

LADY ANNE BLUNT

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

Anne Blunt

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of the Arab Race. Vol. 2 [of 2]**

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Anne Blunt

A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. Vol. 2 [of 2] / A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir, and «our Persian Campaign.»

CHAPTER XII

“Je ne trouvai point en eux ces formes que je m’attendais à retrouver dans la patrie de Zeid el Kheil.” – Guarmani.

Nejd horses – Their rarity – Ibn Saoud’s stud – The stables at Haïl – Some notes of individual mares – The points of a Nejd head – The tribes in the Nefûds and their horses – Meaning of the term “Nejdi” – Recipe for training.

A chapter on the horses we saw at Haïl has been promised, and may as well be given here.

Ibn Rashid’s stud is now the most celebrated in Arabia, and has taken the place in public estimation of that stud of Feysul ibn Saoud’s which Mr. Palgrave saw sixteen years ago at Riad, and which he described in the picturesque paragraphs which have since been constantly quoted. The cause of this transference of supremacy from Aared to Jebel Shammar, lies in the political changes which have occurred since 1865, and which have taken the leadership of Central Arabia out of the hands of the Ibn Saouds and put it into those of the Emirs of Haïl.

Mohammed ibn Rashid is now not only the most powerful of Bedouin sheykhs, but the richest prince in Arabia; and as such has better means than any other of acquiring the best horses of Nejd, nor have these been neglected by him.

The possession of thoroughbred mares is always among the Arabs a symbol of power; and with the loss of their supreme position in Nejd, the Ibn Saouds have lost their command of the market, and their stud has been allowed to dwindle. The quarrels of the two brothers, Abdallah and Saoud, sons of Feysul, on their father’s death, their alternate victories and flights from the capital, and the ruin wrought on them both by the Turks, broke up an establishment which depended on wealth and security for its maintenance; and at the present moment, if common report speaks true, hardly a twentieth part of the old stud remains at Riad. The rest have passed into other hands.

That Feysul’s stud in its day was the best in Arabia is probable, and it may be that no collection now to be found there has an equal merit; but there seems little reason for supposing that it differed in anything but degree from what we ourselves saw, or that the animals composing it were distinct from those still owned by the various Bedouin tribes of Nejd. All our inquiries, on the contrary (and we spared no occasion of asking questions), tend to show that it is a mistake to suppose that the horses kept by the Emirs of Riad were a special breed, preserved in the towns of Aared from time immemorial, or that they differed in any way from those bred elsewhere in Central Arabia. They were, we were repeatedly assured, a collection recruited from the various tribes of the Nefûds, – a very fine collection, no doubt, but still a collection. Every Bedouin we have asked has laughed at the idea of there being a special *Nejd breed*, only found in Aared. In answer to our questions we were informed that in Feysul’s time emissaries from Riad were constantly on the look-out for mares wherever they could find them; and that the Emir had often made ghazús against this and that tribe, with no other object than the possession of a particular animal, of a particular breed. The tribe from which he got the best blood, the Hamdani Simri and the Kehilan el-Krush, was the Muteyr (sometimes called the Dushan), while the Beni Khaled, Dafir, Shammar, and even the Ánazeh, supplied him with occasional

specimens. Abdallah ibn Saoud, his successor, still retains a few of them, but the bulk of the collection was dispersed, many of the best passing into the hands of Metaab and Bender, Mohammed ibn Rashid's predecessors. Mohammed himself follows precisely the same system, except that he does not take by force, but on payment. He makes purchases from all the tribes around, and though he breeds in the town, his collection is constantly recruited from without. Were this not the case, no doubt, it would soon degenerate, as town-bred horses in Arabia, being stall-fed and getting no sort of exercise, are seldom fit for much. There is a false notion that the oases, such as those of Jebel Shammar and Aared, are spots especially adapted for the rearing of horses, and that the sandy wastes outside contain no pasture. But the very reverse of this is the case. The oases in which the towns stand, produce nothing but date palms and garden produce, nor is there a blade of grass, or even a tuft of camel pasture in their neighbourhood. The townspeople keep no animals except a few camels used for working the wells, and now and then a donkey. Even these must be fed either on corn or dates, which none but the rich can afford. Horses are a luxury reserved only for princes, and even the richest citizens do their travelling from village to village on foot. Longer journeys are performed on dromedaries brought in from the desert for the purpose, which are either the property of Bedouins or held with them by the citizens on shares.

The Nefûds, on the other hand, contain pasture in abundance, not only for camels, but for sheep and horses, and it is in the Nefûds that all these are bred. Ibn Rashid goes every spring with the bulk of his live stock to the desert, and leaves them during part of the summer with the tribes, only a few animals being reserved for use in the town. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon, that the upper plateaux of Nejd, where the towns and villages are found, are a stony wilderness almost entirely devoid of vegetation, while the Nefûds afford an inexhaustible supply of pasture. The want of water alone limits the pastoral value of these, for the inhabited area is necessarily confined to a radius of twenty or thirty miles round each well, – and wells are rare. These facts have not, I think, been hitherto sufficiently known to be appreciated.

With regard to Ibn Rashid's collection at Haïl we looked it over three or four times in the stables, and saw it out once on a gala day, when each animal was made to look its best. The stables consist of four open yards communicating with each other, in which the animals stand tethered each to a square manger of sun-dried brick. They are not sheltered in any way, but wear long heavy rugs fastened across the chest. They are chained by one or more feet to the ground, and wear no headstalls. It being winter time and they ungroomed, they were all in the roughest possible condition, and, as has been mentioned, our first impression was one of disappointment. When at Haïl they are given no regular exercise, remaining it would seem for weeks together tied up thus, except for a few minutes in the evening, when they are led to drink. They are fed almost entirely on dry barley. In the spring only, for a few weeks, they eat green corn grown on purpose, and then are taken to the Nefûd or on ghazûs. It is surprising that they should be able to do their work under such conditions.

The first yard one enters in going through the stables, contained, when we saw them, from twenty-five to thirty mares. In the second were twenty more, kept in a certain kind of condition for service in case of necessity; but even these get very little exercise. As they stand there in the yard, slovenly and unkempt, they have very little of that air of high breeding one would expect; and it requires considerable imagination to look upon them as indeed the *ne plus ultra* of breeding in Arabia. We made the mistake, too common, of judging horses by condition, for, mounted and in motion, these at once became transfigured.

Here may follow some descriptions of particular animals, written after one of our visits to the stud; these will give a better idea of them than any general remarks. In our notes I find: —

“1. A chestnut Kehîlet el-Krush with three white feet (*mutlak el-yemin*), 14 hands, or 14·1, but very powerful. Her head is plainer than most here – it would be thought a good head in England – lean and rather narrow. She has too heavy a neck, but a very fine shoulder, a high wither, legs like steel, hind quarter decidedly coarse, much hair at the heels. More bone than breeding, one is inclined

to say, seeing her at her manger, though moving, and with the Emir on her back, one must be very captious not to admire. She is Mohammed's favourite charger, and of the best blood in Nejd. Ibn Rashid got this strain from Ibn Saoud's stables at Riad, but it came originally from the Muteyr."

"2. A bay Hamdanieh Simri, also from Ibn Saoud's collection, a pretty head, but no other distinction. N.B. This mare is of the same strain as our own mare Sherifa, but inferior to her."

"3. A grey Seglawieh Sheyfi, extremely plain at first sight, with very drooping quarters, and a head in no way remarkable, but with a fine shoulder. This Seglawieh Sheyfi has a great reputation here, and is of special interest as being the last of her race, the only descendant of the famous mare bought by Abbas Pasha, who sent a bullock cart from Egypt all the way to Nejd to fetch her, for she was old, and unable to travel on foot. The story is well known here, and was told to us exactly as we heard it in the north, with the addition that this mare of Ibn Rashid's is the only representative of the strain left in Arabia."¹

"4. A dark bay Kehîlet Ajuz, quite 14·2, one white foot, really splendid in every point, shoulder quarter and all; the handsomest head and largest eye of any here. She has ideal action, head and tail carried to perfection, and recalls Beteven ibn Mershid's mare, but her head is finer. She belongs to Hamúd, who is very proud of her, and tells us she came from the Jerba Shammar. It surprises us to find here a mare from Mesopotamia; but we are told that interchange of horses between the southern and northern Shammar is by no means rare."

"5. A dark brown Kehîlet Ajuz, no white except an inch in breadth just above one hoof, lovely head and thoroughbred appearance, and for style of galloping perhaps the best here, although less powerful than the Emir's chestnut and Hamúd's bay. It is hard to choose among the three."

"Of the eight horses, the best is a Shueyman Sbah of great power, head large and very fine. He reminds us of Faris Jerba's mare of the same strain of blood; they are probably related closely, for he has much the same points, forequarter perfect, hindquarter strong but less distinguished. He was bred, however, in Nejd."

"A grey Seglawi Jedran, from Ibn Nedéri of the Gomussa Ánazeh, is a poor specimen of that great strain of blood; but the Bedouin respect for it prevails here though they have now no pure Seglawi Jedrans in Nejd. It is interesting to find this horse valued here, as the fact proves that the Ánazeh horses are thought much of in Nejd. The more one sees of the Nejd horses here, the more is one convinced of the superiority of those of the Ánazeh in the points of speed, and, proud as every one here is of the 'kheyl Nejdi,' it seems to be acknowledged that in these points they are surpassed by the Ánazeh horses."

"Our own Ánazeh mares are looked upon as prodigies of speed.

"In comparing what we see here, with what we saw last year in the north, the first thing that strikes us is that these are ponies, the others horses. It is not so much the actual difference in height, though there must be quite three inches on an average, as the shape, which produces this impression. The Nejd horses have as a rule shorter necks and shorter bodies, and stand over far less ground than the Ánazehs. Then, although their shoulders are undoubtedly good and their withers higher than one generally sees further north, the hind-quarter is short, and if it were not for the peculiarly handsome carriage of the tail would certainly want distinction. Their legs all seem to be extremely good; but we have not seen in one of them that splendid line of the hind leg to the hock which is so striking in the Ánazeh thoroughbreds. Of their feet it is difficult to judge, for from long standing without exercise, all the Emir's mares have their hoofs overgrown. Their manes and tails are thicker than one would expect.

