Ibn-Saud resolved to annex to his kingdom the territories of Asir and Yemen, which stretched along the Red Sea to the south-east of the Hejaz.

Asir was a part of the peninsula outstanding for its fertility. Agricultural in character, it was inhabited by a dense and industrious population. Thanks to a well-developed system of irrigation, the peasants there led a life similar to that of peasants in Europe, cultivating from year's end to year's end their fields of maize, lucerne and millet.

This land had been one of the cradles of Arabian civilisation. There, long before the birth of Islam, had reigned the semi-legendary dynasties of the Sabeans, the Hemyarites and the Nabetheans. But it was at Taima, on the Hejaz border, that King Nabonidus had lived, the father of Belshazzar, who "transported thither all the glory of Persepolis." An idea of the wealth of the country can be gained from a Mesopotamian text of the period. A graven tablet tells us that one of its kings, Hazal Hazaal of Duma, had to pay to Esarhaddon "ten minas of gold, a thousand precious stones, fifty camels, and

a thousand bundles of aromatic herbs" as tribute for the restoration of his captured gods.[1]

In 1926 Asir was governed by a minor king named Hassan Idrissi, who oppressed his people from the depths of his stronghold. Arriving full tilt upon Abha, the large township which he used as his lair, the Ikwan had no difficulty in driving him out of it and putting him to flight. Ibn-Saud declared him deposed, put in his place one of his own cousins, Turki-ibn-Sudairi, and resumed his march in the direction of Yemen.

This province was even richer and more populous than Asir. It was the source of the human migrations which had spread across the desert from century to century. It included several towns whose ruins went back to the time of the Assyrians and which prided themselves upon a fabulous past. Tales were told of the antique splendour of Sana, its capital, and of the legendary magnificence of its "zigurat," twenty stories high, which had been the residence of Queen Balkis, with its walls of granite, jasper and porphyry, its rooms adorned with azure porcelain and its roof of golden tiles, crowned by bronze lions "which roared when the wind blew."

No doubt Yemen had decayed somewhat since the time when it was governed by "diademed kings," and its present condition could not sustain comparison with its past grandeur. But it had remained a prosperous country, nevertheless, thanks to its trade in spices, incense and pearls.

This territory was ruled by a religious chief, the Imam Yaya, an obese, rheumatic man of fifty who never left his palace and spent most of his time in eating. This confirmed glutton was not a very serious adversary for the Ikwan, and the soldiers commanded by the young Prince Saud dislodged him from his throne in a trice.

But Yemen—for the profit of him who governed it—served as an access to Aden, and Aden was an important stage on the sea route to India. Since 1839 the British had been solidly entrenched in this little quadrilateral of eighty square miles. They had no intention of allowing the Wahabis to seize its approaches.

They sent off a messenger in haste to Ibn-Saud, requesting him to halt his troops and proposing the opening of a general negotiation at the same time. After some days of hesitation, Ibn-Saud had the good sense to accept.

[1] Gerald de Gaury *Arabia Phoenix*, p 19

[LXXVIII]

THIS TIME the conversations took place in a very different atmosphere from Cairo and Oqair. In the interval Britain had come to realise the real strength of Ibn-Saud and had resolved to make a friend of him. The views of Philby had at last prevailed over those of Lawrence. The period of slights and humiliations was over.

The British negotiators showed themselves full of consideration and treated the King with respect. Agreeably surprised by this change of front, which contrasted with the stormy discussions he had known hitherto, Ibn-Saud thought it opportune to profit by the conciliatory atmosphere to enlarge the debate and settle at one blow not only the question of Aden but all the problems which remained in suspense between the British and himself.

He agreed to conclude a good-neighbour treaty with Feisal and Abdullah and engaged himself not to attack Iraq or Transjordania. He also agreed to evacuate Yemen and to leave the Imam Yaya in place with his doctors, astrologers and cooks, on condition that the latter cancelled a secret agreement which linked him with Mussolini[1] and signed with him a treaty of friendship stipulating: (1) that Sana should henceforward follow the same line as Riyadh in foreign affairs; (2) that Yemenites should be enabled to enlist for long periods in the Ikwan (this was an important source of recruitment in view of Yemen's dense population. Thus its excess population, instead of going out of the district and increasing the number of nomads, would go to swell the agrarian colonies in the interior); (3) that Wahabi preachers should be authorised to teach freely throughout the territory. Despite appearances, the Imam Yaya was by these terms virtually deposed.

These questions settled, the negotiators passed on to the other problems of Arabia. Ibn-Saud agreed to disinterest himself from the two long strips of land which bordered the peninsula on the south-east, along the Indian Ocean: the Hadramout and Oman. These wild and sparsely inhabited territories, which formed the extensions of the Rub-al-Khali, contained hardly any urban areas. Apart from Muscat, the capital of Oman, there was little to be found beyond sparse villages, built of bricks and mud, where a population of fishermen led a wretched existence. These areas offered only small interest for Ibn-Saud.[2]

[1] At this period Mussolini was seeking a foothold in the Red Sea. It appears that he dreamed of using Yemen as the base for his future conquest of Ethiopia.

[2] It is a curious fact that there is no reciprocal influence, moral or political, between these countries and the rest of the peninsula. Hadramout, in particular, historically forms part of the Indian Archipelago. Its civilisation more closely resembles that of Java than that of Arabia (cf. T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 32).

The two parties also reached accord upon Trucial Oman. This little territory of 6,000 square miles and 80,000 inhabitants, which lies on the shores of the Persian Gulf, comprises the western coast of the peninsula of Ras-Mousandam and a part of the eastern coast, from Dibba to Ras-Khalba. It then consisted of a small group of native principalities linked by a British protectorate treaty.[1]

Ibn-Saud agreed to recognise this treaty and undertook not to interfere with the autonomy of the local governors. An identical solution was adopted for the Sultanate of Quatar (800 square miles, 25,000 inhabitants), which occupies the peninsula of that name in the Persian Gulf.

In exchange for these concessions the victor of Taif retained the whole of the Hejaz and Asir. The right of administration of the Holy Cities was not contested. In addition Ibn-Saud asked Britain to recognise him *de jure* as King of Arabia and to invite other Powers to do the same. The British Government declared itself ready to "examine this request with all possible benevolence."

[LXXIX]

When Mohammed had conquered Mecca and become master of the Hejaz he received homage from all the tribes of Arabia, who came to acknowledge his spiritual and temporal authority (630–631). That year, which marked for the first time in history the unification of the peninsula under one sovereign, was called by the chroniclers "the Year of the Ambassadors." Wishing to conform once more to the example of the Prophet, and to recall the memory of his illustrious predecessor, Ibn-Saud convoked to Riyadh for the autumn of 1928 a "General Assembly of Arab Countries," to which all the tribes of the kingdom, the towns and villages, were invited to send delegations.

In acting thus, Ibn-Saud was obeying not only a wish to strike the imagination of his subjects: his decision responded also to a necessity of internal politics.

Absorbed by the conquest of the Hejaz and Asir, Ibn-Saud had been absent from central Arabia for two whole years. During this time the districts of Nejd, Hail, Hasa and Ataiba had been administered by lieutenants. Although these had been chosen with care, some of them had not been adequate for their tasks. Their stewardship had aroused some criticisms and provoked a good deal of discontent. In some areas the populations had at times been on the point of revolt. The Ikwan,

[1] Abu-Dhabi, Dibai, Sharja, Ras-al-Khaima, Ajman, Um-al-Quwain and Kalba.

occupied by its military tasks, had not been there to maintain order. There had resulted a general *malaise* which threatened to compromise the stability of the throne. It was time that the King took things in hand.

The opening of the Assembly had been fixed for October 8. During the first week of the month delegations from all corners of Arabia could be seen approaching the capital. On the day named an immense concourse of people assembled in front of the royal palace. There were nearly 60,000 people there. The crowd was so vast that the gates of the palace had to be opened and the public overflowed into the adjacent gardens. The centre of the town was black with people. There were clusters of spectators at the balconies and windows, in the trees, and even on the roofs of nearby houses. Never since its foundation had Riyadh known such numbers.

This crowd was the microcosm of Arabia. Great dignitaries of the kingdom, "ulemas" and preachers, emirs and governors, princes of the house of Saud, notables of the towns, sheiks of tribes, generals of the Ikwan, captains and soldiers jostled with villagers, artisans, shepherds and farmers.

These men, of varying age, origin and condition, were not all inspired by the same feelings. Some were entirely devoted to the King, others were less favourably disposed. Most of them had never seen him. They had crossed hundreds of miles of desert to answer his appeal and now waited with impatience to hear what he had to say.

Ibn-Saud appeared at the top of the palace steps. He stood at his full height, looked over the crowd with a dominating gaze and began to speak:

"Power belongs only to God," he said. "When I came among you I found you divided against yourselves, killing and robbing each other without cause. All those who handled your affairs, whether Arabs or foreigners, intrigued against you and encouraged your quarrels in order to prevent you from uniting and obtaining power.

"When I came amongst you I was weak. I had no strength but in God, for I had with me only fifty men, as you all know. Nevertheless, from victory to victory, I have made you one people—and a great people.

"It is not fear of man which has caused me to summon you here, for I fear no one. I have fought alone in the past with no help but that of God. I have not feared to confront the armies of my enemies, for I knew that God would accord me victory.

"What has caused me to assemble you here is the fear of God. Yes —the fear of the Lord and the fear of falling into the sin of pride. These are the things which have driven me to speak to you today. I wish to do so with an open heart.

"It has come to my ears that some among you have grievances to voice against me, against my viceroys and my governors. I wish to know these grievances in order to perform my duty fully towards you and to be absolved of my faults when I shall come before God.

"But there is one question which must be settled before all others, for it dominates everything. If there be those among you who have reproaches to address to me, let them say without fear whether they desire that I should continue to govern them, or whether they would rather put another in my place. I will never cede my power to whomsoever wishes to deprive me of it by intimidation, or by force. But I will place it now in your hand if that is your wish, for I, for my part, have no desire to govern a people who do not wish that I should be their king.

"See! Here before you are the eldest of my sons: Saud, Feisal, Abdullah, Mansur, and all the male members of my family. Choose a chief among them. Whoever be the man you shall have chosen, I will obey him and serve him loyally.

"And now, decide! I await your answer."

Ibn-Saud was silent, to allow his hearers to reply. Surprised by his exordium, they remained a moment in silence. Then a murmur arose. It swelled, grew, rose like a wave and finished in a prolonged clamour.

"We are one with you, O Ibn-Saud! We will have no other man to lead us."

Ibn-Saud raised an arm to establish silence.

"I thank you for your confidence," he replied, "and I shall do my best to deserve it. But there must remain no shadow between us. I wish that everything be clear and without secondary thoughts.

"You remember the words of the first successor of Mohammed, the great Caliph Abu-Bekr, when he received the oath of the companions of the Prophet?—'Here, then, am I, charged with the care of governing you,' he said to them. 'If I do it well, aid me. If I do it ill, correct me. To tell the truth to the depositary of power is an act of zeal and devotion. To hide it from him is treason. Before me the weak man and the strong man are equal; I wish to render justice impartially to all. If ever I step aside from the laws of God and His Prophet I shall cease to have the right to your obedience.'

"I repeat his words today for my own part and yours. The times change, but the duties remain the same. If there be those among you who have been injured, or who have a reproach to make to me, or a request to put, let them speak out frankly. I shall not hold it against them, whether it be concerned with the affairs of this world, or those of the next. The complaints will be transmitted to the judges, who will examine them impartially. If they declare me culpable or if they find

me in default, I will submit to the common law, like any other subject of this kingdom.

"Therefore speak, O my people. Say without fear what is on your heart. Make known what reproaches you have against my governors. I am responsible, since it is I who appointed them. And you, my 'ulemas,' speak as at the day of judgment when you shall appear before God to give account of your ministry. Speak, and fear none, be he humble or mighty."

In the days that followed those who had complaints to make were heard by a tribunal specially set up for the purpose. During this time the chiefs of the delegations, meeting in committees, examined with Ibn-Saud the different aspects of royal administration. Development of the agricultural colonies, irrigation works, property rents, management of governors, recruitment of the Ikwan, municipal finances, safety of roads—everything was put through the sieve and minutely examined. No aspect of the King's activities was banned from the investigation of the committees.

The Arabs are like children. Ibn-Saud knew their psychology well. He knew that the more he allowed them to discuss and criticise his actions, the more they would show themselves docile and obedient. But he forbade them to concern themselves with problems resulting from quarrels between tribes or individuals. He considered that those questions concerned himself alone. He intended to retain the right to settle them himself.

The crowd had been favourably impressed by the King's speech. The sanctions taken against certain governors who had been guilty of extortion in the districts entrusted to their protection and the absence of any measures of reprisal against the plaintiffs won their hearts completely. These things proved that Ibn-Saud kept his promises and that he knew how to make his acts accord with his words.

The day of the closure of the assembly was marked by important religious and military solemnities. A thanksgiving service was held in the mosque. After the ritual prayers the college of the Elders and the Doctors of Law announced that the people had decided to proclaim Ibn-Saud King of Arabia and Protector of the Holy Places.

When the ceremony was completed and the great-grand-nephew of Saud the Great appeared on the square court of the sanctuary accompanied by his sons, bearing in his hand the sword of Al-Rahaiyan and wearing the insignia of his new royalty, the crowd acclaimed him with wild cheers. From the top of the steps of the mosque Ibn-Saud declared in a strong voice that henceforth there would no longer exist the separate kingdoms of Nejd, Hejaz and Hasa, but a single State which would bear the name of "Saudi Arabia."

Then the King betook himself to the great square of Riyadh, where

the detachments sent by the different formations of the Ikwan were assembled. He presented new standards to them, and distributed sumptuous gifts to the "ulemas" and governors, the generals, officers and soldiers who had distinguished themselves in recent campaigns. According to their rank, he gave them finely chiselled swords and daggers, prayer rugs, brocaded robes, harness ornamented with gold and silver, ceremonial saddles, bowls of enamel and onyx, hunting falcons, rifles and various trophies from the abandoned treasures of Hussein.

The air was keen, the sun brilliant, and the transparent light set off the iridescent colours of the uniforms displayed around the square and the steps of the palace: those of royal servants, scarlet and lemon, with heavy gold brocade at the neck and wrists; those of the Bedouin guard with their full Damascan mantles, adorned with golden arabesques, and their white, vermilion or almond green scarves. All this created a brilliant and colourful spectacle. An eye-witness states that "the movement of the guards, as they bent at the King's passage, evoked fields of tulips waving in the breeze."

The crowd's enthusiasm continually rose. Endless ovations marked the presentation of each gift. People pointed out the King's sons, Saud, Feisal, Mansur, Abdullah; the most famous heroes of the victorious armies: Mutib, the founder of Artawiya; Jiluwi, who had conquered Riyadh; Dawish, who had conquered Medina; Luwai, who had conquered Mecca. . . .

But the joy of the people passed all bounds when were seen advancing upon the steps of the palace the representatives of the foreign countries which had recognised the new Saudi State. There were plenipotentiary ministers and consuls from most of the Great Powers: from Turkey, Italy, Germany, the United States, Holland, Japan and many others.[1]

At the head of the delegation came the representative of His Britannic Majesty, and this representative was none other than Sir Gilbert Clayton himself.[2]

In sending so notable a personality to Riyadh Britain had wanted to do things properly. Perhaps the London Government hoped at the last minute to create the impression of a British victory for what was in reality the victory of Ibn-Saud? But perhaps other considerations had contributed to bring about this gesture. For, swiftly as Downing Street had reacted, it had been outstripped by a rival power which after

[1] France was not yet represented.

[2] Sir Gilbert Clayton's mission was only temporary The first British plenipotentiary minister officially accredited to Ibn-Saud was Sir Andrew Ryan. He came to Riyadh on November 24, 1935, to bring the King of Arabia the insignia of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, accompanied by the royal warrant of King George V in which the son of Abdur-Rahman was addressed as "our cousin"

a period of eclipse was reappearing upon the Near Eastern scene. Three weeks before the grand assembly met at Riyadh, the Saudi State had been recognised by the U.S.S.R.

From the shores of Syria to the Indian Ocean and from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, Ibn-Saud was Lord of Arabia. A new kingdom had taken its place upon the map of the world.

PART FOUR

SAUDI ARABIA
(1928–1945)

LXXX *The first Pan-Islamic conference at Mecca*

LXXXI *The "Mahmal" incident*

LXXXII *The Ikwan establishes order in the Hejaz*

LXXXIII *The administration of the Holy Cities*

LXXXIV *The Saudi State and the government of Arabia*

LXXXV *The royal family*

LXXXVI *Reorganisation, development and modernisation of the Ikwan*

LXXXVII *Discovery of water*

LXXXVIII *Development of agriculture*

LXXXIX *Cars, telephones, planes, radio*

XC *Discovery of oil*

XCI *Founding of Aramco*

XCII *The plan for the "modernisation of Arabia"*

XCIII *The second world war. The revolt of Iraq*

XCIV *The "thirty days' war"*

XCV *Britain intervenes in Syria and Iran*

XCVI *Again the Persian Gulf*

XCVII *American Lease-Lend to Russia*

XCVIII *Deterioration of Anglo-Saudi relations*

XCIX *Intervention of Roosevelt. The Quincy interview*

I

[LXXX]

HUSSEIN HAD left the Hejaz in a state of dilapidation difficult to describe. Finances, police, road maintenance, public health, municipal government and the organisation of pilgrimages were all in need of thorough reorganisation. This task was all the more formidable because in this country, where all activity was dominated by the presence of the sanctuaries, political, economic and religious questions were inextricably mingled.

The difficulties had started immediately after the conquest. In June 1926 Ibn-Saud had called a grand Pan-Islamic Congress at Mecca in order to discuss the question of the Holy Cities with the leaders of the Moslem world.

Ibn-Saud had based great hopes on that conference. Nothing which could help the delegates to work in the best possible conditions had been overlooked. The former artillery barracks, built long ago by the Turks at the summit of a bare hill which overlooks the west gate, had been completely renovated. The building had been repainted and decorated with the Nejd colours. Two long strips of land had been laid out on either side of the road; these had been sown with barley and kept constantly watered so that the tender green of the young shoots—symbols of the renaissance of Islam—should offer the eye a pleasing contrast with the dusty pepper-and-salt of the surrounding countryside. Finally, a working agenda had been prepared to facilitate the task of the congress.

The sittings were held in the Salle d'Honneur, at one end of which a platform had been set up and surmounted by a dais of green and gold.

The members of the congress, who had come from all the Moslem countries, numbered seventy. Among them the delegate from Kemalist Turkey, Edib Sevet, was conspicuous amid the *iqals* and burnouses by his double-breasted jacket and bowler hat.[1]

As soon as the delegates had taken their seats Ibn-Saud entered, crossed the hall with rapid step and took his seat on the platform. Then his chief counsellor, Hafiz-Wahba, read the speech of welcome in his name.

"At the time of the taking of Mecca by the Ikwan forces," said the royal announcement, "I asked you to come here to study with me the measures which should be taken. Since then a year has passed, during which you have had time to reflect upon the question. I have invited you once again, therefore, in order that you may let me know the

[1] cf. Benoist-Méchin: op. cit., p. 384.

result of your work. I expect from you that you will let me know what can and ought to be undertaken for the moral and religious improvement of the Hejaz and that in this field you yourselves will take all the decisions acceptable to God and men."

When Hafiz-Wahba had finished reading Ibn-Saud bowed respectfully to the congress and left the hall so that they might deliberate independently. However, the sense of his speech was clear: in limiting the debate to "moral and religious" questions he had retained the right to settle political and administrative problems himself.

The delegates naturally did not approve of this limitation. They declared that Ibn-Saud was trampling on their prerogatives. Rejecting the programme drawn up by the King, they at once began to discuss questions touching civil administration, and proposed the construction of a railway to link Jedda with Mecca. Ibn-Saud requested Hafiz-Wahba to thank them for this suggestion, but to point out that it lay outside the scope of the conference. The delegates thereupon proposed to raise substantial funds in their respective countries and to devote these to the upkeep of the sanctuaries, on condition that the amount of the taxes raised upon pilgrimages should be paid over to them in entirety. Ibn-Saud declared himself in full accord with this generous initiative, but asked them first to raise the sums in question; the attribution of the taxes obtained from pilgrimages would be examined subsequently. He knew that the delegates' proposition was only bluff and that they were in fact in no position to raise the necessary sums.

As sittings followed each other Ibn-Saud little by little lost confidence in the congress members. Totally without practical sense, they showed themselves incapable of solving any problem. Their vanity, on the other hand, was fully displayed. All the discussions degenerated into personal quarrels where questions of personal prestige held chief place.

As the year before, the Indian delegates, furious at finding themselves deprived of the senior position to which they claimed to have rights, continually provoked incidents. One of them proposed to elect Edib Sevet as congress president, although a Hejazi was already occupying the presidential chair. Another insisted upon speaking in Urdu or English, although it was understood that the debates would take place exclusively in Arabic. They set themselves to criticise everything in a spirit of obvious prejudice: the Wahabi doctrine, the handling of the pilgrimage finances, the organisation of the congress and even the principle of annual assemblies proposed by Ibn-Saud. In turn the Turks and the Egyptians set themselves to create obstructions and sabotage the sittings. At the end of fifteen days the work had not advanced a single step.

These quarrels caused Ibn-Saud lively disappointment. He had dreamed of developing these assemblies into a great inter-Moslem parliament, where moral and religious problems of interest to 400,000,000 Believers would be debated in a fervent and fraternal atmosphere. He had dreamed, too, of establishing the Holy Cities in autonomous territories which would be the common property of all Mohammedans. The mean disputes which now set the members of the different delegations against each other not only showed him that he was badly mistaken: they revealed in dramatic fashion how sharply the Moslem world was divided.

Accustomed to the small religious communities of central Arabia, which were so living and passionate, he had imagined the whole of Islam thus and believed that the whole of its immense body was consumed by his own aspiration towards unity. Alas! It was indeed an immense body, but it was amorphous and almost lifeless. He had invited to Mecca those who spoke in its name, believing that he would be dealing with men of wisdom and experience, and he found before him a crowd of pretentious and incoherent chatterboxes, all busy to satisfy their personal ambitions. The unity of the Islamic world was the least of their cares. Their speeches, their professions of faith, their devotion itself, were only shams. Behind the mask of long words there was nothing but vacuity.

Ibn-Saud concluded from this that he could not and must not abdicate a single one of his prerogatives in their favour. Conqueror and master of the Hejaz, it was his task to administer it.

The congress dragged on and seemed no nearer its end. Suddenly, at the instigation of an Afghan delegate, the members put on their agenda a motion for the independence of the Holy Places. Ibn-Saud resolved to be present, for this question touched him personally. He had hardly reached the congress hall when he was sharply attacked by one of the delegates:

"Why are you seated under that canopy?" asked the delegate, pointing to the green dais which surmounted the platform.

"Because I am the King," Ibn-Saud replied.

"And by what right are you King?" insisted the delegate.

Ibn-Saud considered this an intolerable impudence. He rose to his full height and looked the assembly up and down.

"Which of you," he demanded in a voice of thunder, "can guarantee the Sacred Territories against any foreign interference?"

The delegates exchanged embarrassed looks and plunged their noses into their dossiers.

"I repeat my question: Which of you can guarantee the Sacred Territories against any foreign interference?"

No one replied.

"I alone here am free. I alone, in consequence, am in position to do this," Ibn-Saud declared in a tone which admitted of no reply. "Take that independence for granted and speak to me of it no more."

This piece of plain speaking closed the assembly's debate.

[LXXXI]

THE CONGRESS delegates were not the only ones to quarrel among themselves. The caravans of pilgrims did so likewise. Their quarrels were so bitter that they sometimes degenerated into fights in which blood was shed.

The year 1927 among others was marked by incidents particularly grave. The pilgrimage took place at the beginning of June and caravans had begun to come in from Persia, Transjordan and Egypt. In accordance with a very ancient tradition the Egyptian pilgrims, with whom were those from the Mahgreb, the Niger, Lake Chad and Tibesti, brought with them the "Mahmal," a kind of square coffer surmounted by a palanquin carried on the back of a camel. This was supposed to have been, 600 years before, the litter of the Queen of Egypt, Shajarat-al-Dor, the first foreign sovereign to be converted to Islamism. Each year it was escorted by a company of Egyptian soldiers bearing arms and accompanied by a cannon. This caravan was always commanded by an important personage called the "Emir-el-Hadj"—the Emir of the Pilgrimage—who generally was a member of the Khedive's family.

On the day of the Grand Sermon, which marks the culminating point of the pilgrimages, custom required that the "Mahmal" should be carried in procession to Arafa, passing by the valley of Abtah and the village of Mina.

Arafa is a little plain surrounded by a ring of hills, in the centre of which, upon a pile of bare rocks, stands the "Jebel-el-Rahma," or Mountain of Mercy. "In this airless enclosure, sometimes for an entire day under a torrid sun some sixty to eighty thousand people are crowded together, with their animals, tents and provisions, all the necessities and debris of a humanity already weakened by a long journey and excited by religious emotions."[1]

On that day the Egyptians had reached Mina at the end of the afternoon and had halted for a while at the entrance to the village to give time for stragglers to rejoin them. Because of the density of the crowd the Egyptian soldiers had sounded a trumpet to indicate their position to the laggards.

[1] M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes: op. cit., p. 96.

All had passed off well up to that point, when suddenly a Wahabi pointed to the "Mahmal" with his finger and cried:

"It is an idol! The Egyptians have brought an idol here. I have seen them worshipping it and playing music for its sake."

Another Wahabi affirmed that he had seen a pilgrim from Cairo smoking.

"Those people there," he shouted, "have no respect for the Holy creed. They are idolaters, miscreants, dogs of infidels."

An excited group approached the "Mahmal" and began throwing stones at it. Other pilgrims joined them, uttering hostile cries. The officer in command of the Egyptian detachment lost his nerve and ordered his men to fire in the air. The sound of the salvoes of musketry only increased the crowd's exasperation. Cries and curses multiplied. Fearing to be overwhelmed, the captain then told his soldiers to mount the cannon in position and to fire it at the demonstrators. The discharge caused over 100 wounded and killed twenty-five persons, including a certain number of women.

At once a roar of anger arose on all sides. Soldiers of the Ikwan and other Nejdis seized weapons. The neighbouring hills, the valley of Abtah, the village of Mina and the Mountain of Mercy were at once covered with angry pilgrims swearing to massacre the Egyptians.

Ibn-Saud was in the palace at Mecca. As soon as he was informed of the incident he leaped on his horse, called to his bodyguard to follow him and galloped to Mina.[1] The matter was very serious. If he did not succeed in getting the situation in hand the whole world would see that he was incapable of governing the Holy Places and the Wahabis would have deserved the judgment of their enemies: that their presence in Mecca was a danger for Islam.

Night was already falling. The valley was shrouded in a cloud of dust through which a disorderly multitude could be glimpsed confusedly. The air was filled with the smell of powder and blood.

Ibn-Saud jumped from his horse and forced his way through the crowd with blows of his riding-whip. Wrenching the Egyptians and the Wahabis apart, the giant King advanced with great strides to the point where the victims lay, shouting to the Nejdis to keep quiet. Despite the dim light of dusk they recognised Ibn-Saud by his great height and drew back on the slopes of the hill to see what was about to happen.

Ibn-Saud looked about him: the ground was covered with mutilated bodies and traces of dark blood lay on the sand.

He frowned and turned to the Egyptian officer.

"By what right have you taken it upon yourself to kill?" he demanded in angry tones. "There is here both a law and a government.

[1] H. C. Armstrong: op. cit., p. 249.

I am the sovereign. If you had appealed to me I would have settled this matter."

"It was only from respect for Your Majesty that I gave orders to cease firing," replied the officer in offensive tones. "Else I would not have hesitated to mow down all this Wahabi riff-raff."

Ibn-Saud paled. He was the Imam of the Wahabis and the Egyptian knew this. No one had ever dared to insult him in this way. Terrible anger took possession of him. He took a step forward, clenching his fists. The insolent Egyptian and the King stood face to face, six feet from each other. The crowd held its breath, wondering what was going to happen. Ibn-Saud closed his eyes. The blood was beating furiously in his neck and temples. Should he kill this man who through him had outraged the religion of his fathers? But then he also would have shed blood in the precincts of the temple and the protector of the Holy Places would have been himself guilty of an act of sacrilege. Making a violent effort, he breathed deeply, dropped his arm and slowly unclenched his hands. Then, after a moment of silence:

"This is no place for bragging and boasting," he said, mastering himself. "This is a sacred place on whose threshold it is written: 'Thou shalt not kill.' We are within the radius of the Sanctuary[1] and you are my guests; if this were not so I would punish you as you deserve."

The King called his guards, had the bodies picked up and taken away and the wounded removed to the nearest hospital. Then he commanded the Egyptian officer to disarm his men and placed a cordon between them and the Wahabis to prevent a fresh collision. After this he remounted his horse and slowly returned to Mecca while the crowd, suddenly calmed, dispersed into the night. . . .

Next day Ibn-Saud demanded reparation from the Egyptian Government. This was refused. But the new Sherif of Mecca showed himself inflexible. The maintenance of order and the policing of the Holy Places were his personal prerogative. He had no intention of allowing his authority to be flouted or his rights ignored. He told the Khedive that he would bar access to the sacred territories to all caravans coming from Cairo as long as he did not obtain satisfaction.

