

Seven Pillars of Wisdom

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Introductory Chapter

The story which follows was first written out in Paris during the Peace Conference, from notes jotted daily on the march, strengthened by some reports sent to my chiefs in Cairo. Afterwards, in the autumn of 1919, this first draft and some of the notes were lost. It seemed to me historically needful to reproduce the tale, as perhaps no one but myself in Feisal's army had thought of writing down at the time what we felt, what we hoped, what we tried. So it was built again with heavy repugnance in London in the winter of 1919-20 from memory and my surviving notes. The record of events was not dulled in me and perhaps few actual mistakes crept in--except in details of dates or numbers--but the outlines and significance of things had lost edge in the haze of new interests.

Dates and places are correct, so far as my notes preserved them: but the personal names are not. Since the adventure some of those who worked with me have buried themselves in the shallow grave of public duty. Free use has been made of their names. Others still possess themselves, and here keep their secrecy. Sometimes one man carried various names. This may hide individuality and make the book a scatter of featureless puppets, rather than a group of living people: but once good is told of a man, and again evil, and some would not thank me for either blame or praise.

This isolated picture throwing the main light upon myself is unfair to my British colleagues. Especially I am most sorry that I have not told what the non-commissioned of us did. They were but wonderful, especially when it is taken into account that they had not the motive, the imaginative vision of the end, which sustained officers. Unfortunately my concern was limited to this end, and the book is just a designed procession of Arab freedom from Mecca to Damascus. It is intended to rationalize the campaign, that everyone may see how natural the success was and how inevitable, how little dependent on direction or brain, how much less on the outside assistance of the few British. It was an Arab war waged and led by Arabs for an Arab aim in Arabia.

My proper share was a minor one, but because of a fluent pen, a free speech, and a certain adroitness of brain, I took upon myself, as I describe it, a mock primacy. In reality I never had any office among the Arabs: was never in charge of the British mission with them. Wilson, Joyce, Newcombe, Dawnay and Davenport were all over my head. I flattered myself that I was too young, not that they had more heart or mind in the work, I did my best. Wilson, Newcombe, Dawnay, Davenport, Buxton, Marshall, Stirling, Young, Maynard, Ross, Scott, Winterton, Lloyd, Wordie, Siddons, Goslett, Stent Henderson, Spence, Gilman, Garland, Brodie, Makins, Nunan, Leeson, Hornby, Peake, Scott-Higgins, Ramsay, Wood, Hinde, Bright, MacIndoe, Greenhill, Grisenthwaite, Dowsett, Bennett, Wade, Gray, Pascoe and the others also did their best.

It would be impertinent in me to praise them. When I wish to say ill of one outside our number, I do it: though there is less of this than was in my diary, since the passage of time seems to have bleached out men's stains. When I wish to praise outsiders, I do it: but our family affairs are our own. We did what we set out to do, and have the satisfaction of that knowledge. The others have liberty some day to put on record their story, one parallel to mine but not mentioning more of me than I of them, for each of us did his job by himself and as he pleased, hardly seeing his friends.

In these pages the history is not of the Arab movement, but of me in it. It is a narrative of daily life, mean happenings, little people. Here are no lessons for the world, no disclosures to shock peoples. It is filled with trivial things, partly that no one mistake for history the bones from which some day a man may make history, and partly for the pleasure it gave me to recall the fellowship of the revolt. We were fond together, because of the sweep of the open places, the taste of wide winds, the sunlight, and the hopes in which we worked. The moral freshness of the world-to-be intoxicated us. We were wrought up in ideas inexpressible and vaporous, but to be fought for. We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves: yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew. Youth could win, but had not learned to keep: and was pitifully weak against age. We stammered that we had worked for a new heaven and a new earth, and they thanked us kindly and made their peace.

All men dream: but not equally, Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible. This I did. I meant to make a new nation, to restore! a lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundations on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts. So high an aim called out the inherent nobility of their minds, and made them play a generous part in events: but when we won, it was charged against me that the British petrol royalties in Mesopotamia were become dubious, and French Colonial policy ruined in the Levant.