¹ Abbas Pasha's Seglawieh is reported to have had two foals while in Egypt; one of them died, and the other was given to the late King of Italy, and left descendants, now in the possession of the present king.

“In their heads, however, there is certainly a general superiority to the Ánazeh mares, at least in all the points the Arabs most admire, and we were both struck, directly we saw them, with the difference.”

* * * * *

As I may fairly assume that few persons out of Arabia have an idea what are there considered the proper points of a horse's head, I will give here a description of them:

First of all, the head should be large, not small. A little head the Arabs particularly dislike, but the size should be all in the upper regions of the skull. There should be a great distance from the ears to the eyes, and a great distance from one eye to the other, though not from ear to ear. The forehead, moreover, and the whole region between and just below the eyes, should be convex, the eyes themselves standing rather “à fleur de tête.” But there should be nothing fleshy about their prominence, and each bone should be sharply edged; a flat forehead is disliked. The space round the eyes should be free of all hair, so as to show the black skin underneath, and this just round the eyes should be especially black and lustrous. The cheek-bone should be deep and lean, and the jaw-bone clearly marked. Then the face should narrow suddenly and run down almost to a point, not however to such a point as one sees in the English racehorse, whose profile seems to terminate with the nostril, but to the tip of the lip. The nostril when in repose should lie flat with the face, appearing in it little more than a slit, and pinched and puckered up, as also should the mouth, which should have the under-lip longer than the upper, “like the camel's,” the Bedouins say. The ears, especially in the mare, should be long, but fine and delicately cut, like the ears of a gazelle.

It must be remarked that the head and the tail are the two points especially regarded by Arabs in judging of a horse, as in them they think they can discover the surest signs of his breeding. The tails of the Nejd horses are as peculiar as their heads, and are as essential to their beauty. However other points might differ, every horse at Haïl had its tail set on in the same fashion, in repose something like the tail of a rocking horse, and not as has been described, “thrown out in a perfect arch.” In motion the tail was held high in the air, and looked as if it could not under any circumstances be carried low. Mohammed ibn Arûk declared roundly that the phenomenon was an effect, partly at least, of art. He assured us that before a foal is an hour old, its tail is bent back over a stick and the twist produces a permanent result. But this sounds unlikely, and in any case it could hardly affect the carriage of the tail in galloping.

With regard to colour, of the hundred animals in the Haïl stables, there were about forty greys or rather whites, thirty bays, twenty chestnuts, and the rest brown. We did not see a real black, and of course there are no roans, or piebalds, or duns, for these are not Arab colours. The Emir one day asked us what colours we preferred in England, and when we told him bay or chestnut he quite agreed with us. Nearly all Arabs prefer bay with black points, though pure white with a very black skin and hoofs is also liked. In a bay or chestnut, three white feet, the off fore-foot being dark, are not objected to. But, as a rule, colour is not much regarded at Haïl, for there as elsewhere in Arabia a fashionable strain is all in all.

“Besides the full grown animals, Ibn Rashid's yards contain thirty or forty foals and yearlings, beautiful little creatures but terribly starved and miserable. Foals bred in the desert are poor enough, but these in town have a positively sickly appearance. Tied all day long by the foot they seem to have quite lost heart, and show none of the playfulness of their age. Their tameness, like that of the “fowl and the brute,” is shocking to see. The Emir tells us that every spring he sends a hundred yearlings down to Queyt on the Persian Gulf under charge of one of his slaves, who sells them at Bombay for £100 apiece. They are of course now at their worst age, but they have the prospect of a few months' grazing in the Nefûd before appearing in the market.”

“On the whole, both of us are rather disappointed with what we see here. Of all the mares in the prince’s stables I do not think more than three or four could show with advantage among the Gomussa, and, in fact, we are somewhat alarmed lest the Emir should propose an exchange with us for our chestnut Ras el-Fedawi which is greatly admired by every one. If he did, we could not well refuse.”

With regard to Nejd horses in general, the following remarks are based on what we saw and heard at Haïl, and elsewhere in Arabia.

First, whatever may have been the case formerly, horses of any kind are now exceedingly rare in Nejd. One may travel vast distances in the Peninsula without meeting a single horse or even crossing a horse track. Both in the Nefûd and on our return journey to the Euphrates, we carefully examined every track of man and beast we met; but from the time of our leaving the Roala till close to Meshhed Ali, not twenty of these proved to be tracks of horses. The wind no doubt obliterates footsteps quickly, but it could not wholly do so, if there were a great number of the animals near. The Ketherin, a true Nejd tribe and a branch of the Beni Khaled, told us with some pride that they could mount a hundred horsemen, and even the Muteyr, reputed to be the greatest breeders of thoroughbred stock in Nejd, are said to possess only 400 mares. The horse is a luxury with the Bedouins of the Peninsula, and not, as it is with those of the North, a necessity of their daily life. Their journeys and raids and wars are all made on camel, not on horse-back; and at most the Sheykh mounts his mare at the moment of battle. The want of water in Nejd is a sufficient reason for this. Horses there are kept for show rather than actual use, and are looked upon as far too precious to run unnecessary risks.

Secondly, what horses there are in Nejd, are bred in the Nefûds. The stony plateaux of the interior contain no suitable pasture except in a very few places, while the Nefûds afford grass, green or dry, the whole year round. The Muteyr, the Beni Khaled, the Dafir, and the Shammar, are now the principal breeders of horses in Nejd, but the Ánazeh are regarded as possessing the best strains, and the Ánazeh have disappeared from Nejd. They began to migrate northwards about two hundred years ago, and have ever since continued moving by successive migrations till all have abandoned their original homes. It may be that the great name which Nejd horses undoubtedly have in the East, was due mainly to these very Ánazeh, with whose horses they are now contrasted. The Bissr Ánazeh were settled in the neighbourhood of Kheybar, on the western edge of the Nefûd, the Roala south of Jôf, and the Amarrat in the extreme east. These probably among them supplied Nejd horses in former times to Syria, Bagdad, and Persia, and some sections of the tribe may even have found their way further south; for the Ibn Saouds themselves are an Ánazeh family. So that then, probably, as now, the best strains of blood were in their hands. To the present day in the north the Ánazeh distinguish the descendants of the mares brought with them from Nejd as “Nejdi,” while they call the descendants of the mares captured from the tribes of the North, “Shimali” or Northerners.

The management and education of horses seems to differ little in Nejd from what it is elsewhere among the Arabs. But we were surprised to find that, in place of the Bedouin halter, the bit is used at Haïl. At first we fancied that this was in imitation of Turkish manners; but it is more likely to be an old custom with town Arabs. Indeed the Bedouins of the Sahara, no less than the Turks, use the ring bit, which may after all have been an invention of Arabia. Bad as it is for the mouth, it is certainly of use in the fancy riding indulged in at Haïl, the jerid play and sham fighting. Among the Bedouins of Nejd the halter alone is used.

Of anything like racing we could learn nothing. Trials of speed are no longer in fashion, as they must have been once, and skill in turning and doubling is alone of any value. That some tradition, however, of training still exists among the Arabs, the following recipe for rearing a colt seems to prove. It was given us in answer to our description of English racing and racehorses, and probably represents a traditional practice of Arabia as old as the days of Mahomet.

ARAB RECIPE FOR REARING A COLT

“If,” said our informant, “you would make a colt run faster than his fellows, remember the following rules: —

“During the first month of his life let him be content with his mother’s milk, it will be sufficient for him. Then during five months add to this natural supply goat’s milk, as much as he will drink. For six months more give him the milk of camels, and besides a measure of wheat steeped in water for a quarter of an hour, and served in a nosebag.

“At a year old the colt will have done with milk; he must be fed on wheat and grass, the wheat dry from a nose-bag, the grass green if there is any.

“At two years old he must work, or he will be worthless. Feed him now, like a full-grown horse, on barley; but in summer let him also have gruel daily at midday. Make the gruel thus: – Take a double-handful of flour, and mix it in water well with your hands till the water seems like milk; then strain it, leaving the dregs of the flour, and give what is liquid to the colt to drink.

“Be careful from the hour he is born to let him stand in the sun; shade hurts horses, but let him have water in plenty when the day is hot.

“The colt must now be mounted, and taken by his owner everywhere with him, so that he shall see everything, and learn courage. He must be kept constantly in exercise, and never remain long at his manger. He should be taken on a journey, for work will fortify his limbs.

“At three years old he should be trained to gallop. Then, if he be of true blood, he will not be left behind. Yalla!”

CHAPTER XIII

“Babel was Nimrod’s hunting box, and then
A town of gardens, walls, and wealth amazing,
Where Nabuchodonosor, king of men,
Reigned till one summer’s day he took to grazing.”

Byron.

“.. Oh how wretched
Is that poor man that lives on princes’ favours.”

Shakespeare.

Mohammed loses his head – A ride with the Emir – The mountain fortress
of Agde – Farewell to Haïl – We join the Persian Haj – Ways and manners of the
pilgrims – A clergyman of Medina.

I have hinted at a mystification in which we found ourselves involved a few days after our arrival at Haïl, and which at the time caused us no little anxiety. It had its origin in a piece of childishness on Mohammed’s part, whose head was completely turned by the handsome reception given him as an Ibn Arûk by the Emir, and a little too, I fear, by our own spoiling. To the present day I am not quite sure that we heard all that happened, and so forbear entering upon the matter in detail; but as far as we could learn, Mohammed’s vanity seems to have led him to aggrandise his own position in the eyes of Ibn Rashid’s court, by representing us as persons whom he had taken under his protection, and who were in some way dependent on him; boasting that the camels, horses, and other property were his own, and our servants his people. This under ordinary circumstances might have been a matter of small consequence, and we should not have grudged him a little self-glorification at our expense, conscious as we were of having owed the success of our journey hitherto, mainly to his fidelity. But unfortunately the secondary *rôle* which he would thus have assigned to us, made our relations with the Emir not only embarrassing, but positively dangerous. Our reception at first had been cordial to a degree that made it all the more annoying to find, that when we had been four days at Haïl, we no longer received the attentions which had hitherto been paid us. The presents of game ceased, and the lamb, with which we had hitherto been regaled at dinner, was replaced by camel meat. Instead of two soldiers being sent to escort us to the palace, a slave boy came with a message. On the fifth day we were not invited to the evening party, and on the sixth Wilfrid, calling at the palace, was told curtly that the Emir was not at home. We could not imagine the cause of this change, and Mohammed, usually so cheerful and so open-hearted, had become moody and embarrassed, keeping almost entirely with the servants in the outer house. Hanna, the faithful Hanna, began to hint darkly that things were not well, and Abdallah and the rest of the Mussulman servants seemed unwilling to do their duty. We remembered that we were among Wahhabi fanatics, and we began to be very much alarmed. Still we were far from guessing the real reason, and it was not till we had been a week at Haïl that Wilfrid, happening to meet the Emir’s chief slave Mubarek, learned from him how matters stood. It was no use being angry; indeed Mohammed’s conduct was rather childish than disloyal, and the *dénouement* would have not been worth mentioning except as an illustration of Arab manners and ways of thought, and also as explaining why our stay at Haïl was cut shorter than we had originally intended it to be; and why, instead of going on to Kasim, we joined the Persian pilgrimage on their homeward road to Meshhed Ali.