The Egyptian Government ended by complying and paid an indemnity to the families of the victims.

[1] "The limits of the sacred territory correspond according to Moslem tradition to the points at which demons halt on seeing the light of the fire lit by Abraham on Mount Abu Quobais above the Holy City, they thus mark the precise extent of the radius of the Sanctuary. At these limits piles of stones, since replaced by pillars or columns, indicate the entrance to the 'haram.' . . . The 'haram' of Mecca is protected by prohibitions, tabus: blood must not be shed there, even that of animals except certain harmful kinds; vegetation which grows there naturally must not be cut; even the earth must be respected and no part of it may be removed from the 'haram.' These are general prohibitions applying to all and are quite independent of the commandments which regulate the pilgrimage ceremonies. They explain why the entrance to the territory of Mecca is strictly forbidden to all non-Moslems " (cf. M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes: op. cit., p 91.)

[LXXXII]

VIOLENT CONFLICTS between pilgrims, stormy arguments among congress members, all proved to Ibn-Saud that he would have to act without seeking advice from foreign delegations. The method of free discussion might be good for other countries: it had no value for the passionate and independent Arabs. The Cromwell of Arabia, as Philby had called him, had greater confidence in the power of his Puritan horsemen than in the reasoning of ideologists. It was not with speeches that he would purge this province, abandoned for years past to pedlars and thieves. Solid construction could be begun only from the bottom. And the basis, as always, must be order and public safety.

Under Hussein's régime life in the Hejaz had become impossible. Every year hundreds of pilgrims were stripped or killed. Murders were an everyday occurrence. Men killed for a tarboosh, for a few pence, for a lump of bread. Robbery was endemic. No road was secure, no village safe from pillagers. And, because corruption reigned from top to bottom in the administration, crimes and offences generally remained unpunished.

Ibn-Saud soon realised that Draconian measures were needed to put down this anarchy. Drawing inspiration from the methods used by Jiluwi in the Hasa, he handed over the task of policing Mecca to his personal guard, established small detachments of the Ikwan at fixed points in the villages and towns and sent flying patrols throughout the country, consisting of a handful of horsemen who could move swiftly from place to place by day or night.

These detachments applied the law ruthlessly. Criminals and delinquents were immediately brought before a court martial composed of three Wahabis. The procedure was swift. The primitive life of the desert does not allow for protracted punishments, tribunals and jails. "Blood, according to the primitive law of the desert, calls for blood," writes Hitti, "no chastisement is recognised other than vengeance."[1]

Therefore punishment is simple, rapid and severe. Murderers have their heads cut off. A thief caught in the act has his right hand cut off; if he robs again, the other hand follows, then the right foot, then the left. Drunkards caught in a state of intoxication receive eighty strokes of the rod. Those guilty of adultery are buried to the waist in the sand and stoned to death.

"One day," Jean-Paul Penez relates, "an Arab went to tell the police that a sack of rice had fallen in the street.

[1] Philip K. Hitti: op. cit., p. 14.

" 'How do you know it is rice?' asked the police officer.

" 'I felt it,' said the Arab.

"It was more than enough: it cost him his thumb."[1]

The Ikwan soldiers pursued malefactors with an indefatigable zeal. They were as deaf to supplications, as to threats, and showed no mercy. Armed against bribery by their puritanism, they knew neither compromise nor leniency and drew no distinctions between social classes. When a man was found guilty they applied the same rules whether he were a high functionary or a shepherd. They fulfilled their role as executioners with inflexible rigour. Their consciousness of being "just men" strengthened their arms and brought intense satisfaction to their sectarian souls. They dispensed justice with a ferocious energy which condoned cruelty by clothing it with the name of virtue.

Thus repression was merciless. During the months that followed one could hardly go through a village without meeting crippled men. But it had at least one happy result: in a very short time there reigned in the Hejaz such order and tranquillity that the whole face of the country was transformed.

Crimes of violence vanished. The roads were purged of the bands of pillagers which had infested them and became safe even for those who travelled alone. The Turks had dotted the land with forts to shelter their police. Ibn-Saud had these demolished, for they had become superfluous. A merchant could leave his goods at the side of the road and return to collect them several weeks later. Passers-by would rather make a detour than touch them. The Wahabi tribunals had inspired a salutary terror everywhere. Three Ikwan soldiers, commanded by an officer were enough to maintain order in an entire district.

It is difficult to imagine a more radical change brought about in so short a time, writes Gerald de Gaury. "It is said that a bag of coffee dropped by a caravan in Saudi Arabia is now to be found in the same place six months later. . . . Security in Central Arabia is now perhaps better than anywhere in Europe in peace time. The four things essential for the control of Arab nomads are quick intelligence, complete identification of the governor with his force, greater mobility than the tribes, and a complete understanding of tribal traditions and habits."[2] The Saudi administrators had all these things. This was the reason for their success.

"If Ibn-Saud has succeeded in rallying Arabia under his sceptre," says Maurice Jarnoux, "if he has made a troubled country peopled by bandits into one of the safest countries in the world, where virtue is *obligatory*, it is not only by appeal to the force of the sword. He has

[1] Jean-Paul Penez and Maurice Jarnoux: "Enquête chez le fils d'Ibn-Séoud," *Match*, March 6–13, 1954, p. 45.

[2] Gerald de Gaury: *Arabia Phoenix*, p. 103.

poured into the crucible of the young nation the most binding of cements: the austerity of the Koran.

"In Arabia at the present time fewer crimes are committed in a year than in a day in Paris."[1] This comes from the fact that the whole of life is ruled by the Koran. And the Koran is "a code which has foreseen everything."[2]

[LXXXIII]

PUBLIC ORDER once established, Ibn-Saud concentrated on improving the civil administration and the conditions in which the pilgrimages took place.

Many tribes, notably those of Harj, had acquired the custom of charging a toll on caravans which used their territory to reach Mecca. Ibn-Saud forbade this abuse as well as all similar practices introduced in the time of the Sultans and encouraged by Hussein in order to fill his emptying treasuries.

The commercial exploitation of the Holy Places by the people of Mecca had attained incredible proportions during the nineteenth century. "Whether one reads Burckhardt, Burton, Snouck, Batanouni, or Ben Sherif," writes M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, "what dominates their memories is the ruthlessness of the Meccans, the smiles and the sharp practice they poured out to earn in a few days their subsistence for a whole year."[3]

Guides, owners of horses, landlords of houses and rooms, vendors of amulets and Zemzem water,[4] prostitutes, barbers, keepers of houses more or less historic, merchants of all ranks and all commodities, wasted no time in emptying the pilgrims' pockets. Ibn-Saud took vigorous action against these practices without, however, being able to suppress them entirely.

A regular system of transport was organised between the ports and Mecca and Medina. Capacious reservoirs of water were built at Arafa[5] and on the fringes of the routes used by the caravans. After the "Mahmal" incident hospital units and first-aid posts for the wounded were also established.

[1] Jean-Paul Penez and Maurice Jarnoux. op. cit., *Match*, March 6–13, 1954.

[2] Ibid.

[3] M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes: op. cit, p. 100. The author rightly adds: "It would require in any case a strange ignorance of the character of the populations which live in the shadow of humanity's great sanctuaries to reproach the Meccans for their mercenary morals and to see in this a fault exclusive to Islam."

[4] Sacred well, near the Kaaba, from which the pilgrims sprinkled themselves and in which they dipped the pieces of linen destined to serve them for shrouds. The water was on sale in earthenware flasks.

[5] An aqueduct existed there in the time of the Abassids (see above, p. 33).

The Saudi administration—aided in this task by international accords which enabled medical inspections and quarantines to become general—brought a special care to the improvement of hygiene and the fight against the spreading of epidemics after the pilgrimages.[1]

At Medina and Mecca Ibn-Saud created "Social Committees" whose task was to ensure the cleanliness of the streets, the paving of roads, the clearing of filth and the maintenance of the sewers. These committees had also to watch that the inhabitants of the Holy Cities conformed strictly to the Koran precepts. Those who failed to do so were fined. Prostitution was severely repressed, usury forbidden, luxury discouraged. No man was permitted to smoke, or to carry gold or silk upon his person within the perimeter of the sanctuaries. All demonstrations of personal worship to Mohammed or to the members of his family were declared sacrilege and rigorously proscribed.[2]

To complete the work of reorganisation, Ibn-Saud set up Municipal Councils in the six chief Hejaz towns: Mecca, Medina, Jedda, Yenbo, Rabigh and Taif. These councils, endowed with very wide powers, were composed half of notables appointed by the King, half of citizens elected by the people. Their role was at once consultative and executive.

Later, when his other sources of income became sufficient, the King suppressed the tax he received from each of the 300,000 annual pilgrims who came to the Holy City.[3] He did not wish, he said, to draw from the sanctuaries any advantage other than the enhancement of his moral authority.

"All these measures will open up a new era not only to Arabia but to the pilgrimage whose material decorum and religious strictness they will increase."[4]

[LXXXIV]

As THE kingdom grew progressively larger and new provinces were added to those Ibn-Saud already possessed, it became more and more necessary to provide them with a sound and flexible instrument of government. At first the King had governed with the help of his father's experience, then with the advice of a small group of

[1] "The gathering of a crowd in the Holy Places, at Mecca, Arafa, or Mina, coming from all parts of the world and bringing with it disease germs which were all the more dangerous because they were foreign, represented a periodic peril for the health of humanity: the Hejaz was the focal point of several serious epidemics such as cholera." (M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes: op cit., p. 104)

[2] This measure, inspired by the wish to maintain monotheism in all its purity, was the application of one of the fundamental principles of the Wahabi doctrine.

[3] This tax was the principal revenue of the kingdom until 1936. It brought 7,000,000 dollars annually into the State treasury.

[4] M Gaudefroy-Demombynes· op. cit, p. 105.

"counsellors." He had acquired the habit of directing everything himself, having frequently noticed that his orders were carried out only when he watched personally over their execution. But now the administration of the country went beyond the power of a single man. The territorial unification, the consolidation of the régime and the development of the resources of Arabia called for permanent departments, a government, in short a State.

Ibn-Saud decided to split up the tasks between responsible ministers placed at the head of specialised departments: Interior, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture and Mines, Justice, National Defence, etc. But where was he to find able and reliable men to do the work? Arabia was sparsely populated and its people were for the most part poor, ignorant and illiterate. The small class of sheiks was rich, but ridden with prejudices and of little use except upon the field of battle. It had sufficed for the King to be absent for two years for unrest to arise. This showed that those to whom he had delegated his powers were not up to their tasks, and on his return from the Hejaz he had been obliged to deal with some of them severely. In this way he learned that competent administrators were rare. This shortage of higher grades was all the more serious because he had need of ministers and governors of unusual capacity to resolve the problems confronting them and to lead the country on the road of progress. For Ibn-Saud had set himself a triple objective: to unify the territory of the peninsula, to restore the true Faith and to make Arabia a modern nation. The first goal was more or less achieved. The second was in process of accomplishment. But the third still lay in the future.[1]

Very astutely Ibn-Saud planned to surmount the difficulties of recruitment by drawing his personnel not from the narrow framework of Nejd, but from the immense reservoir provided by the whole Arab world. It little worried him that his ministers were of foreign "nationality" provided that they were pure-bred Arabs and fervent Believers. After all, they all spoke the same language. This absence of any "nationalist" prejudice (in the sense in which we understand it in the West) was not due to chance, but flowed from the sovereign's innate convictions. In his eyes an Arab from Damascus or Cairo, Basra or Bagdad, was in no way "foreign," but a member of the same racial and religious community, which, although disjointed and partitioned off by the vicissitudes of history, would none the less be called upon one day to find its unity again under the same flag.

Abdulla-al-Fadl, president of the Mecca Municipal Council, was a

[1] This third point in the Saudi programme was evidently inspired by the examples of the U.S.S.R. and Kemalist Turkey. It can be seen again today in Iraq, Syria, Jordania and Israel. It was one of the essential points of the Egyptian revolution launched by General Negub and the group of young officers surrounding him.

native of Anaiza, in Quasim;[1] Hafiz-Wahba, the King's first counsellor and Minister of the Interior, was an Egyptian; Usuf-Yasin, head of the personal secretariat, was from Latakia in northern Syria; Rushdi-ben-Malhas, the royal private secretary, was a Palestinian; Fuad-Hamsa, one of the most remarkable brains of the team, who directed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was for some time Minister Plenipotentiary in Paris, was a Druse from Lebanon. So also was Dr. Pharaon, lately ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Paris, who doubtless owes to his Syrian origin his perfect grasp of all the nuances of French thought.

Lesser functionaries were chosen for preference among merchants and schoolmasters, and were drawn from different countries, not excepting Iraq and Transjordan.

This proved to be a happy decision on the King's part, for it enabled him to group around him the most advanced men of the time, with an intellectual standing well above what he would have obtained had he recruited them exclusively within his own kingdom. This choice explains to a great extent the surprising results of his internal and foreign policy.

[LXXXV]

At the summit of the hierarchy were the King and his family. It will be recalled that Ibn-Saud had married—in 1895, when he was fifteen—a grand-niece of Abdul-Wahab, Princess Jauhara. But the Koran gave him the right to have four wives and a man so vigorous had no reason not to profit by the authorisation of the Prophet. (It was said that he had many women in addition to "official" wives, notably a favourite Circassian of surpassing beauty, which was also in the tradition of the Osmanli Sultans.) Hence his progeniture rapidly increased.

In 1899 a first son was born, whom he called Turki and cherished as "the apple of his eye." He had a second son, Khalid, who died young; then Saud, Feisal, Abdullah, Mansur, Fahd, Nasr, Khalid and Mohammed. But the number of his children was not to stop there. In all he was the father of thirty-six sons and about the same number of daughters. He was less a father of a family in the Western sense of the term than an antique patriarch amid his tribe.

The King was self-taught. His expulsion from Riyadh at the age of eleven had prevented him from going to school regularly and he had later suffered from the sketchy character of his studies. His ignorance of history and religion put him at a disadvantage at times in his

[1] He it was who ruled supreme for fifty years over the funds of the kingdom without accounts or books and with a minimum of fiscal control.

discussions with the "ulemas," who could not open their mouths without citing an ancient text or referring to a point of theology. In consequence he saw to it that his children should be better instructed than he had been. Their education was the object of his attentive care and he gave them eminent masters as their teachers.

But it goes without saying that so large a progeniture could not avoid paying heavy tribute to death, especially in a country where the mortality rate is high and where the rules of hygiene were still but little known. In 1919 the epidemic of Spanish influenza which scourged Arabia carried off Queen Jauhara in a few hours Ibn-Saud, who loved her passionately, was prostrated by grief. He arranged a sumptuous funeral for the Queen and had her buried in a corner of the palace gardens. During the ensuing weeks he spent nearly all his days praying at her tomb, taking no food and refusing to concern himself with public affairs. His affliction was sincere and tragic to see. The King visibly shrank. Never had he been seen so sombre, so depressed.

Then the epidemic carried off his eldest son Turki, aged twenty. This was too much. Ibn-Saud felt that he could not survive a second blow of this kind. Turki, so handsome, so brave. Turki, who had no equal at hunting with the falcon. Turki, on whom he had laid all his hopes and all his pride, would now not be there to carry on his work when the time came. Of what use were all these battles, these struggles, if his favourite son would reap no harvest from them? Ibn-Saud considered taking refuge in a monastery. These two deaths, coming one after the other, injured his health and the wielding of power seemed to him deprived of all interest.

During the years 1920, 1921 and 1922 he lived confined in his palace, receiving no one, rarely opening his mouth and devoting all his days to meditation and prayer. His only occupations were the reading of the Koran and the study of Islamic history. This period corresponded with a phase of stagnation for Arabia. Britain was trying to set up her Hashimite Confederation. The inaction of the King had no evil consequences, for any initiative on his part during these empty years would have most probably ended in defeat.

But with time his health improved and his robust vitality finally gained the upper hand. The acute neurasthenia which had undermined his strength disappeared progressively and the Desert Leopard felt his wounds beginning to heal. Little by little he resumed his zest for life, began hunting again and, like a great tree which grows a new branch at the point where one has been cut off by the woodman's axe, he transferred to his other sons the ardent affection he had had for Turki.

Prince Saud-ibn-Abdul-Aziz, born at Kuweit during the month of Rabia-al-Aloual, 1319 (1901), at the very hour when Ibn-Saud conquered his capital—a fact which the Arabs interpreted as a good

augury for the child's future—had become heir to the throne on his brother's death. He was strangely like his father, both physically and morally, and had already given many proofs of ability in both war and politics. From the age of eighteen he had frequently led Saudi forces in combat, in Hail, Yemen and elsewhere. He had also governed Riyadh during the absence of Ibn-Saud in the Hejaz and had shown proof in this function of a maturity so precocious that the King had not hesitated to entrust him with the vice-regency of Nejd (1930). Subsequently he had given the King the greatest proof of devotion a son can give his father: in 1934, while Ibn-Saud was on pilgrimage to Mecca, four assassins (acting possibly at the instigation of the Hashimites) threw themselves at him. Saud, who happened to be by, covered his father with his own body, receiving wounds in his place. He was much loved by the Bedouins, whose mode of life he shared and to whom he addressed himself in a simple and direct fashion that went straight to their hearts. Slim, but well set up and muscular, and endowed with a natural dignity of manner, he pleased everyone by his charm. Perhaps he was more reserved than Ibn-Saud (he prided himself upon not speaking any foreign language). But this was almost the only leading characteristic which distinguished the one from the other. His father had brought him up in a rough school, teaching him to ride for hours on end without either saddle or stirrups and to live off a few dates. He was a whole-hearted Nejdi and a fervent Wahabi.

Ibn-Saud named his second son Feisal viceroy of the Hejaz and provided him with experienced advisers. Very different from his brother Saud (he has only one wife and speaks French and English fluently), Feisal represents the modern dynamic trend in the heart of the kingdom. He was not long in becoming Minister of Foreign Affairs, then Prime Minister, where his knowledge of the Western world was a valuable asset.

A few years later Ibn-Saud made his sixth son, Mansur, Controller General of the Camps and Minister of National Defence. The other children were still too young to take an active part in affairs.

[LXXXVI]

THE KING reserved to himself certain tasks which he had at heart, in the forefront of which was the development and modernisation of the Ikwan. This had made amazing progress since the time when the first troop of volunteers had installed itself at Artawiya under the direction of Mutib. Attracting to itself the pick of all the warriors in Arabia, it had become with the passage of time an impressive force which had

shown its value at Turaba and Taif, had conquered Mecca, Jedda and Medina, re-established order in the Hejaz, and facilitated the swift annexation of Asir.

But Ibn-Saud was too much of a realist to over-estimate its strength. Though admirably adapted to its work as a "desert militia," it was not strong enough to ensure the security of the Saudi State. He therefore busied himself with increasing its numbers, improving its armament, training and officer cadres.

It could not rival a European army. Ibn-Saud was too clear-sighted to have the least illusion on this point, and that was why he had never wished to engage it against British forces. The scanty population of Arabia would not allow of a high quantitative recruitment for some time to come. But it could be the best army in the Arab world. In this respect it could ensure respect of the frontiers, discourage any aggression by neighbouring States and even, thanks to its mobility and skill in guerrilla tactics, create serious difficulties for any foreign force which should attempt to occupy the country.

The great advantages of the Ikwan, and those which had so far always ensured it success, were its rapidity of movement, the frugality of its soldiers and its capacity to act without taking account of the distance separating its bases from the eventual field of battle. The problem was to modernise it without losing these advantages. For this it was necessary to increase its fire-power without at the same time burdening it with the weight of needless gear or diminishing the range of action of its units.

Ibn-Saud bought machine guns, some armoured cars and light artillery and obtained English and American instructors to teach his men how to use these weapons. He founded a school for officers and a permanent staff college whose chiefs went off to take courses at Sandhurst and West Point.

This modernisation of the Ikwan was not carried out without difficulty. As in all the King's enterprises there was a strong current of hostility to be overcome at the outset. The Wahabi horsemen considered the technical inventions of Christian countries to be the work of demons and refused to give up the sword and the camel for the machine gun and the armoured car. "It is not weapons that give victory," they said, "but Allah. Mohammed himself would never have won the battle of Beder if the angels had not descended from heaven to fight at his side. If we adopt these new arms we shall frighten off the angels and at the same time lose the favour of the Most High. The strength of the Ikwan is not to be increased by modernising its armaments, but by intensifying its faith, by fasting and by prayer."

It was very difficult to make these men understand why their

reasoning was false, for to do so would be to weaken in them a whole body of belief whose disappearance could have brought about the dissolution of the Ikwan itself. Several times dangerous undercurrents made themselves evident in the heart of the formations. Ibn-Saud had to exert all his authority to calm this unrest. He put down all signs of insubordination without mercy and—as an example—decapitated some officers who had protested. After a somewhat stormy period, the Ikwan was finally appeased.

Then he divided the army into two categories: active and reserve. The active formations, 60,000 men strong, constituted a permanent Legion. Well equipped and well officered, this was given the task of policing the desert and maintaining internal order. The reserve formations remained in the agrarian colonies; they were mobilised only during periods of hostilities.

Today the Saudi State possesses a military force to be reckoned with, capable of being raised to 350,000 men in case of need. It is equipped in part with American material derived either from deliveries made during the second world war as "Lease-Lend,"[1] or from "surplus" left in Basra by the United States and originally destined for the U.S.S.R.

Besides cavalry, artillery, signals and armour (10,000 motorised men), the Saudi army includes an air force of 350 fighters, all piloted by airmen drawn from the youth of the country.

"The new Saudi army, which uses radio, automatic weapons and armoured cars, is not to be despised by any eventual aggressor," affirms the British military writer, Liddell Hart.[2]

[LXXXVII]

When Mustapha Kemal set in motion his "plan for the modernisation of Turkey" he encountered almost insurmountable difficulties from the fact that all his problems were entangled one with another. It was not long before Ibn-Saud discovered the same thing. The security and defence of the territory depended upon the development of the Ikwan. The development of the Ikwan depended upon the multiplication of the agrarian colonies. But the multiplication of the agrarian colonies was linked in turn with the problem of water.

Was it not tempting fortune to try to found the strength and prosperity of a country upon agriculture when this country, composed for the most part of deserts, included no river and received only seven

[1] To the benefits of which Arabia was admitted in 1943 (We shall see later on what conditions)

[2] cf. *Match*, June 2, 1951.

centimetres of rain per year? The drought—that redoubtable plague—barred Ibn-Saud's road like an obstacle against which his will was in danger of being broken. One would have to be mad to wish to transform Nature and change what had determined Arabia's destiny for thousands of years. As well might one attempt to halt the march of the sun. . . .

However, despite the advice which poured in from his advisers, the King refused to admit defeat. A stream of strange tales about water circulated among the Bedouins, who had handed them down from father to son for generations. These told of a distant time when all Arabia was covered with gardens and forests. Legends, most people said with a shrug. But Ibn-Saud was convinced that these legends contained a good part of truth.

The Arabs persisted in believing that their water-points and wells communicated with each other by subterranean passages, and related, basing this on verbal traditions, the story of a wooden bowl lost at the bottom of a spring and mysteriously found again in another spring several hundred miles away. They also claimed to know when rain fell in a distant spot merely by observing the level of water in the wells in their own district. On the shores of the Persian Gulf pearl divers plunged down to find fresh water beneath the salt layer and brought up handfuls of sheep or camel hairs. Did not this prove that underwater springs were connected by subterranean channels with those inland? Was there not somewhere an immense sheet of water deeply buried under the covering of sand?

This was what the King thought, too, and these popular beliefs encouraged him to persevere in his efforts. Hafiz-Wahba, his Minister of the Interior, suggested that he should call in American hydrographers. Once more luck favoured the King. American engineers prospected the country and confirmed the intuitions of the nomads. They discovered water. They found it everywhere. Not in small trickles, but in abundant reserves. And not only at certain points, but over a wide area, even in places where its existence had never been suspected.

The Bedouins, writes Gerald de Gaury, have a kind of sixth sense which enables them to divine where one should dig in order to find water. It is an infallible instinct which the foreigner, no matter what he does, never succeeds in acquiring. They obey this instinct with such confidence that they often persist in affirming that there is water even when soundings by European or American experts have found nothing. "But where the European can help the Arab is in the striking of water at great depth, with the aid of machinery and from his knowledge of geological structure beyond the Bedouin comprehension."[1] This is exactly what happened with these American engineers. These enabled

[1] Gerald de Gaury: *Arabia Phoenix*, pp. 67–68.

the Bedouins to reach subterranean reserves of water whose presence they had known by instinct, but which they were unable to reach through lack of modern technique.

A certain number of wells already existed at Riyadh which yielded but moderate amounts. A new one was drilled. It was an enormous excavation, 375 feet deep and ninety feet wide.

"I shall never forget the day when the King came to visit our drilling yard," writes Kenneth J. Edwards, who was in charge of the work. "He leaned over the edge of the well and looked a long time at the sheet of water which shone at the bottom of the dark hole. The water was there, more precious than gold, water which dispenses life and which was going to enable him to realise his projects and transform the face of his kingdom bit by bit. . . . When he stood up his face, usually impassive, was transformed. His eyes were filled with tears. He clapped me on the shoulder and said in a voice vibrant with emotion: 'You have wrought a miracle! Stay here fifteen years and we will drive back the desert. We will transform the wilderness into a paradise!' "[1]

At Jedda also a huge sheet of underground water was found twenty-five miles outside the town. It enabled running water to be distributed not only in Jedda but in Mecca, where, within the memory of man, water had never been known other than that sold in small casks or preserved in tanks.

These discoveries produced a perfect fever of activity. Ibn-Saud began by ordering the restoration of the existing wells. (More than a hundred of these were restored and deepened in the Nejd region alone.) Then under the direction of the Minister of Finance, Abdullah-al-Suleiman, aqueducts and canals were constructed across the desert, even dams to dike up the waters of the Jebel-Tuwaiq, the chain of mountains which forms a dorsal spine through central Arabia. Finally a whole network of new artesian wells was drilled, some of them reaching to a depth of 750 feet. The total output of these wells made it possible to supply water to 400,000 people annually and to 2,000,000 head of livestock as well.

The news that the King had opened new water-points spread over the desert like wildfire and an astonishing scene took place. Pushing their camels before them, 100,000 Bedouins hurried down to the wells in a joyous tumult to let their beasts drink. Most of them, when thirst was satisfied, and leather bottles were filled, left again for the high plateaux whence they had come. But others stayed and settled in the valleys.[2]

Thanks to these gushing waters, suddenly brought to light, gardens, palm groves and agrarian colonies could be multiplied. The whole aspect of a region of the globe was about to be transformed. . . .

[1] See the *American Magazine*, October 1947 [2] Ibid.

[LXXXVIII]

THE KING now brought agricultural engineers from the United States and asked them for a report on the country's agricultural possibilities. These experts travelled the length and breadth of the kingdom to prepare an inventory of its resources and draw up an estimate of its productive capacities. At the end of six months they gave Ibn-Saud an enthusiastic report. The document consisted of a hundred pages, each more optimistic than the last. The American technicians proposed for example to put 65,000 acres under cultivation in the Hasa alone and to double this figure at the end of three years. The harvest of fruits could rapidly be tripled and quadrupled by a better selection of species and the introduction of bees. Everywhere yield and harvesting could be increased. The report ended with this promising statement: "There is practically no limit to the agricultural possibilities of Arabia."

These results went far beyond the King's hopes. As soon as he had the report he decided to put it into practice. His first objective was to augment the density and number of the agricultural colonies and link them one with another by a string of gardens.

The orchards of Riyadh were naturally the object of his especial attention, and Gerald de Gaury, who visited them in 1935, was struck at that time by their extraordinary luxuriance. Along the banks of the Wadi-Hanifa, he says, "under the tall palms were apricot and pomegranate trees, divided by squares of emerald lucerne. Doves flitted up and down the sunbeams and wheeled between the drooping, yellow palm-fronds."[1]

And these gardens, which flourish all the year round, were not the only ones of their kind. There were others equally beautiful at Sulayil and Maqran; at Salma and Laila; at Dahara, Dilam and Manfuha; at Sadus, Hauta and Majmaa; at Jajajil and Zilfi, these last arranged in terraces on the slopes of the Jebel-Tuwaiq, dominated by the old fortified castles which Ibn-Saud had conquered in his youth, some of which went back to the time of Richard Cœur-de-Lion.

Like Mustapha Kemal, Ibn-Saud had a "model farm" and, again like the Ghazi, he spent there nearly all the time he did not devote to affairs of state. It was situated at El-Karj, a natural oasis of seven square miles, some thirty miles from Riyadh. The King, who had installed there a team of Ikwan veterans with their families, asked Edwards to take charge of it and make it an experimental centre to serve as a "pilot" for other similar establishments.

[1] Gerald de Gaury. *Arabia Phoenix*, p. 67.

Edwards brought in four specialists from Texas. With the help of local labour he built a concrete water conduit eleven miles long. Fed by four powerful pumps producing 7,700 gallons per minute, this enabled an area of 7,500 acres to be irrigated methodically. The result surpassed even the predictions of the experts. As soon as it was watered, the soil of the desert, left fallow for centuries, awoke from its torpor and revealed an almost explosive fertility.