I am afraid that I hope so. We pay for these things too much in honour and in innocent lives. I went up the Tigris with one hundred Devon Territorials, young, clean, delightful fellows, full of the power of happiness and of making women and children glad. By them one saw vividly how great it was to be their kin, and English. And we were casting them by thousands into the fire to the worst of deaths, not to win the war but that the corn and rice and oil of Mesopotamia might be ours. The only need was to defeat our enemies (Turkey among them), and this was at last done in the wisdom of Allenby with less than four hundred killed, by turning to our uses the hands of the oppressed in Turkey. I am proudest of my thirty fights in that I did not have any of our own blood shed. All our subject provinces to me were not worth one dead Englishman.

We were three years over this effort and I have had to hold back many things which may not yet be said. Even so, parts of this book will be new to nearly all who see it, and many will look for familiar things and not find them. Once I reported fully to my chiefs, but learnt that they were rewarding me on my own evidence. This was not as it should be. Honours may be necessary in a professional army, as so many emphatic mentions in despatches, and by enlisting we had put ourselves, willingly or not, in the position of regular soldiers.

For my work on the Arab front I had determined to accept nothing. The Cabinet raised the Arabs to fight for us by definite promises of self-government afterwards. Arabs believe in persons, not in institutions. They saw in me a free agent of the British Government, and demanded from me an endorsement of its written promises. So I had to join the conspiracy, and, for what my word was worth, assured the men of their

reward. In our two years' partnership under fire they grew accustomed to believing me and to think my Government, like myself, sincere. In this hope they performed some fine things, but, of course, instead of being proud of what we did together, I was bitterly ashamed.

It was evident from the beginning that if we won the war these promises would be dead paper, and had I been an honest adviser of the Arabs I would have advised them to go home and not risk their lives fighting for such stuff: but I salved myself with the hope that, by leading these Arabs madly in the final victory I would establish them, with arms in their hands, in a position so assured (if not dominant) that expediency would counsel to the Great Powers a fair settlement of their claims. In other words, I presumed (seeing no other leader with the will and power) that I would survive the campaigns, and be able to defeat not merely the Turks on the battlefield, but my own country and its allies in the council-chamber. It was an immodest presumption: it is not yet: clear if I succeeded: but it is clear that I had no shadow of leave to engage the Arabs, unknowing, in such hazard. I risked the fraud, on my conviction that Arab help was necessary to our cheap and speedy victory in the East, and that better we win and break our word than lose.

The dismissal of Sir Henry McMahon [who had promised independence to the Arabs] confirmed my belief in our essential insincerity: but I could not so explain myself to General Wingate while the war lasted, since I was nominally under his orders, and he did not seem sensible of how false his own standing was. The only thing remaining was to refuse rewards for being a successful trickster and, to prevent this unpleasantness arising, I began in my reports to conceal the true stories of things, and to persuade the few Arabs who knew to an equal reticence. In this book also, for the, last time, I mean to be my own judge of what to say.

Chapter 1

Some of the evil of my tale may have been inherent in our circumstances. For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. By day the hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silences of stars. We were a self-centred army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom,

the second of man's creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare.

As time went by our need to fight for the ideal increased to an unquestioning possession, riding with spur and rein over our doubts. Willy-nilly it became a faith. We had sold ourselves into its slavery, manacled ourselves together in its chain-gang, bowed ourselves to serve its holiness with all our good and ill content. The mentality of ordinary human slaves is terrible--they have lost the world--and we had surrendered, not body alone, but soul to the overmastering greed of victory. By our own act we were drained of morality, of volition, of responsibility, like dead leaves in the wind.

The everlasting battle stripped from us care of our own lives or of others'. We had ropes about our necks, and on our heads prices which showed that the enemy intended hideous tortures for us if we were caught. Each day some of us passed; and the living knew themselves just sentient puppets on God's stage: indeed, our taskmaster was merciless, merciless, so long as our bruised feet could stagger forward on the road. The weak envied those tired enough to die; for success looked so remote, and failure a near and certain, if sharp, release from toil. We lived always in the stretch or sag of nerves, either on the crest or in the trough of waves of feeling. This impotency was bitter to us, and made us live only for the seen horizon, reckless what spite we inflicted or endured, since physical sensation showed itself meanly transient. Gusts of cruelty, perversions, lusts ran lightly over the surface without troubling us; for the moral laws which had seemed to hedge about these silly accidents must be yet fainter words. We had learned that there were pangs too sharp, griefs too deep, ecstasies too high for our finite selves to register. When emotion reached this pitch the mind choked; and memory went white till the circumstances were humdrum once more.