Matters of course could not rest there, and on returning home from his interview with Mubarek, Wilfrid upbraided Mohammed with his folly, and then sent to the palace for Mufurraj, the master of ceremonies, and the same dignified old gentleman who had received us on our arrival, and having explained the circumstances bade him in his turn explain them to the Emir. The old man promised to do this, and I have no doubt kept his word, for that very evening we were sent for once more to the palace, and received with the old cordiality. It is, too, I think very creditable to the arrangements of the Hail court, that no explanations of any sort were entered into. Mohammed, though put in his proper place, was still politely received; and only an increase of amiable attentions made us remember that we had ever had cause to complain. As to Mohammed, I am bound to say, that once the fumes of his vanity evaporated, he bore no kind of malice for what we had been obliged to do, and became once more the amiable, attentive and serviceable friend he had hitherto been. Ill-temper is not an Arab failing. Still the incident was a lesson and a warning, a lesson that we were Europeans still among Asiatics, a warning that Hail was a lion's den, though fortunately we were friends with the lion. We began to make our plans for moving on.

I have said little as yet about the Persian pilgrimage which, encamped just outside the walls of Hail, had all along been a main feature in the goings on of the place. On a certain Tuesday, however, the Emir sent us a message that he expected us to come out riding with him, and that he would meet us at that gate of the town where the pilgrims were. It was a fortunate day for us, not indeed because we saw the pilgrims, but because we saw what we would have come the whole journey to see, and had almost despaired of seeing, – all the best of the Emir's horses out and galloping about. We were delighted at the opportunity, and made haste to get ready. In half an hour we were on our mares, and in the street. There was a great concourse of people all moving towards the camp, and just outside the town we found the Emir's cavalcade. This for the moment absorbed all my thoughts, for I had not yet seen any of the Hail horses mounted. The Emir, splendidly dressed but barefooted, was riding a pretty little white mare, while the chestnut Krushieh followed him mounted by a slave.

All our friends were there, Hamúd, Majid and the two boys his brothers, with a still smaller boy, whom they introduced to us as a son of Metaab, the late Emir, all in high spirits and anxious to show off their horses and their horsemanship; while next the Emir and under his special protection rode the youth with the tragical history, Naif, the sole remaining son of Tellál, whose brothers Mohammed had killed, and who, it is whispered, will some day be called on to revenge their deaths. Mubarek too, the white slave, was there, a slave in name only, for he is strikingly like the princely family in feature and is one of the richest and most important personages in Hail. The rest of the party consisted of friends and servants, with a fair sprinkling of black faces among them, dressed in their best clothes and mounted on the Emir's mares. Conspicuous on his beautiful bay was Hamúd, who, as usual, did us the honours, and pointed out and explained the various persons and things we saw. It was one of those mornings one only finds in Nejd. The air brilliant and sparkling to a degree one cannot imagine in Europe, and filling one with a sense of life such as one remembers to have had in childhood, and which gives one a wish to shout. The sky of an intense blue, and the hills in front of us carved out of sapphire, and the plain, crisp and even as a billiard table, sloping gently upwards towards them. On one side the battlemented walls and towers of Hail, with the palace rising out of a dark mass of palms almost black in the sunlight; on the other the pilgrim camp, a parti-coloured mass of tents, blue, green, red, white, with the pilgrims themselves in a dark crowd, watching with curious half-frightened eyes the barbaric display of which we formed a part.

Presently the Emir gave a signal to advance, and turning towards the south-west, our whole party moved on in the direction of a clump of palm-trees we could see about two miles off. Hamúd then suddenly put his mare into a gallop, and one after another the rest of the party joined him in a sham fight, galloping, doubling, and returning to the Emir, who remained alone with us, and shouting as though they would bring the sky about their ears. At last the Emir could resist it no longer, and seizing a jerid or palm stick from one of the slaves, went off himself among the others. In a moment

his dignity and his town manners were forgotten, and he became the Bedouin again which he and all his family really are. His silk kefiyehs were thrown back, and bare-headed with his long Bedouin plaits streaming in the wind and bare-legged and bare-armed, he galloped hither and thither; charging into the throng, and pursuing and being pursued, and shouting as if he had never felt a care, and never committed a crime in his life.

We found ourselves alone with a strange little personage whom we had already noticed riding beside the Emir, and who seemed even more out of place in this fantastic entertainment than ourselves. I hope at least that we looked less ridiculous than he did. Mounted on a sorry little kadish, and dressed in the fashion of European children fifty years ago, with a high waisted coat, well pleated at the skirt, trousers up to his knees, and feet shod with slippers, a little brown skull cap on his head, and a round shaven face, sat what seemed an overgrown boy, but what in reality was a chief person from among the Persian pilgrims. It was Ali Koli Khan, son of the great Khan of the Bactiari, who for his father's sake was being treated by the Emir with all possible honour. He, with the rest of the Haj, was now on his way back from Mecca, and it was partly to impress him with the Emir's magnificence that the present party had been arranged.

We did not long stay alone, for in a few minutes the galloping ceased, and we then went on sedately as before, and in due time arrived at the palm trees, which, it turned out, were the Emir's property, and contained in a garden surrounded by a high wall. Here we were invited to dismount, and a carpet having been spread under the trees, we all sat down. Slaves were soon busy serving a luncheon of sweetmeats, – boys were made to climb the lemon trees, and shake down the fruit, and coffee was handed round. Then all the party said their prayers except ourselves and the Persian, who, as a Shiah, could not join in their devotions, and we mounted again and rode home. This time we too joined in the galloping, which speedily recommenced, our mares fully enjoying the fun, and in this way we scampered back to Hail.

On the following day Wilfrid called on Ali Koli Khan in his tent, going there with Mohammed, now once more a reasonable companion and follower. Indeed in the Persian camp assumptions of nobility on Mohammed's part would have been quite thrown away, for the Persians care nothing for Arabian nobility, and treat all alike as Bedouins and barbarians. Ali Koli, though only a younger son, was travelling in state, having his mother with him, and a multitude of servants, male and female, besides his *hemeldaria* or contractor, and the Arabs managing his beasts. His major-domo and interpreter was a magnificent personage, and his followers, dressed in felt tunics and skull caps, gave him the appearance of being an important chief. His tent was of the Turkish pattern, well lined and comfortable, with fine Persian carpets on the floor, and a divan. There Wilfrid found him sitting with a friend, Abd er-Rahim, the son of a merchant of Kermanshah, who is also British consular agent there. The young Persians were very amiable; but the contrast of their manners with those of the ceremonious Arabs struck Wilfrid at once. There were none of those elaborate compliments and polite inquiries one gets used to at Hail, but rather a European *sans gêne* in the form of reception. They made Wilfrid comfortable on the divan, called for tea, which was served in a *samovar*, and at once poured out a long history of their sufferings on the pilgrimage. This they did in very broken Arabic, and with an accent irresistibly absurd, for the Persians speak with a drawl in their intonation, wholly foreign to that of the Arabs. Ali's natural language, he says, is Kurdish, but being an educated person, and an officer in the Shah's army, he talks Persian equally well. In Persia, Arabic plays much the part in education which Latin did in Europe before it was quite a dead language. Both he and Abd er-Rahim were loud in complaints of every thing Arabian, and in spite of Mohammed's presence, abused roundly the whole Arab race, the poverty of the towns, the ignorance of the citizens, and the robberies of the Bedouins, also the extortionate charges of the Arab *hemeldarias*, contractors for camels, and the miseries of desert travelling. "Was ever anything seen so miserable as the bazaar at Hail; not a bag of sweetmeats to be had for love or money, the Arabs were mere barbarians, drinkers of coffee instead of tea." Every now and then, too, they would break out into conversation in their

own language. Wilfrid, however, liked Ali Koli, and they parted very good friends, with an invitation from both the young Persians to travel on with them to Meshhed on the Euphrates, where the Persians always end their pilgrimage by a visit to the shrines of Ali and Huseyn. This seemed an excellent opportunity, and having consulted the Emir, who highly approved of the plan, we accordingly decided to travel with the Haj as soon as it should start.

Our last days at Haïl were by no means the least pleasant. As a final proof of his goodwill and confidence, the Emir announced that we might pay a visit to Agde, a fortress in the mountains some miles from Haïl, and which he had never before shown to any stranger. I do not feel at liberty to say exactly where this is, for we were sent to see it rather on parole, and though I hope Ibn Rashid runs no danger of foreign invasion, I would not give a clue to possible enemies. Suffice it to say that it lies in the mountains, in a position of great natural strength, made stronger by some rude attempts at fortification, and that it is really one of the most curious places in the world.

One approaches it from the plain by a narrow winding valley, reminding one not a little of the wadys of Mount Sinai, where the granite rocks rise abruptly on either hand out of a pure bed of sand. On one of these is engraved an inscription in Arabic which we copied and which though not very legible may be read thus: —

“Hadihi kharâbat Senhârib.”

“This (is) the ruin of Senacherib (’s building).”

Such at least is its meaning in the opinion of Mr. Sabunji, a competent Arabic scholar, though I will not venture to explain on what occasion Senacherib made his way to Nejd, nor why he wrote in Arabic instead of his own cuneiform.