"Despite the simoon and the sandstorms," Edwards wrote to his family, "everything grows here as if by magic. Alfa, wheat, barley, tomatoes, carrots, onions, melons and aubergines grow in profusion. The wheatfields produce seven quintals per acre, against two in Texas, lucerne can be forked at the end of twenty days, which means eighteen crops per year. Compare that with the four to five crops we get at home."[1]

When the experimental centre at Karj was in full operation Ibn-Saud asked Edwards to prepare him plans for a Ministry of Agriculture, an institution which the Arabs had never possessed in the whole course of their history and which a few months earlier would have seemed a wild extravagance.

[LXXXIX]

TIRELESSLY THE King pushed Arabia onward, stimulating the zeal of some, disarming the criticisms of others and galvanising his followers by the example of his own energy.

But this fever of creation did not meet with universal approval. The "ulemas" in particular asked themselves what the King wanted. Could he not content himself with reigning peacefully over the domain he had conquered? What was the meaning of all these disquieting innovations which he sought to impose upon Arabia: cars, aeroplanes, telephones, radio? Tongues wagged and the influential members of the priesthood were soon whispering that their Imam had sold his soul to the Devil. The King would lead the country to its ruin if he persevered in this course. The "mutawas" went from village to village, putting people on their guard against these "satanic" inventions and repeating a dictum of which all the Elders approved: "Nothing that is new is good."

To be frank, this opposition did not worry Ibn-Saud very much. Now that he was launched, nothing could stop him. Far from taking a tragic view of the recriminations of the "ulemas," he amused himself by reducing them to silence by malicious tricks of which he had the secret and which put these sad and solemn men to flight.

[1] See the *American Magazine*, October 1947.

When he wished to install the first telephone at the palace of Riyadh he called a hundred experts of the Koran, the most famous in all Islam, and showed them the instrument.

"They say," he told them, "that this curious object can transmit words over a distance. If I speak in Mecca I can be heard in Riyadh, and vice versa. This sounds very interesting, but I mistrust it. I fear that this invention may be a snare of the Devil. Therefore I have summoned you here that you may reassure me. One of you will recite the first verses of the Koran into this orifice. Another will take the receiver in the most distant room of the palace. If the sacred words are intercepted, or if they are deformed in any way, it will be a proof that the Devil is behind it. As you are the best Doctors of Law you will be the best people to pronounce a verdict."

The experts did what the King requested. All the verses of the Koran were transmitted without any deformation. The students of the Koran hastened to reassure the King: the machine contained nothing evil.

Another time while at Mecca Ibn-Saud was informed by his police that an important Doctor of Law of Riyadh, reputed for his virtue, had committed serious malpractices in the exercise of his functions. This "ulema" moreover was one of the Kings most incorrigible detractors. He had him summoned to the telephone.

A messenger went in search of the holy man in his mosque and led him to the instrument, saying:

"Mecca is calling you."

The "ulema" took the receiver and heard a long recital of his misdeeds. He sank on his knees before the omniscient machine, which was relating in a loud voice what he believed to be known to no one, and fell to his devotions as if in the presence of Allah himself.

"I forgive you your sins," said the voice in the telephone, "on condition that you never again speak ill of the King."

The terrified "ulema" promised all that he was asked. He ceased his campaign of denigration and spoke no more of telephones with disrespect.

The King's dream was to provide Arabia with a system of railways and roads comparable to those of the great Western nations. But this was easier to dream than to perform. Ibn-Saud soon found himself confronted with a fresh obstacle, more difficult to overcome than lack of water: lack of financial means. Where was he to find the sums necessary for an undertaking of this size? The only regular revenues on which he could count were the taxes imposed on all the pilgrims to Mecca.[1] The imposition of this tax was distasteful to Ibn-Saud, for it gave his protection of the Holy Places a character of commercial exploitation. There could be no question of increasing them, for any

[1] See above, p 194, note 3

aggravation of the taxation would have recalled the evil example of Hussein. Moreover, these revenues, sufficient to the needs of the Hejaz, would not be enough to balance the budget of the Saudi State, let alone finance a large programme of construction. He would need gigantic sums to buy concrete, steel, tools, machines, and all the technical equipment needed for the "modernisation of Arabia." The country manufactured nothing and possessed no source of energy. Its poverty was a terrible handicap. One cannot switch overnight from a patriarchal economy to capitalism. . . .

Once again Ibn-Saud had the feeling of being up against a wall, of reaching a limit beyond which he could not pass.

But once again he had luck—unheard-of luck. In a life as fertile in dramatic changes as a tale of the Thousand and One Nights, the most extraordinary was yet to come.

[XC]

TOWARDS THE autumn of 1924 a British major named Frank Holmes, who was prospecting in the Bahrein area on behalf of a British shipping company, made an unexpected discovery. While engaged in boring for water he came upon small traces of petroleum. Bahrein is an island in the south of the Persian Gulf, twelve and a half miles from the Hasa coast. It was governed by an independent sheik who, like all the small potentates bordering the Oman peninsula, had signed a protectorate convention with the British Empire, while recognising himself nominally allied to Ibn-Saud.

Holmes approached the Sheik of Bahrein and asked him to accord him an option on this potential oilfield. Fearing to displease the King of Nejd, who was constantly threatening to "absorb" him, the sheik referred Holmes to Ibn-Saud, and as a result a concession was granted to a British group, the Eastern and General Syndicate, in December 1925. In November 1927 an American corporation, the Eastern Gulf Oil Company, secured an option from the British syndicate and on December 21, 1928, the Bahrein rights were transferred to the Standard Oil Company of California. This transfer was the subject of discussion between the British and American Governments and finally became operative six years later when the Sheik of Bahrein granted a mining lease to the Bahrein Petroleum Company, a subsidiary of the Standard Oil Company of California, registered as a British company under the laws of Canada. Oil was first discovered in Bahrein in June 1932, after careful tests had been made.

Towards mid-June 1930 a small group of Bedouins of unusual appearance landed at Hufuf in the Hasa. They wore the customary

iqal and burnous and were bearded. But, what was odd, they did not speak a word of Arabic, never recited ritual prayers and did their best to pass unobserved. They seemed to be engaged upon some clandestine activity. As soon as he was informed of their presence, Ibn-Saud ordered an inquiry.

"They must be secret agents of some foreign Power," reported the Hasa police. "Their obvious ignorance of our religious customs, their clumsy disguise and the mystery with which they have surrounded themselves could not deceive anyone."

The King had no sooner decided to have them arrested and properly interrogated than it was disclosed that these strange Bedouins were in reality a group of American prospectors who had come to find out whether this region also contained oil. Ibn-Saud had second thoughts. He instructed the governor of Hasa to let the young men go about their business without hindrance. If ever Ibn-Saud had a happy inspiration it was undoubtedly that day.[1]

The "Bedouins" carried out a series of tests. It was suggested that since oil is found in the Caucasus, in the Persian Gulf, and in Persia and Mesopotamia, it might well be found also as far as the heart of Arabia. How much "black gold" was there under the desert sands? It was still impossible to say.

Ibn-Saud had a pressing need of money to implement his programme for the modernisation of Arabia. An oil strike could become a source of enormous income. But he was too cautious—and too mistrustful—to tie his hands before reflecting upon all aspects of the problem.

Finally he granted a concession to the Standard Oil Company of California (in May 1933). "American companies enjoy great independence in relation to their Government," he said. "Moreover, the United States are the furthest from Arabia and, unlike the European Powers, have no political designs upon it. Finally, certain citizens of America have already rendered me inestimable services. I hope that these will do so also."

[XCI]

SUCCESSORS OF the great feudal lords who came to the Levant in the Middle Ages, the petroleum trusts exert their influence today over the whole of the Persian Gulf area. British Petroleum, Iraq Petroleum, Royal Dutch-Shell group, Basra Petroleum, Kuweit Oil Company, Standard (New Jersey), Standard Oil of California, Texas Oil, Socony

[1] Some maintain—and this appears in no way impossible—that the King changed his mind as the result of an intervention by Kenneth J. Edwards, who was at that time engaged upon the El-Karj agricultural centre and whom Ibn-Saud liked very much. Edwards was from Texas, the prospectors also. . . .

Mobiloil, and several others are gathered there, tirelessly pumping "black gold" out of the earth. Their "fiefs" are their concessions; their hunting grounds the deposits; their castles the refineries; their dungeons the glittering "cracking towers"; the symbols of their power the fleets of tankers which plough day and night through the great waterway which runs from Shatt-el-Arab to the Indian Ocean.

Today they are gaints. But it has not always been so. Their beginnings were modest, even difficult. They have developed through a succession of crises, rivalries and conflicts which, for all that they have taken place in the velvety silences of board meetings or in the shadows of ministerial offices, have none the less been violent, dramatic, sometimes even bloody. The "oil war" which has raged for half a century in this region of the globe has known pauses at times; it has never known peace. To find one's way about in this jungle of interests and ambitions it is necessary to go back a little.

Towards 1908 a British "business man" named D'Arcy discovered oil in Persia, having obtained a concession from the Shah in 1901, and in 1909 the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed with British capital. Between 1906 and 1910 British and Dutch interests obtained from the Sultan of Turkey, Abdul Hamid (and after his overthrow, from his successors), the right to exploit the oil in the Mosul region. An international company, the Turkish Petroleum Company, was launched (in 1912), in which D'Arcy's Anglo-Persian obtained 50 per cent. of the shares, the Deutsche Bank 25 per cent., the remaining quarter going to an Anglo-Dutch group. Calouste Gulbenkian, an Armenian, who had acted as intermediary, received 5 per cent. without voting rights. Thanks to this arrangement, Britain had a controlling hand over all the oil of the Middle East.

The political and territorial rearrangements resulting from the Allied victory in 1918 and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire did not alter this preponderance. In 1920 the Treaty of San Remo transferred to France the 25 per cent. of the Turkish Petroleum which had previously belonged to the Germans. Britain continued to control three-quarters of the affair.

But the City business men meant to leave nothing to chance. Unofficial influence was brought to bear upon Arab rulers, from the princes of the Hashimite dynasty to the ragged sheiks on the shores of the Persian Gulf, to induce them to withhold further concessions from non-British companies. Only Ibn-Saud, that "unscrupulous adventurer" who, according to the experts at the Colonial Office, "held sway only over deserts destitute of interest," was excluded from these negotiations.

Having thus consolidated their monopoly in regard to the Americans and the Arabs, the British then turned to their French and Dutch

associates. They induced their respective governments to sign an accord under the terms of which no Power benefiting from the share-out of the Ottoman Empire would have the right, unless *by unanimous agreement*, to undertake new drillings, or to develop the exploitation of existing wells, within a given perimeter. This perimeter, bounded by what was called the "Red Tape Line," corresponded approximately to the frontiers of the former estate of the Sultans. Arabia was included in it in the same way as Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Transjordan.

For added security, the British companies responsible for maintenance of the accord within the "red perimeter," formed a cartel in which they held a majority and to which non-British companies were obliged to adhere. This cartel fixed the selling price of petroleum and the production "quotas." These figures could not be altered without the *unanimous* consent of the other members of the cartel—consent which was in fact never given except when the request emanated from a British company.

It would be hard to imagine a better guarded monopoly, a more impregnable fortress. Hence the anger of the British when they learned that the Sheik of Bahrein had granted a concession on his oil to an American firm. London financial circles described this as a scandal. But to the remonstrances of His Majesty's Government the Sheik of Bahrein replied, with an assumed candour, that he had in no way broken his word, since he had been dealing with a company registered in Canada. He had always understood that Canada formed an integral part of the British Commonwealth. . . .[1]

The British companies at once took a series of counter-measures to limit the consequences of this intrusion upon their domain. They forced the American company to affiliate itself to the cartel and from then on to respect its rules. When the Americans requested the cartel to allow a higher production quota the cartel refused categorically. The British groups wished at all costs to prevent a competition which might bring down the price of petroleum on the world market.

The Americans could not remain indifferent to this state of things. They protested against the economic exclusiveness of the British and against the control they claimed to exert over all the oil of the Middle East. In 1928, after laborious negotiation, in which the principles of the "open door" and "the balance of power" were invoked, they obtained a modification in the structure of Turkish Petroleum, which changed its name and became the Iraq Petroleum Company. America received 23·5 per cent. of the shares of the new company, France the same; while Britain received 48 per cent., the last five per cent. going to Gulbenkian, who had meanwhile become a British subject. By this Britain continued to control nearly everything.

[1] cf J. R. Percheral: "Le Malaise arabe." *L'Aurore*, August 27, 1951.

But Standard Oil of California, not being a member of the cartel, was not obliged to respect its ukase. Disregarding the British limitations of quotas and vetoes, it carried on its search for oil in the Hasa area. In 1936 it succeeded, though the quantity found was not great. Two years later oil was found in what is now the main producing zone, Damman field. Much greater quantities were produced after the war.

In 1944 Standard Oil of California (operating as the California Arabian Company) reached agreement with the Texas Oil Company to found together a new company, the Arabian-American Oil Company, commonly known under the name of Aramco. This took over the Hasa exploitation and, not fearing a conflict with its British rivals, began to compete seriously with them in the Asiatic market.

The British Government protested to Washington against what it called this "flagrant violation of the accord of 1928" and induced the French Government to support its move.[1] But this time it was the State Department which turned a deaf ear. . . .

From that time on the Arabian oil was saved. Nothing again impeded its spectacular rise. In 1935 production was only 174,000 tons. It reached 640,000 tons in 1936; 1,100,000 tons in 1937; 2,000,000 tons in 1939; 3,000,000 tons in 1941. A large refinery has sprung up on the coast. Miles of quays, cranes, jetties, tanks and dry docks bear witness to the intense activity of a region whose silence had hitherto been broken only by the songs of the pearl divers. A large section of the native population, attracted by the high wages, is now employed in the oilfield, dealing with the endless flow of "black gold" from the desert. The royalties from all this pay ever larger sums into the treasury of the Saudi State.

In 1936 it was not yet prosperity, but it was a foretaste. The obstacle of poverty had been surmounted. . . .

[XCII]

JUST AS alfa, barley and wheat grew in profusion under the impact of water, so railways and roads began to develop under the impact of petroleum. Asphalt motor roads spread along the coasts and penetrated little by little into the inland regions. A legend grew up around the "Hasa treasures." "Arabia," it was said in America, "is the land of Wajid Mafi, the land of nothing and of abundance." And this was true, for both rubbed shoulders strangely. The nothing was the surface of the earth, and the abundance its depths.

Other prospectors arrived, with their drills and seismographs. They

[1] As co-participant in Iraq-Petroleum.

discovered that the soil of Arabia was one of the richest in the world. It contained not only oil, but iron, copper, silver, tungsten, chromium and even gold. In 1937 a New York financial group founded the Saudi Arabia Mining Syndicate at Jedda for the exploitation of the gold-bearing rocks of the Hejaz. The Bouhran gold-mine was also restored to activity after having been neglected for centuries. Mohammed had given it as a privilege to his faithful friend, Bilal-al-Mouzani. At one time this mine, one of the oldest in the world, had worked for King Solomon. Now it furnished gold for Ibn-Saud's Minister of Finance.

The King intended that all these riches should be returned to the country when the contracts signed with foreign companies should expire. But would the Arab be able to guarantee the yield, or would he continue to starve in the midst of an Eldorado he could not himself exploit? Could he retrieve in two generations all that he had lost in six centuries of Ottoman domination and several millenniums of anarchy? This would depend upon the growing generations and the degree of education they could be given. . . .

Thus, like Mustapha Kemal, Ibn-Saud was brought back by the force of circumstances to the crux on which all the rest depended: the education of the people. Perhaps this question was even more acute in Riyadh than in Ankara, for in Arabia everything had yet to be done: the populations were here almost totally uneducated. Nevertheless, the intelligence of the Arab was more supple and nimble than that of the Anatolian peasant, his capacity for assimilation was greater and more rapid. In the past the Arab civilisation had known splendour to which the Ottoman civilisation could make no claim. When Mustapha Kemal looked back over the history of his people and climbed the centuries in thought, he could perceive only borrowed ideas or the grassy horizons of the Asiatic steppe. He needed a theoretical relationship with the Hittites and the Sumerians to find some spiritual starting-point. And since then three to five thousand years had passed. . . .

Ibn-Saud had no need to go back so far into the past to encounter one of the most brilliant civilisations the world had known, one which had sprung incontestibly from a genius purely Arab. What could one not expect from a race which had built palaces like those of Bagdad and Cordoba, and which had produced, one after another, men of war like Abu-Obeida, Mohammed-ben-Cassem, Hassan and Moussa-ibn-Nosier, poets like Omar Khayyám and Montanebbi, mathematicians like Thebit-ibn-Corrah and Alkowarezmi, scientists like Avicenna and Averröes? Why should not the intellectual summits which had already been climbed once not be climbed again?

The King in no way planned to revive these high intellectual

speculations at one stroke. His ambitions were more modest. For him the aim was to give the Arabs a technical and professional training sufficient to enable them to fulfil the tasks which the near future reserved for them. The rest would come afterwards, with Allah's aid. . . .

Ibn-Saud had already endowed the Centre for Islamic Studies at Mecca with considerable funds obtained from profits on the pilgrimages. He devoted a part of his new revenues to the establishment of primary schools and apprenticeship centres. The development of public education became one of his major considerations and he missed no opportunity of emphasising its importance. If the Arabs were not capable of forming in time a social corps sufficiently developed, then his heirs would be obliged to renew their concessions to foreign firms. These in turn would then be tempted to establish themselves permanently and the independence of Arabia would vanish like a dream. . . .

"The technical and industrial development of Arabia," he declared in an address to the agricultural centre at El Karj in November 1938, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of its foundation, "ought to keep pace with the professional education of the Arab people, for if it does not we shall be condemned for ever to call upon foreigners. It is not good in the long run that a people should have to rely on others for the accomplishments of tasks indispensable to their existence. . . . What is the use of shaking off a political yoke if it is only to be replaced by an economic one? I believe that it is necessary to modernise this country, not to deprive it of its liberty, but to enable it to enjoy liberty fully. Our Western friends, whose help is so precious, must not misunderstand the sense of my words. They contain nothing unfriendly towards them. They know that they have free access to me at all times to explain their difficulties and to tell me of their wishes. They know that they can count on my esteem and my friendship and that my benevolent help will never fail them.

"The Arab people mistrusted them in the past because it has always been from the foreigner that misfortune has come. For some time past this feeling has tended to change. I have noted with pleasure that confident, even friendly, relations have grown up between the *élite* of my subjects and the foreign technicians. This is because we now see them as guides who will free us from ignorance and open to us the way to a new prosperity.

"But I do not wish our Western friends to have any illusions: they will retain this friendship only if they respect the customs, traditions and beliefs of the Arab people. I want them to come here as teachers, not as masters; as guests, not as conquerors. Arabia is large enough, thanks be to God, to satisfy all ambitions save one: that of trying to tamper with its integrity. This has cost us dear to win and we would

rather die poor than renounce it. Arabia, I am sure, would be ready to refuse the benefits of a technical civilisation if these were to mean servitude to a foreign Power."

In this speech, coloured with an uncompromising nationalism, Ibn-Saud defined clearly the line of conduct which he had designed in relation to foreign concessionaires. This language did not displease the American foremen and drillers before whom it was spoken. They well understood the love of independence. Were they not themselves the sons of emancipated colonists? There was in the efforts of these Bedouins, so austere and Puritan, something which went straight to their hearts, for it recalled their own past. They, too, had once been pioneers whose sole capital had been the strength of their arms and their faith in God. They, too, had had to defend their nascent liberty against the envy of richer and more developed Powers. The stature of the "Giant King" impressed these admirers of physical prowess even more than his speeches. They argued among themselves whether in America he would have been a champion of boxing or of baseball. And if the fatalism of the Arabs at times disconcerted them they remembered having seen their own grandparents seeking guidance in the Bible, just as they now saw their Arab team-mates consulting the Koran.

A strange kingdom this, in which, thanks to a symbiosis of two worlds, the Wahabi psalms echoed to Lutheran chants amid the screeching of drills and the rumble of tractors. . . .

[XCIII]

MEANWHILE, THE clouds which foreshadow a storm were gathering once again in the European sky. 1939 arrived. Before that year had ended France, Britain, Germany and Poland were once more at war. The second world conflagration had broken out.

In 1914 Ibn-Saud had let himself be overtaken by events. This time he was on his guard. In 1914 he had been poor and disarmed. This time he was incomparably stronger and richer. In 1914 he had been only an insignificant sheik, whose power was disputed and who was relegated to the sands of the central desert. This time he was a king. He held a part of the coasts of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. His power was officially recognised by all the great nations and he possessed legations in the chief capitals of the world.

He mobilised the Ikwan and disposed it facing north and west so that it would be able to intervene in several directions at once, and watched the development of operations with close attention. The

first world war had rung the knell of the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps the second was to mark the start of the decline of the British.

As in 1914, the war, after a beginning in Poland and Flanders, spread eastwards. In 1941 the Germans occupied Salonika, Athens and Crete successively. A German-Italian corps landed in Cyrenaica and marched on Alexandria. Driven from Greece, threatened in Egypt, with a hostile Persia at her back and with Afghanistan and India on the boil, Britain was enduring one of the toughest assaults in her history. Bombed by the Luftwaffe and fearing invasion by German forces stationed on the Channel shores and the North Sea, she was having difficulty, as Churchill said, in keeping her head above water.

Abdullah still reigned in Transjordan. But in Iraq the situation had deteriorated considerably. Feisal I had died suddenly in Geneva in 1933, during a session of the League of Nations, leaving the throne to his son, Ghazi. The latter died in his turn in April 1939 in a motoring accident. The heir to the throne, his son, Feisal II, was only five years old. A regency had been set up in favour of Abdul-Illah, brother of Ghazi and grandson of Hussein.

Anxious about British interests in this region whence the British Navy and Air Force obtained the greater part of their fuel, Churchill gave orders for an Indian brigade to land at Basra (April 18). This was a violation of the protectorate agreement which linked the two countries.[1]

The British intervention aroused indignation among the nationalist officers of the Iraqi army,[2] notably those who belonged to a secret society called the "Golden Square." These approached Rashid-Ali, a politician known for his hostility towards Britain, and declared themselves willing to follow him if he would carry out a *coup d'état*.

After some intimidation manœuvres, to which the Regent opposed but a feeble resistance, Rashid-Ali had himself appointed Prime Minister (April 24). In fear of his life, Abdul-Illah left Bagdad secretly and took refuge at the air base of Habbaniya, where he put himself under the protection of the British authorities.[3]

[1] The Statute of Iraq had been laid down in 1921, on the broad lines furnished by Lawrence at the time when Churchill was Secretary of State for the Colonies, when the author of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was acting as his adviser. A treaty assured British protection to this country in exchange for a mandate. By the terms of this agreement, the land troops as well as the police were wholly Iraqi and the only British outpost consisted of a detachment of the R.A.F. stationed at Habbaniya, with an Assyrian battalion to ensure security. "Iraq," writes Somerset de Chair, "was, in fact, the first country where the experiment of air power, as the only and ultimate sanction of strength, had been tried" (*The Golden Carpet*, p. 49.)

[2] The Iraqi army was composed of 40,000 men, equipped with British arms and material.

[3] In April 1941 the Habbaniya base contained two squadrons of bombers, a fighter squadron, 1,500 men of the Assyrian Levy commanded by Alastair Graham and a battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment.

His hands thus freed, Rashid-Ali had himself voted full powers and pronounced the dissolution of Parliament. He then announced that the British mandate was ended and proclaimed the independence of Iraq. Simultaneously he had the British Embassy in Bagdad cordoned by police. "If British aircraft drop a single bomb on Bagdad," he told the Ambassador, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, "you will all be massacred as a reprisal."

Supposing that the last days of Britain were arriving, the Emperor of Iran, Reza Shah Pahlevi, also tore up the treaties which bound him to London and prepared to join forces with Rashid-Ali.

The British might be blocked up in their island, but they had not lost the habit of imperial reflex action on that account. The double defection of Iraq and Iran represented for the Commonwealth a danger as great as the Luftwaffe raids for Britain itself. Churchill took immediate counter-measures. Habbaniya, on the Euphrates, was at that time the one R.A.F. station able to make an effort, however inadequate, to defend British interests. To its support a reinforcement column was sent from Palestine under the command of Brigadier J. J. Kingstone, to proceed by forced marches upon the city of the Caliphs, deliver the Ambassador and protect the British colony.

Surprised by this riposte, which he had not expected, and seeing his troops wilting under R.A.F. bombing from Habbaniya, Rashid-Ali sent an appeal for help to the German Reich on April 30. But the Reich was too far away to be able to give him any help. It contented itself with supplying some arms, seized from the stocks of the French army of the Levant[1] and with selling him a certain number of fighter aircraft, of which only forty reached their destination.[2]

[XCIV]

THE FORCES of Kingstone, or "Kingcol," were concentrated at Rutbah, along the course of the Mosul-Haifa pipeline. There its strength was augmented by Bedouins of the Arab Legion recruited by Major Glubb. This little man, square-built and ruddy, with fair hair cut short, a moustache the colour of sand, and with a deep scar on one side of his face which had earned him the nickname of Abu-Huniak—"Father Jaw"—was one of those enterprising and adventurous individuals whom Britain from time to time sends to the East to defend her interests, and disowns if they compromise themselves too deeply.

[1] Since the Franco-German armistice of June 24, 1940, these had been stockpiled under the control of a German-Italian military commission.

[2] Major von Blomberg, who commanded the group, did not even have time to land in Iraq. His machine was destroyed in error on the first day by Iraqi Bedouins.

For some a man to be relied on and for others a man of mystery, who aspired to play in this war a role comparable to that of Lawrence in the last, Glubb Pasha had quickly realised that in the East the first condition of success is to have a personal legend. Arriving in the Arab countries twenty years before, he had had himself appointed military adviser to the Emir Abdullah, with the support of the Foreign Office, and had taken in hand the organisation of the Transjordanian Army. Active, ambitious and very likeable, the creator of the "Desert Patrols," whose members were drawn from all the countries in the Levant, had managed to win the hearts of his soldiers. Less a poet than Lawrence, he had one undeniable advantage over him: that of being able to lean upon an established Power. "I had mentioned Lawrence's name," writes Somerset de Chair, who took part in the Iraq expedition in the Kingstone column, "in gatherings of Arabs perhaps in a village perched high on some crag, accessible only to men on horses, and seen the flicker of recognition which passed around the circle of dark faces at the mention of Lawrence's name. But much of this fame had come after the event, from the publicity which it received in books, newspapers and cinemas. Lawrence was a name to conjure with in the Near East, but Abu-Hunaik's was accepted as of the Near East itself."[1]

After completing its final preparations, the Kingstone column set out, escorted by Glubb's Arabs, and blazed itself a trail through the sands (March 5, 1941). The advance of this handful of men, lost in the immensity, was extremely arduous. The season was bad and the motorised units suffered numerous breakdowns. Jarred by the reverberation of the engines, harassed by the Bedouin *harkas* and bombed several times by aircraft with Iraqi colours, these advance forces were exhausted when, a fortnight later, they reached the banks of the Tigris and saw the enchanting outlines of the Caliphs' city appear on the horizon. "It was the hour of dusk," writes Somerset de Chair. "To our left swept undulating country, meshed with the silvery veins of flood water, growing more hazy until a long fringe of dark green vegetation showed us the course of the Tigris. Above the tops of the trees were the domes and minarets of Bagdad, and, standing out conspicuously across the marshes to the north, was a mosque with two great golden domes glowing in the sun and four tall minarets capped with gold, which gave the effect of flame-topped torches. That must be the golden-roofed Mosque of Holy Kadhimain. Straight ahead of us, not three miles away, were the red roofs of the Palace of Roses, showing above tree-tops."[2]

The arrival of the "Kingcol" column had thrown the Iraqis into confusion. They had not expected to see the enemy arrive in that

[1] Somerset de Chair. op cit., p 33.

[2] Somerset de Chair: op. cit., p. 87.

quarter and supposed that its trucks and motorised artillery were but the vanguard of a much more powerful army. Kingstone resolved to exploit the effect of surprise. Making a brusque detour to the south, he drove upon Habbaniya and penetrated into the air base, where more than 9,000 British civilians had been crowded together since the month of April. The Iraqis, mangled by the R.A.F. Wellingtons,[1] fled at their approach, abandoning their dead and wounded on the field.

There remained only to clean up the Embassy. But this was an infinitely more delicate operation, for it entailed penetrating into the centre of Bagdad where the attitude of the population was unknown. To venture this with such weak forces would have been foolishly rash.

Fortunately Glubb Pasha was there, and it was in circumstances like this that this "friend of the Arabs" revealed himself as an invaluable auxiliary. Through him the British general staff was able to obtain intelligence inside the town and at the end of a few days of parley messengers from Bagdad announced that the British plenipotentiaries could be admitted on May 28 at dawn.

But what a contrast with the triumphal welcome made by the people of Damascus to Allenby and his troops twenty-five years earlier was this almost clandestine entrance of His Majesty's representatives into the former capital of Haroun-al-Rashid!