Such exaltation of thought, while it let adrift the spirit, and gave it licence in strange airs, lost it the old patient rule over the body. The body was too coarse to feel the utmost of our sorrows and of our joys. Therefore, we abandoned it as rubbish: we left it below us to march forward, a breathing simulacrum, on its own unaided level, subject to influences from which in normal times our instincts would

have shrunk. The men were young and sturdy; and hot flesh and blood unconsciously claimed a right in them and tormented their bellies with strange longings. Our privations and dangers fanned this virile heat, in a climate as racking as can be conceived. We had no shut places to be alone in, no thick clothes to hide our nature. Man in all things lived candidly with man.

The Arab was by nature continent; and the use of universal marriage had nearly abolished irregular courses in his tribes. The public women of the rare settlements we encountered in our months of wandering would have been nothing to our numbers, even had their raddled meat been palatable to a man of healthy parts. In horror of such sordid commerce our youths began indifferently to slake one another's few needs in their own clean bodies--a cold convenience that, by comparison, seemed sexless and even pure. Later, some began to justify this sterile process, and swore that friends quivering together in the yielding sand with intimate hot limbs in supreme embrace, found there hidden in the darkness a sensual co-efficient of the mental passion which was welding our souls and spirits in one flaming effort. Several, thirsting to punish appetites they could not wholly prevent, took a savage pride in degrading the body, and offered themselves fiercely in any habit which promised physical pain or filth.

I was sent to these Arabs as a stranger, unable to think their thoughts or subscribe their beliefs, but charged by duty to lead them forward and to develop to the highest any movement of theirs profitable to England in her war. If I could not assume their character, I could at least conceal my own, and pass among them without evident friction, neither a discord nor a critic but an unnoticed influence. Since I was their fellow, I will not be their apologist or advocate. To-day in my old garments, I could play the bystander, obedient to the sensibilities of our theatre . . . but it is more honest to record that these ideas and actions then passed naturally. What now looks wanton or sadic seemed in the field inevitable, or just unimportant routine.

Blood was always on our hands: we were licensed to it. Wounding and killing seemed ephemeral pains, so very brief and sore was life with us. With the sorrow of living so great, the sorrow of punishment had to be pitiless. We lived for the day and died for it. When there was reason and desire to punish we wrote our lesson with gun or whip

immediately in the sullen flesh of the sufferer, and the case was beyond appeal. The desert did not afford the refined slow penalties of courts and gaols [jails].

Of course our rewards and pleasures were as suddenly sweeping as our troubles; but, to me in particular, they bulked less large. Bedouin ways were hard even for those brought up to them, and for strangers terrible: a death in life. When the march or labour ended I had no energy to record sensation, nor while it lasted any leisure to see the spiritual loveliness which sometimes came upon us by the way. In my notes, the cruel rather than the beautiful found place. We no doubt enjoyed more the rare moments of peace and forgetfulness; but I remember more the agony, the terrors, and the mistakes. Our life is not summed up in what I have written (there are things not to be repeated in cold blood for very shame); but what I have written was in and of our life. Pray God that men reading the story will not, for love of the glamour of strangeness, go out to prostitute themselves and their talents in serving another race.

A man who gives himself to be a possession of aliens leads a Yahoo life, having bartered his soul to a brute-master. He is not of them. He may stand against them, persuade himself of a mission, batter and twist them into something which they, of their own accord, would not have been. Then he is exploiting his old environment to press them out of theirs. Or, after my model, he may imitate them so well that they spuriously imitate him back again. Then he is giving away his own environment: pretending to theirs; and pretences are hollow, worthless things. In neither case does he do a thing of himself, nor a thing so clean as to be his own (without thought of conversion), letting them take what action or reaction they please from the silent example.

In my case, the effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other, and was become like Mohammed's coffin in our legend, with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness in life, and a contempt, not for other men, but for all they

do. Such detachment came at times to a man exhausted by prolonged physical effort and isolation. His body plodded on mechanically, while his reasonable mind left him, and from without looked down critically on him, wondering what that futile lumber did and why. Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.