Inside the defences, the valley broadens out into an amphitheatre formed by the junction of three or four wadys in which there is a village and a palm garden. Besides which, the wadys are filled with wild palms watered, the Arabs say, “min Allah,” by Providence, at least by no human hand. They are very beautiful, forming a brilliant contrast of green fertility with the naked granite crags which overhang them on all sides. These are perhaps a thousand feet in height, and run down sheer into the sandy floor of the wadys, so that one is reminded in looking at them of that valley of diamonds where the serpents lived, and down which the merchants threw their pieces of meat for the rocs to gather, in the tale of Sinbad the Sailor. No serpents however live in Agde, but a population of very honest Shammar, who entertained us with a prodigality of dates and coffee, difficult to do justice to. We had been sent in the company of two horsemen of the Emir’s, Shammar, who did the honours, as Agde and all in it are really Ibn Rashid’s private property. These and the villagers gave us a deal of information about the hills we were in, and showed us where a great battle had been fought by Mohammed’s father and his uncle Obeyd against the Ibn Ali, formerly Emirs of the Jebel. It would seem that Agde was the oldest possession of the Ibn Rashids, and that on their taking Haïl the Ibn Alis marched against them, when they retreated to their fortress, and there gave battle and such a defeat to the people of Kefar that it secured to the Ibn Rashids supreme power ever after. They also showed us with great pride a wall built by Obeyd to block the narrow valley, and made us look at everything, wells, gardens, and houses, so that we spent nearly all the day there. They told us too of a mysterious beast that comes from the hills by night and climbs the palm trees for sake of the dates. “As large as a hare, with a long tail, and very good to eat.” They describe it as sitting on its hind-legs, and whistling, so that Wilfrid thinks it must be a marmot. Only, do marmots climb? They call it the Webber.

We had a delightful gallop home with the two Bedouins, (Mohammed was not with us,) of whom we learned one of the Shammar war songs, which runs thus: —

“Ma arid ana erkobu delúl,
Lau zeynuli shedadeha,
Aridu ana hamra shenûf,
Hamra seryeh aruddeha.”

thus literally translated: —

“I would not ride a mere delúl,
Though lovely to me her shedad (camel-saddle);
Let me be mounted on a mare,
A bay mare, swift and quick to turn.”

They were mounted on very pretty ponies, but could not keep up with us galloping. If we had been in Turkey, or indeed anywhere else but in Arabia, we should have had to give a handsome tip after an expedition of this kind; but at Haïl nothing of the sort was expected. Both these Shammar were exceedingly intelligent well mannered men, with souls above money. They were doing their duty to the prince as Sheykh, and to us as strangers, and they did it enthusiastically.

The level of Agde is 3,780 feet above the sea, that of Haïl 3,500.

This was, perhaps, the pleasantest day of all those we spent at Haïl, and will live long with us as a delightful remembrance. On the following day we were to depart. Mohammed, while we were away, had been making preparations. Two new camels had been bought, and a month's provision of dates and rice purchased, in addition to a gift of excellent Yemen coffee sent us by the Emir. Our last interview with Ibn Rashid was characteristic. He was not at the kasr, but in a house he has close to the Mecca gate, where from a little window he can watch unperceived the goings on of the Haj encamped below him. We found him all alone, for he has lost all fear of our being assassins now, at his window like a bird of prey, calculating no doubt how many more silver pieces he should be able to make out of the Persians before they were well out of his clutches. Every now and then he would lean out of the window, which was partly covered by a shutter, and shout to one of his men who were standing below some message with regard to the pilgrims. He seemed to be enjoying the pleasure of his power over them, and it is absolute.

To us he was very amiable, renewing all his protestations of friendship and regard, and offering to give us anything we might choose to ask for, dromedaries for the journey, or one of his mares. This, although we should have liked to accept the last offer, we of course declined, Wilfrid making a short speech in the Arab manner, saying that the only thing we asked was the Emir's regard, and wishing him length of days. He begged Mohammed ibn Rashid to consider him as his wakil in Europe in case he required assistance of any kind, and thanked him for all the kindness we had received at his hands. The Emir then proposed that we should put off our departure, and go with him instead on a ghazú or warlike expedition he was starting on in a few days, a very attractive offer which might have been difficult to refuse had it been made earlier, but which we now declined. Our heads, in fact, had been in the jaws of the lion long enough, and now our only object was to get quietly and decorously out of the den. We therefore pleaded want of time, and added that our camels were already on the road; we then said good-bye and took our leave.

There was, however, one more visit to be paid, this time of friendly regard more than of ceremony. As we rode through the town we stopped at Hamúd's house and found him and all his family at home. To them our farewells were really expressions of regret at parting, and Hamúd gave us some very sound advice about going on with the Haj to Meshhed Ali, instead of trying to get across to Bussora. There had been rain, he said, on the pilgrim road, and all the reservoirs (those marked on the map as the tanks of Zobeydeh) were full, so that our journey that way would be exceptionally easy, whereas between this and Bussorah, we should have to pass over an almost waterless region,

without anything interesting to compensate for the difficulty. But this we should see as we went on – the first thing, as I have said, was to get clear away, and it would be time enough later to settle details about our course.

Majid was there, and received from Wilfrid as a remembrance a silver-handled Spanish knife, whereupon he sent for a black cloth cloak with a little gold embroidery on the collar and presented it to me. It was a suitable gift, for I had nothing of the sort, indeed no respectable abba at all, and this one was both dignified and quiet in appearance. Majid at least, I am sure, regrets us, and if circumstances ever take us again to Haïl, it would be the best fortune for us to find him or his father on the throne. They are regarded as the natural heirs to the Sheykhat, and Ibn Rashid's does not look like a long life.

After this we mounted, and in another five minutes were clear of the town. Then looking back, we each drew a long breath, for Haïl with all the charm of its strangeness, and its interesting inhabitants, had come to be like a prison to us, and at one time when we had had that quarrel with Mohammed, had seemed very like a tomb.

We left Haïl by the same gate at which we had entered it, what seemed like years before, but instead of turning towards the mountains, we skirted the wall of the town and further on the palm gardens, which are its continuation, for about three miles down a ravine-like wady. Then we came out on the plain again, and at the last isolated group of ithel trees, halted for the last time to enjoy the shade, for the sun was almost hot, before joining the pilgrim caravan, which we could see like a long line of ants traversing the plain between us and the main range of Jebel Shammar.

It was, without exception, the most beautiful view I ever saw in my life, and I will try to describe it. To begin with, it must be understood that the air, always clear in Jebel Shammar, was this day of a transparent clearness, which probably surpasses anything seen in ordinary deserts, or in the high regions of the Alps, or at the North Pole, or anywhere except perhaps in the moon. For this is the very centre of the desert, four hundred miles from the sea, and nearly four thousand feet above the sea level. Before us lay a foreground of coarse reddish sand, the washing down of the granite rocks of Jebel Aja, with here and there magnificent clumps of ithel, great pollards whose trunks measure twenty and thirty feet ² in circumference, growing on little mounds showing where houses once stood – just as in Sussex the yew trees do – for the town seems to have shifted from this end of the oasis to where it now is. Across this sand lay a long green belt of barley, perhaps a couple of acres in extent, the blades of corn brilliantly green, and just having shot up high enough to hide the irrigation furrows. Beyond this, for a mile or more, the level desert fading from red to orange, till it was again cut by what appeared to be a shining sheet of water reflecting the deep blue of the sky – a mirage of course, but the most perfect illusion that can be imagined. Crossing this, and apparently wading in the water, was the long line of the pilgrim camels, each reflected exactly in the mirage below him with the dots of blue, red, green, or pink, representing the litter or tent he carried. The line of the procession might be five miles or more in length; we could not see the end of it. Beyond again rose the confused fantastic mass of the sapphire coloured crags of Jebel Aja, the most strange and beautiful mountain range that can be imagined – a lovely vision.

When we had sufficiently admired all this, and I had made my sketch of it, for there was no hurry, we got on our mares again and rejoicing with them in our freedom, galloped on singing the Shammar song, “Ma arid ana erkobu delúl lau zeynoli shedadeha, biddi ana hamra shenûf, hamra seriyeh arruddeha,” a proceeding which inspired them more than any whip or spur could have done, and which as we converged towards the Haj caravan, made the camels caper, and startled the pilgrims into the idea that the Harb Bedouins were once more upon them. So we went along with Mohammed following us, till we reached the vanguard of the Haj, and the green and red banner which goes in front of it. Close to this we found our own camels, and soon after camped with them, not ten miles from Haïl in a bit of a wady where the standard was planted.

² We measured one, a pollard, thirty-six feet round the trunk at five feet from the ground.

Our tents are a couple of hundred yards away from the Haj camp, which is crowded together for fear of the dangers of the desert. The pilgrim mueddins have just chanted the evening call to prayers, and the people are at their devotions. Our mares are munching their barley, and our hawk (a trained bird we bought yesterday for six mejidies of a Bedouin at Haïl), is sitting looking very wise on his perch in front of us. It is a cold evening, but oh how clean and comfortable in the tent!

February 2. – It appears after all that only about half the Haj left Haïl yesterday. There has been a difficulty about camels some say, others that Ibn Rashid will not let the people go, an affair of money probably in either case. So we had hardly gone more than two miles before a halt was ordered by the emir el-haj, one Ambar, a black slave of Ibn Rashid's, and the camels and their riders remained massed together on a piece of rising ground for the purpose we think of being counted. The dervishes, however, and other pilgrims on foot went on as they liked, and so did we, for we do not consider ourselves bound by any of the rules of the Haj procession, and Abdallah has orders to march our camels well outside the main body. There was no road or track at all to-day, and we went forward on the look-out for water which we heard was somewhere on ahead, crossing some very rough ground and wadys which were almost ravines. We have become so used to the desert now, that from a long distance we made out the water, guessing its position from the white colour of the ground near it. The whiteness is caused by a stonelike deposit the water makes when it stands long anywhere; and in this instance it lay in a sort of natural reservoir or series of reservoirs in the bed of a shallow wady. These must have been filled some time during the winter by rain, and we hurried on to fill our goat skins at them while they were still clean, for the pilgrims would soon drink up and pollute them. They are but small pools. We found Awwad already there, he having been sent on in front with a delûl to make sure of our supply, and the process of filling the skins was hardly over before the dervishes who always march ahead of the Haj began to arrive. They have an unpleasant habit of washing in the water first, and drinking it afterwards, which we are told is part of their religious ritual.