The British delegates were led blindfold through the outer posts and their bandages were only removed on the actual outskirts of the town. "The car sped on through streets of mustard-coloured buildings with flat roofs and shuttered windows," writes Somerset de Chair. "There were few people about. Here and there an Iraqi soldier, in dark khaki topee and shorts, with face and knees the colour of walnut, and a rifle slung over his shoulder, would look up in surprise at the spectacle of two British officers driving in by car."[2]

On the return journey the spectacle was even more humiliating. When the line of cars passed through the capital for the second time to take the Ambassador and his suite to Habbaniya, the morning was already well advanced. "There were more people about now," writes Somerset de Chair, "all the colourful pageantry of an eastern city . . . and many more soldiers. They looked up at us out of their dark brown eyes as we passed, and spat."[3]

The same day a large Bombay air transport machine was seen to land on the airfield. A young man stepped out of it, wearing American army uniform. It was Captain James Roosevelt, one of the sons of the President, who had come to investigate the situation. The British

[1] The battles of May 2 and 6 were particularly murderous for the besiegers, who had lost in addition a dozen cannons, sixty machine guns and ten armoured cars.

[2] Somerset de Chair: op. cit., p. 103.

[3] Somerset de Chair: op. cit, p. 105.

officers welcomed him, for they had pressing need of United States support.

James Roosevelt's visit had in fact considerable consequences. For on his return to Washington he drew his father's attention to the military and economic importance of the Middle East and at the same time to the diminished British prestige which he had noticed.

The British colony was henceforth out of danger and there remained only to liquidate what remained of Rashid's army. This was disintegrating of its own accord, demoralised by the absence of support by the Axis Powers and by reports of the imminent arrival of Auchinleck's army.

On May 29 a delegation of Iraqis arrived at Habbaniya. Its members were at once presented to General Clark by Glubb Pasha. They had come to ask for an armistice.

Agreement was rapidly reached because, thanks to the good offices of Glubb Pasha, its principal clauses had been accepted in advance by both sides. It came into force at midnight on May 30.[1]

Bagdad was evacuated by Iraqi troops in the morning of June 1. The security of the town was ensured by mixed Arab and British police forces. Rashid-Ali fled hastily to Persia. The "Golden Square" was disbanded and its members were arrested and brought before a court martial. Parliament was re-established. A severe purge fell upon all Iraqis who had been guilty of "rebellion" against their lawful sovereign. Abdul-Illah re-entered his capital under the protection of the Horse Guards and set up a new Government. This undertook to "facilitate by every means" the work of the British armies in their struggle against Germany and Italy. Rashid-Ali was condemned to death *in absentia* and a price was set upon his head.

The "thirty days' war" had ended. But what in fact had been only a local revolt, ill-conceived, badly led and inadequately armed, had caused many sleepless nights to the men in Downing Street. "The situation which in April appeared so disastrous," declared Churchill in the Commons, "was fully restored by the end of May. There are still dangers in Iraq which require attention but which need cause no serious anxiety."[2]

[1] Settlement was the more easily reached because Iraqian opinion as a whole had not supported the rebellion and most responsible Iraqian statesmen had joined the Regent in Jerusalem. (Translator's note.)

[2] Winston Churchill Speech in the House of Commons, September 9, 1941.

[XCV]

As SOON as the Iraqi affair was settled General Wavell entrusted General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson with the task of driving the French out of Syria. Tendentious rumours, put in circulation in Cairo, had led the British C.-in-C. to believe that Syria was occupied—or about to be occupied at any moment—by strong German contingents.[1] These rumours were devoid of any foundation and General Wavell hesitated to intervene. But as the Free French were insistent and General Catroux, representative of General de Gaulle in the Middle East, had declared himself ready "to accord full independence to the Syrians and put an end to French mandates in the Levant,"[2] the British doubtless considered that they would never have a better chance to cancel the concession they had made to France in 1916 and which they had never since ceased to regret.

After a violent air bombardment launched without warning upon Beirut and Nerab, the Anglo-Gaullist troops, supported by Indian and Australian contingents, attacked Syria at dawn on June 8. General Dentz, French High Commissioner in the Levant, ordered his troops to defend themselves vigorously.

Deadly fighting took place on land, on the sea and in the air. "The French fought like madmen all along the line," declared a British officer who took part in the battles.[3] At Palmyra a battalion commanded by Commandant Ghérardi, solidly entrenched in the ruins of the Temple of Baal, held out for more than thirteen days against Anglo-Indian forces, fighting one against ten with the courage of despair.

However, on June 15, the French troops along the coast, who had been broken up by the fire of the British naval guns, were obliged to evacuate Sidon, and eight days later the Anglo-Gaullist forces entered Damascus, amid an apathetic crowd (June 22). This "change of guard" excited but little interest.

The Palmyra garrison, reduced to a handful of men, was still resisting. But its last forces—a company of the Legion—were outnumbered a hundred to one. Dying of thirst and out of ammunition, they finally capitulated on the night of July 3.

Exhausted, lacking reinforcements, armour, aircraft, heavy war material and petrol, constantly in the breach and sometimes without sleep for a week, the forces of General Dentz could not expect to be

[1] Statement of Field Marshall Lord Wavell, *Combat*, July 4, 1946.

[2] General Catroux: Proclamation on Cairo radio, June 8, 1941.

[3] Statement by Lieut.-Com. Hugh Hodgkinson, R.N., quoted by Commandant Guiot, in his work: *Combats sans espoir*, p. 195.

victorious in this unequal struggle where courage, no matter how great, could not make up for inadequate weapons. On July 10 the French High Commissioner received authorisation from Marshal Pétain for a cease-fire. On July 14 an armistice, signed at Saint Jean d'Acre, put an end to the hostilities. The French had taken 2,000 prisoners. But they had 1,819 dead and missing.[1] The British on their side admitted 4,500 killed or wounded.

Fifteen days later, in execution of the promise of General Catroux, the French mandate was officially abolished. A Syrian Government was established under the presidency of Sheik Tageddine-El-Hassani, and General Spears installed himself at Damascus to "control" the activities of Gaullist agents whose presence had been tolerated only on a provisional basis. France was virtually excluded from the Levant.

With the Syrian affair settled, the British felt strong enough to speak with authority. They now turned to Iran, which had seemed to support the Iraqi independence movement. On August 25, 1941, British and Soviet forces penetrated jointly into Persia, occupied Teheran, demanded the closing down of the Axis legations and the withdrawal of Iranian troops to a point within a prearranged demarcation line (September 5). The Emperor Reza Shah Pahlevi, who was accused of a "pro-German" policy comparable with that of Rashid-Ali, was forced to abdicate and was deported to Maurice Island. On December 28 a "tripartite treaty of alliance" was signed between Great Britain, the U.S.S.R. and the new Iranian Government. This involved the total occupation of the country until the end of the war.[2]

Having thus made themselves felt at Bagdad, Damascus, Beirut and Teheran, the British turned to Ibn-Saud and requested him to withdraw his troops from the Kuweit frontiers.

Despite her reverses in Europe, Britain had proved that she was still able to make her wishes respected. Not wishing to suffer the same fate as the Shah of Persia or the Prime Minister of Iraq, Ibn-Saud found it more prudent to acquiesce. He withdrew the Ikwan into the interior of the country.

[1] Of these 405 were officers and non-commissioned officers (official report of General Dentz)

[2] This treaty also divided Persia—or Iran—into two zones of influence: a northern zone attributed to the U.S S R and a southern zone attributed to Great Britain. To some extent it renewed the Anglo-Russian treaty of August 31, 1907 (see above, p. 110, note 1), and cancelled the protectorate convention for the whole of Persia signed by Sir Percy Cox with the Persian Government on August 9, 1919 (see above, p. 148) As we shall see later, this important concession by Churchill to Russia was to have very serious consequences for Britain at the time of the nationalisation of Iranian oil by Dr. Mossadek.

[XCVI]

He was right. For not only was the war not yet ended, but in the course of the year 1942 the Middle East was to assume an even greater importance than during the first phase of the conflict.

Hostilities, at first confined to Europe and North Africa, had now spread all over the globe. After the U.S.S.R. they spread to Japan and the United States. Once again Basra and the Persian Gulf had become intersection points of international tension.

Ever since July 1941 Rommel had been submitting to the German General Staff a plan aiming at the conquest of the Suez Canal. But his personal projects went much further. In his mind this first advance was to be no more than a prelude to operations aiming at the seizure of Basra, in order to cut off the flow of American material which was beginning to reach the U.S.S.R. across the Persian Gulf.

"Before anyone dismisses such a scheme as fantastic," writes General Desmond Young, "as did the German High Command, who had only seen the first part of it, he should read General Auchinleck's dispatch (38177), covering events in the Middle East from November 1, 1941, to August 15, 1942. He will then see how much we had with which to hold Syria, after the Vichy French had capitulated; how much we had in Iraq and Iran; how easily Cyprus could have been captured by airborne troops at any time before the late summer of 1942 and what a constant preoccupation to him was his northern flank. His fear was, admittedly, an attack through the Caucasus. But whichever way the attack came, we were too thin on the ground to meet it had it been made in force."[1]

The leaders of the O.K.W. had rejected Rommel's project as too ambitious. But Hitler kept its broad lines in mind, fascinated by the vast prospects it opened up. "If the British knew what awaits them in the East," he said on January 5, 1942, to Otto Abetz, Reich Ambassador in Paris, "they would have no reason for rejoicing. . . . As soon as Singapore has fallen—which will not be long—the Japanese will be masters of the Gulf of Bengal. . . . By the end of the spring their cruisers will make their appearance in the Persian Gulf.

"At that moment I shall have resumed the offensive on the Russian front, with a more powerful army than in 1941. My armoured divisions will proceed in the direction of the Caucasus and will then descend as far as the Persian Gulf. We will effect our junction with the Japanese at Basra."[2]

Despite the secrecy with which they were surrounded, news of

[1] General Desmond Young: *Rommel*, p. 99.

[2] Benoist-Méchin: "Rapport à l'Amiral Darlan, January 9, 1942" (See *Procès B.-M.*, p. 344).

these projects filtered through to certain Wehrmacht units, where they aroused great enthusiasm. An echo is to be found in Léon Degrelle's campaign diary:

"The orders for the division had arrived," he wrote under the date August 16, 1942. "Objectives: Adler, then Sukkum, not far from Turkey in Asia. We are laying bets: by Christmas, Tiflis; in the spring, Babylon. On the sacred rivers, on the Tigris and on the Euphrates we shall meet Marshal Rommel's forces from Africa, coming from the Suez Canal. The war will be ended in the cradle of the world.

"Sukkum, its seaboard and its palm trees. Tiflis and its houses hung upon the rocks of Transcaucasia. The Lakes of the Moon of Azerbajdan. The great slope of crystalline sands down to the Persian Gulf. Our eyes gleam at the thought of this prodigious Odyssey. . . ."[1]

In the opposite camp General Auchinleck and his general staff were preparing to confront the storm and were measuring out their forces cautiously.

Not only were the naval convoys no longer arriving—for many ships were being sunk on the way by packs of submarines—but the British High Command had been obliged to draw units from Egypt and Palestine in order to send them to the Far East. Syria, Iraq and Iran had been more or less evacuated and the troops which occupied them brought back to the Nile. The Eighth Army was in an awkward position. It had just suffered a series of bad reverses. At Sidi-Rezegh and Belhamed one of the two brigades of the First South African Division had been practically wiped out. The New Zealand Division had lost two-thirds of its effectives. The three armoured divisions which constituted the army's breastplate had been reduced to a single mixed formation. In short, there was not much left with which to meet even the increasingly spirited assaults of Rommel and his Afrika Korps[2] without taking into account a possible German offensive from the north, through the Caucasus and Turkey.

Although a man of great self-control, Auchinleck had difficulty in concealing his anxiety. He cabled the War Office that it would be three months before he could be sure of holding his ground, and asked urgently for guns, tanks, aircraft and troops.

As its only reply, the British Government made known to him that it was materially impossible to send him anything and that he must hold on with the means in his possession. Even more: it informed him that it proposed to levy yet more troops from him in order to send them to Singapore, where the situation was critical. "In that case," replied Auchinleck, "I cannot resume the offensive for six months. . . ."

[1] Léon Degrelle: *La campagne de Russie*, pp. 138–139.

[2] All these facts and those which follow are taken from General Auchinleck's Report No. 38177, published in the supplement to the *London Gazette* on January 13, 1948.

While this dialogue was going on between Cairo and London, Marshal von Bock's advance guards had reached Maikop and Mozdok in the Caucasus. Rommel's armoured divisions, having passed Tobruk, were rolling on at full speed upon Alfaya and El-Alamein. Finally, Japanese warships had been reported to the west of Trincomalee in the Indian Ocean. "I would say that at that climax of the war we were nearer to victory than at any other time before or after," Marshal Keitel stated later. "Very little was needed then to conquer Alexandria and push forward to Suez and Palestine. . . ."[1]

Alone the barrier of Stalingrad was interposed between the Wehrmacht forces and the almost empty spaces of the Middle East.[2]

All the routes leading to India—those arteries vital to the British Empire—were in danger of being cut: the sea route via Suez, Aden and Ceylon; the land route via Haifa, Bagdad and Basra. And even a third route, not less important for the Allied strategy, which had been opened through the Persian Gulf. . . .

[XCVII]

THIS "THIRD ROUTE" was that by which the ever-growing flood of provisions, material and armaments which the United States was sending to the U.S.S.R. to sustain its war effort was being directed through Iran. If it was vital that the Stalingrad barrier should hold firm and German divisions be prevented from invading the Arab lands, then it was absolutely necessary that this flow of aid should not be interrupted.

After the occupation of Iran in August 1941, the Russians had asked the British to furnish them with raw materials. An agreement had been concluded between the two countries, under the terms of which the Russians undertook to transport these supplies from Teheran to the U.S.S.R. while the British undertook the much heavier task of conveying them from their place of origin to the Persian Gulf, unloading them there and taking them across Southern Persia as far as the limit of the northern zone controlled by Russia.

"When the British started to work," writes Edward R. Stettinius, Junr., "there was only one port of any size in the whole Persian Gulf area—Basra on the Shatt-el-Arab, the river formed by the juncture of the Tigris and the Euphrates. And Basra was on the wrong side of the river, in Iraq. Although it was connected by railroad with Turkey, Syria and Palestine, there were only roundabout connections by desert road with Iran. Khorramshahr, on the Iranian side of the river, could

[1] General Desmond Young· op cit., p. 186.
[2] General Auchinleck. Dispatch No. 38177, p. 310.

scarcely be called a port at all, and the same was true of Bandar Shahpur, the southern railhead of the Iranian railroad, further east on the Persian Gulf.

"The railroad itself was equally inadequate. It was not equipped to handle anything beyond the lightest kind of traffic. There were only a few hundred freight cars and nowhere near enough locomotives to haul heavy freight up the steep and sharply curving grades. The line was single-tracked most of the way. It passed over hundreds of bridges, and in the stretches through the mountains of Central Iran, tunnels averaged one in every two miles. Landslides which blocked all traffic were frequent. There were a few roads running north to Teheran and the Caspian Sea from the Persian Gulf, but most of them were little better than camel or donkey tracks."[1]

Despite these difficult conditions the British succeeded during the last six months of 1941 in delivering to the Russians 38,000 tons of rubber from Singapore, 13,000 tons of jute from India, 8,000 tons of tin from Malaya and 18,000 tons of lead from Burma and Australia. But in face of Stalin's growing demands it became clear that, unaided, the British would never be able to perform this double task: satisfy the enormous needs of the Soviets and at the same time equip the ports and routes of Iran. London turned to Washington for help.

The United States leaders were only waiting for this appeal. At the end of autumn 1941 a mission commanded by General Wheeler arrived in Iran to second the efforts of the British staff. Leaving Basra and Bender-Abbas to the British, the American engineers concentrated their efforts on Khorramshahr. There they built new quays and jetties. They dredged the canal of Shatt-el-Arab to allow the entry of large vessels. They installed cranes to unload heavy material. An old roadway which ran from Khorramshahr to Ahwaz (about fifty miles away on the Trans-Iranian Railway) was taken in hand by American army engineers, who transformed it into a superb highway. Shipyards for barges able to transport heavy material by water were installed on the River Karoun between Ahwaz and Khorramshahr.

Finally, at Abidjan, in the spring of 1942, American engineers began building a factory for the assembling of bombers which the Soviets needed in considerable numbers. A large airfield was constructed near the factory for testing these machines before delivery.

By the spring the volume of freight transported each month over the Trans-Iranian Railway had been tripled. Intense activity reigned over the whole northern coast of the Persian Gulf. British rolling-stock, with Indian locomotives, ran noisily along the track amid other locomotives from Krupps and wagons bought in Germany by the dethroned Shah. Iranian workers, under the orders of British and

[1] Edward R. Stettinius, Junr.: *Lease-Lend, Weapon for Victory*, p 214.

American engineers, laid miles of new track brought from the United States. American locomotives and trucks began to arrive, followed, after a short interval, by quantities of lorries. New roads were opened, old tracks were restored to working order and repair centres sprang up along the principal arteries. "All through 1942 the tonnage of supplies carried through Iran to Russia increased as more and more equipment from the United States arrived, and the building of ports and roads went on furiously under General Wheeler's direction."[1]

In October 1942 President Roosevelt—without consulting Congress—took a "generous initiative": he announced that henceforth "the United States army would relieve the British entirely of the responsibility of deliveries to the U.S.S.R. via Iran." This decision, which had great consequences, was to enable the American Government to supplant the British administration bit by bit in this part of the globe. It was the end of the convention, signed in 1913 by Lord Curzon and Mubarrak, conferring upon Britain the exclusive right of "policing the Gulf." Fifteen days later the American General Conolly took command of all inter-Allied services in the Persian Gulf.

At once the volume of traffic took a new jump forward. In May 1943 supplies sent to Russia via Iran amounted to over 100,000 tons. This was two and a half times the weight of merchandise transported at the moment when the Americans entered the picture and ten times what it could have been in August 1941.

The War Shipping Administration set about sending ships from America to the Middle East as fast as the cargoes could be discharged. At Khorramshahr and in the other ports of the Persian Gulf Liberty ships, and an enormous fleet of cargo vessels flying the Stars and Stripes or the colours of other Allied nations, lay side by side in the new docks built by the Americans.

Between July 1942 and June 1943 nearly 3,000,000 tons of material were sent to Russia, and this figure increased still further in the course of the following year. One is left dumbfounded by the magnitude of the effort accomplished by the United States and by the variety of goods furnished to the U.S.S.R. The detail of the deliveries included: 4,100 aeroplanes, 138,000 trucks and jeeps; 912,000 tons of steel of all categories; aluminium, copper, 100,000 tons of powder and toluol, hundreds of miles of railway tracks, points and signals; locomotives and freight cars; over 150,000,000 dollars' worth of tools and industrial equipment; pulverisers, crushing and roller mills, cutting tools, boring tools, electric drills, forge hammers, electric motors, portable grinders and all the equipment necessary for drilling wells to aid the U.S.S.R. in its oil production; six complete refineries, packed in cases and ready to be reassembled on the site; a synthetic rubber

[1] Edward R. Stettinius, Junr : op. cit., p. 216

factory capable of manufacturing a million lorry tyres a year; electric generators to increase the output of Soviet power stations; diesel generating factories; telephones, radio apparatus; machine tools of all kinds; excavators, skips, cranes; 1,500,000 tons of food; and finally 9,000 tons of seed and selected plants.

"As the President said, in a memorandum addressed to those of us concerned with the Soviet supply programme in the summer of 1942, 'The real criterion is the ability to deliver material in Russia. . . . Our position should be to say to the Russians, in effect, that we can let them have almost anything they want, but they must list these items in order of priority, and that we will fill them in the order chosen by them.' "[1] Between the American teams conveying these deliveries and the Russian teams taking delivery, a friendly rivalry was soon established. The Yankee soldiers strove to get the goods to the transfer points more quickly than the Soviets could take them away.[2]

From this resulted a bottleneck, because, despite all the improvements that had been made in them, the ports were too small for so intense a traffic. The northern coast of the Persian Gulf, sheer, rocky and battered by the winds, was ill adapted to the landing and loading of convoys. Basra and Khorramshahr were more sheltered; but their channels needed to be constantly dredged to avoid being silted up by the mud of the Shatt-el-Arab. There remained the southern coast of the Gulf, which was infinitely more suitable. But there the ports, the quays and the roads were all in the hands of Ibn-Saud.

The King of Arabia was at that time in serious financial difficulties. By suspending the Mecca pilgrimages, the war deprived him of an important source of revenue. He had received 6,800,000 dollars from Aramco as an advance on his royalties and had used this sum to arm the Ikwan. The soldiers had been mobilised for nearly three years and this had brought about a drop in agricultural production. He needed another 10,000,000 dollars.

"The British," he said to himself, "wish to keep the route to India open. Then let them pay for it. The Americans wish to keep the route to Persia open. They, too, can pay. The United States are looking for a safe spot in which to repair their Liberty ships and warehouse their material. I have just what they need: the Hasa ports. There, there are quays, cranes, hangars, warehouses, dry docks and port installations, already built by American oil engineers. But all these things, established on Saudi territory for purely civilian and commercial reasons, can be used for the transit of war material only with my authorisation.

"I am ready to give authorisation. But they must pay for it. And let them pay in gold or in dollars, because I have only limited confidence in the pound sterling. . . ."

[1] Edward R. Stettinius, Junr.: op. cit., p. 217. [2] Ibid., p. 221.

[XCVIII]

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT felt that Ibn-Saud was impudent. Such presumptuousness went beyond all bounds. The British Empire was not prepared to let itself be blackmailed by a small oriental potentate —and at that a potentate they had had at their beck and call twenty-five years earlier for a matter of £5,000 per month. What was to prevent Britain and the United States from using the Hasa bases as they pleased? The London cabinet proposed to bring Ibn-Saud to reason by using the strong hand which had succeeded so well in Iraq and Iran.

But now Britain was no longer directing the policy of the coalition. It was in Washington rather than in London that the major war decisions were being made. And Ibn-Saud knew this. Kept informed of White House feeling towards him by his legations and oil advisers, he knew that the American Government would not lightly permit Britain to engage in conflict with a country in which the United States had such powerful interests.

Not that the Saudi army represented a very formidable adversary. Far from it. Moreover, the situation had changed a good deal since the moment when Auchinleck, in his anxiety, had seen closing around him the double pincers of the German panzers from Libya and the Caucasus. The barrier of Stalingrad had held firm. The gates of the Nile had not been forced. Von Bock's divisions had had to fall back upon Kerch and Kharkov. The Japanese had just suffered a serious defeat at Guadalcanal and their warships had vanished from the Indian Ocean. All danger of an enemy invasion in the Middle East seemed henceforward excluded.

But the Ikwan would not let Arabia be occupied without a struggle. The Bedouin fanatics would fight to their last breath to protect the independence of their country. Their resistance could spread to adjacent States whose populations had not forgotten their humiliation of 1941. The oil wells would be burned, and this would cause serious damage to Anglo-American interests. It would be necessary to divert troops from essential theatres of operations to establish order. In short, it would be a source of immeasurable bitterness and difficulty.

Why risk putting the Middle East to fire and sword when a neat solution lay ready to hand? The United States had just lent the British Government 425 million dollars. In agreement with Roosevelt, James A. Moffet, the "grey eminence" of the Secretary of State, "advised" the British to put some water in their wine. "The President would be happy to see you open talks with the King of Arabia," he

told them. "He would also like you to pay him some of the money you have just borrowed from us."[1] At the same time, the oil directors were asked to let Ibn-Saud know discreetly that the money the British were about to offer him came not from the generosity of London but the liberality of Washington.

Even when mixed with water the British found this wine a bitter drink. During the first world war Ibn-Saud had played off the British against the Turks. Now he was trying to play off the United States against Britain. America was wrong to lend itself to these wily manœuvres. Its ideological anti-colonialism would lead it nowhere. The hidden war against the British Empire pursued by Roosevelt under cover of his programme of "economic aid to backward peoples" was a double-edged weapon which could one day be turned against its inventor. The Foreign Office diplomats considered this cavalier fashion of lending with one hand and taking back with the other supremely ungentlemanly. The world had changed since the happy times of Lord Cromer and Queen Victoria, when it had been enough for Britain to frown for the whole world to bow to her will. . . .

Against their better judgment, the British invited Ibn-Saud to come to Cairo for talks with them. The King of Arabia, who knew what this kind of invitation had generally meant in the past, replied that he was unwell and unable to make such a journey. The delegates he sent to the Egyptian capital in his stead received his orders to use stonewall tactics. Since the British negotiators were linking the granting of the loan with the acceptance of certain political conditions, the talks went round in circles and finally petered out. Anglo-Arab relations had entered an impasse. . . .

[XCIX]

President Roosevelt now decided to take matters in hand himself. His son James had given him a detailed report on his mission to Iraq and had pointed out the ill-disguised hostility felt by the populations towards the British. Generals Wheeler and Conolly had described to him the fabulous wealth within the Persian Gulf area. The oil directors drew his attention continually to the almost limitless resources of Saudi Arabia. In the course of his journey to Teheran in November 1943 he had stopped at Cairo and had there received visits from various obsequious Islamic personalities who had asked him for favours. This reception had flattered his vanity, without at the same time clouding his common sense. As the head of a free democracy which had only fairly recently made its début in world history,

[1] See *Life*, June 20, 1949, p. 45

Roosevelt saw himself as a new Augustus, appeasing the quarrels of the world with a sovereign gesture. . . .

As if to strengthen these tendencies still further, the President had just received a report from Senator Landis which was to become the White House Bible in matters concerning Middle Eastern policy. Describing the sterling block as an "outworn instrument of British domination," its author advocated by-passing this block by the establishment of direct exchanges with the Arab countries.

Roosevelt smiled when he heard that the British were trying to use their financial deal with Ibn-Saud to obtain for themselves a semi-protectorate over Arabia. Once again the "Diehards" were at work and seeking to extend their influence. Evidently they were incorrigible. But they must be very naïve also if they thought the United States would pay the costs of this transaction. It was not for such ends that Uncle Sam's dollars were meant to be used.

The President's reaction was prompt. Without seeking advice from anyone he added Arabia to the list of nations benefiting from "Lease-Lend." This measure made it possible for the United States to furnish material to the Saudi State and to advance funds to it without passing through a third Power.

"I do not know," wrote Harry Hopkins to Jesse Jones, "just how this decision will be explained to Congress, nor how it will be persuaded that Arabia is a democracy and a victim of Fascist aggression."

But the Senators raised no queries. The President's decision was ratified by a large majority. Mr. Landis and the oil interests had put in their word beforehand. . . .

Having thus created an "amicable atmosphere," Roosevelt sought to tighten still further the ties which linked the United States with Arabia. The stop he made in Egypt in February 1945 on his return from the Crimea gave him the opportunity.

"I shall be happy to make your acquaintance during my passage to Alexandria," he cabled the King through the American Consul at Jedda. This invitation, extended without the knowledge of the British, filled them with alarm when they learned of it. On the last evening of the Yalta Conference Roosevelt told Churchill airily that he intended to fly to Egypt the next day "because he had made arrangements for the King of Egypt, Ibn-Saud, and Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia, to confer with him for three days on board his cruiser on the Great Bitter Lake."

Churchill was visibly disconcerted. But as Roosevelt had taken the precaution of announcing this in the presence of a considerable number of people, he found no suitable opportunity of asking the President confidentially about the object of the meetings.

The more the evening drew on the more Churchill displayed

uneasiness. Finally, unable to restrain himself, he took Hopkins aside and questioned him about Roosevelt's intentions towards the three heads of States.

"I know nothing whatever about it," replied the "grey eminence" of the White House, who adds in his memoirs: "I did know the President intended to talk to Ibn-Saud about the Palestine situation Nothing I said, however, was comforting to Churchill, because he thought we had some deep-laid plot to undermine the British Empire in those areas."

Next day the Prime Minister told the President that he, too, would go to Egypt, after a short stay in Greece, and would also see the three sovereigns. He had already sent them messages asking them to stay on in Egypt, as he wished to have interviews with them himself after the President's departure.

This communication made Roosevelt smile. But he remained impenetrable.[1]

Churchill's uneasiness was nothing to the ill-humour of the Cabinet in London. For a century and a half the Middle East had been the "game preserve" of the British Crown. And now here was a powerful competitor—today an ally, but tomorrow, perhaps, a rival—who wanted to carry off their customers under their noses, and with a deplorable lack of ceremony.

The Americans treated Ibn-Saud with exceptional courtesy. They sent a special cruiser to Jedda. A tent of white muslin had been set up over the bridge to enable him to sleep in the open air during the crossing of the Red Sea.

"One would think it was the Queen of Sheba, going off to meet a new Solomon," remarked the managing director of Aramco, who witnessed the embarkation.

But this was no docile queen, this warrior over six feet tall who, up to now, had defeated all his adversaries. And the "new Solomon" was soon to discover this himself. . . .

The interview took place on February 14, 1945, at the entrance to the Red Sea, on board the cruiser *Quincy*. The Imam of the Wahabis was presented to the head of the American Republic with all the honours due to a sovereign.

"So glad to see you," said Roosevelt, stretching out his hand with that charming smile immortalised by thousands of photographers. "What can I do for you?"

"I am more than honoured by your friendly reception," replied Ibn-Saud. "But I have no requests to make. It was you, Mr. President, who expressed the wish to see me. Therefore, I presume that you have some request to make to me."

[1] Harry L. Hopkins: *The White House Papers*, by Robert E. Sherwood, Vol. II, p. 860.

This tone was in marked contrast to the obsequiousness of the other Arab leaders. The President brought out all his magnetism—that charm which Elliott Roosevelt tells us had already served so well with so many great ones of the world and which he had just used to the full upon Stalin.