Chapter 2

A first difficulty of the Arab movement was to say who the Arabs were. Being a manufactured people, their name had been changing in sense slowly year by year. Once it meant an Arabian. There was a country called Arabia; but this was nothing to the point. There was a language called Arabic; and in it lay the test. It was the current tongue of Syria and Palestine, of Mesopotamia, and of the great peninsula called Arabia on the map. Before the Moslem conquest, these areas were inhabited by diverse peoples, speaking languages of the Arabic family. We called them Semitic, but (as with most scientific terms) incorrectly. However, Arabic, Assyrian, Babylonian, Phoenician, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac were related tongues; and indications of common influences in the past, or even of a common origin, were strengthened by our knowledge that the appearances and customs of the present Arabic-speaking peoples of Asia, while as varied as a field--full of poppies, had an equal and essential likeness. We might with perfect propriety call them cousins--and cousins certainly, if sadly, aware of their own relationship.

The Arabic-speaking areas of Asia in this sense were a rough parallelogram. The northern side ran from Alexandretta, on the Mediterranean, across Mesopotamia eastward to the Tigris. The south side was the edge of the Indian Ocean, from Aden to Muscat. On the west it was bounded by the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea to Aden. On the east by the Tigris, and the Persian Gulf to Muscat. This square of land, as large as India, formed the homeland of our Semites, in which no foreign race had kept a permanent footing, though Egyptians, Hittites, Philistines, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Turks and Franks had variously tried. All had in the end been broken, and their scattered elements drowned in the strong characteristics of the Semitic

race. Semites had sometimes pushed outside this area, and themselves been drowned in the outer world. Egypt, Algiers, Morocco, Malta, Sicily, Spain, Cilicia and France absorbed and obliterated Semitic colonies. Only in Tripoli of Africa, and in the everlasting miracle of Jewry, had distant Semites kept some of their identity and force.

The origin of these peoples was an academic question; but for the understanding of their revolt their present social and political differences were important, and could only be grasped by looking at their geography. This continent of theirs fell into certain great regions, whose gross physical diversities imposed varying habits on the dwellers in them. On the west the parallelogram was framed, from Alexandretta to Aden, by a mountain belt, called (in the north) Syria, and thence progressively southward called Palestine, Midian, Hejaz, and lastly Yemen. It had an average height of perhaps three thousand feet, with peaks of ten to twelve thousand feet. It faced west, was well watered with rain and cloud from the sea, and in general was fully peopled.

Another range of inhabited hills, facing the Indian Ocean, was the south edge of the parallelogram. The eastern frontier was at first an alluvial plain called Mesopotamia, but south of Basra a level littoral, called Kuwait, and Hasa, to Gattar. Much of this plain was peopled. These inhabited hills and plains framed a gulf of thirsty desert, in whose heart was an archipelago of watered and populous oases called Kasim and Aridh. In this group of oases lay the true centre of Arabia, the preserve of its native spirit, and its most conscious individuality. The desert lapped it round and kept it pure of contact.

The desert which performed this great function around the oases, and so made the character of Arabia, varied in nature. South of the oases it appeared to be a pathless sea of sand, stretching nearly to the populous escarpment of the Indian Ocean shore, shutting it out from Arabian history, and from all influence on Arabian morals and politics. Hadhramaut, as they called this southern coast, formed part of the history of the Dutch Indies; and its thought swayed Java rather than Arabia. To the west of the oases, between them and the Hejaz hills, was the Nejd desert, an area of gravel and lava, with little sand in it. To the east of these oases, between them and Kuwait, spread a similar expanse of gravel, but with some great stretches of soft sand, making

the road difficult. To the north of the oases lay a belt of sand, and then an immense gravel and lava plain, filling up everything between the eastern edge of Syria and the banks of the Euphrates where Mesopotamia began. The practicability of this northern desert for men and motor-cars enabled the Arab revolt to win its ready success.

The hills of the west and the plains of the east were the parts of Arabia always most populous and active. In particular on the west, the mountains of Syria and Palestine, of Hejaz and Yemen, entered time and again into the current of our European life. Ethically, these fertile healthy hills were in Europe, not in Asia, just as the Arabs looked always to the Mediterranean, not to the Indian Ocean, for their cultural sympathies, for their enterprises, and particularly for their expansions, since the migration problem was the greatest and most complex force in Arabia, and general to it, however it might vary in the different Arabic districts.