The wind has been very violent all day with a good deal of sand in it, but it has now gone down. Our course since leaving Haïl has been east by north, and is directed towards a tall hill, Jebel Jildiyeh, which is a very conspicuous landmark. Our camp to-night is a pleasanter one than yesterday's, being further from the pilgrims, and we have a little wady all to ourselves, with plenty of good firewood, and food for the camels.

February 3. – Though fires were lit this morning at four o'clock as if in preparation of an early start, no move has been made to-day. Half the pilgrimage they tell us is still at Haïl, and must be waited for. Wilfrid went to-day into the camp to find our friend Ali Koli Khan, but neither he nor Abd er-Rahim, nor anyone else he knew had arrived.

The Persian pilgrims, though not very agreeable in person or in habits (for they are without the sense of propriety which is so characteristic of the Arabs), are friendly enough, and if we could talk to them, would, I dare say, be interesting, but on a superficial comparison with the Arabs they seem coarse and boorish. They are most of them fair complexioned, and many have fair hair and blue eyes; but their features are heavy, and there is much the same difference between them and the Shammar who are escorting them, as there is between a Dutch cart-horse and one of Ibn Rashid's mares. In spite of their washings, which are performed in season and out of season all day long, they look unutterably dirty in their greasy felt dresses, as no unwashed Arab ever did. Awwad and the rest of our people now and then get into disputes with them when they come too near our tents in search of firewood, and it is evident that there is no love lost between Persian and Arab.

My day has been spent profitably at home re-stuffing my saddle, which was sadly in want of it. Mohammed has become quite himself again, no airs or graces of any kind, and, as he says, the air of Haïl did not agree with him. He seems anxious now to efface all recollection of the past, and has made himself very agreeable, telling us histories connected with the Sebaa and their horses, all of them instructive, some amusing.

February 4. – Another day's waiting, the pilgrims as well as we ourselves impatient, but impatience is no good. Wilfrid, by way of occupying the time, went off on a surveying expedition by himself, with his mare and the greyhounds. He went in a straight line northwards, towards a line of low hills which are visible here from the high ground. They are about twelve miles off. He met nobody except a couple of Bedouins on delúls, going to Atwa, where they told him there is a well. They looked on him and his gun with suspicion, and did not much like being cross-questioned. After that he found the desert absolutely empty of life, a succession of level sandy plains, and rough ridges of sandstone. The hills themselves, which he reached before turning back, were also of yellow sandstone, weathered black in patches, and from the top of the ridge he could make out the Nefûd, like a red sea. He galloped to the ridge and back in three hours. The ride was useful, as it enabled him to get the position of several of the principal hills, Yatubb, Jildiyeh, and others, and to mark them on his chart. He did not say where he intended to go, but as it happened, he returned before there was time for me to become anxious.

In the meanwhile, Awwad and Abdallah had been giving the falcon a lesson with a lure they have made out of one of the nosebags. The bird seems very tame, and comes to Awwad when he calls it, shouting "Ash'o, ash'o," which he explains is the short for its name, Rasham, a corruption of the word *rashmon*, which means shining like lightning. We may hope now with Rasham's assistance to keep ourselves supplied with meat, for hares are in plenty.

In the afternoon visitors came, some Shammar Bedouins of the Ibn Duala family, who have preferred to camp beside us, as more congenial neighbours to them than the Persians. They are on their way from Hail to their tents in the Nefûd with a message from the Emir that more camels are wanted; and they are going on afterwards with the Haj as far as Meshhed Ali, or perhaps to Samawa on the Euphrates, to buy rice (tummin), and wheat. It is only twice a year that the tribes of Jebel Shammar can communicate with the outside world; on the occasion of the two Haj journeys, coming and going. It is then that they lay in their provision for the year. The eldest of these Ibn Duala, a man of sixty, is very well-mannered and amiable. He dined with Mohammed and the servants in their tent, and came to sit with us afterwards in ours. We are in half a mind to leave this dawdling Haj, and go on with him to-morrow. But his tents lie some way to the left out of our road.

Besides the Ibn Dualas, there are some poor Bedouins with their camels crouched down in our wady to be out of sight. They are afraid of being impressed for the Haj, and at first it was difficult to understand why, if so, they should have come so close to it. But they explained that they hoped to get lost in the crowd, and hoped to have the advantage of its company, without having their camels loaded. They, like everybody else, are on their way to Meshhed to buy corn.

There is a report that the Emir is coming from Hail to-morrow, and will travel three days with the pilgrimage, going on afterwards, nobody knows where, on a ghazú. This would be tiresome, as now we have wished him good-bye we only want to get away.

February 5. – We have moved at last, but only another ten miles, to a larger wady, which seems to drain the whole country, and which they call Wady Hanasser (the valley of the little fingers), why so called I cannot say. Here there are numerous wells, and a large tract of camel pasture, of the sort called *rimh*. There are a good number of hares in this cover, and we have had some coursing with our greyhounds, aided by a sort of lurcher who has attached himself to us. The servants call him "Merzug," which may be translated a "windfall" literally a gift from God, an unattractive animal, but possessed of a nose.

Two hours after starting we came to a curious tell standing quite alone in the plain. It is, like all the rest of the country now, of sandstone, and we were delighted to find it covered with inscriptions,³ and pictures of birds and beasts of the sort we had already seen, but much better executed, and on

³ Rassam, who has been digging at Babylon, informs me that these inscriptions are in the ancient Phœnician character. It would seem that the Phœnicians, who were a nation of shopkeepers, were in the habit of sending out commercial travellers with samples

a larger scale. The character, whatever its name, is a very handsome one, as distinct and symmetrical as the Greek or Latin capitals, and some of the drawings have a rude, but real artistic merit. They cannot be the work of mere barbarians, any more than the alphabet. It is remarkable that all the animals represented are essentially Arabian, the gazelle, the camel, the ibex, the ostrich. I noticed also a palm tree conventionally treated, but nothing like a house, or even a tent. The principal subject is a composition of two camels with necks crossed, of no small merit. It is combined with an inscription very regularly cut. That these things are very ancient is proved by the colour of the indentations. The rock is a reddish sandstone weathered black, and it is evident that when fresh, the letters and drawings stood out red against a dark back-ground, but now many of these have been completely weathered over again, a process it must have taken centuries in this dry climate to effect.

We were in front of the Haj when we came to this tell (Tell es Sayliyah), and we waited on the top of it while the whole procession passed us, an hour or more. It was a curious spectacle. From the height where we were, we could see for thirty or forty miles back over the plain, as far as Jebel Aja, at the foot of which Haïl lies. The procession, three miles long, was composed of some four thousand camels (nor was this the whole Haj), with a great number of men on foot besides. In front were the dervishes, walking very fast, almost running; wild dirty people, but amiable, and quite ready to converse if they know Arabic; then, a group of respectably dressed people walking out of piety, a man with an immense blue turban, we believe to be an Afghan; a slim, very neat-looking youth, who might be a clerk or a shopkeeper's assistant, reading as he walks a scroll, and others carrying leather bottles in their hands containing water for their ablutions, which they stop every now and then to perform. Sometimes they chant or recite prayers. All these devotees are very rude to us, answering nothing when we salute them, and being thrown into consternation if the greyhounds come near them lest they should be touched by them and defiled. One of them, the youth with the scroll, stopped this morning at our fire to warm his hands as he went by, and we offered him a cup of coffee, but he said he had breakfasted, and turned to talk to the servants, his fellow Mussulmans, but the servants told him to move on. Among Arabs, to refuse a cup of coffee is the grossest offence, and is almost tantamount to a declaration of war. The Arabs do not understand the religious prejudices of the Shiyite Persians.

Some way behind these forerunners comes the *berak*, or banner, carried in the centre of a group of mounted dromedaries magnificently caparisoned and moving on at a fast walk. These most beautiful creatures have coats like satin, eyes like those of the gazelle, and a certain graceful action which baffles description. Not even the Arabian horse has such a look of breeding as these thoroughbred camels. They are called *naamiyeh*, because one may go to sleep while riding them without being disturbed by the least jolting.

The *berak*, Ibn Rashid's standard, is a square of purple silk with a device and motto in white in the centre, and a green border. It is carried by a servant on a tall dromedary, and is usually partly furled on the march. Ambar, the negro emir el-Haj, generally accompanies this group. He has a little white mare led by a slave which follows him, and which we have not yet seen him ride.

After the *berak* comes the mass of pilgrims, mounted sometimes two on one camel, sometimes with a couple of boxes on each side, the household furniture. The camels are the property of Bedouins, mostly Shammar, but many of them Dafir, Sherârat, or Howeysein. They follow their animals on foot, and are at perpetual wrangle with the pilgrims, although, if they come to blows, Ibn Rashid's police mounted on dromedaries interfere, deciding the quarrel in a summary manner.

A Persian riding on a camel is the most ridiculous sight in the world. He insists on sitting astride, and seems absolutely unable to learn the ways and habits of the creature he rides; and he talks to

of goods all over Asia; and wherever they stopped on the road, if there was a convenient bit of soft rock, they scratched their names on it, and drew pictures of animals. The explanation may be the true one, but how does it come that these tradesmen should choose purely desert subjects for their artistic efforts – camels, ostriches, ibexes, and horsemen with lances. I should have fancied rather that these were the work of Arabs, or of whoever represented the Arabs, in days gone by, anyhow of people living in the country. But I am no archæologist.

it with his falsetto voice in a language no Arabian camel could possibly understand. The jokes cut on the Persians by the Arabs never cease from morning till night. The better class of pilgrims, and of course all the women except the very poor, travel in *mahmals* or litters – panniers, of which a camel carries two – covered over like a tradesman's van with blue or red canvas. One or two persons possess *tahteravans*, a more expensive kind of conveyance, which requires two mules or two camels, one before and one behind, to carry it. In either of these litters the traveller can squat or even lie down and sleep. The camels chosen for the mahmals are strong and even-paced; and some of these double panniers are fitted up with a certain care and elegance, and the luxuries of Persian rugs and hangings. A confidential driver leads the camel, and servants sometimes walk beside it. One of the pilgrims keeps a man to march in front with his narghileh, which he smokes through a very long tube sitting in the pannier above. There are a few horses, perhaps about half a dozen. One, a white Kehilan Harkan, was bought the other day by a rich pilgrim from a Shammar Bedouin of the escort. This horse seems to be thoroughbred as far as can be judged from his head, tail, and pasterns; the rest of him is hidden by a huge *pallan*, or pack-saddle, with trappings, in which his new owner rides him. I have seen no others worth mentioning.