But the President's studied charm had little effect upon his visitor, who had been accustomed since his earliest youth to the most elaborate forms of Arabian politeness. This was not his first effort either in such matters, and it was not for nothing that those of his countrymen who had had dealings with him described him as "the sleuth of all the sleuths on earth, swifter than the lightning of the sky."[1]

Usually the King spoke forcibly and at length, adorning his conversation with proverbs, popular sayings and texts from the Koran. He was wont to develop his arguments logically and bring them to their climax with consummate skill. Once arrived at his conclusion he would be silent, lean back and smile with an engaging air as if to say: "Are you not entirely of my opinion?"[2] But this time Ibn-Saud used different tactics. He was reserved and silent, obliging his interlocutor to be the first to show his cards.

That is what happened in the end. Tired of waiting, Roosevelt began to talk about the subject he had especially at heart: the future fate of the Jews in Palestine.

"I am sure the President did not realise what kind of man he was going to be entertaining when he invited Ibn-Saud to meet him," writes Harry Hopkins, "a man of austere dignity, great power and a born soldier and, above all, an Arab. . . . So, when the President asked Ibn-Saud to admit some more Jews into Palestine, indicating that it was such a small percentage of the total population of the Arab world, he was greatly shocked when Ibn-Saud, without a smile said:

" 'No!'

"Ibn-Saud emphasised the fact that the Jews in Palestine were successful in making the countryside bloom only because American and British capital had been poured in by the million and said if those same millions had been given to the Arabs they could have done quite as well. He also said that there was a Palestine army of Jews, all armed to the teeth, and he remarked that they did not seem to be fighting the Germans, but were aiming at the Arabs.

"He stated plainly that the Arab world would not permit a further extension beyond the commitment already made for future Jewish settlement in Palestine. He clearly inferred that the Arabs would take up arms before they would consent to that and he, as religious leader of the Arab world, must, naturally, support the Arabs in and about Palestine. The President seemed not to fully comprehend what

[1] Gerald de Gaury: *Arabia Phoenix*, p. 65. [2] Ibid., p. 66.

Ibn-Saud was saying to him, for he brought the question up two or three times more and each time Ibn-Saud was more determined than before.

"There is not doubt that Ibn-Saud made a great impression on the President that the Arabs meant business."[1]

This impression is confirmed by the statement Roosevelt made to Bernard Baruch at the end of this interview. Among all the men with whom he had had dealings in the course of his life, he told Baruch, he had got least satisfaction from "this iron-willed Arab monarch."[2]

For several hours the President and the King talked thus in the shadow of the great naval guns. At last, tired of waiting for concessions which did not come, Roosevelt changed the subject. He explained the needs of the American High Command in the Persian Gulf. The General Staff of the U.S.A. wished to have freedom of movement on the Hasa coast and in its ports, not only to shelter and refuel its convoys, but also to construct a powerful air base which would serve as a turn-table between the European and Asiatic war theatres.

The conversation at once took a wider turn. Now that Arabian questions were being approached, Ibn-Saud was ready to be more conciliatory. He assented very amiably to Roosevelt's proposals, but asked that in return the United States should agree to the following undertakings:

(1) Saudi Arabia should in no case be subjected to a military occupation, like those in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

(2) No part of its national territory should be alienated. The areas required by the American army would be leased to them for a period of not more than five years. After that time they would return to the Saudi State with all their installations.[3]

(3) A part of the light war material stocked at Khorramshahr should revert by priority to the Saudi Government to enable it to improve the armament of the Ikwan. In exchange, Ibn-Saud undertook not to attack the Allies and "to oppose by force any aggression by the Axis Powers."[4]

(4) In virtue of the "Four Freedoms" inscribed in the Atlantic Charter the United States would support all initiatives taken by the Saudi State in favour of the emancipation of Arab peoples at present under foreign tutelage.

By the first of these clauses Ibn-Saud guaranteed the independence of Arabia; by the fourth he presented himself as the champion of Pan-Arab independence.

[1] Harry L Hopkins: *The White House Papers*, by Robert E. Sherwood, Vol. II, p. 861.
[2] Elliott Roosevelt: *As He Saw It*, p. 245. [3] i.e. in February 1950.
[4] In February 1945 this eventuality was little to be feared.

"As far as the first point is concerned," said Roosevelt, "I will never sanction any American gesture hostile to the Arab people. As for the fourth, this is so much in tune with my own policy that there is not even need to discuss it. The era of colonialism is ended. The time of the political empires is past. One of the incontestible benefits of this war will be to give them the finishing stroke."

Recalling the precedent of Syria and Lebanon, the President declared that he had the written promise of the Algerian Committee that full independence would be granted to these two territories forthwith.

"I can write at any time to the French Government," he said, "and insist that they honour their word."[1]

He added that he would support the Lebanese and the Syrians by all the means at his disposal, excluding force, and that he intended to act similarly in respect to the other Arab countries as and when these should demand their independence.

On points 2 and 3—notably on the duration of the lease of territory to the army—Roosevelt tried to obtain some supplementary advantages. But this effort was in vain. Ibn-Saud stood pat on his position. For the sake of peace and quiet Roosevelt came round to his visitor's viewpoint. He maintained only that certain details should be clarified by a committee of experts.

Then the President introduced the subject of oil. Thinking already of the postwar period, he asked Ibn-Saud to confirm the existing concession covering exploitation of the oilfields in Saudi Arabia, and a project was discussed to construct a gigantic pipeline 1,000 miles long—the Trans-Arabian Pipeline—to link the Hasa oil basin with a port in the Eastern Mediterranean—Haifa or Sidon (the point of exit was not settled). The King said that realisation of this project would gratify his wishes to the full and that he would do all in his power to facilitate its execution. He would like this pipeline to be built by a private company.

Despite the somewhat sharp tone the conversation had had at the start, Roosevelt and Ibn-Saud parted delighted with each other. Each had the impression of having made an excellent bargain. As a mark of his pleasure, Roosevelt made a gift to the King of the wheelchair in which he was seated.

Surreptitiously, without anything spectacular to reveal it to world opinion, a sensational blow had been struck at British supremacy in the Middle East: Arabia had escaped from the sphere of British influence and entered that of America.

In one afternoon Ibn-Saud had had his revenge for twenty years of insults.

[1] Elliott Roosevelt: op. cit., p. 245.

PART FIVE

SAUDI ARABIA: OUTPOST OF THE WESTERN WORLD (1945–1953)

C *The 1946 oil "reshuffle"*

CI *Development of Aramco*

CII *Creation of road, rail and air system*

CIII *Gardens and palaces; the simplicity of the King*

CIV *Social policy of Aramco*

CV *Saudi oil to the help of U.S.A.*

CVI *Arabia, outpost of the Western world*

CVII *"Sterling oil" versus "dollar oil"*

CVIII *Enter Marshal Zaim*

CIX *Alarm in Downing Street. Assassination of Zaim*

CX *The Arab League checkmates the "Fertile Crescent"*

CXI *Coup at Damascus. Check to "Greater Syria"*

CXII *Victory of "dollar oil." The Transarabian pipeline*

CXIII *The water pipeline*

CXIV *General view of the Near and Middle East (1951–1953)*

CXV *The King's "baraka." The future of Arabia*

CXVI *"For me all things, even obstacles, are but a means"*

CXVII *Death of Ibn-Saud (November 9, 1953)*

APPENDICES

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Genealogy of the Saudis

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THE AGREEMENT confirmed between Roosevelt and Ibn-Saud on board the *Quincy* entered into force immediately. From March 1945 American prospecting was extended over the whole of the 440,000 square miles conceded to Aramco. Their efforts showed that the oilfield under the desert was a rich one. Saudi Arabia's proven reserves were estimated at about 5·5 thousand million tons, or roughly a sixth of the world total, now put at 30,000 million tons.

When these enormous figures were published in Wall Street, American oil circles were seized with a sort of dizziness. The United States had an assured monopoly for exploiting these riches until the year 2005. Standard Oil of California had indeed brought off an outstanding deal in obtaining this fabulous concession.

But not all American oil magnates shared the enthusiasm of the Aramco directors. Might not these latter use their gigantic resources to strangle competing companies, such as Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Mobiloil.

The British also began to be alarmed. The breach in their oil majority influence made by the intrusion of the Americans was now assuming disastrous proportions. What would become of British interests in face of the new floods of oil which Aramco would soon be pouring into the world market? All the elements for a sharp economic struggle were thus assembled. "A first-class row is in prospect," wrote the economist A. Visson. "The sharks will not be long in devouring each other. . . ."

But at the very moment when tension was at its peak and the "war" foreseen by all was on the point of breaking out, the State Department intervened and brought about a certain number of agreements. The directors of Aramco came to the sensible conclusion that they would now be unable to exploit so gigantic an oilfield single-handed. A cable from New York on December 11, 1946, announced that the two founder companies of Aramco, Standard Oil of California and Texas Oil, were offering Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Mobiloil a 40 per cent. share in the Arabian American Oil Company. Agreement was announced a fortnight later and another threatened American internal crisis was averted.

On the same day (December 26, 1946) another piece of news, not less sensational than the former, burst like a bombshell in London and New York. It was learned that Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Mobiloil had just bought from the British Government, for

a period of twenty years, a substantial proportion of the oil produced by Anglo-Iranian.[1] As the Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Mobiloil already possessed 23·75 per cent. of the shares of Iraq Petroleum, their activities thus now covered the whole of the Middle East.

In this way the "war" predicted by the Wall Street prophets was successfully avoided. The Arabian-American oil consortium, which comprised the most powerful financial groups in the United States, Rockefeller, Morgan and Mellon, was to have all the capital, technical staff and equipment necessary for an intensive exploitation of the Hasa oilfields.[2] But for Britain the lesson was a severe one. Everywhere where she had not been dispossessed by her young American rival she found herself now obliged to share with her.

Churchill, out of office after the general election of the preceding year, protested in the House of Commons against what he called a "policy of surrender." Sir Stafford Cripps, speaking in the name of the Labour Government, replied that Sir Winston himself bore too large a part of responsibility in this business to be in a position to reproach others and that in any case the state of British finances, heavily encumbered by war debts, permitted of no other solution.

[CI]

As soon as the "reshuffle" was completed, development of the Hasa oilfields was resumed at an astonishing speed.

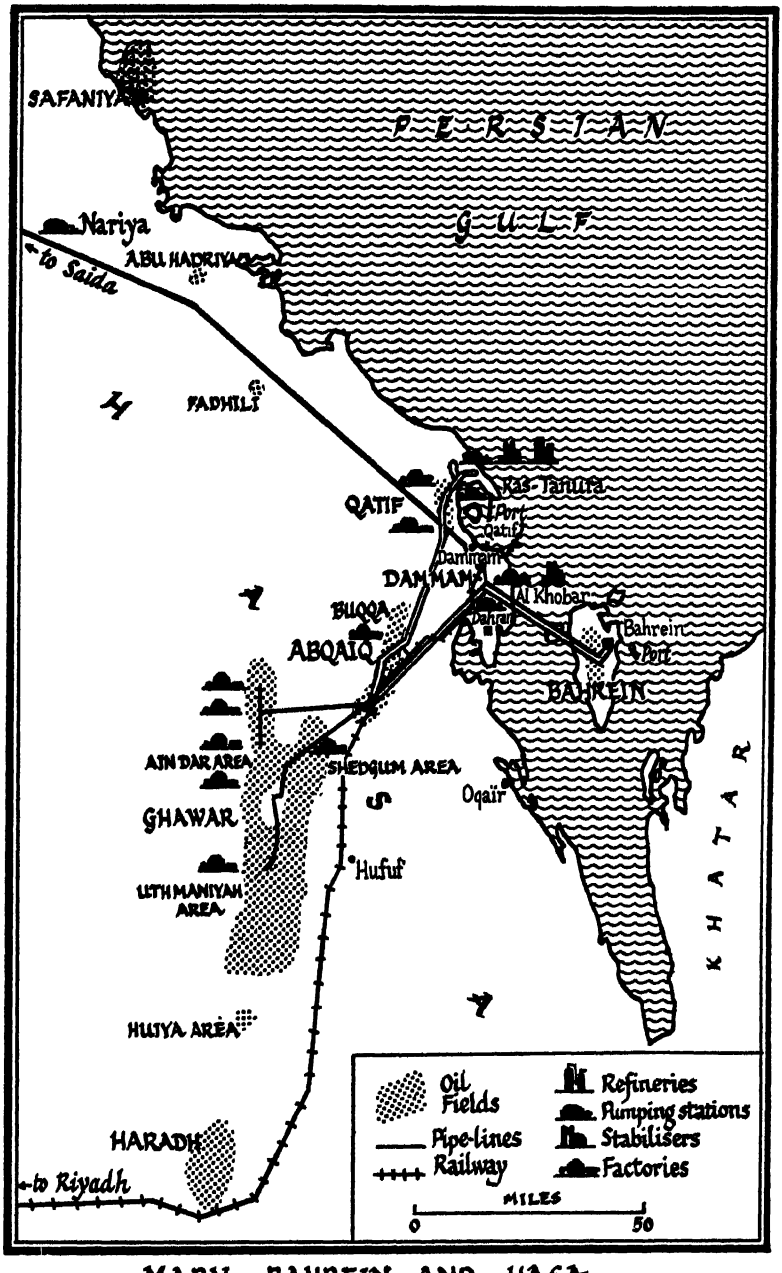
Four large oilfields were exploited simultaneously: one in the island of Bahrein and three on the mainland, at Qatif, Dammam and Abqaiq. Ninety-seven miles of quadruple pipeline linked these centres with each other. In addition, a submarine pipeline connected the shore installations with the island and port of Bahrein.

The large refinery at Ras-Tanura, to the north of Qatif, yields 7·5 to 8 million gallons a day at the present time. A port with the most modern equipment has been built there. The oil reservoirs along the quays are the largest in the world. Some of them have a capacity of 180,000 barrels.

"It is a lunar landscape," writes Jean-Paul Penez. "Over the yellow desert, all plateaux and broken rocks, under a sky of incredible blue, roll thousands of red Aramco lorries. The great storage tanks and cracking towers suggest the aspect of a landing on the moon. At

[1] The British Government owns 51 per cent of Anglo-Iranian.

[2] The management of Aramco was composed of W. F. Moore (President), Floyd Ohliger (Vice-President—whom Ibn-Saud called "my son") and James Macpherson (Director-General for Arabia). The present President is R. L. Keyes (1955).



MAPV BAHREIN AND HASA
OILFIELDS AND PIPELINES

ground level flares throw soft flames like scarves fifteen feet in the air. At night the sky seems on fire. The petroleum flares can be seen ninety miles away."[1]

In five years Dhahran, the oil capital, has risen from the desert like a piece of stage scenery, with its prefabricated bungalows, its drug stores, stadiums, swimming baths and cinemas, its little houses and pavilions painted in bright colours and its watered gardens.

"The laurel bushes arrived in crates and the lawns in rolls," writes James de Coquet, who went there in 1951. "Everything is imported from the United States. Everything consumed in these villas, from beer and fillet steak to green salad, is guaranteed American. On the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia the personnel of Aramco live in the same conditions of comfort as if they had never left home. The American way of life arrives weekly by aeroplane and steamship in the form of preserves, vitamins, gramophone records, films and glossy magazines. If television is still lacking there is at any rate a country club, with tennis courts and a golf course with flawless greens."[2]

Dhahran, from being a small unknown township hidden in the sands, has become overnight a place of interest to economists and strategists. Emulating the mushroom towns of the Middle West, its population grew from 7,000 to 69,000 between 1933 and 1953. The built-up area comprises a green quadrilateral where 3,000 United States citizens live the same family life as at home, a workers' city where 5,000 Moslem employees of Aramco enjoy refinements of life unknown in the oasis, and an Arab town in traditional style with *souks* and covered markets, public baths and mosques. It was there that the Emir Jiluwi, "the most feared prince in Arabia," lived until his death. The discipline he introduced has wholly stamped out the bandits who infested it thirty years ago.[3]

In 1955, the latest year for which figures are available, Aramco produced 965,041 barrels of oil per day.

As might have been expected, this industrial advance has favoured the creation of a number of ancillary activities: electric power houses, mechanical workshops, naval shipyards, foundries and building enterprises. The total of American capital invested in Arabia at January 1, 1950, was estimated at 1,800 million dollars.

[1] Jean-Paul Penez and Maurice Jarnoux. op cit. *Match*, March 6–13, 1954, p 45.
[2] James de Coquet· "Pétrole 51." *Le Figaro*, March 24–25, 1951, p. 5.
[3] Jean-Paul Penez and Maurice Jarnoux: op cit., *Match*, March 6–13, 1954.

[CII]

THE ROYALTIES paid by Aramco to Ibn-Saud during the last years of his life, which made him one of the worlds' four or five richest men, amounted to 440,000 dollars per day, or about 160,000,000 dollars per year.[1] The King used these sums for:

(1) the importation of certain foodstuffs and textiles indispensible to the Arabs (rice, sugar, tea, coffee, cotton goods);

(2) the purchase of heavy and light motor vehicles (350 in 1942; 5,000 in 1944; 13,000 in 1949; 22,000 in 1951);

(3) the implementation of the first stages of his "programme for the modernisation of Arabia," notably:

(*a*) the electrification of Riyadh and the main towns in the Hejaz (Mecca, Medina, Jedda and Taif);
(*b*) the construction of a communications network (roads, railways and air routes);
(*c*) the building of palaces and laying out of gardens;
(*d*) development of public education;
(*e*) a "prestige policy" towards other Arab States.

In respect of communications the King laid down a plan providing for the construction within twenty years of 27,000 miles of motor roads, of which some sections, representing about 3,750 miles, are now completed. Of what was William Shakespeare dreaming when he made one of the characters in the *Merchant of Venice* declare: "The vasty wilds of wide Arabia are as throughfares now. . . ."? For audiences in the sixteenth century this phrase was meaningless. Today it has become a reality.

"There are over fifteen thousand miles of regularly used car-tracks in Arabia," writes the British traveller Gerald de Gaury, "and where we painfully made our way through the Hejaz valleys are well-metalled roads. Huge six-wheeled lorries rumble along them—the noise of their motors echoing through the wadis—to Mecca, driven by strapping Nigerians who formerly earned a precariously low wage at the pilgrim port of Jedda and are now competent regular chauffeurs.

"Every month new ways are being opened up through the great plateau of Nejd which ten years ago less than a dozen Westerners had ever crossed. Drivers who return from long expeditions upon it often have a tale to tell of some new track they have made, of waterless sands crossed, of a well or village reached for the first time. They debate with

[1] It is probable that the amounts paid to his successors will be even higher.

their fellow-drivers the shortest and best routes and which way is least tiresome; and as they argue in the coffee halls of the princes and merchants something is felt of what must have been the atmosphere in the ports of England in Elizabethan days. The thousand-kilometre route across the peninsula through Riyadh they now regard as humdrum, and they set off over its long waterless desert with less demur than a taxi driver in London will start for a suburb.

"All the more fertile valleys and the great oases are now reached by cars and it would today be possible to motor from Aden to Bagdad."[1] Yes, indeed, "the vasty wilds of wide Arabia are as throughfares now." . . .

But despite the rapid development of the road network the King's preference was for railways, doubtless because he knew that trains are the symbol of wealth and success in the eyes of the big children Arabs sometimes are. In 1947 Ibn-Saud—"the rail-minded King," as the American engineers called him—called in a New York company to plan a railway from Riyadh to Dhahran which would have to cross 375 miles of desert.

Laden with graphs and statistics, the experts returned after protracted investigation and explained to the King that the sandy sections of the route would make railway construction impossible.

Ibn-Saud brushed the plans with the back of his hand. "I want a railway," he said in peremptory tones. "I brought you here to build it. If you can't do it I will call in another firm."

Two months later the first spike was driven into the sand. For four years 2,000 workers laboured day and night. Where the ground was soft the American engineers poured in thousands of tons of concrete to strengthen it. When concrete was not used rivers of crude oil were poured out on the sand. Sand and petroleum mixed formed a sort of crust upon which the railway could be laid.[2]

On October 25, 1951, the Emir Saud, the Crown Prince, laid the first bolt—of gold—in the presence of his father the King.

Encouraged by this success, Ibn-Saud ordered work to be started forthwith upon:

(1) construction of a "Transarabian" railway to involve laying 700 miles of track and link the Persian Gulf with the Red Sea, passing via Riyadh (cost approximately 32,500,000 dollars);

(2) extension of the Damascus–Medina line as far as Aden, passing via Mecca, Abha, Sabya and Sana, and connecting with the Transarabian;

(3) renovation and extension of the Hejaz railway system.

[1] Gerald de Gaury: *Arabia Phoenix*, p. 130.

[2] cf. Jean-Paul Penez and Maurice Jarnoux: op. cit., *Match*, March 6–13, 1954.

But it is perhaps in the realm of air travel that the most spectacular progress was achieved. It will be remembered that Roosevelt and Ibn-Saud reached agreement on board the *Quincy* for the establishment of a large air and sea base in Hasa. The American general air staff had chosen the Dhahran–Al-Khobar–Al-Aghesia area, and by the month of March 1945 the foundations had been laid.

When the American war effort shifted from the European theatre to Asia after the collapse of Germany, this airfield filled the role of a "turn-table" and assumed considerable strategic importance. Construction of the airfield was unaffected by the swift capitulation of Japan (August 11, 1945). As the *Quincy* agreements gave America the right to use this base until February 1950, the United States Air Force continued fitting it out and completed their work only in 1946.

Today the airfield is one of the best equipped in the world. It includes two concrete airstrips 1,800 and 2,100 yards long, a command post fitted with radio and radar, hangars and repair workshops, all provided with the most up-to-date gear.

In 1947 the Saudi Government acquired for its own use a fleet of DC-3s from war surplus and handed over its exploitation to Trans-World Airways. A regular service now links Jedda, Dhahran, Riyadh and other points in Arabia with Cairo, Damascus, Ankara, Bagdad, Basra and Teheran. Today T.W.A. international lines make regular stops at Dhahran on the India–United States route. B.O.A.C. (Britain) and K.L.M. (Holland) also make transit stops there. By 1947 air traffic was in excess of 400 aircraft a month. When the United States Navy aircraft *Lucky Lady* made its first non-stop flight round the world (February 26–March 2, 1949) its second refuelling point was over Dhahran.

[CIII]

IBN-SAUD knew that peoples do not ask only that those who govern them should nourish, educate and enrich them, but also that they should provide them with food for their imaginations. This aspect of the art of government holds true everywhere; it is especially true in the case of a people as sensitive to aesthetic emotions as the Arabs. Following the tradition of the great Abassid Caliphs, Ibn-Saud resolved to devote a part of his revenues to the embellishment of his capital and the building of new palaces. In his mind these things would give his subjects a heightened sense of his power and at the same time foster their national pride.

Riyadh was no longer the old broken-down township he had known in his youth. It was now "the King's city," whose 100,000 inhabitants

lived only by and for him. Ibn-Saud decreed that whoever entered the town should automatically become the sovereign's guest. The palace table was open to all. Anyone could enter, sit down and eat. "A Versailles in the midst of the desert," Maurice Jarnoux tells us, "Riyadh became the centre for all the tribal chiefs who came in numbers every day to seek an audience of the King or to beg a royal favour."[1]

Ibn-Saud wished to make Riyadh a modern capital and installed the ministries and embassies there. But he had retained a sad memory of the sombre, decayed palace of his childhood, with its tangle of winding corridors and ill-matched rooms damaged by time and the depredations of successive conquerors. He had never wished to re-enter the audience room where at the age of eleven, concealed between the thighs of the giant Ethiopian slave, he had witnessed the massacre of Salim. This scene had etched itself on his memory and he never thought of it without a shiver of horror. It was for this reason that he had a new dwelling built, six miles from Riyadh: the Nasria palace.

This was a fairylike building, rising in the desert itself and linked with the capital by a double motor road. Visitors to the new royal residence could not but be impressed by the tens of thousands of potted flowers which formed a multi-coloured hedge between the up-and-down roads. After alighting they passed through the palace and reached the gardens where green lawns and banks of camelias from Shiraz, terebinths and roses, were laid out over a half a square mile. The rarest specimens were brought each day from the agricultural centre at El-Karj and kept fresh—something never before seen in this part of Arabia—by a system of pools and gushing fountains. At night, from sunset to sunrise, 10,000 electric lamps lit up this magical spectacle.[2]

Next, Ibn-Saud had a winter palace built at Taif, not far from Mecca, for his second son, Feisal, viceroy of the Hejaz. Designed by Washington architects, this sumptuous building contains ninety rooms including a grand reception hall in green and black marble, supported by sixty-four columns; with a cinema, a swimming pool, gardens, and modern bathrooms decorated with pink ceramic.[3]

All this was made possible only by the royalties paid by the Americans and it is understandable that the King should one day have made this remark:

"Believe me, I know the worth of Aramco and shall defend it against anyone who tries to harm it."

But despite the floods of gold which oil was bringing into the coffers of Arabia, despite his palaces and gardens, his railways and roads,

[1] Maurice Jarnoux: op. cit., p. 45. [2] Ibid., p. 45.
[3] cf Frédéric Mégret: "Des Mille et Une Nuits aux puits de pétrole." *L'Illustration*, January 7, 1950, pp. 6 et seq.

Ibn-Saud made no change in his way of life. He continued to lead the rough, ascetic, Bedouin existence his father had taught him when he was a child and which had given him the strength to survive his exile in the Rub-al-Khali desert. He disliked beds and preferred to sleep upon a plain piece of matting laid on the ground. Whenever he could, he fled his sumptuous palaces and dwelt in a tent. He had also retained the frugality of his ancestors. His usual menu consisted of camel's milk, a little meat, some rice and a few dates. He drank only water, coffee and tea.

This asceticism and "the methodical manner he displayed in all things" had their influence upon the life of the court, as upon the administrative life of the country.[1]

Luncheon was at midday precisely. During the falcon hunts which were his favourite amusement, Ibn-Saud had the members of his council, his ministers and guests of honour at his table. These would say to him "God protect you," and call him by his first name. It was at once simple and great.

At meetings he spoke to everyone, knew everyone and took an interest in everyone's small troubles. He was easy to approach. Any of his subjects could ask him for justice. He refused no one. He was very fond of poetry and loved to recite verses. He appreciated wit, a clever or well-turned phrase, adored anecdotes and sometimes told them himself with a frank and friendly laugh which infected his listeners.[2]

If he had one over-indulgence it was rather in his harem, where he ended by having a considerable number of wives and concubines. But this was due less to sensuality than to natural vitality, and even the strictest Wahabis found nothing in it to criticise in a country where fecundity is considered a blessing of Allah and where fathers of families are in reality chiefs of clans. It was undeniably an impressive spectacle to see Ibn-Saud come forward on a day of ceremony, escorted by his thirty-five sons. The Arabs who bowed respectfully as he passed said:

"The Lord be praised Who has given us so great a king."

[CIV]

"Believe me, I know the worth of Aramco and shall defend it against anyone who tries to harm it." When he said this the King was not thinking only of the royalties which the American company was paying to him direct. He was thinking also of the advantages which flowed from them for the whole Arab people.

[1] Guémarqué: "Avec Ibn-Séoud, Roi des Sables." *Rivarol*, November 20, 1953, p. 10.
[2] Id., ibid.

Each worker Aramco brought from the United States cost the company 3,000 dollars even before he began to work in Hasa. In consequence the firm found it simpler to limit the number of American workmen to the higher branches and technicians and to use local labour to the greatest possible extent.

But to be able to use local labour it was necessary first of all to house it. A 26,000,000-dollar plan, to be spread over five years, was launched in 1945 for the construction of workers' dwellings, supplied with running water, drainage, electric kitchens and air-conditioning.

Then it was necessary to educate them. Aramco opened schools for young Arabs of from nine to eighteen years of age. A first study cycle, lasting three years, included courses in Arabic, English, arithmetic, elementary mechanics and hygiene. A second cycle of six years was provided for the 500 best pupils. These were housed, fed and clothed free by the company, which also paid for a final course in the United States. They were taught mathematics, physics, chemistry, history and geography.

Finally, there was need for medical care. The Americans opened free health centres and dispensaries almost everywhere. In these the country's commonest diseases were treated: trachoma, skin ulcers, syphilis and malaria. The Arab students showed a surprising aptitude for medicine. Teachers brought specially from Los Angeles and San Francisco opened nursing courses whose graduates were sent subsequently to the other towns of Arabia to spread knowledge of hygiene and prophylaxis.

"It is too early to say what will be the full effect on the people of industrial life," writes Gerald de Gaury, "but it is clear that the introduction of regular food and muscular exercise to a strain that is already one of the most virile in the world, will have a most remarkable physical effect upon them. Men who have worked for six months at the rigs on the oilfields are changed almost beyond recognition. The lean, desert-bred boy soon becomes a bronzed and eager athlete. After a generation the effect upon the race may be very great . . . consequently a quick rise in the population of Arabia may be seen before the end of this century."[1]

The Aramco directors soon noticed that the output of the native workers was greater when they were directed by their co-religionists. They selected 8,000 suitable Arabs and split them into teams under the direct authority of 400 Moslem foremen, with whom they then sub-contracted for a variety of jobs. In this way the Arabs learned to follow a number of varied trades. They became joiners, carpenters, electricians, assemblers of prefabricated houses, taxi drivers, hairdressers, laundrymen, ice-makers, cooks, etc. Others were entrusted

[1] Gerald de Gaury: op. cit., p. 132.

with the policing of roads, the upkeep of docks and the repairing of railways. Ikwan veterans were given the management of a canteen or a filling station in form of a pension. These were honorary functions of which they were very proud.