In the north (Syria) the birth rate was low in the cities and the death rate high, because of the insanitary conditions and the hectic life led by the majority. Consequently the surplus peasantry found openings in the towns, and were there swallowed up. In the Lebanon, where sanitation had been improved, a greater exodus of youth took place to America each year, threatening (for the first time since Greek days) to change the outlook of an entire district.

In Yemen the solution was different. There was no foreign trade, and no massed industries to accumulate population in unhealthy places. The towns were just market towns, as clean and simple as ordinary villages. Therefore the population slowly increased; the scale of living was brought down very low; and a congestion of numbers was generally felt. They could not emigrate overseas; for the Sudan was even worse country than Arabia, and the few tribes which did venture across were compelled to modify their manner of life and their Semitic culture profoundly, in order to exist. They could not move northward along the hills; for these were barred by the holy town of Mecca and its port Jidda: an alien belt, continually reinforced by strangers from India and Java and Bokhara and Africa, very strong in vitality, violently hostile to the Semitic consciousness, and maintained despite economics and geography and climate by the artificial factor of a world-religion. The congestion of Yemen, therefore, becoming extreme, found its only relief

in the east, by forcing the weaker aggregations of its border down and down the slopes of the hills along the Widian, the half-waste district of the great water-bearing valleys of Bisha, Dawasir, Ranya and Taraba, which ran out towards the deserts of Nejd. These weaker clans had continually to exchange good springs and fertile palms for poorer springs and scantier palms, till at last they reached an area where a proper agricultural life became impossible. They then began to eke out their precarious husbandry by breeding sheep and camels, and in time came to depend more and more on these herds for their living.

Finally, under a last impulse from the straining population behind them, the border people (now almost wholly pastoral), were flung out of the furthest crazy oasis into the untrodden wilderness as nomads. This process, to be watched to-day with individual families and tribes to whose marches an exact name and date might be put, must have been going on since the first day of full settlement of Yemen. The Widian below Mecca and Taif are crowded with the memories and place-names of half a hundred tribes which have gone from there, and may be found to-day in Nejd, in Jebel Sham-mar, in the Hamad, even on the frontiers of Syria and Mesopotamia. There was the source of migration, the factory of nomads, the springing of the gulf-stream of desert wanderers.

For the people of the desert were as little static as the people of the hills. The economic life of the desert was based on the supply of camels, which were best bred on the rigorous upland pastures with their strong nutritive thorns. By this industry the Bedouins lived; and it in turn moulded their life, apportioned the tribal areas, and kept the clans revolving through their rote of spring, summer and winter pasturages, as the herds cropped the scanty growths of each in turn. The camel markets in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt determined the population which the deserts could support, and regulated strictly their standard of living. So the desert likewise overpeopled itself upon occasion; and then there were heavings and thrustings of the crowded tribes as they elbowed themselves by natural courses towards the light. They might not go south towards the inhospitable sand or sea. They could not turn west; for there the steep hills of Hejaz were thickly lined by mountain peoples taking full advantage of their defensiveness. Sometimes they went towards the central oases of Aridh and Kasim, and, if the tribes looking for new homes were strong and vigorous, might succeed in occupying parts of them. If, however, the

desert had not this strength, its peoples were pushed gradually north, up between Medina of the Hejaz and Kasim of Nejd, till they found themselves at the fork of two roads. They could strike eastward, by Wadi Rumh or Jebel Sham-mar, to follow eventually the Batn to Shamiya, where they would become riverine Arabs of the Lower Euphrates; or they could climb, by slow degrees, the ladder of western oases--Henakiya, Kheibar, Teima, Jauf, and the Sirhan--till fate saw them nearing Jebel Druse, in Syria, or watering their herds about Tadmor of the northern desert, on their way to Aleppo or Assyria.

Nor then did the pressure cease: the inexorable trend northward continued. The tribes found themselves driven to the very edge of cultivation in Syria or Mesopotamia. Opportunity and their bellies persuaded them of the advantages of possessing goats, and then of possessing sheep; and lastly they began to sow, if only a little barley for their animals. They were now no longer Bedouin, and began to suffer like the villagers from the ravages of the nomads behind. Insensibly, they made common cause with the peasants already on the soil, and found out that they, too, were peasantry. So we see clans, born in the highlands of Yemen, thrust by stronger clans into the desert, where, unwillingly, they became nomad to keep themselves alive. We see them wandering, every year moving a little further north or a little further east as chance has sent them down one or other of the well-roads of the wilderness, till finally this pressure drives them from the desert again into the sown, with the like unwillingness of their first shrinking experiment in nomad life. This was the circulation which kept vigour in the Semitic body. There were few, if indeed there was a single northern Semite, whose ancestors had not at some dark age passed through the desert. The mark of nomadism, that most deep and biting social discipline, was on each of them in his degree.