The whole of this procession defiled before us as we sat perched on the Tell es Sayliyah just above their heads.

We have made some new acquaintances, Hejazis from Medina, who came to our tent to-day and sat down in a friendly way to drink coffee with us. The Hejazi, though accounted pure Arabs, are almost as black as negroes, and have mean squat features, very unlike those of the Shammar and other pure races we have seen. They are also wanting in dignity, and have a sort of Gascon reputation in this part of Arabia. These were extremely outspoken people. The chief man among them, one Saleh ibn Benji, is keeper of the grand mosque at Medina, and is now travelling to collect alms in Persia for the shrine.

He told us that although quite willing to make friends with us here and drink our coffee, he could not advise us to go to Medina. Not but what Englishmen as Englishmen were in good repute there; but it was against their rule to allow any except Mussulmans inside the town. If we came as Mussulmans it would be all very well, but as Nasrani it would not do. He himself would be the first to try and compass our deaths. They had found a Jew in Medina last year and executed him; and the people were very angry because the Sultan had sent a Frank engineer to survey the district, and had given out that he was a Moslem. The rule only applied to the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, not to the rest of the country. The Mussulman subjects of the Queen who came from India were (even though Shias) always well received; so should we be if we conformed to Islam. The Persians, though tolerated by the Hejazi, were disliked as Persians as well as heretics, and often got beaten in Medina. He (Saleh) was going to collect money from them, as they were fools enough to give it him, but he did not care for their company. He would sooner travel with us. We might all go together on this tour through Persia. One thing he could not understand about the English Government, and that was, what earthly interest they had in interfering with the slave trade. We said it was to prevent cruelty. But there was no cruelty in it, he insisted. "Who ever saw a negro ill-treated?" he asked. We could not say that we had ever done so in Arabia; and, indeed, it is notorious that with the Arabs the slaves are like spoiled children rather than servants. We had to explain that in other countries slaves were badly used; but as Saleh remained unconvinced, we could only wind up with a general remark, that this interference with the slave trade was a "shoghl hukm," a matter concerning the Government, and no affair of ours. He seemed pretty well informed of what was going on in the world, having heard of the Russian war, though not the full circumstances of its termination; and of the cession of Cyprus, as to which he remarked, that the English Queen has been given Kubros as a bakshish by the Sultan. His last words were, "Plain speaking is best. I am your friend here; but, remember, not in Medina, on account of religion."

CHAPTER XIV

“Come, Myrrha, let us go on to the Euphrates.” – Byron.

We go in search of adventures – Taybetism – An hyæna hunt – How to cook locusts – Hawking – The reservoirs of Zobeydeh – Tales, and legends – A *coup de théâtre*– Mohammed composes a kasid.

February 6. – We are tired of loitering with the Haj, and besides, do not care to see more of Ibn Rashid, who is expected to-day. It is always a good rule not to outstay your welcome, and to go when you have once said good-bye. So, finding no indication of a move in the pilgrim camp this morning, we decided on marching without them. We have not gone far; indeed, from the high ground where we are camped we can see the smoke of the camp rising up at the edge of the plain. There is capital pasture here; and we have a fine wide prospect to the south and west; Jebel Jildiyeh being now due south of us, and Jebel Aja west by south, Haïl perhaps forty miles off; to the north the Nefûd, and behind us to the east from the ridge above our camp, we can look over a subbkha six or seven miles distant, with the oasis of Bekaa or Taybetism (happy be its name) round its shores. The place had always been called Bekaa, we are told, till a few years ago, when the name was thought unlucky, and changed, though I cannot quite understand why, for the word means a place where water can collect.

We flew our falcon to-day, and, after one or two disappointments, it caught us a hare. The wadys are full of hares, but the dogs cannot see them in the high bushes, and this was the only one started in the open. We have encamped early, and are enjoying the solitude. The moon will be full to-night; and it is provoking to think how much of its light has been wasted by delay. The moon is of little use for travelling after it is full.

February 7. – Though we did not move our camp to-day, we had a long ride, and got as far as the village of Taybetism, which is worth seeing. It is a very curious place, resembling Jobba as far as situation goes. Indeed, it seems probable that most of the towns of Nejd have in common this feature, that they are placed in hollows towards which the water drains, as it is in such positions that wells can be dug without much labour. Like Jobba, Taybetism has a subbkha, but the latter is altogether a more important oasis, for the palm-gardens reach nearly round the lake, and though not quite continuous, they must have an extent of four or five miles. The houses seem to be scattered in groups all along this length, and there is no special town. ⁴ The geology of the district is most interesting. At the edge of the subbkha the sandstone rocks form strange fantastic cliffs, none more than fifty feet high, but most fanciful in form. Some, shaped like mushrooms, show that the subbkha must at one time have been an important lake, instead of the dry semblance of a lake it now is. We measured the largest of these, and found it was forty feet in length by twenty-five in width at top, with a stalk of only five feet, the whole mass resting on a high pedestal. Other rocks looked as though they had been suddenly cooled while boiling and red hot, with the bubbles petrified as they stood. There were broad sheets of rose-coloured stone like strawberry cream with more cream poured into it and not yet mixed, streaked pink and white. Here and there, there were patches of Nefûd sand with the green Nefûd adr growing on them, and clusters of wild palms and tamarisks with a pool or two of bitter water. The subbkha, although quite dry, looked like a lake, so perfect was the mirage, of clear blue water without a ripple, reflecting the palms and houses on the opposite shore. We went round to some of these, and found beautiful gardens and well-to-do farms with patches of green barley growing outside. These were watered from wells about forty-five feet deep, good water, which the people drew for our mares to drink. We passed, but did not go into a large square kasr belonging to Ibn Rashid, where a dozen

⁴ It was to Taybetism that Abdallah ibn Saoud fled ten years ago when he was driven by his brother out of Aared, and from it that he sent that treacherous message to Midhat Pasha at Bagdad which brought the Turks into Hasa and broke up the Wahhabi Empire.

or so of dervishes from the Haj were loafing about. They asked us for news – whether the Emir had come, and whether the Haj was still waiting. These were most of them not Persian dervishes, though Shias, but from Bagdad and Meshhed Ali, people of Arab race.

On our way back we crossed a party of Shammar Bedouins, with their camels come for water from the Nefûd, which is close by. They gave us some lebben to drink, the first we have tasted this year. There were women with them. We also met a man alone on a very thin delûl. Mohammed made some rather uncomplimentary remarks about this animal, whereupon the owner in great scorn explained that she was a Bint Udeyhan, the very best breed of dromedaries in Arabia, and that if Mohammed should offer him a hundred pounds he would not sell her, that she was the camel always sent by Ibn Rashid on messages which wanted speed. He then trotted off at a pace which, though it appeared nothing remarkable, soon took him out of sight.

Awwad and Ibrahim Kasir have been back to the Haj camp for water, and have brought news that the Emir has actually arrived, and a message from him, that if we go on to the wells of Shaybeh he will meet us there.

February 8. – We have marched fifteen miles to-day from point to point, making a circuit round Taybetism and are now encamped at the top of the Nefûd. A Shammar boy of the name of Izzar with three delûls came back from the Haj camp yesterday with Awwad, and he undertakes to show us the way if we want to go on in front. He would sooner travel with us than with the Haj, as his beasts are thin, and he is afraid of their being impressed for the pilgrims. He wants to drive them unloaded to Meshhed, so that they may grow fat on the way, and then load them for the home voyage with wheat. He talks about six or seven days to Meshhed; but Wilfrid insists that we are not twenty miles nearer Meshhed than when we left Hâil, as we have been travelling almost due east, instead of nearly due north, and there must be four hundred miles more to go. This should take us twenty days at least. But the servants will not believe. We shall see who is right. They and Mohammed are very unwilling to go on before the Haj, but now that we have got this boy Izzar we are determined not to wait. If we delay we shall run short of provisions, which would be worse than anything. Already, Awwad says, the pilgrims are complaining loudly that they shall starve if they are kept longer waiting in this way. They have brought provisions for so many days and no more, and there is no place now where they can revictual. “The Haj,” added Awwad, “is sitting by the fire, very angry.”

Our march to-day was enlivened by some hunting, though with no good result. Sayad and Shiekha coursed a herd of gazelles, and succeeded in turning them, but could not get hold of any, though one passed close to Mohammed, who fired without effect. They made off straight for the Nefûd. The falcon was flown at a houbara (frilled bustard), but the bustard beat him off, as he is only a last year’s bird, and not entered to anything but hares. Rasham, however, is an amusement to us and sits on his perch at our tent door. This spot is pleasant and lonely, within a hundred yards of the edge of the Nefûd.

February 9. – Having sent Izzar to a high point for a last look back for the Haj and in vain, we have given them up and now mean to march straight on without them. It is however annoying that we are still going east instead of north, coasting the Nefud I suppose to get round instead of crossing it; but we dare not plunge into it against Izzar’s positive assurance that the other is the only way. Soil sprinkled with *jabsin* (talc), and in places with the fruit of the wild poisonous melon. Passed the well of Beyud (eggs) thirty feet deep, and travelled six and a half hours, perhaps eighteen miles, to our present camp absolutely without incident. Looking at the stars to-night, Mohammed tells me they call Orion’s belt “mizan” (the balance), and the pole star “el jiddeh” (the kid). We now have milk every day from Izzar’s she-camel, a great luxury.

February 10. – At eight o’clock we reached the wells of Shaybeh. There are forty of them close together in the middle of a great bare space, with some hills of white sand to the north of them. The wind was blowing violently, drifting the sand, and the place looked as inhospitable a one as could well be imagined, a good excuse for over-ruling all notions of stopping there, “to wait for the Emir.”