"Our object," said Floyd Ohliger, vice-president of Aramco, "is to create an Arab middle class, made up of men ready to take up every possible job."[1]

James Macpherson, director general manager for Arabia, added: "We are convinced that in helping the Arabs to help themselves we are also in the long run helping ourselves. We are thinking in terms of generations. I shall be dead by the year 2005, the date when this concession is due to expire. But obviously we shall like the company to retain its influence and the only reasonable way of doing that is to collaborate with the Arabs as with friends and partners."[2]

Under American guidance the Arabs displayed a sense of initiative and organisation of which they would not have been thought capable ten years earlier. Their high salaries, part of which could be saved, helped them to accumulate a little capital. Wealthy families perceived that it was more profitable to put their capital to work than to leave it in a cedarwood treasure chest. In 1937 there were not half a dozen private Arab businesses in the whole country. By 1947 there were more than a hundred, some of them on a large scale, in such diverse branches as building construction, transport enterprises, garage exploitation, the manufacture of preserves, weaving, mechanical workshops, milling and brick-making.

Ibn-Saud was sincerely grateful to Aramco for the help it gave him in these different spheres. But he still watched closely to see that these "foreign teachers" scrupulously respected the customs of the country. Petroleum and high salaries brought the Arabs the great temptations of the West. "Every society which has not changed its way of life for centuries runs the risk of collapsing upon contact with the modern world."[3]

Ibn-Saud wished indeed to obtain the benefits of Western civilisation, but he refused to allow its destructive aspects to penetrate his country, as these could corrupt his subjects and plunge them into an anarchy far worse than that of their ancestors.

To keep these dangers at bay he made use of the Koran. Superficial observers smiled at this. They said the King was trying to protect his country "with a paper shield." But they were wrong. This shield proved itself a solid one, because it was the expression of unshakeable faith. The strictness of the Koran teaching had already ensured the success of the Ikwan; it had served as cement to unite the tribes. It now

[1] See "Aramco Educates Its Labour." *Life*, June 20, 1949.
[2] See the *American Magazine*, October 1947.
[3] Maurice Jarnoux: op. cit.

enabled the King to exclude from his territories aspects of civilisation which he considered harmful for his people.

Unlike Mustapha Kemal, Ibn-Saud did not wish to alienate his people from their past or their traditions. On the contrary, he wished to root them more deeply into these, believing that they were the best antidotes to the poisons of the modern world. He always refused to wear European dress and would never allow any visitor to appear in his presence in a jacket. He would not allow any foreigners to criticise the Islamic religion. He forbade certain films and jazz music throughout his territory. In order to avoid incidents he asked the American managers not to engage Jews or ring their church bells lest these things should arouse the ire of the Wahabi priesthood.

He went still further. Fearing above all the effects of drunkenness, he took a Draconian decision in December 1952. All importation of alcohol was forbidden in Arabia. To prevent smuggling he gave orders to the Customs at Jedda to seize even the smallest quantity of alcohol destined either for Aramco or for foreign legations and embassies. To deprive Americans of whisky was a daring step. . . .

But the Americans bowed to the King's will. In return they tried to temper his justice. Bodily punishment was still in force. It was all very well to explain to the King that these practices were barbarous: he replied that they were less barbarous than robbing men of their liberty by shutting them up for years in prisons. He refused to change his methods. All that the Americans could obtain was that the executioner's sword should be disinfected before use and that a doctor should be authorised to treat stumps with chromate of mercury after amputation. . . . "Civilisation" had gained a point.

In this way Yankees and Bedouins managed to adjust their respective prejudices and beliefs. The workers from Texas left off wearing caps and adopted the *iqal*, which gave better protection against the sun; the Arab workers exchanged their white *ganduras* for overalls, which they found more convenient and cleaner. More and more often Bedouins could be heard saying "O.K., boy," to their comrades from the New World, while the latter greeted each other with "Salaam Aleikum"—peace be with you.

"The modernisation of Arabia undertaken by Ibn-Saud has already produced surprising results," writes Gerald de Gaury. "Arabia has travelled further during the past ten years than during the past ten centuries."

[CV]

THUS ARAMCO rendered Arabia services which Ibn-Saud could not have suspected when he first made contact with the American prospectors. In return, Arabia rendered the United States services which Roosevelt could not have foreseen either when he invited the King of Arabia to come and talk with him on board the *Quincy*.

In 1946 and even more in 1947 alarming rumours began to circulate in American industrial circles: the United States was in danger of running short of oil and was on the eve of a serious fuel crisis.

At first this news was not believed, so unlikely did it sound. But very soon the evidence had to be accepted: facts confirmed the predictions of statisticians. In that country which boasts of possessing everything in abundance and which had never known real restrictions, the great oil trusts found that they were using their reserves too quickly. Occupants of buildings fitted with new oil-burning plants found themselves abruptly without adequate heating during a particularly severe winter. What then had happened? It was said that the oil reserves in the New World had been used up as a result of the enormous consumption entailed by the war. If this was a fact, then the United States was faced with a real disaster. . . .

Fortunately for the Americans it was not a fact. But the causes of the crisis were nevertheless disturbing. Between 1935 and 1946 the total oil consumption of the United States had increased by 96 per cent. During the same period production had not kept pace with consumption.[1]

There was therefore a deficit. This was due not to exhaustion of the oilfields, as was at first believed, but in part to the bad state of the refineries. As these had been kept at work at full pressure during the war, maintenance of plant had not been carried out nor had the wear and tear of tanks been provided against. Deterioration of all this plant was hindering output. There ought to have been replacements. But replacement called for enormous quantities of steel, and there was also a steel crisis. Steel, in turn, involved the question of manganese . . . the difficulties merged with each other into an endless chain.

Fortunately there were the oils of Arabia. These together with plant repair came just in time to enable America to get through the critical period.

"For the first time in history," wrote Bertrand de Jouvenel, "American tankers went to the Persian Gulf in order to supply the

[1] 5,000,000 barrels per day in 1948, against 3,500,000 in 1940.

Middle West. . . . What no one had believed possible had happened: from being exporters the United States had become importers of oil."[1] When the situation seemed without solution, Dhahran and Bahrein came to the help of New York and Chicago. . . .

[CVI]

AT ONCE the Air and Navy general staffs began to worry. If Arabian oil was indispensable to American economy in *peace time*, what would it be in wartime? In anticipation of this eventuality the Navy signed a contract with Aramco whereby it obtained an option on 1,000 million barrels at 25 per cent. above the world price on the date of delivery. But what was to happen if it could not obtain delivery at the requisite time? The Army and Air chiefs on their side could not ignore the strategic advantages which the base at Dhahran gave them. Although in open rivalry upon many other points, the two general staffs were agreed that in case of conflict America would be unable to maintain long-term operations unless she had free use of Saudi oil. They made their anxieties known to General Marshall, who informed the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. The senators requested an interview with President Truman to point out to him "all the importance they attached to the defence of American interests in the Persian Gulf."

Thus, by force of circumstances, the United States was forced to involve itself more and more deeply in the Middle East.

It will be remembered that the first step in this direction had been taken in October 1942 when General Conolly took over all the Persian Gulf transport services "to release the British of the responsibility of deliveries to Russia via Iran."[2]

The second was taken by Truman on March 12, 1947. On that day the President informed Congress that "Great Britain being no longer in a position to support Greece and Turkey, America has decided to assume Britain's responsibilities in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East."

There remained one last gap to bridge. This was accomplished on June 23, 1948, when John Forrestal, American Secretary for War, told a conference of combined general staffs at Miami that "Saudi Arabia must be considered henceforth as included within the defence zone of the Western hemisphere."

The more tension mounted between the United States and the U.S.S.R. the more the Middle East appeared to the Pentagon experts as one of the world's most vital strategic areas.

[1] Bertrand de Jouvenel: *L'Amérique en Europe*, p. 224.

[2] See above, p. 225.

But what the Americans were discovering little by little the Russians on their side had known for a long time. On this point—as on many others—Soviet action had simply followed the expansionist policy of the Tsars. When Molotov went to see Hitler in March 1941 one of the conditions for the conclusion of a Germano-Russian military alliance—as was proved by certain documents at the Nuremberg trials—had been "a free hand in Iran and Iraq and the seizure of a large part of Saudi Arabia to ensure Soviet control of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden."[1]

Since then the Kremlin leaders had not changed their doctrine, as was confirmed by the rare scraps of information which filtered through the Iron Curtain. Was it not said, during the conference held on November 23, 1948, by the Soviet Grand General Staff and the most influential members of the Politburo, that General Shtemenko had submitted to Stalin a far-reaching plan of operations involving, among other things, "a lightning offensive in the Persian Gulf led by fifty armoured divisions"?[2]

Two years later, in November 1950, did not the Russians call a conference on the Middle East at Batum, where, in the presence of delegates and observers sent by communist circles in Turkey, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Egypt, measures for the protection of the oil zones of the U.S.S.R., "simultaneously with the annexation of oil sources in adjacent countries," were examined?[3] All these things showed very clearly that the direction of Russian policy had not changed. Its objectives still remained the same; the Straits, the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf. . . .

Could it be otherwise? Even if the masters of the Kremlin had wished to change the policy line they could not have done so. Russo-American rivalry around the Persian Gulf was inscribed in the nature of things. In round figures the United States and the Western democracies controlled 90 per cent. of the world production of oil and about 75 per cent. of the known reserves. In case of a conflict what could the U.S.S.R. accomplish with its 10 per cent. of the production and 25 per cent. of the reserves?[4] How could its 37,000,000 tons a year weigh against the 523,000,000 tons of the Atlantic group?[5] To overcome this

[1] See *New York Times*, March 19, 1946.
[2] See *Samedi-Soir*, October 8, 1949. [3] *L'Illustration*, December 9, 1950.
[4] Figures supplied by the Study Department of the Universal Oil Company of Chicago.
[5] Here are the figures for world oil production given by Harold Ickes at the Economic Conference held in Washington in April–May 1944.

Country	*Total Reserves*	*Production in 1943*	*Probable Duration of Reserves on Basis of 1943 Production*
	(In millions of tons)		
United States	2,700	200	13 years
Persian Gulf	2,200	15	146 years
U.S.S.R.	1,165	25·5	46 years
Antilles	1,025	35·5	30 years
Various	380	25	16 years

inferiority was absolutely necessary. How could this be done if not by seizing new oilfields? And where were the nearest to be found, if not in Iran, in Iraq and in Arabia?

The Americans, newly arrived in this part of the world, had finally grasped the importance of the issues. They now realised that Arabia was not only a source of fuel, but also a great strategic base whence large-scale air attack could be launched against the Soviet oilfields at Batum and Baku. It was by starting from this area, at the hinge between Europe and Asia, that the Soviet colossus could most easily be struck. To neglect Arabia, on the other hand, was to provide an easy prey for Soviet airborne divisions landing and then reaching the coast in support of naval forces.

In the race for strategic bases, a preliminary phase of an eventual conflict, Arabia was thus a capital card. So much so that the Pentagon experts came to believe that whoever held this outpost when hostilities broke out would have an immense advantage over its adversary through this alone. They went so far as to say that "in ten years whoever is master of Arabia and Middle East will be in practice master of the Old World."[1]

Without losing time the United States general staff opened negotiations with Ibn-Saud for a renewal of the contract covering the aero-naval bases at Dhahran which was due to expire in February 1950. The accord was renewed on July 15, 1951, for a duration of five years. Simultaneously plans were prepared to transform the northern seaboard of Arabia into an arsenal provided with powerful offensive and defensive weapons: underground aerodromes, submarine bases, launching ramps for guided missiles, etc.

In this plan special tasks fell to the Ikwan. In case of hostilities it would be required:

(1) to occupy all the water points immediately to prevent them from falling into enemy hands;

(2) to assure the security of the hinterland and prevent the sabotage of oil wells and pipelines.

This arrangement was to be completed later by the establishment of a continuous defence line at the north of the Persian Gulf to be constituted by means of military alliances with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.[2]

But the setting up of this "bronze shield" intended to protect the heart of Arabia was about to run into unforeseen difficulties.

[1] Albert Ducrocq: *Les Armes de Demain*, p. 34-35.

[2] See Benoist-Méchin: *Mustapha Kemal ou la Mort d'un Empire*, p. 402, note 1.

[CVII]

BRITAIN HAD never forgotten what Russia had long known and America had just discovered—the importance of the Middle East as a factor in world domination—and it would have been to misunderstand British obstinacy to suppose that she would let herself be evicted without a struggle.

Great Britain still retained a strong position in this area, thanks to the capital invested in the exploitation of oil in Iraq and Iran. Supported by these financial foundations and by her network of pipelines in Palestine and Mesopotamia, the sphere of British influence, although diminished, still stretched from Kirkuk to Haifa and from Bagdad to Teheran. Now British policy, in regard to petroleum, was diametrically opposed to that of the United States.

American policy was very simple. The oil reserves of the Western hemisphere had already supplied two wars—two wars during which consumption of petrol had been upon a terrifying scale. Warned by the crisis of 1947, American economic authorities concluded that American oilfields would have to be husbanded, since these, although vast, were not inexhaustible. The most practical way of accomplishing this was to use Saudi oil instead.

British policy was to extend the markets for oil produced by British firms and itself to consume oil from foreign sources—i.e. American oil, since there was now no other.[1]

To this end the London Government strove to keep the price of Mesopotamian oil *slightly above* that of oil imported from the United States by sea.[2]

Before it could reach European markets, oil from Dhahran or Bahrein had to make a complete tour of the Arabian peninsula, return up the Red Sea and pass through the Suez Canal. This represented a journey of nearly 3,000 miles. A great part of the Hasa oil was transported by British tankers.

In addition, a duty of fifteen to twenty cents for each barrel of oil was charged for passing through the Suez Canal. This amounted to a considerable sum when it is recalled that in 1948 tankers represented 58 per cent. of the total navigation of the Canal (against 43·9 per cent. in 1947 and 17 per cent. in 1938).

[1] Polish and Rumanian oil was monopolised by Russia. The Anglo-Dutch oils of the Indian archipelago (11,700,000 tons in 1940) were almost wholly absorbed by the Asiatic market: Japan, China, Malaya, Burma and India

[2] André Visson: "Why Must We Build That Pipeline?" *Reader's Digest*, June 1944 (American edition).

It was natural that the Americans should wish to free themselves from this bondage. For this two methods were available: the first would consist in laying down super-tankers, as large as liners, capable of carrying 50,000 tons of fuel and travelling at 15 knots. This would solve the problems of tonnage and freight. But it would not solve that of toll dues.

The second consisted in building a Transarabian pipeline—the T.A.P.—to link Dhahran directly with the Mediterranean. This plan, in which the American Government took a keen interest, had been under consideration since 1943. Roosevelt had mentioned it to Ibn-Saud on board the *Quincy*. The pipeline, 1,094 miles long, would shorten the journey by two-thirds and permit delivery of over ten million gallons of oil daily into the Mediterranean basin.

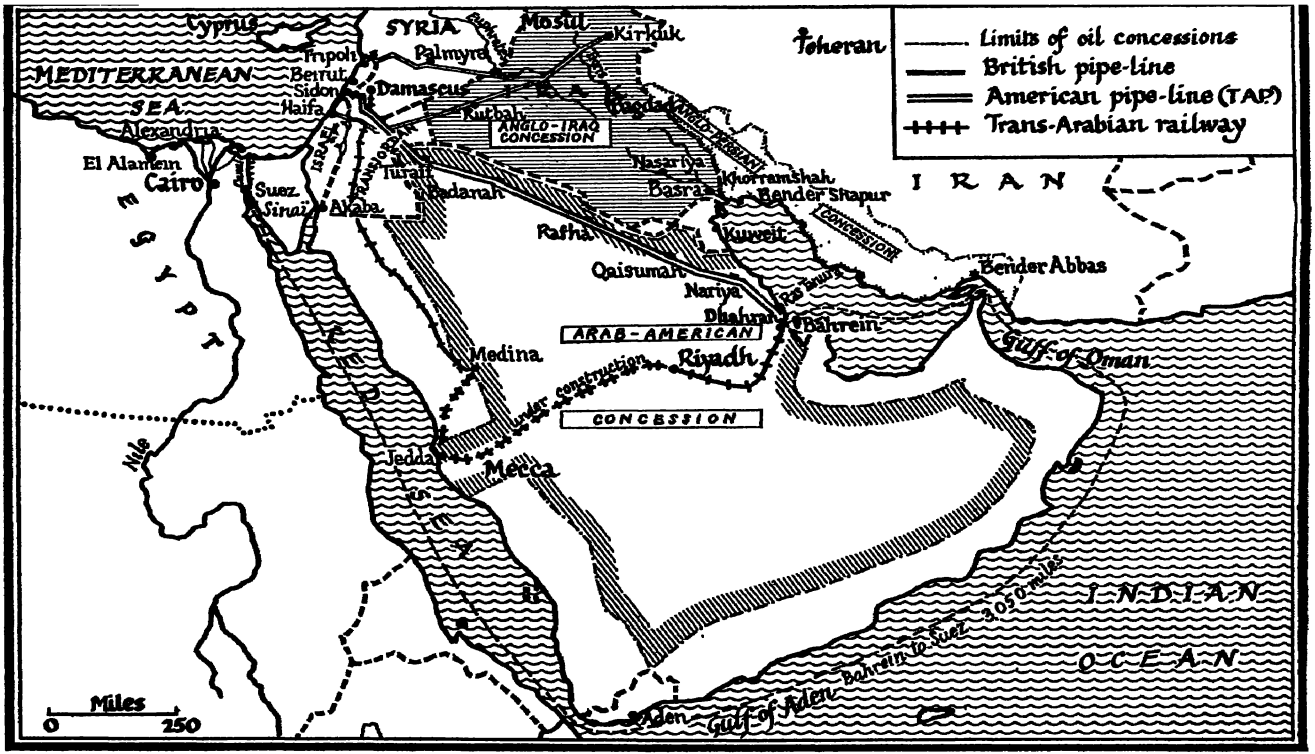
This project was essentially an American counterblast to the Malthusian economy practised by the British. London could not mistake its significance. "Conveyance of Saudi production to the Mediterranean by pipeline," wrote Edouard Sablier, "would strike Britain a terrible blow. . . . Would Anglo-Iranian be able to stand up for long to American competition? Moreover, certain countries on which London counts most to maintain its influence in the Middle East would be in danger of collapsing. Iraq exists only by its oil and Transjordan only by the guard it keeps along the Iraqi pipeline."[1] Thus the invisible war which put "sterling oil" against "dollar oil" now took the form of a spectacular rivalry between pipelines and tankers. . . .

As long as only Saudi territory was concerned, the pipeline's construction encountered no difficulty. But it was to be otherwise with the last section, between the north-western frontier of Saudi Arabia and the Mediterranean seaboard. There the American pipeline had necessarily to cross countries where British influence was preponderant —Transjordan and Palestine. London resolved to use all possible means to prevent the T.A.P. from reaching the sea.

Abdullah, king of Transjordan, had no need to be encouraged in this sense. By increasing the volume of American production the pipeline would increase the revenues of Ibn-Saud, and the son of Hussein would rather have "sold his soul to the Devil than help to enrich his mortal enemy." In consequence, he did his utmost to defeat the American project and when Aramco agents finally obtained from him an acceptance in principle, he invoked the confused situation prevailing in Palestine to postpone its execution indefinitely.

Tired of these delays, the Americans looked for another outlet. They turned to Syria, whose independence had been declared in 1945, and planned to bring the pipeline out at Sidon instead of Haifa. But there, also, the British were maintaining a careful watch. The Syrian Government, then headed by Jemil Mardam, continually put off

[1] *Monde*, August 16, 1949.



MAP VI OIL CONCESSIONS AND TRANSARABIAN PIPELINE

reaching an agreement and took refuge in the most varied pretexts to justify its evasions. Each time the negotiations seemed on the point of settlement an unforeseen incident arose to put everything back to the beginning. The talks marked time for several years; the pipeline, which should have been in use by 1946, was still unfinished by the end of 1949.

The Americans did not know to what to attribute these delays, and it may not have been without secret amusement that the British watched them struggling in a tangle of constantly recurring complications. Obviously the controllers of "sterling oil" knew that they could not checkmate their rivals' projects indefinitely. A day would come when "dollar oil" would have enough tankers to do without British tonnage and when the T.A.P. would finally reach the sea. What the British wanted was to tire the Americans by this war of attrition and induce them to agree to a New Deal for oil before that happened. By this means London hoped to bring about an Anglo-American "pool" within which prices and production figures would be fixed by mutual agreement, and the total oil wealth of the Middle East shared between the two Powers on a less unequal basis than that of the convention of December 1946.

On several occasions the British had made proposals to Washington on these lines. The Americans had systematically rejected them. But now the directors of Aramco were beginning to lose heart. Some of them were asking themselves whether the best solution after all would not be to open negotiations with London. The British saw themselves on the point of reaping the harvest of their efforts when a new personage of whom no one had heard suddenly stepped on to the Syrian political stage: General Zaim.

His accession to power changed all the fundamental factors of the problem.

[CVIII]

WHO, THEN, was this new figure, with a name like a clash of cymbals, whom events had brusquely pushed into the forefront?

What was known about him amounted to very little. Born in Aleppo in 1897, Husni-Zaim was a career officer who had had some of his training in France. A former cadet at Saint Maixent, he had served in a corps of the Turkish army in 1917 and 1918 and had taken part in the retreat from Syria under Mustapha Kemal. After the arrival of General Gouraud at Beirut in 1919 he had been the first Syrian officer to be given command of a French regiment. In 1941 General Dentz, who had the greatest confidence in him, had placed him in command of a brigade and given him the task of defending Damascus against Anglo-

Gaullist troops. The British, who accused him of pro-German sympathies, had interned him after the armistice of Saint Jean-d'Acre. Released in 1943, he had been appointed inspector-general of police in 1948 and shortly afterwards commander-in-chief of the Syrian armed forces. The heights and depths of his career had left him with three ruling passions: a great admiration for the Ghazi, a genuine liking for France, and an unshakable enmity for Britain.

At the beginning of 1949 Zaim had both the police and the army in his hands. Sickened by the corruption in Syrian administrative circles, he and three officer friends—Banij Kallas, Adib-Shishakli and Sami-Hinnawi—resolved to overthrow the Government and get rid of the President, M. Shukri-Kuwatli, with all his entourage.

On March 23, 1949, Zaim's army, returning defeated from Palestine, entered Damascus and forthwith arrested the head of the State, the head of the Government and the principal ministers. The public acclaimed this stroke, which rid them of a hated Government without shedding blood or calling in foreign help. On April 6, President Shukri-Kuwatli resigned; the following day Khaled-el-Azem, the Prime Minister, followed his example. On May 28, General Zaim was elected President by 726,116 out of 730,731 possible votes. While a hundred cannon shots were announcing the outcome of this plebiscite in Damascus, Zaim assumed the rank of Marshal and called upon the Syrian minister in Cairo, Mohzen-Barasi, to form a new Government. With a legal mandate from the Syrian people, the former Saint Maixent cadet was now installed in power for a period of seven years. What were his plans?

"What Husni-Zaim had in mind was nothing less than a radical revolution," writes General Catroux, "not only in political institutions and in economic and social structure, but also in the psychology and morality of his country. It was to be a revolution like those accomplished by Peter the Great and Ataturk, and aimed at the overthrow of existing social hierarchies, interests, conditions and ideas."[1]

Zaim's programme in fact corresponded point for point with that of Mustapha Kemal: agrarian reform and large-scale irrigation works; reorganisation of the army and a purge of the civil service; elimination of the retrograde Koranic laws; secularisation of the State; granting of votes to women; development of public education; reinforcement of the Syrian People's Party, etc. All these measures aimed at extirpating the last surviving traces of feudalism and forging the Syrian people into a modern nation.

The Marshal's likeable personality, his charm, energy and the masterful will which he derived perhaps from his Druse origin gave ground for belief that he would make his programme a reality.

[1] General Catroux: "Reflexions sur l'affaire syrienne." *Le Figaro*, August 20, 1949.

"Working twenty hours a day, shaking up the congenital apathy, setting the powers at defiance and respecting justice," Edouard Sablier tells us, "he was a man of clear speech, sane ideas and upright character."[1] After Mustapha Kemal and Ibn-Saud, a third statesman of exceptional stature seemed about to appear on the Middle Eastern stage.

Naturally, the Marshal's projects could not please everybody. He soon had the classic coalition again him of reactionary "ulemas," big landowners, hangers-on of the former régime and numerous functionaries dismissed for malpractices. His marked sympathy for France and attitude of reserve towards Abdullah drew upon him also the hostility of pro-Hashimite political groups who were working secretly for the creation of a Syrian-Iraqi-Transjordanian *bloc* under the aegis of Britain. But this opposition caused him little anxiety, for he felt himself strong enough to hold it in check.

When he reached power Zaim had found the treasury empty and public finances in a state of confusion. A currency agreement with France enabled him to parry the worst. But to obtain additional resources to enable Syria's economy to be put in working order, he sought to obtain a foreign loan.

Husni-Zaim was of Druse origin. The Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister, Fuad-Hamsa, was a Druse also. Ibn-Saud, who had a marked liking for that vigorous and proud race, followed the career of the new President attentively. It was even reported that this liking took a tangible form and that Ibn-Saud furnished Zaim with large subsidies to ensure his personal propaganda among the police and the army. It is certainly true that when Zaim seized power Ibn-Saud gave him a 6,000,000-dollar credit, repayable within ten years. This was the first time an Arab sovereign had been in a position to carry through a financial operation of such size. Simultaneously, talks were begun for an alliance between the Syrian and Saudi Governments (June 25, 1949).

A few days later Zaim put his signature to an agreement authorising the passage of the Transarabian pipeline through Syria.

"Dollar oil" had won the first round.

[CIX]

THIS NEWS, as may well be imagined, did not pass without causing a stir in London. The British Government did not hide its anxiety. "Everyone in Britain accounted an expert on Middle Eastern questions has been gathered at the Foreign Office for two days past," wrote the *Monde* in a leader on July 24, 1949. "The question at issue is the refloat-

[1] Edouard Sablier: "Le nouveau putsch syrien." *Monde*, August 16, 1949.

ing, after bankruptcy, of London's Middle Eastern policy. . . . The situation is such that in less than five years the Labour Government has lost nearly all the cards it held when it took power."

The experts were unanimous in describing the situation as very serious. Zaim's policy threatened the shield of small vassal States which Britain had built up along the sea to guarantee the continuity of her communications between Cairo and Bagdad and to prevent central Arabia "from overflowing into the Mediterranean basin."

This last consideration was the spectre which had haunted all British statesmen since 1919. Ibn-Saud had struck hammer-blow after hammer-blow against this rampart, now at one point, now at another.

On the first occasion, in 1919, the Wahabis had entered Jauf and Turaif. The British had driven them out with bombs. A second time in 1925 the Ikwan had occupied the Wadi Sirhan corridor. The British had brought about their evacuation by negotiation.[1] And now here was Ibn-Saud returning to the charge, borne this time upon a tide of oil and American dollars. Within the shelter of negotiations over the pipeline he was trying to conclude an alliance with Zaim!

If Syria came to terms with Saudi Arabia it would mean the end of British power in the Middle East. For then American oil would flow unhindered into the Mediterranean basin. Iraq Petroleum and Anglo-Iranian would be in no condition to compete with Aramco. They would be forced to yield place to American companies and Britain would become dependent upon the United States for the fuel indispensable to her air force and navy. . . .

Politically, the consequences would be hardly less disastrous. Transjordan would be cut off from Iraq. Isolated from each other, these two States would be crushed sooner or later and Britain would have lost the two last pillars upon which her prestige in the East depended. Nor was this all.

Under the leadership of an ardent defender of pan-Arab doctrines, Abder-Rahman-Azzam Bey, an "Arab League" had been formed at Heliopolis, near Cairo (on March 17, 1945) to "co-ordinate the action of the various Arab States in the Middle East." Ibn-Saud, who had never been able to obtain admission to Lawrence's Confederation—"an adventurer cannot sit at table with princes"—was a foundation member of the Arab League. There were seven members: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Transjordan, Syria, the Lebanon and Iraq. Decisions were taken by a majority vote. Now Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen always voted together. Iraq and Transjordan did the same. Between these two *blocs* Syria and the Lebanon swayed the balance, sometimes one day, sometimes another.[2]

[1] See above, p. 168.
[2] See Maurice Pernot: "La Ligue arabe." *Hommes et Mondes*, March 1947.

If Syria (which carried the Lebanon with it automatically) should go over to the side of Ibn-Saud the latter would command not three but five votes out of seven, and with Egypt would be master of the Arab League.

The Foreign Office experts unanimously agreed that Britain must not allow this to happen.

Then, twenty days later, swiftly and brutally, the climax came.

On August 14, 1949, at three o'clock in the morning, three armoured cars pulled up in front of the steps of the Presidential residence at Damascus, while a cordon of troops surrounded the palace. Officers got out of the cars, exchanged a few shots with the guards, broke into Marshal Zaim's bedroom and killed him.

The leader of the gang of murderers was Colonel Hinnawi—his best friend.

Zaim's body was taken by car to the Mezze fortress. Meanwhile, another group of officers had gone to find the Prime Minister, Mohzen-Barasi, at his home, and had brought him to the fortress unconscious and covered in blood. His body was laid on the ground beside that of the Marshal. Then all the soldiers and officers present emptied their revolvers into the bodies.[1]

During the night, Hinnawi seized power, announced on the radio that he had rid the country of an odious tyrant, and called upon M. Hashem-Atassi, a politician of the former régime, to form a new cabinet.

When she learned of the Marshal's death, his wife, who was pregnant, gave birth to a stillborn child. Abdullah showed his pleasure at this in so blatant a fashion that the British Government had to call him sharply to order. All the dismissed officials were reinstated. The Syrian parliament, summoned by Hinnawi, voted him congratulations, and refused to ratify the pipeline agreement.

Husni-Zaim had passed like a meteor over the Syrian political sky. His Government, planned for seven years, had lasted only twenty days.

"Sterling oil" had won the second round.

[CX]

"THE NOTION at Damascus that the assassination of Marshal Zaim was ordered and arranged by London is sheer, irresponsible rumour, expressed in outdated clichés," wrote J. R. Percheral.[2] Perhaps he was right, for in a country where personal rivalries and local intrigues hold so great a place that they eventually eclipse problems of general order,

[1] See *Journal de Caire*, August 19, 1949.

[2] *L'Aurore*, September 4, 1951.

nothing is ever as simple as it seems. But one thing remains certain. That is, that on learning of the tragic death of Zaim, Britain heaved a sigh of relief. Now that one danger had been averted a recurrence of awkward circumstances must be prevented at all costs.

The Foreign Office experts re-examined their dossiers and concluded that they would have to revive the plan proposed by Lawrence in 1919. All in all, the author of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* has seen clearly. Experience showed that his projected Arab Confederation must be resurrected and placed under the exclusive authority of the Hashimites. Doubtless it would have to be on a less ambitious scale than in 1919. It would be reduced territorially and diminished politically. But in return it could be given a new, poetical name, the "Fertile Crescent." Who could resist so promising a title?

This British project was to be accomplished in two stages. In the first stage Syria and Iraq would unite under the name of "Greater Syria," while Transjordan, changing its name to Jordan, would be enlarged by the addition of Arab areas lately detached from Palestine.

In the second stage "Jordan" and "Greater Syria" would merge in their turn either under the sceptre of King Abdullah, or—to save certain faces—under that of his grand-nephew, Feisal II, the future King of Iraq, at that time completing his studies at Harrow. In this latter case, as Feisal was still a minor, a regency council would be added, to be composed, apart from Abdullah, of Abdul-Illah, regent of Iraq, the presidents of the Syrian and Lebanese republics, and the heads of the Shiite and Maronite religious communities.

Up to that time most Syrians and Lebanese had been hostile to a combination of this kind, for what was known as "Greater Syria" meant in reality "Greater Iraq." In addition, the union would raise internal political questions. The republicans of Damascus would perhaps have agreed to unite with Bagdad, on condition that Iraq renounced the monarchy. But this solution did not suit the British. For them the essential object of the operation was to place Syria under the rule of a Hashimite, which meant a sovereign owing allegiance to London. It was thus for Damascus to renounce the republic.

As if by accident, the accession to power of General (ex-Colonel) Hinnawi coincided with a marked recrudescence of monarchist propaganda. On August 20 the Syrian parliament declared itself "favourable to the attachment of Syria to Iraq and Transjordan." The "Fertile Crescent" was beginning to take shape. It remained only to ratify this decision in the Arab League.

On August 24—ten days after the assassination of Marshal Zaim—Iraq asked for an urgent convocation of the Cairo Assembly, insisting that the meeting should be held before the end of the month. This demand emanated from the Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri-Said, a

former aide-de-camp of Lawrence whom the author of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* had named "Commander-in-Chief of the Arab Forces" at the taking of Damascus in 1918.[1] It was supported by Nazem-Kudzi, Foreign Minister of the Syrian Government, by Riad-Sohl, the Lebanese Premier, and, naturally, by Abdullah, King of Jordan. In these conditions it could be expected that the Syrian proposal would be adopted, since four members of the League out of seven had already given it their support.

The delegates met in the Egyptian capital on August 30. Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt asked for an adjournment of the conference to a later date. "We have been taken by surprise by this premature convocation," they said. "Give us at least a reasonable interval in which to examine the repercussions of the recent Syrian *coup d'état*." After a sharp debate the meeting was postponed until October 12. This was six weeks gained—six weeks which Saudi Arabia and the enemies of the Hashimites were to use for a counter-offensive.

October 12 arrived. But when the delegates of the Arab States assembled again, a surprising thing happened. Immediately after the opening of the first sitting, Nuri-Said, in the name of Iraq, and Nazem-Kudzi, in that of Syria, the very men who had asked for the convocation of the Assembly, declared that they had renounced the union of their respective countries. When the delegate from Yemen smilingly asked their reasons for this change of front, they replied, with visible embarrassment, that "the moment did not seem to them opportune to engage in discussions upon so delicate a subject." Retreating all along the line, they went so far as to request that the question should not even appear on the agenda. Instead of the Syrio-Iraqi union project, the delegates adopted an Egyptian proposal for a pact of collective security based on periodic contacts between the chiefs of staff of the various Arab armies.[2] Although in a minority, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Yemen had carried the day.

What, then, had happened during these six weeks? Is it true, as has been reported, that Ibn-Saud, supported by the Ikwan, had made known to Nuri-Said that he would consider the union of Iraq and Syria as a *casus belli* and that he would withdraw from the Arab League if it ratified this measure? Had the United States Ambassador at Cairo, Mr. Jefferson Caffery, inspired, as has been suggested, the collective security pact substituted *in extremis* by the Egyptian delegate for the "Fertile Crescent" project? Had Nuri-Said recoiled at the last minute before the prospect of seeing the Arab States torn into two mutually hostile *blocs*, one centred on London, the other on Washington? All these rumours circulated, and all are plausible. . . .

[1] T. E Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

[2] Later the Egyptian parliament refused to ratify this.

In the meanwhile the constitution of the "Fertile Crescent" was adjourned *sine die*. A stop had been put to London's pro-Hashimite plans. The holders of "dollar oil" had not yet won the game outright. But they had gained a decisive advantage.

[CXI]

BRITAIN ROSE in protest against this new reverse. After having praised "the wisdom of the Arab League," she now declared that this organisation had discredited itself by its incoherence and that its decisions had no validity. Narrowing down her Confederation plans still further, she dropped the "Fertile Crescent" and fell back upon the "Greater Syria" plan. This was now to be brought about without consulting neighbouring countries by a simple bilateral agreement between Damascus and Bagdad.

To assure himself of solid support in the Syrian parliament, General Hinnawi called for a new election on November 15. Although it was said that Ibn-Saud paid out 500,000,000 Syrian pounds to prevent a victory of pro-Hashimite parties,[1] the election gave Hinnawi a majority. Hashem-Atassi was confirmed in his post as Premier.

The swearing-in of the new cabinet was to have taken place on December 19. Its statement of policy included no mention of the Republic, although the Syrio-Iraqi union was expressly referred to.

The holders of "dollar oil" now decided in their turn against an operation which would have the result of closing the Mediterranean to them or of forcing them to pay an exorbitant price for access to it. Syrian history was about to repeat itself.

At four o'clock in the morning of December 19, Damascus was surrounded by police forces and public buildings and the airport were occupied by the army. After a brief fusillade of shots, General Hinnawi, his brother-in-law, Hassad-Talas, Minister of Finance, Hashem-Atassi, the Premier, and several other ministers were arrested and placed under guard. Directing this operation was Colonel Adib-Shishakli, chief of the general staff of the Syrian army, an influential member of the Popular Party, an intimate friend of Husni-Zaim and a relative of Mohzen-Barasi, who had been assassinated at the same time as the Marshal.

At six o'clock Damascus radio announced that "the Syrian army had deposed the Government" and justified this action by the following communiqué, signed by Colonel Shishakli: "The Syrian army has had proof that General Hinnawi and his brother-in-law, Hassad-Talas,

[1] Frédéric Mégret: op. cit *L'Illustration*, January 7, 1950.

were preparing a union of Syria with a neighbour State. . . . The Syrian army, faithful to the Republican constitution, is resolved that the régime shall be retained."

On October 30, 1950, Hinnawi—who had been put at provisional liberty—was murdered by Mohammed-Barasi, cousin of Mohzen-Barasi, one of the victims of the massacre of the previous year. The assassin fired four revolver shots at him at point-blank range as he was leaving his home at Mazraa, the southern suburb of Beirut.

London concealed its chagrin behind a show of indifference. But the blow was severe. The champion of its pro-Hashimite policy was destroyed and the "Greater Syria" project seemed buried for good. "Dollar oil" had won a second round. It now seemed a safe bet that the Transarabian pipeline would not be long in reaching the sea. . . .

[CXII]

NOVEMBER 13, 1950 arrived. On that day, after saying midday prayers, Ibn-Saud turned the switch of a geiger counter at Riyadh. A sluice opened at Abqaiq and a flood of brown oil poured into the pipeline on its way to its distant destination: Sidon.

The work that had been accomplished was colossal. The Transarabian pipeline, which had a diameter of 32 inches and bridged at one stroke the 1,094 miles which separated the Hasa oilfields from the Mediterranean coast, had cost 280,000,000 dollars. A whole fleet of cargo vessels had been required to transport the materials necessary to its construction. The pipeline itself had absorbed 265,000 tons of steel tubing, 500 firms had participated in the delivery of supplies.

An asphalt roadway 1,125 miles long ran beside the pipe and along this 1,500 lorries travelled day and night. Squadrons of aircraft flew over it hourly to ensure surveillance of the building yards and prevent possible sabotage. Forty wells had been drilled at regular intervals to furnish water for the construction team. Today these wells supply the 100,000 Hail Bedouins and their flocks.

Five pumping stations lie along the route of the pipeline. At each of these points a new town was founded by the King.[1] Intended to serve both to house the American technical staffs responsible for the functioning of the pumps and as extra Ikwan colonies, these towns are already rising from the sands, with their mosques, their hospitals, their electric power stations, stadiums and swimming pools, built according to the designs of the most up-to-date planners.

The "T.A.P.," built and exploited by a private company—the

[1] Nariya, Qaisumah, Rafha, Badanah and Turaif.

Transarabian Pipe Line Company—relegates to second place the fleet of sixty-five tankers which had previously to make a 3,000 miles journey around the peninsula. It also shortens the delivery time by ten days. Its capacity is 350,000 barrels—12,250,000 gallons—daily. These floods of oil flow into thirteen gigantic reservoirs constructed at Sidon, whose total capacity is 7,000,000 barrels—more than the present total daily production of the United States.

In 1950 it was predicted that the T.A.P. would have the effect of supplying Western Europe with a flood of oil cheaper than that so far supplied by British companies, and have far-reaching repercussions in international economy. "The T.A.P.," stated Mr. Burt E. Hall, builder of the pipeline and president of the Tapco, "will revolutionise the map of the world in so far as the distribution of liquid fuel is concerned."[1]

"Dollar oil" had won the game and the match.

[CXIII]

IT WAS soon perceived that the Hejaz and Nejd cities—which were growing from day to day—and the Hasa factories and pumping stations of the new pipeline, with their constantly increasing Arab and American staff, were consuming a great deal more water than could be furnished from the artesian wells in the desert. If this continued there would soon be insufficient for the development of the agricultural colonies and the irrigation of the gardens. For the second time the problem of water became acute.

Ibn-Saud, whose whole attention was absorbed by foreign policy, handed this problem over to his eldest son, Saud, to deal with.

The Crown Prince approached the task with an energy which surprised even his most intimate associates. Never before had he shown evidence of such enthusiasm. Although he had been viceroy of Nejd for years past this was the first time his father had entrusted him with a mission of such scope. He was now to demonstrate that in imagination and will he was not inferior to his father.

Saud summoned to Riyadh representatives of the largest foreign firms handling public works and put them in competition with each other for the carrying out of a fantastic project. This was to ensure a wholesale irrigation of the desert by means of fresh water brought direct from the Shatt-el-Arab in Iraq. This was to be done by means of an immense pipeline, of diameter four times greater than that of the T.A.P., which it would cross in mid-desert. The water would then flow into an artificial lake of an area of several hundred square miles.

[1] cf. *Time*, November 20, 1950, pp 39–40.

The technicians declared that although miracles had been accomplished in Arabia in recent times, this time the project was crazy and impractical and would cost ten times as much as the Aramco pipeline. Following the King's example, however, the Crown Prince was not to be deterred.

"Zobeida, wife of Haroun-al-Rashid," he told them, "had an aqueduct built to bring water to Mecca from the surrounding hills. Are you not capable, with all the means at your disposal, of doing what the Arab architects did in the eighth century?"

The Western engineers failed to convince him that there was nothing in common between the aqueduct of the Abassids and the piping project he was asking them to carry out. They were wasting their breath.

"My father inherited wastes of sand and made a kingdom out of them," Saud replied. "Thanks to my father I shall inherit a kingdom and in it I shall make forests grow. Then when the rain comes the irrigation problem will solve itself."

So great was his desire to attach his name to the accomplishment of this work that the first journey he made after his accession to the throne was to the frontiers of Iraq (January 1954) with an escort of 3,000 people. There, on a pretext of a falcon hunt, he had interviews with several Iraqi personalities in order to study with them means of accelerating the construction of the "water pipeline."[1]

[CXIV]

In the person of the Crown Prince the King had an invaluable helper, unhesitatingly resolved to carry on the programme of modernising Arabia. Ibn-Saud was fortunately able to delegate to him a number of tasks which he could no longer attend to in person. For the foreign policy of the kingdom now required an attention and vigilance all the more sustained because the links which bound it to its neighbours were numerous and complex.

In whatever direction the eye turned in that year 1951 the coastal countries of the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf could be seen to be in the throes of unrest. From Cairo to Teheran, everything seemed to be ablaze at the same moment. In the midst of these turmoils, Saudi Arabia appeared as an oasis of calm. But everywhere else—in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Iran—it was a tale of killings and upheavals, revolts and *coups d'état*.

[1] cf Jean-Paul Penez and Maurice Jarnoux: op. cit., *Match*, March 6–13, 1954, pp. 36–45.

Among all these peoples, disordered by unrest provoked by nationalism, communism and religious fanaticism, secret societies and clandestine organisations abounded. To steer a course in the midst of these intrigues called for all the old King's experience and sagacity.

On July 16, 1951, Riad-Sohl, former premier of the Lebanon, who had gone to Amman to negotiate a secret treaty with Abdullah of Jordan, was assassinated at the end of his visit. Four days later Abdullah was shot dead with a revolver while entering the Al-Aksa mosque at Jerusalem.

Abdullah was the last pillar of the temple Lawrence had tried in 1919 to build upon the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. His disappearance struck a blow at British influence which was the more felt because his successor, Prince Tallal, was known for his strong anti-British feeling. The Colonial Office, which had tried to pass him off as mad—and the least that can be said is that he was not very well balanced—had "advised" him to take a long rest cure at Prangins, a Swiss sanatorium near Geneva. "If I fall ill in earnest," Tallal had said, "it will be from hatred for the British."[1]

Anxious about the future, the London cabinet had then attempted a *rapprochement* with Ibn-Saud. The head of the Labour Government invited the King's second son, Emir Feisal, who seconded his father in the realm of foreign policy, to come for a talk, not in Cairo, but on the banks of the Thames. Feisal was received in state at Downing Street by Messrs. Herbert Morrison and Clement Attlee. But when his hosts asked him if he would agree not to intervene if Iraq should "absorb" Jordan, he took refuge in cautious reserve and refused to give any undertaking at all in this respect (August 8–11, 1951).

The British had therefore been obliged to allow Prince Tallal to mount the throne of Abdullah (September 5). No sooner was he invested with royal power than the new sovereign came into open conflict with the leader of the Arab Legion, General Glubb Pasha. British by birth, although a naturalised Jordanian, Glubb Pasha had been in Amman for more than twenty years. There he had divided his time between two occupations: one consisted of playing interminable games of chess with the late King Abdullah, whereby he was able to learn a good deal of what went on in the back of the King's mind; the other consisted of recruiting, training and instructing the Jordanian army, helped by British subsidies.[2] When he had built up this army, impressively uniformed and admirably drilled, he led it with moderate success against formations improvised by the new State of Israel.

[1] Tallal is now in a Swiss mental hospital (Translator's note)

[2] The Anglo-Jordanian treaty of 1948 stipulated that "financial aid would be granted to the Legion." This aid amounted to £7,500,000 sterling annually. It was with these sums, of which he had control, that Glubb Pasha had built up a force of 25,000 disciplined men, fully trained and supplied with modern equipment (motorised units, mechanised machine guns, light tanks and radio cars).

Although Glubb Pasha had declared that he "would serve the new King with a devotion equal to that he had had for his predecessor," Tallal wanted to withdraw him from the command of the Arab Legion. Not, however, feeling himself strong enough to carry out this policy unaided, the King of Jordan went to Riyadh and asked for Ibn-Saud's support in the event of a break with Britain (November 10, 1951). Although flattered that a Hashimite should come soliciting his protection, Ibn-Saud refused to be drawn into this hornets' nest.

His caution was the more justified because hostility towards the new King of Jordan was growing daily in London.

Brusquely, Tallal decided to dissolve the Arab Legion. This was too much to swallow and the British reacted strongly. Following a series of tragi-comic incidents, ranging from an attempted murder to a scene of outraged domesticity, Tallal was declared insane and deposed by the Jordan parliament. His young son, Hussein, was enthroned in his place (May 2, 1952) and Glubb Pasha recovered his former authority. But it could be doubted whether the will of the young sovereign would be strong enough to stand against the storms which were gathering on the horizon and of which the assassination of his grandfather, Abdullah, had been a warning signal.

When the eye of the observer turned from Jordan to Syria it was seen that there also the task of government was no sinecure. Incessant rivalries between personalities and doctrines had brought military and civilian circles into conflict; the partisans of "Independent Syria" were battling against the propagandists of the "Fertile Crescent," and the supporters of the monarchy against those of the Republican régime. The sequence of events was violent and confused.

In March 1949—as we have seen—Marshal Zaim had been murdered by General Hinnawi, and in December of the same year Hinnawi had been deposed and assassinated in his turn following a *coup* led by Colonel Shishakli. Power had then passed into the hands of the civil authorities. But not for long, for on November 29, 1951, the army once more intervened, under Shishakli's orders, and seized power to "assure order and stability." On December 3, President Hashem Atassi resigned and was replaced by Colonel Fawzi-Silo, a friend of Shishakli, who, now promoted to the rank of general, declared on the radio: "The new Syrian Government is resolved to oppose by all possible means the fusion of Syria and Iraq and the realisation of the project of the 'Fertile Crescent.' We will never consent to be placed under the tutelage of a Hashimite sovereign."

Shishakli seemed to be more or less master of the situation when, towards the end of 1953, a revolt broke out among the Druses with which the political parties evicted from power by the general were associated. The leader of the rising was none other than Soltan Attrache,

and his mere presence at the head of the rebel tribes was significant. For it was he who in 1917 had answered Lawrence's appeal and had fought beside Feisal against the Turks; it was he who had been the first to enter Damascus on October 2, 1918; finally it was he who had unleashed the murderous operations against the French troops, in 1922 and 1925, intended, it was then said, "to reunite what had been unjustly separated."

The present revolt, starting from Mezraa in the Jebel Druse, where Attrache had accumulated considerable stocks of arms—grenades, machine guns and mortars of foreign origin—was crushed by the Syrian army after several weeks of fighting. Soltan Attrache fled to Jordan and calm seemed at long last restored to Syria when yet another military plot broke out, at Aleppo (February 1954). The Government was overthrown, its members were arrested and General Shishakli, to escape death, was forced to take refuge in Saudi Arabia.

Spectacular as were these events in Syria they were, however, less so than those which had been taking place meanwhile in the valley of the Nile. At Cairo and Alexandria riots and disorder had broken out. On October 9, 1951, impelled by a mounting feeling of hostility to foreigners and by the combined agitation of nationalist parties, religious sects and the Arab League propaganda services, Nahas Pasha had torn up the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936. The next day an angry crowd had sacked and burnt British establishments in Cairo: shops, banks and shipping companies. Shepheard's Hotel, one of the most luxurious in the world, was reduced to a shell of blackened walls. The Embassy itself had barely escaped.[1]

In the days that followed violence and sabotage spread to Alexandria, Ismailia and the Canal Zone. Dead and wounded were reported everywhere. On November 14 a million Cairenes, led by Nahas Pasha in person, marched in silence through the capital to protest against the presence of the British in Suez.

Britain had taken immediate energetic counter-measures. The 16th Paratroop Brigade—the famous "Red Devils"—coming from Cyprus, had landed in Ismailia. The Mediterranean Fleet was put in a state of emergency. "We will never yield to intimidation," the British Ambassador, Sir Ralph Stevenson, had said. Nahas had replied by tabling a general mobilisation decree before the Egyptian State Council. From one minute to the next there could be war. . . .

Moderate elements tried to intervene to avert the worst. The Americans gave counsels of prudence to both sides. Nahas Pasha made way for Ali-Maher and King Farouk seemed ready to compromise with the British when suddenly a group of young officers—Colonel

[1] A number of Egyptian police had been killed by British troops after their refusal to disarm and quit barrack premises they had seized in Ismailia (Translator's note.)

Nasser, Major Salah-Salem and a few others, led by General Neguib[1] —seized power, drove Farouk from the throne, replaced the monarchy by a military dictatorship and demanded that the British should quit Suez and the Sudan forthwith. . . .

Feeling the mounting tide of xenophobia in all the countries on Arabia's borders, and fearing to be abruptly dispossessed of its privileges, Aramco had thought it prudent to take some precautions. On January 1, 1951, its board of directors announced that it was completely revising the contract which bound it to Ibn-Saud. Not only did it now offer an increased percentage for each barrel of oil exported from Arabia, but it acknowledged that, as head of the State, he had the right to tax the firm's revenues. "For the first time a big concessionary company ceased to act in the manner of a sovereign power and recognised only the authority of the Government. It agreed of its own accord to submit to the laws of the country whose wealth it was exploiting."[2]

This decision could not fail to provoke a "chain reaction" among all the States which had conceded the right to exploit their oilfields to foreign firms. In Iraq nationalist circles at once launched a violent campaign for the revision of the Iraq Petroleum contract. But it was in Iran that the conflict was to assume its acutest form.

It must be said that the British had done nothing to avoid this. The 1933 agreement between Anglo-Iranian and the Persian Government granted the latter half the profits distributed to the company's shareholders. Now, since 1945, the Labour Government's financial policy had been to reduce dividends and increase taxes. The proportion taken by London before any share-out of profits had grown continually, while the proportion paid to the Persian Government had shrunk from year to year.[3]

In the end the disproportion between the two had become blatant. In 1948, London had received nearly three times as much as Teheran.[4] The reform introduced by Aramco in Saudi Arabia had made this situation appear intolerable to Iranian opinion.

[1] Like Zaim and Shishakli in Syria, Neguib, Nasser, Salah-Salem and their friends had returned disheartened from their defeat in Israel where they had fought courageously. Like the Jordanian nationalist circles, who had assassinated King Abdullah, they held their Government—that is, King Farouk—responsible for their defeat.

[2] cf. J R. Percheral, *L'Aurore*, August 27, 1951. It appears that this decision was taken on the advice of Mr. Averell Harriman.

[3] Not in absolute figures but compared with the amounts taken by the British Treasury.

[4]

Year	*Total Received by Iranian State*	*Total Received by British Government*
1945	£5,624,000	£5,055,000
1947	£7,700,000	£15,000,000
1948	£9,172,000	£31,685,000*

* Figures taken from the *Daily Mirror*, August 1, 1951.

Nationalists and communists of the Tudeh party were agreed in declaring that the clauses of the 1933 agreement had been violated. It was easy for them to denounce "capitalist exploitation."

Development was swift. On March 7, 1951, General Ali Razmara, head of a pro-British Government, was assassinated while entering the mosque of Teheran by a member of the "Fidaiyam-Islam," a religious sect. A few days afterwards Dr. Mossadek, well known for his hatred of foreigners, was asked by the Iranian parliament to form a new government. He immediately tabled a decree terminating the Anglo-Iranian concession (without waiting for 1993, the date at which the contract expired), and nationalising all the oil in Persia. This decree was adopted by an overwhelming majority. If put into force it signified the end of Anglo-Iranian and the eviction of the British from all the installations they possessed in Persia, notably the gigantic refineries at Abadan.

The British tried to appease Teheran by pointing out that a good deal of capital had been ploughed back and by offering a larger participation in the exploitation of oil and a payment of £45,000,000, representing dividends not paid in previous years. In Iraq they modified the Iraq Petroleum contract and offered the Iraqi Government even better conditions than those accorded to Ibn-Saud by Aramco.

At Bagdad, where British influence was still very strong, matters were arranged without too much difficulty. But not at Teheran, where the hostility of the population towards the British had been brought to boiling point by the secret agitation of agents from Moscow and by the inflammatory speeches of Dr. Mossadek. The latter rejected all compromise proposals and demanded the unconditional departure of the British.

In Egypt the British Government had replied to the expulsion threats of Nahas Pasha and Neguib by sending reinforcements to Ismailia and Suez. Eighty thousand armed men maintained a day-and-night patrol of the Suez Zone. But the same policy could not be applied in Iran. Here no troops could be landed. For the Anglo-Russo-Persian tripartite agreement of December 28, 1941[1]—which had very incautiously retained certain clauses of the Russo-Persian treaty of 1921[2]—laid down that if the British occupied south Persia militarily, the U.S.S.R. would automatically have the right to occupy north Persia.[3] This was precisely what London and Washington wished

[1] See above, p. 220.

[2] Notably Article 6, which said: "If a third Power should attempt to apply a policy of armed intervention in Persia (or if this Power should covet Persian territories for use as bases for operations directed against Russia, or if a foreign Power should threaten the frontiers of Russia or those of her allies), and the Persian Government should not be in a position to parry such a danger after being called upon to do so by Russia, the latter would have the right to advance her troops into the interior of Persia to proceed to military action necessary for her defence."

[3] When it was a question of evacuating Persia in 1946 the Red Army agreed to quit the northern zone of the country only on condition that the last British soldier left the southern zone on the same day.

at all costs to avoid. For if that happened the remedy would be worse than the complaint. Indeed, it would prevent the American Government from setting up a "defensive shield" north of Arabia for the purpose, if war came, of preventing the Russians from seizing the Middle Eastern oilfields. Now Iran, by its geographical position, flanked on the left by Turkey and on the right by Pakistan, constituted an essential element in this defence line.

With resentment in their hearts, the British were therefore forced to leave Iran and abandon all the privileges they had enjoyed there since 1906. For several months more they clung to the refinery at Abadan within whose perimeter they were entrenched as if in a stronghold. But this last foothold had been swept away, and the Abadan refinery was abandoned also. One by one the factories stopped working; the cracking towers assumed the air of giants that had been struck by lightning, kept standing only by their frameworks; the wharves were deserted and there was a silence of death where a few weeks before there had been feverish activity.

"The departure of the last Anglo-Iranian engineers under the impotent gaze of the Royal Navy is a humiliation without precedent, a veritable economic Dunkirk," wrote the London Conservative Press. Churchill, in the Commons, stormed against the Labour Government, responsible "for this shameful disaster, diminution and impoverishment of our world position." Mr. Herbert Morrison, Foreign Secretary, who had just been organising a big artistic and touristic season in London—which had earned him the nickname of "Lord Festival"—was baptised overnight "Lord Festival of Abadan." There remained no other course for Mr. Clement Attlee than to point out to the Conservative leader that the disastrous agreement of 1941, which had so tragically tied Britain's hand, had been signed not by the Labour Government, but by the Government of national union over which Mr. Churchill himself had presided.

Nevertheless, and in spite of all these difficulties, Britain had made an incontestable recovery in the Middle East since the spring of 1952. It might be said that a strong will was presiding over her destinies and that she was reacquiring self-confidence. If in Egypt she agreed to evacuate the Suez Canal it was as the result of negotiation and not under the threat of armed force.[1] At Teheran she refused to admit herself beaten and maintained her claim on Persian oils. At Amman and Bagdad, in spite of growing opposition, she succeeded in obtaining agreement to the installation of two Hashimite princes, Hussein of

[1] The Anglo-Egyptian agreement of August 10, 1954 (signed on October 18) stipulated that British forces must evacuate the Canal Zone by August 10, 1956, at the latest. But they could return in the event that one of the Powers in the Middle East—including Turkey—should find itself threatened.

Jordan and Feisal II of Iraq, enthroned on the same day under showers of roses.

Despite her damaged prestige, her compromised political position and her contested economic privileges, she continued to cling to her imperial positions with the magnificent obstinacy which had enabled her several times in the past to turn a succession of defeats into victory. . . .

[CXV]

SUCH WAS the situation in the Middle East at the moment when the King of Arabia was approaching his seventy-fourth birthday. What changes had taken place since his childhood! Not a lifetime but several centuries seemed to have elapsed since the dawn of that day when for the first time little Abdul-Aziz had heard the cries of the muezzins rising to heaven to call the Believers to prayer. A world separated the mediaeval palace of Riyadh where he was born, with its embattled walls crumbling in the sunshine, from the industrial scene at Dhahran which had the look of something borrowed from a film of days to come, with its steel reservoirs and its airstrips on which could be heard the roar of the turbo-props of American Thunderjets.