Shaybeh stands on the old Haj road which passes east of Haïl, making straight for Bereydeh in Kasîm, and the reason of our travelling so far east is thus explained. Now we have turned at right angles northwards, and there is a well-defined track which it will be easy enough for us to follow, even if we lose our Shammar guide. After leaving the wells, we travelled for some miles between ridges of white sand, which the wind was shaping "like the snow wreaths in the high Alps." The white sand, I noticed, is always of a finer texture than the red, and is more easily affected by the wind. It carries, moreover, very little vegetation, so that the mounds and ridges are less permanent than those of the Nefûd. While we were watching them, the wind shifted, and it was interesting to observe how the summits of the ridges gradually changed with it, the lee side being always steep, the wind side rounded. We gradually ascended now through broken ground to the edge of a level gravelly plain, beyond which about four miles distant we could see the red line of the real Nefûd. We had nearly crossed this, when we sighted an animal half a mile away, and galloped off in pursuit, Mohammed following. I thought at first it must be a wolf or a wild cow, but as we got nearer to it, we saw that it was a hyæna, and it seemed to be carrying something in its mouth. The dogs now gave chase, and the beast made off as fast as it could go for the broken ground we had just left, and where it probably had its den, dropping in its hurry the leg of a gazelle, the piece of booty it was bringing with it from the Nefûd. The three greyhounds boldly attacked it, Sayad especially seizing it at the shoulder, but they were unable to stop it, and it still went on doggedly intent on gaining the broken ground. It would have escaped had not we got in front and barred the way. Then it doubled back again, and we managed to drive it before us towards where we had left our camels. I never saw so cowardly a creature, for though much bigger than any dog, it never offered to turn round and defend itself as a boar or even a jackal would have done, and the dogs were so persistent in their attacks, that Wilfrid had great difficulty in getting a clear shot at it, which he did at last, rolling it over as it cantered along almost under the feet of our camels. Great of course were the rejoicings, for though Mohammed and Awwad affected some repugnance, Abdallah declared boldly and at once, that hyena was "khosh lahm," capital meat. So it was flayed and quartered on the spot. I confess the look of the carcass was not appetising, the fat with which it was covered being bright yellow, but hyænas in the desert are not the ghoul-like creatures they become in the neighbourhood of towns, and on examination the stomach was found to be full of locusts and fresh gazelle meat. Wilfrid pronounces it eatable, but I, though I have just tasted a morsel, could not bring myself to make a meal off it. I perceive that in spite of protestations about unclean food, the whole of this very large and fat animal has been devoured by our followers. I am not sure whether Mohammed kept his resolution of abstaining.

Locusts are now a regular portion of the day's provision with us, and are really an excellent article of diet. After trying them in several ways, we have come to the conclusion that they are best plain boiled. The long hopping legs must be pulled off, and the locust held by the wings, dipped into salt and eaten. As to flavour this insect tastes of vegetable rather than of fish or flesh, not unlike green wheat in England, and to us it supplies the place of vegetables, of which we are much in need. The red locust is better eating than the green one.⁵ Wilfrid considers that it would hold its own among the *hors d'œuvre* at a Paris restaurant; I am not so sure of this, for on former journeys I have resolved that other excellent dishes should be adopted at home, but afterwards among the multitude of luxuries, they have not been found worth the trouble of preparation. For catching locusts, the morning is the time, when they are half benumbed by the cold, and their wings are damp with the dew, so that they cannot fly; they may then be found clustered in hundreds under the desert bushes, and gathered without trouble, merely shovelled into a bag or basket. Later on, the sun dries their wings and they are difficult to capture, having intelligence enough to keep just out of reach when pursued. Flying, they look extremely like May flies, being carried side-on to the wind. They can steer themselves about as much as flying fish do, and can alight when they like; in fact, they very seldom let themselves be

⁵ Red is said to be the female and green the male, but some say all are green at first and become red afterwards.

drifted against men or camels, and seem able to calculate exactly the reach of a stick. This year they are all over the country, in enormous armies by day, and huddled in regiments under every bush by night. They devour everything vegetable; and are devoured by everything animal: desert larks and bustards, ravens, hawks, and buzzards. We passed to-day through flocks of ravens and buzzards, sitting on the ground gorged with them. The camels munch them in with their food, the greyhounds run snapping after them all day long, eating as many as they can catch. The Bedouins often give them to their horses, and Awwad says that this year many tribes have nothing to eat just now but locusts and camels' milk; thus the locust in some measure makes amends for being a pestilence, by being himself consumed.

We are encamped to-night once more in the Nefûd, amongst the same herbage, and at the edge of one of the same kind of fuljes, we were accustomed to on our way from Jôf. This Nefûd however, is intermittent, as there are intervening tracts of bare ground, between the ridges of sand which here very distinctly run east and west. The sand is not more than eighty feet deep, and the fuljes are insignificant compared with what we saw further west.

February 11. – Some boys with camels joined us last night, Bedouins from the Abde tribe of Shammar, on their way to meet the Haj, as they have been ordered up by Ibn Rashid. They have given us some information about the road. Ibn Duala is five days' journey on; but we shall find the Dafir, with their Sheykh, Ibn Sueyti, on the second day. Ibn Sueyti, they say, has a kind of *utfa* like Ibn Shaalan's, but it is pitched like a tent when a battle is to be fought. The Ajman, near Queyt, have a real *utfa* with ostrich feathers and a girl to sing during the fighting. ⁶ They also narrated the following remarkable tale.

There is, they say, in the desert, five days' march from here to the eastwards, and ten days from Suk es Shiôkh on the Euphrates, a kubr or tomb, the resting-place of a prophet named Er Refay. It is called Tellateyn el Kharab (the two hills of the ruins), and near it is a birkeh or tank always full of water. The tomb has a door which stands open, but round it there sleeps all day and all night a huge snake, whose mouth and tail nearly meet, leaving but just room for anyone to pass in. This it prevents unless the person presenting himself for entrance is a dervish, and many dervishes go there to pray. Inside there is a well, and those who enter are provided ("min Allah") for three days with food, three times a day, but on the fourth they must go. A lion is chained up by the neck inside the kubr.

The birkeh outside is always full of water, but its shores are inhabited by snakes, who spit poison into the pool so that nothing can drink there. But at evening comes the ariel (a fabulous antelope), who strikes the water with his horns, and by so doing makes it sweet. Then all the beasts and birds of the desert follow him, and drink. The Sheykh of the Montefyk is bound to send camels and guides with all dervishes who come to him at Suk-es-Shiôkh to make the pilgrimage to Refay. The boys did not say that they had themselves seen the place.

We are not on the high road now, having left it some miles to the right, and our march to-day has been mostly through Nefûd. The same swarms of locusts everywhere, and the same attendant flocks of birds, especially of fine black buzzards, one of which Abdallah was very anxious to secure if possible, as he says the wing bones are like ivory, and are used for inlaying the stocks of guns and stems of pipes. But he had no success, though he fired several times. Wilfrid was more fortunate, however, in getting what we value more, a bustard, and the very best bird we ever ate. Though they are common enough here, it is seldom that they come within shot, but this one was frightened by the hawk, and came right overhead.

About noon, we came to a solitary building, standing in the middle of the Nefûd, called Kasr Torba. It is square, with walls twenty feet high, and has a tower at each corner. It is garrisoned by four men, soldiers of Ibn Rashid's, who surlily refused us admittance, and threatened to fire on us if we drew water from the well outside. For a moment we thought of storming the place, which I believe

⁶ Compare Mr. Palgrave's account.

we could have done without much difficulty, as the door was very rotten and we were all very angry and thirsty, but second thoughts are generally accepted as best in Arabia, and on consideration, we pocketed the affront and went on.

Soon afterwards, we overtook a young man and his mother, travelling with three *delúls* in our direction. They were on the look-out, they said, for their own people, who were somewhere in the Nefûd, they didn't quite know where. There are no tracks anywhere, however, and they have stopped for the night with us. Very nice people, the young fellow attentive and kind to his mother, making her a shelter under a bush with the camel saddles. They are Shammar, and have been on business to Haïl.

February 12. – Our disappointment about water yesterday, has forced us back on to the Haj road and the wells of Khuddra, thirteen or fourteen miles east of last night's camp. We had, however, some sport on our way. First, a hare was started and the falcon flown. The Nefûd is so covered with bushes, that without the assistance of the bird the dogs could have had no chance, for it was only by watching the hawk's flight that they were able to keep on the hare's track. It was a pretty sight, the bird above doubling as the hare doubled, and the three dogs below following with their noses in the air. We made the best of our way after them, but the sand being very deep they were soon out of sight. Suddenly we came to the edge of the Nefûd, and there, a few hundred yards from the foot of the last sand-bank, we saw the falcon and the greyhounds all sitting in a circle on the ground, watching a large hole into which the hare had just bolted. The four pursuers looked so puzzled and foolish, that in spite of the annoyance of losing the game, we could not help laughing. Hares in the desert always go to ground. Mohammed and Abdallah and Awwad were keen for digging out this one, and they all worked away like navvies for more than half an hour, till they were up to their shoulders in the sandy earth (here firm ground), but it was in vain, the hole was big enough for a hyæna, and reached down into the rock below. Further on, however, we had better luck, and having run another hare to ground, pulled out not only it, but a little silver grey fox, where they were both crouched together. I do not think the hares ever dig holes, but they make use of any they can find when pressed. We also coursed some gazelles.

There are fourteen wells at Khuddra, mere holes in the ground, without parapet or anything to mark their position, and as we drew near, we were rather alarmed at finding them occupied by a large party of Bedouins. It looked like a *ghazú*, for there were as many men as camels, thirty or forty of them with spears; and the camels wore *shedads* instead of pack saddles. They did not, however, molest us, though their looks were far from agreeable. They told us they were Dafir waiting like the rest for the Haj; that their Sheykh, Ibn Sueyti, was still two days' march to the eastwards, beyond Lina, which is another group of wells something like these; and they added, that they had heard of us and of our presents to the Emir, the rifle which fired twelve shots, and the rest. It is extraordinary how news travels in the desert. I noticed that Mohammed when questioned by them, said that he was from Mosul, and he explained afterwards that the Tudmur people had an old standing blood feud with the Dafir in consequence of some *ghazú* made long before his time, in which twenty of the latter were killed.⁷ This has decided us not to pay Ibn Sueyti the visit we had intended. It appears that there has been a battle lately between the Dafir and the Amarrat (*Ánazeh*), in which a member of the Ibn Haddal family was killed. This proves that the *Ánazeh* *ghazús* sometimes come as far south as the Nefûd. These wells are seventy feet deep, and the water when first drawn smells of rotten eggs; but the smell goes off on exposure to the air.

The zodiacal light is very bright this evening; it is brightest about two hours after sunset, but though I have often looked out for it, I have never seen it in the morning before sunrise. It is a very remarkable and beautiful phenomenon, seen only, I believe, in Arabia. It is a cone of light extending from the horizon half-way to the zenith, and is rather brighter than the Milky Way.

⁷ Compare Fatalla's account of the war between the Mesenneh and the Dafir near Tudmor at the beginning of the present century.

February 13. – We have travelled quite twenty-four miles to-day, having had nothing to distract our attention from the road, and have reached the first of the reservoirs of Zobeydeh.

To my surprise this, instead of being on low ground, is as it were on the top of a hill. At least, we had to ascend quite two hundred feet to get to it, though there was higher ground beyond. It is built across a narrow wady of massive concrete, six feet thick, and is nearly square, eighty yards by fifty. The inside descends in steps for the convenience of those who come for water, but a great rent in the masonry has let most of this out, and now there is only a small mud-hole full of filthy water in the centre. We found some Arabs there with their camels, who went away when they saw us, but we sent after them to make inquiries, and learnt that they were Beni Wáhari, a new artificial compound tribe of Sherârat, Shammar and others, made up by Ibn Rashid with a slave of his own for their Sheykh. They are employed in taking care of camels and mares for the Emir. They talk of eight days' journey now to Meshhed Ali, but Wilfrid says it cannot be less than fifteen or sixteen.

Mohammed, who has been very anxious to make himself agreeable, now he is quite away from Hâil influences, has been telling us a number of stories and legends, all more or less connected with his birthplace Tudmur. He has a real talent as a narrator, an excellent memory, and that most valuable gift, the manner of a man who believes what he relates. Here is one of his tales, a fair specimen of the extraordinary mixture of fable and historic tradition to be found in all of them:

Suliman ibn Daoud (Solomon, son of David) loved a Nasraniyeh (a Christian woman), named the Sitt Belkis, ⁸ and married her. This Christian lady wished to have a house between Damascus and Irak (Babylonia), because the air of the desert was good, but no such a house could be found. Then Solomon, who was king of the birds as well as king of men, sent for all the birds of the air to tell him where he should look for the place Belkis desired, and they all answered his summons but one, Nissr (the eagle), who did not come. And Solomon asked them if any knew of a spot between Damascus and Irak, in the desert where the air was good. But they answered that they knew of none. And he counted them to see if all were there, and found that the eagle was missing. Then he sent for the eagle, and they brought him to Solomon, and Solomon asked him why he had disobeyed the first summons. And Nissr answered, that he was tending his father, an old eagle, so old that he had lost all his feathers, and could not fly or feed himself unless his son was there. And Solomon asked Nissr if he knew of the place wanted by Belkis; and Nissr answered that his father knew, for he knew every place in the world, having lived four thousand years. And Solomon commanded that he should be brought before him in a box, for the eagle could not fly. But when they tried to carry the eagle he was so heavy that they could not lift him. Then Solomon gave them an ointment, and told them to rub the bird with it and stroke him thus, and thus, and that he would grow young again. And they did so, and the feathers grew on his back and wings, and he flew to Solomon, and alighted before the throne. And Solomon asked him, “where is the palace that the Sitt Belkis requires, between Damascus and Irak, in the desert where the air is good?” and the eagle answered, “It is Tudmur, the city which lies beneath the sand.” And he showed them the place. And Solomon ordered the jinns to remove the sand, and when they had done so, there lay Tudmur with its beautiful ruins and columns.

Still there was no water. For the water was locked up in a cave in the hills by a serpent twenty thousand double arms' length long, which blocked the mouth of the cave. And Solomon called on the serpent to come out. But the serpent answered that she was afraid. And Solomon promised that he would not kill her. But as soon as she was half way out of the cave (and they knew it by a black mark on her body which marked half her length), Solomon set his seal upon her and she died. And the jinns dragged her wholly out and the water ran. Still it was poisonous with the venom of the serpent, and the people could not drink. Then Solomon took sulphur (kubrit) and threw it into the cave, and the water became sweet. And the sulphur is found there to this day.

⁸ Belkis is the name usually given by tradition to the Queen of Sheba.

Mohammed says also that ghosts (afrit) are very common among the ruins at Tudmur – also (more curious still) that there is a man at Tudmur more than a hundred years old, and that when he reached his hundredth year he cut a complete new set of teeth, and is now able to eat like a young man.⁹ So he beguiled the evening.

February 14. – We have passed more birkehs in better repair than the first, and being now in the neighbourhood of water, find a good many Bedouins on the road. Jedur (the Shammar with the mother, with whom we are still travelling, and whom we like particularly) knows everybody, and it is well that he is with us, as some of these Bedouins are rough looking fellows with hang-dog countenances (especially the Dafir and the Sellem), which we don't quite like. To-day, as Wilfrid and I were riding apart from our caravan, a number of men ran towards us without any salaam aleykum and began calling to us to stop. But we did not let them get within arm's length, and bade them ask their questions from a distance. We shall have to keep watch to-night. The road is now regularly marked out with a double wall, which we are told was built by Zobeydeh to hang an awning from, so that the pilgrims might travel in the shade. But this must be nonsense. It is more likely that it is merely the effect of the road having been cleared of the big stones which here cover the plain.

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Since writing this a curious thing has happened. We encamped early inside a ruined birkeh and had just got all in order for the night, when we perceived six men on dromedaries riding down from the northeast, straight towards us. There was much speculation of course amongst us, as to who they might be, honest men or robbers, Shammar or Dafir. They evidently were not a mere party of camels for the Haj, as each delúl was mounted by a man with a lance, and they came on at a trot. They rode straight to where we were, made their camels kneel down, took off khurjs and shedads and then arranged their bivouac for the night. Then they came up to our tents and accosted Mohammed and the servants, who of course invited them to sit down and drink coffee. Mohammed presently came to us and whispered that he felt convinced they were Dafir, but that we should presently know for certain. They sat down and began talking on general subjects, as the custom is till coffee has been served, but afterwards Mohammed asked them whence they had come and whither they were going. They answered that they were Ketherin, sent by their Sheykh to Haïl on business, and explained further that their object was to find a certain relative of their Sheykh's whom he had heard of as being a guest at Ibn Rashid's and to invite him to their tents. Perhaps we might have heard of him, his name was Mohammed ibn Arûk. And their Sheykh's name? Muttlak ibn Arûk! Here is a *coup de théâtre*! Mohammed's long-lost relation, the third brother of the three who left Aared in the eighteenth century and parted company at Jôf, has been discovered in his descendant, whose servants are at this moment in our camp. Imagine the joy of Mohammed and the triumph of so appropriate an occasion for reciting once more the kasid Ibn Arûk! The rhymes of that well-known legend, recited by Mohammed and responded to by the new comers in chorus, were indeed the first intimation we had of what had happened. Then the Ketherin ambassadors were brought to our tent and their story told. Now all ideas of Bussorah and Meshhed Ali and the Haj are abandoned, and, for the moment, there is no other plan for any of us but an immediate visit to these new relations. One of the Ketherin has already started off homewards to announce the joyful event, and the rest will turn back with us to-morrow. Muttlak's tents are not more than a day's journey from where we now are, and we shall see these long-lost cousins to-morrow before the sun goes down. "Yallah," exclaimed Mohammed, beaming with joy and pride.

February 15. – We made a late start, for Mohammed has lost his head again and is playing the fine gentleman, as he did at Haïl, afraid or ashamed to be seen by his new acquaintances doing any

⁹ I have since been told by dentists that the fact of a third set of teeth being cut in old age is not unknown to science.

sort of work. Instead of helping to pack or load the camels, he would do nothing but sit on the ground playing with his beads, and calling to Awwad to saddle his delúl, – airs and graces which, I am glad to see, are thrown away on the Ketherin, who, as Bedouins, care little for the vanities of life. Even when started, we did not get far, for it began to thunder and lighten, and presently to rain heavily, so that Wilfrid ordered a halt at half-past ten. We have now come to the great birkehs which are full of water. They stand in a valley called the Wady Roseh, from a plant of that name which grows in it, and is much prized as pasture for both camels and horses. There are two tanks near us, one round, the other square, and both of the same fashion as the first we saw. We have been examining the construction and find that the walls were originally built hollow, of stone, and filled up with concrete. This is now as hard as granite, and has a fine polish on the surface. The water is beautifully clear and good. The largest of the tanks is sixty-four yards by thirty-seven, and perhaps twelve feet deep. There is a ruined khan of the same date close by, and Wilfrid has discovered an immense well ten feet wide at the mouth and very deep. All these were constructed by Zobeydeh, the wife of the Caliph Haroun er-Rashid, who nearly died of thirst on her way back from Mecca and so had the wells and tanks dug. Wilfrid believes that no European has visited them before, though they are marked vaguely on Chesney's map. A wild day has ended with a fine sunset. Dinner, not of stalled ox, nor of herbs, but of boiled locusts and rice, with such bread as we can manage to make of flour well mixed with sand.

Mohammed, who has been in the agonies of poetic composition for a week past, has at last delivered himself of the following kasíd or ballad, which I believe is intended as a pendant to the original Ibn Arûk kasíd, with which he sees we are bored.

KASÍD IBN ARÛK EL JEDÍDE

Nahárrma min esh Sham, el belád el bayíde,
Némshi ma el wudiân wa el Beg khaláwa.
Wa tobéyt aéla Jóf, dar jedíde.
Yaáz ma tílfi ubrobok khaláwi.
Nahárret 'Abu Túrki, aálumi bayíde,
Dábakha lil khottár héyle semáne.
Ya marhába bil Beg wa es Sitt Khatún.
Talóbbt bíntu gal jaátka atíye.
Wa siághahu min el Beg khámsin mía.
Khatún, ya bint el akrám wa el juwádi.
Khatún, ya bint el Amáva wa el kebár.
Ya Robb, selémli akhúí el Beg wa es Sitt Khatún.
Ya Robb, wasálhom diyar essalámi,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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