Few men could pride themselves on having accomplished so long a journey in the course of their existence. Starting out in life "without even a roof over his head," he reigned over a kingdom more than three and a half times the size of France. In the most exalted moments of his youth, at the time of his exile in the burning desert of Rub-al-Khali, when he had sworn to unite the temporal and spiritual power in his hands, he could not have imagined that his dream would be realised one day in so astonishing a fashion.

His temporal power embodied four-fifths of Arabia submissive to his law; his sword stretched over an immense domain, with outlets in two seas; the fabulous resources of Hasa, which gave his authority an economic basis envied by all his neighbours and making him one of the richest rulers on earth.

His spiritual power derived from Medina and Mecca, the tomb of the Prophet and the House of God, foci of a religious fervour which each year attracted more than 300,000 pilgrims and whose influence stretched from the Atlantic to China. Such success must have exceeded all his hopes. A strange edifice indeed was this kingdom founded upon petroleum and prayer!

To be sure, the Leopard of Riyadh had fought hard to reach this double goal. There had never been a day when his energy had relaxed, no day when his will had flinched before an obstacle. He had known

how to bide his time, how to be patient and lie in wait when he could not fight, to stay on the watch for years on end awaiting the right moment to leap upon his prey. In the course of more than half a century he had shown proof as much of audacity as of prudence, of strength as of subtlety, of tenacity as of cunning. But he had also been served by uncommon good luck. When he had thought himself defeated by drought he had found water. When he had believed himself paralysed by poverty he had discovered oil. And what a concourse of strange circumstances had marked the stages of his rise and evolution in the world! The collapse of the Ottoman Empire had made possible the conquest of the Nejd. The weakening of British influence had helped him to the conquest of Arabia. The rise of American power had hastened the harnessing and modernisation of the peninsula's resources. And when the Americans had tended to raise their tone the re-entry on the stage of the Germans after an eclipse of eight years had provided the King with "alternative solutions" so that he need not feel at the mercy of anyone's discretion.[1] In truth the son of Abdur-Rahman had had the right "baraka." Founder of a dynasty, builder of communities and towns, uniter of provinces and maker of kingdoms—upon all the stages where man's creative genius can function, he could claim to have magnificently succeeded.

Twenty years earlier or twenty years later such a success would have been impossible. Everywhere Ibn-Saud would have encountered occupied positions, locked and bolted doors. He had the good fortune to be born at the precise moment when the constraint which was throttling Arabia loosened, and he accomplished his task before a new constraint could tighten once more around her. Turning the ebb of the Ottoman tide to profit, he succeeded in imposing unity upon the desert tribes and in gathering in his hands their scattered multitudes, just in time to avoid succumbing to a fresh foreign domination. Without the work accomplished between 1900 and 1925 Ibn-Saud would never have been able to free himself of the Turks, to hold his own against London, to make conditions to Washington; and Arabia, after having been a vassal of the Sultan and the game preserve of the

[1] "The Americans have noticed that as a result of competitive conditions the Germans little by little are replacing them everywhere. There is one reason, the only one the King wishes to recognise: *they are cheaper*. In the past year they have succeeded in obtaining all the orders for telephonic equipment and tenders for railways. In all the towns where the Americans had established large shops they are closing down to make way for the Germans. The American public works firms, Becker & Becktel, have just been swept out of their position by the German firm of Govenco" (Jean-Paul Penez and M. Jarnoux: op. cit., *Match*, March 6–13, 1954, p. 45). "An immigration centre directed at Alexandria by Hans Muller, alias Hassim Bey, one of Rommel's former lieutenant-colonels, has recruited 1,200 teachers and military specialists for the Middle East. More than 8,000 German workers and technicians are employed between the Nile and the Persian Gulf" (*Match*, December 29, 1951). This reappearance of the Germans in the Middle Eastern scene is a new phenomenon which cannot fail to have unforeseen results.

Foreign Office, would simply have become the economic fief of the White House. "The great thing in this life," said Clemenceau, "is to steer a course between men." Ibn-Saud had steered a course between empires.

But if Arabia has benefited up to now from the evolution of the world she runs a risk also of being a victim of it. At one time her poverty and isolation left her outside the great convulsions of history. The era when one could speak of "happy Arabia" has turned full circle. The untold riches discovered in her soil run the risk of making her one day the target of perilous cupidities; the strategic value conferred upon her by the development of modern weapons makes her one of the most vulnerable regions of the globe, one which future belligerents will fight over with the greatest bitterness. It is impossible to take refuge in a convenient "neutralism," to play off once more one empire against another: one of the principal protagonists is already established on her soil. It is impossible also to keep out of hostilities: from the first day Arabia will be in the centre of the storm.

Clearly the King cannot be blamed for this. Whether he had lived or not the situation would have been the same. Neither can he be held responsible for the fact that having wished to lead his country to national independence he should have obtained it at the precise moment when the notion of independence has lost a good deal of its value. What independence is there today for small nations? The song of liberty is heard hardly anywhere except where the hum of atomic cyclotrons, as at Hanford or at Kilinusk, can be heard also. Only the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. are still fully masters of their future. All the other countries are reduced to a secondary role. Some of them, proud of a great past, refuse to admit it. They think themselves still free to guide their destiny at their will. This is an illusion. An unforeseen incident has but to happen at the other end of the world and before nightfall their cities may be levelled. . . .

There is another plane upon which the evolution of Arabia offers ample material for reflection. To wish to jump a thousand years of history, skipping all the intervening stages and passing without transition from tribal feudalism to the latest forms of contemporary capitalism, is not an operation which can be carried out painlessly. This collective "mutation," which is the more violent because it is taking place swiftly, may have unforeseen psychological repercussions. How can the individual support this sudden break with the way of life known to the generations which have preceded his own? Will he be able to adapt himself permanently to the conditions of this new existence? Does he not run the risk of injuring himself on the road because he has ignored the essential transition stages? Finally, will he have the intellectual capacity to acquire and assimilate the sum of knowledge which his new condition will soon demand?

Norbert de Bischoff, a close observer of Middle Eastern problems, assures us that the answer is "yes." According to him the secular stagnation, of which the history of the nomads furnishes a picture, is not a tendency peculiar to their nature, but a reflection of the changeless *milieu* in which they have lived.

"Tradition," he writes, "rests upon property. The nomad possesses almost nothing. His history begins with his birth and ends with his death. No historical myth, no family myth links him with the past. Nothing attaches him to the soil. Without a home, without a household, he wanders over the limitless extents of the steppe or the desert, carrying with him his meagre patrimony, which he can always replace at any time or place.

"The unity of the tribe under the authority of chiefs operates under the pressure of the moment, to relax soon afterwards under the pressure of other constraints.

"Elasticity and extreme adaptability: these are the rules that man must observe when he lives face to face with an all-powerful nature which has a manifest superiority over him.

"In return the nomads possess a rich baggage of experience and observation concerning all sides of daily life. It would be a big mistake to consider the fruit of a thousand-year-old experience as proof of a tradition. Rather one must see evidence of the changelessness of external conditions, amid which the nomads have carried on their hard struggle for thousands of years against a Nature invariably hostile. In this struggle they have succeeded in acquiring an incredible degree of adaptability. But the fruit of their experience sends no roots into the soul: it is of a purely utilitarian character. Thus they abandon it with the greatest ease as soon as a change in external conditions puts weapons at their disposal which are better, cheaper or more efficient in the struggle for life.

"This is why it is precisely the people who are most backward from the cultural point of view, the people nearest to the primitive state, who offer the least resistance to modern technique and accept its magic with a childish enthusiasm. This point is capital, if it is desired to understand the mechanism of the nomad mind and the present evolution of the East."[1]

Ibn-Saud had well understood and foreseen this. Guided by the intimate knowledge he had of his people, he had seen that to awaken them from their torpor and instability (these two phenomena are contradictory only in appearance), it was necessary to start by changing the framework of their life, in default of which the work commenced would have constantly to be done again. He had seen that nomad communities had to be given a social and hierarchic structure, rooted

[1] Norbert de Bischoff: *La Turquie dans le Monde*, pp. 47–49.

in the soil and made to last. Was it not to this that the constitution of the Ikwan corresponded? Was it not for this that Abdur-Rahman's son had tirelessly explained to the first pioneers of Artawiya that the whole future of Arabia hung upon the success of their enterprise? What other means was there to put an end to the appalling dispersal of energy which had led them from century to century to erupt outwards or destroy one another on the spot? In order that Arabia should take her place among modern nations it was essential to immobilise the rising generations, replace their tents of felt by houses of stone and develop in them a love of their country more powerful than the call of the desert or the lure of the unknown. The problem was the same whether it concerned Anatolians wandering from garrison to garrison, or Bedouins riding from water-hole to water-hole. But what Mustapha Kemal had tried to accomplish by a psychological transformation of the individual, Ibn-Saud had striven to bring about by a technical change of *milieu*.

That such a transformation could not occur without causing unforeseeable upheavals in the depths of these proud souls, deeply attached to their traditions and customs, is plain to see.

"Her secrets from the past and civilisation of two thousand years ago are not forgotten," writes Gerald de Gaury of Arabia, "but must she abandon them in order to receive advantages of another kind from the West? To increase her harvest must she forgo its joy? A country which conceals and protects the heart of Islam, the shrine of Mecca, is unlikely to swerve willingly from following the code of Mohammed and the tradition of his race. But Islam has a rigid code and it may not be easy for its devotees to adhere to it closely and to pursue the fully industrialised life offered by the West. There go with industrial life new ambitions and new taboos, a new philosophy of living and a conception of security on fixed wages; and with the change may go boredom or disgust, for many men in the neighbouring countries sigh for the olden days, when men might achieve wealth and power and his neighbour's envy in a night; when the highest might fall suddenly and the lowliest as suddenly rise, when there was adventure, of the soul, of the body, or the mind. Those who were successful in the old life can hardly be successful in the new life; inevitably men of another stamp will rise to set example to the race. The progress has not yet gone very far. It is but a few years since a European first stood wondering beside the dark seepages or the green-blue sulphurous pools and sought to gauge the anticlinal ridges of an unknown land. But already they have new ambitions and to some extent a new character."[1]

What is true of men is true also of Nature. A metamorphosis so radical does not take place in the twinkling of an eye. Time is needed

[1] Gerald de Gaury: *Arabia Phoenix*, p. 133.

for palm plantations, sown on the surface of the sands like green archipelagos, to spread sufficiently to join up with each other. The desert is immense and remains the desert. Its majesty seems to challenge all human efforts. Even with the enhanced possibilities brought about by modern equipment, many generations must pass before it can be vanquished.

A day will come, none the less, when the Arabs should be in a position to be self-sufficient. Will they be ready in fifty years' time to take over from their Western teachers? Will the emergence of a powerful industry in the Hasa have the effect of creating, as the Americans wish, "an Arab middle class of artisans and farmers, able to tackle any job"? Or will it engender, as the Russians affirm, "a native proletariat, uprooted and resentful, infinitely more susceptible to communist ideology than the old fighting and feudal tribes"? The example of what happened in the Abadan refineries after the British departure is not very reassuring. No more so are the communist-inspired disorders which broke out in Hasa in October 1953, and which were put down only by the use of martial law. . . .

But the King's ambitions were broader and loftier. What he hoped for from the "modernisation of Arabia without its capitulation" was not the emergence of a new social class—bourgeois or labouring. It was the formation of a nation, in the complete sense of the term, in other words, a social body endowed with all the organs necessary to its existence and capable of serving as a model to the other Arab countries.

Will Ibn-Saud and his heirs succeed in this experiment? Will they give back to Islam the strength and brilliance it had in the time of its ancient splendour? Will the narrow puritanism of the Wahabi doctrines be a help or an obstacle to the realisation of the programme they have set themselves?

"Arabs could be swung on an idea as on a cord," wrote T. E. Lawrence, who had great love for them, "for the unpledged allegiance of their minds made them obedient servants. None of them would escape the bond till success had come, and with it responsibility and duty and engagements. Then the idea was gone and the work ended—in ruins. Without a creed they could be taken to the four corners of the world (but not to heaven) by being shown the riches of earth and the pleasure of it; but if on the road, led in this fashion, they met the prophet of an idea, who had nowhere to lay his head and who depended for his food on charity or birds, then they would all leave their wealth for his inspiration. They were incorrigibly children of the idea, feckless and colour-blind, to whom body and spirit were for ever and inevitably opposed. Their mind was strange and dark, full of depressions and exaltations, lacking in rule, but with more of ardour and more fertile in belief than any other in the world. They were a

people of starts, for whom the abstract was the strongest motive, the process of infinite courage and variety, and the end nothing. They were as unstable as water and like water would perhaps finally prevail. Since the dawn of life in successive waves they had been dashing themselves against the coasts of flesh. Each wave was broken, but, like the sea, wore away ever so little of the granite on which it failed, and some day, ages yet, might roll unchecked over the place where the material world had been, and God would move upon the face of those waters."[1]

It is indeed the sea which Arabia evokes, with its ebb and flow, its invisible currents, its long phases of calm and its times of tempest. Who can predict the future of the sea?

Three waves, so far have lifted Arabia and flung the shining foam of her genius towards the stars. The first, with Mohammed, from the seventh to the twelfth centuries; the second, with Abdul-Wahab, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the third, with Ibn-Saud, which is taking birth and swelling before our eyes. Is this the last wave, to which victory is promised? Or will it fall like the others, to give place to centuries of silence and immobility, during which the following wave will slowly form?

These are questions to which only the Arabs can reply. . . .

[CXVI]

IBN-SAUD, for his part, has already answered them with that faith in the future which was one of the distinctive aspects of his character.

One evening in November 1950, the lord of Saudi Arabia was receiving in his palace at Mecca a committee of the United Nations come to consult him on the Palestine question. A collation had been served on the terrace of the residence, from which the view stretched far over the Hejaz foothills. The evening was very mild. A light breeze shook the crests of the palm trees while to the west the daylight darkened in an opal light.

Just as night fell—it falls swiftly in those regions—the lamps of the motor road linking Jedda with Mecca were turned on suddenly, stretching a garland of lights to the horizon.

The wife of one of the delegates could not restrain a cry of admiration.

With regal courtesy Ibn-Saud bowed to her and told her:

"What you see there, madam, is the pearl necklace of new Arabia."

Then, turning to her husband, and pointing out to him a group of

[1] T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 41.

young men wearing *iqals* with golden tassels who were talking apart with generals of the Ikwan, he added:

"But the finest jewels I possess are not those lights. They are my sons. I am beginning to grow old. I have led a full life. The moment will soon come when I shall have the right to rest. But I shall die tranquilly: my children will complete my work. If God helps them as much as He has helped me they will one day control the destinies of more than a hundred million Believers."

"Is it not unwise to wish to see so far ahead?" the delegate asked. "The world is living on a volcano. If a new conflict should break out what will be the fate of Arabia?"

Ibn-Saud reflected for a moment and replied with simplicity:

"There is no power but in God and I do not pretend to know His will. But He has already showered so many benefits upon Arabia that He will continue to do so if He considers they are deserved. He appeared to me in the desert in the time of my youth and uttered words to me which I have never forgotten. They have inspired all the acts of my life." . . .

"And may one know what He said to your Majesty?"

Ibn-Saud remained silent for a while. Then, almost in a whisper, he said slowly:

"For me all things, even obstacles, are but a means."

[CXVII]

KING IBN-SAUD died on November 9, 1953, at nine-forty in the morning, carried off by an attack of angina pectoris while in residence at his winter palace of Taif, thirty miles from Mecca.

The radio of the Holy City at once announced the news, which was taken up by Damascus and repeated a few hours later by the radio stations of the world.

When the inhabitants of Nejd and the Hejaz, of Hail and Hasa, learned that the greatest heart in Arabia had ceased to beat, they were seized with a kind of stupor. Everything stopped. The labourers in the refineries ceased work; the dockers in the ports threw down their burdens; the caravan Bedouins dismounted; the soldiers in the barracks laid down their rifles; aeroplanes, trains, trucks, all were stilled. Six million Arabs turned their faces towards Mecca and fell on their knees.

The Press of the whole world paid homage to the dead King in terms which expressed both admiration and respect.

"The King of the desert, Abdul-Aziz Abdur-Rahman al Saud, absolute sovereign of Saudi Arabia, is dead," wrote the Cairo

newspaper *El Ahram*. "A strange life has been that of this descendant of Haroun-al-Rashid, who, a fanatical Moslem, became, thanks to Western civilisation, one of the world's richest men."

"Ibn-Saud is dead," wrote the *Daily Express* of London. "He was the toughest, cunningest, most successful of all his generation of Arabs. In defiance of British policy he conquered a kingdom; in collaboration with Aramco (Arabian-American Oil Company) he exploited its oilfields. Both the British whom he out-smarted, and the Americans who paid him £50,000,000 a year, learned to respect his abilities."

"At his death," wrote Maurice Jarnoux in *Match*, "King Ibn-Saud, he whom the British surnamed the Napoleon of Arabia, has left his son a kingdom half as large as Europe, third oil-producing country in the world[1] and spiritual leader of the Arab world. Half a century of fantastic cavalcade, an epic more extraordinary than any tale of knighthood, wrought this miracle. In the midst of the twentieth century, King Ibn-Saud conjured a new nation out of the sands."

"The history of this young Emir without an Emirate, before whom all Arabia bows today," wrote René Branellec in *L'Illustration*, "will be remembered as one of the most astonishing of our century."

"The King of the sands is no more," wrote Guémarqué in *Rivarol*. "Ibn-Saud has died and with him disappears the greatest figure of the Arab world. He has entered into legend in his lifetime and his shadow will long hover over the desert ways."

As required by Moslem law, the remains were buried before sunset.

The body of the old warrior, which bore forty-three scars of sword, lance or sabre wounds, received in half a century of battles, was wrapped in seven winding sheets and a prayer rug. His four-engined personal aeroplane carried it to Riyadh where telegrams of condolence were already streaming in from all the heads of foreign States.

The high dignitaries of the kingdom, the Ikwan and the Wahabi priesthood wished to give him solemn obsequies. But the King, before he died, had disposed otherwise: he wished to be buried without fuss of any kind and desired that his sepulchre should differ in no way from that of the humblest of Believers.

Therefore it was taken to a cemetery on the south side of the town, the same in which he had hidden at the time of his capture of the capital. There he was reunited with his queen, Jauhara, whom he had so much loved, and those of his sons who had died before him.

In conformity with his wish, nothing marked out his tomb from those around it. There was only a modest rectangle of earth, a slab without inscription—a plain white stone, facing the infinite.

[1] Saudi Arabia today is fifth oil-producing country.

TRANSLATOR'S EPILOGUE

MUCH OF what has happened in the Middle East since the death of Ibn-Saud can be seen as the logical outcome of the situation in 1953.

Major events have been few, though most of them have been spectacular. Chiefly they have been dominated by the struggle between Israel and Egypt—typifying the age-old conflict between Jew and Arab, but specifically contrasting the rival needs of a new nation and an old one for markets and living space—the seizure of the Suez Canal by Colonel Nasser of Egypt, and the steady growth of communist influence in Syria.

Less dramatic, but of importance as providing the background to these events and illustrating the continuance of tendencies already marked in Ibn-Saud's lifetime, has been the gradual working out of Western influences upon ancient Eastern cultures, speeded in some cases by the sudden wealth which oil has created and impeded in others by premature Arab attempts at self-assertion.

No firm grasp of Western methods and experience has followed the impact of Western ideas and capital investment. National responsibilities have been realised in part, but have not been implemented in terms of adequate political institutions.

In the recently formed urban centres of Egypt, Syria, Iran and Iraq a middle class has grown up whose prevailing reaction is one of disappointment because new ways of life have not led immediately to new standards of comfort and security. A tendency to believe that natives can be as efficient as foreigners has led to blunders, exemplified by ill-starred Iranian efforts to run an oil industry and by current Egyptian attempts to control a channel of world trade.

Special problems arise in the oil-bearing countries which are still dependent upon foreign skill and capital and where so far little or no economic progress has been made in other directions. Schools, roads, railways, hospitals and the training of native workmen in oil production have not been accompanied by the development of secondary industries which will be needed if the oil wells dry up—hardly to be foreseen for some time—or world demand diminishes with the growth of alternative sources of power—which will certainly be the case.

Outwardly at least Saudi Arabia, though still a semi-feudal society with many calls upon the royal purse for non-productive, even extravagant expenditure, has kept a more or less even keel under the present ruler. In a world of shifting allegiances and in a country of undiminished strategic importance, with appeals for support from

neighbouring Arab countries alternating with the need for continued harmonious relations with the United States, King Saud has had many problems to face.

So far he has solved these—and others, like local strikes and the infiltration of ideas of popular participation in government—by keeping a firm hand upon his inherited leadership of the Arab world and by rigidly maintaining the ancient traditions of his people.

Abroad he has had to face criticisms of lavish personal extravagance, neglect of public welfare and the use of oil revenues for anti-British intrigues in Buraimi Oasis and Jordan. In dealing with his own people he has been handicapped by the lack of a personal legend such as that built up and used to the full by his tremendous father.

A continued princely income from oil has enabled Saudi Arabia to avoid the desperate economic struggle with which Egypt is still contending. An agricultural country entirely dependent for its existence upon the flood waters of the Nile, lacking industries and capital and producing only enough oil for two-thirds of its domestic needs, Egypt remains the prototype of an imperfectly Westernised Arab country which has rejected foreign control without as yet having the money or the trained man-power to carve a future of its own.

The relatively moderate Neguib, under whose leadership withdrawal of British military power was originally negotiated, has been succeeded by Colonel Nasser, a colourful, dynamic personality with a policy of extreme nationalism but with no clearly defined or consistent social theory. His announced projects—for land reform and land reclamation, industrialisation and "social solidarity"—have so far failed of fulfilment, chiefly through lack of money and economic resources.

Egyptian hopes came to be centred upon a mammoth project, the Aswan Dam, planned to extend irrigation on a huge scale, double the agricultural area and provide a source of cheap electricity. But prospects of obtaining foreign (mainly American) loans to build the dam were not fulfilled and in the summer of 1956, claiming that revenues from Egyptian exploitation of this international seaway were needed to finance the dam project, Nasser burned his boats and seized the Suez Canal.

World indignation at this gesture of challenge and subsequent British and French military intervention to preserve the Canal for Western use and profit are a matter of recent history. So also is the situation created by Israel's invasion of Sinai and the Gaza Strip on grounds of self-protection and national economic and political necessity. For these and related problems the world has looked to the United Nations for solution.

Internationally the Middle East has become not less but more important during the years since Ibn-Saud died. While American

influence has been, rather sporadically, maintained, and culminated in 1957 in President Eisenhower's offer to help in defence against Communism in the whole area, British power has not revived.

Iraq and Jordan, termed in this book the "two pillars of British prestige in the Middle East," have necessarily felt the influence of both Nasserism and communism. Iraq, thanks to Nuri Said's wide influence, has remained hostile to both, while Jordan, finding in it an attitude of mind favourable to the growth of Arab self-confidence, has on the whole supported Nasserism. But old ties with Britain have not vanished entirely.

A powerful new factor in Middle Eastern affairs since 1955 has been the succession of offers of military, technical and economic aid made to the Arabs by Russia and her satellites. Reception of Russian overtures has been mixed, and has been influenced by a number of prevailing Middle Eastern notions, including mistrust of Western imperialism, evidence or seeming evidence, of British jealousy of American power and of American suspicion of British colonialism—and above all resentment of the very existence of Israel, believed by the Arabs to be an Anglo-American creation.

The power vacuum produced by the shrinking of British influence is still largely unfilled. This is a matter of concern to all who keep the future of European prosperity in mind. But it is worthy of note that in Syria communist ideas have taken root more obviously than elsewhere in the Arab world, and that in Saudi Arabia American political as well as economic influence has been at least temporarily accepted.

From 1949 to 1954, as we have seen, Syria was ruled by a succession of military dictators, one following another by a process of violence and assassination, but since the overthrow of Shishakly's régime in 1954 existing tensions and discontent have been cloaked beneath the outward forms of a parliamentary democracy, led by the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party, in favour of Arab unity and opposed to Western interference. Leading this party, which has considerable following outside Syria, has been Akram al Haurani, an able and eloquent personality. Under Khalid Bakhdash the Syrian Communist Party, active and well organised, has had growing influence behind the scenes.

Increasing communist influence led in 1957 to the formation of a new coalition headed by Sabri el Assali, whose first act was to stage a "treason trial," almost on Russian lines, against forty-seven prominent Syrians accused of plotting with Britain, France and Israel.

So far as can be seen, communism has made less headway in Egypt, Lebanon or Jordan than is often pretended and none at all in Saudi Arabia, though offers of Russian arms to Arab States are a different matter, particularly where there is any prospect of using these against Israel.

The "oil war" which marked the last years of Ibn-Saud's participation in world affairs has largely ended in a truce to the advantage of American companies, leaving "non-dollar" lands under the necessity of buying what they need from them. But the latent struggle for strategic control of the "hinge" between the old world and the new is as much in evidence as ever.

Both geographically and as the source of over 60 per cent. of the world's proved resources of oil the Middle East remains the vital prize for dispute during—and even before—any major world conflict. Efforts to build up a comprehensive system of collective security—the Bagdad Pact among them—have so far failed to convince the divided and suspicious Arabs that their interests lie wholly with those of the Western powers.

All the more significance attaches, therefore, to the outcome of the meeting in spring 1957 between King Saud, as spokesman not only for his own country but for those of the neighbouring Arab States who either trusted his leadership or needed his money, with President Eisenhower. In the event this second meeting of an Arab king and an American president may turn out to have momentous consequences.

The added prestige his visit to Washington gave him has enabled King Saud to assume officially the role of protector to a Hashimite sovereign and of arbiter between the Arab countries of the Middle East, as we have seen during the recent Jordan crisis. The presence of his armed Bedouins on the Jordan–Saudi frontiers has helped to facilitate the task of loyal elements in the Arab Legion and enabled the young King Hussein to hold his own against his enemies, displaying in doing so a praiseworthy courage and presence of mind.

Saud has set himself thereby upon a course which seems to continue the aspirations of his father and recalls one of the last things the latter said before his death:

"If God helps my sons as much as He has helped me they will one day control the destinies of a hundred million Believers."

GENEALOGY OF THE SAUDIS

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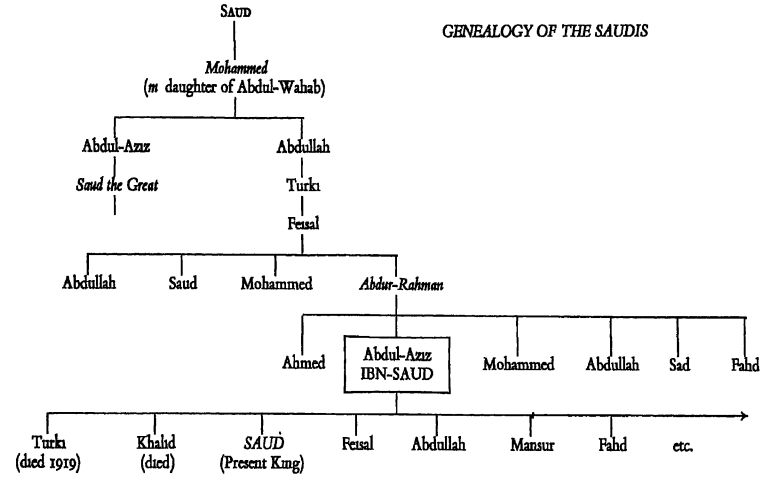

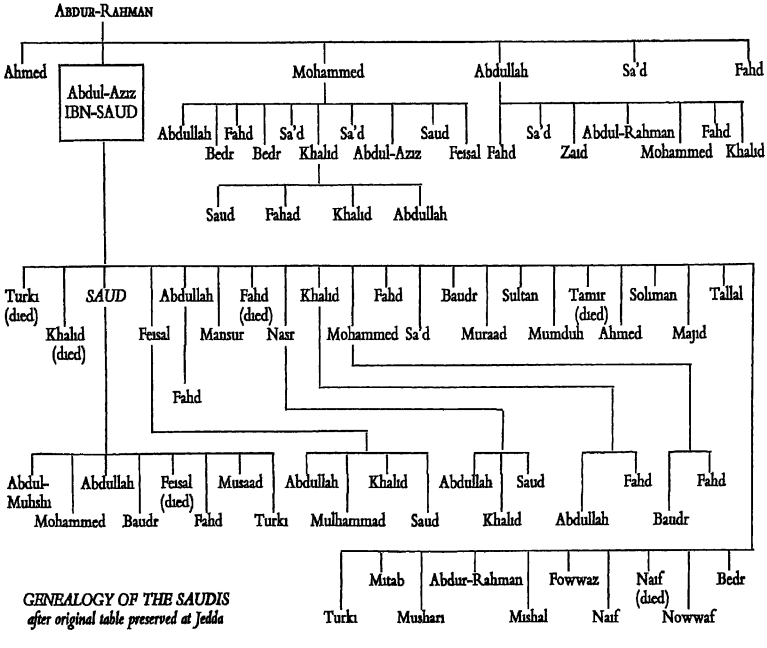

GENEALOGY OF THE SAUDIS
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