Chapter 3

If tribesman and townsman in Arabic-speaking Asia were not different races, but just men in different social and economic stages, a family resemblance might be expected in the working of their minds, and so it was only reasonable that common elements should appear in the product of all these peoples. In the very outset, at the first meeting with

them, was found a universal clearness or hardness of belief, almost mathematical in its limitation, and repellent in its unsympathetic form. Semites had no half-tones in their register of vision. They were a people of primary colours, or rather of black and white, who saw the world always in contour. They were a dogmatic people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns. They did not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our introspective questionings. They knew only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief, without our hesitating retinue of finer shades.

This people was black and white, not only in vision, but by inmost furnishing: black and white not merely in clarity, but in apposition. Their thoughts were at ease only in extremes. They inhabited superlatives by choice. Sometimes inconsistencies seemed to possess them at once in joint sway; but they never compromised: they pursued the logic of several incompatible opinions to absurd ends, without perceiving the incongruity. With cool head and tranquil judgement, imperturbably unconscious of the flight, they oscillated from asymptote to asymptote.

They were a limited, narrow-minded people, whose inert intellects lay fallow in incurious resignation. Their imaginations were vivid, but not creative. There was so little Arab art in Asia that they could almost be said to have had no art, though their classes were liberal patrons, and had encouraged whatever talents in architecture, or ceramics, or other handicraft their neighbours and helots displayed. Nor did they handle great industries: they had no organizations of mind or body. They invented no systems of philosophy, no complex mythologies. They steered their course between the idols of the tribe and of the cave. The least morbid of peoples, they had accepted the gift of Me unquestioningly, as axiomatic. To them it was a thing inevitable, entailed on man, a usufruct, beyond control. Suicide was a thing impossible, and death no grief.

They were a people of spasms, of upheavals, of ideas, the race of the individual genius. Their movements were the more shocking by contrast with the quietude of every day, their great men greater by contrast with the humanity of their mob. Their convictions were by instinct, their activities intuitional. Their largest manufacture was of creeds: almost they were monopolists of revealed religions. Three of these

efforts had endured among them: two of the three had also borne export (in modified forms) to non-Semitic peoples. Christianity, translated into the diverse spirits of Greek and Latin and Teutonic tongues, had conquered Europe and America. Islam in various transformations was subjecting Africa and parts of Asia. These were Semitic successes. Their failures they kept to themselves. The fringes of their deserts were strewn with broken faiths.

It was significant that this wrack of fallen religions lay about the meeting of the desert and the sown. It pointed to the generation of all these creeds. They were assertions, not arguments; so they required a prophet to set them forth. The Arabs said there had been forty thousand prophets: we had record of at least some hundreds. None of them had been of the wilderness; but their lives were after a pattern. Their birth set them in crowded places. An unintelligible passionate yearning drove them out into the desert. There they lived a greater or lesser time in meditation and physical abandonment; and thence they returned with their imagined message articulate, to preach it to their old, and now doubting, associates. The founders of the three great creeds fulfilled this cycle: their possible coincidence was proved a law by the parallel life-histories of the myriad others, the unfortunate who failed, whom we might judge of no less true profession, but for whom time and disillusion had not heaped up dry souls ready to be set on fire. To the thinkers of the town the impulse into Nitria had ever been irresistible, not probably that they found God dwelling there, but that in its solitude they heard more certainly the living word they brought with them.

The common base of all the Semitic creeds, winners or losers, was the ever present idea of world-worthlessness. Their profound reaction from matter led them to preach bareness, renunciation, poverty; and the atmosphere of this invention stifled the minds of the desert pitilessly. A first knowledge of their sense of the purity of rarefaction was given me in early years, when we had ridden far out over the rolling plains of North Syria to a ruin of the Roman period which the Arabs believed was made by a prince of the border as a desert-palace for his queen. The clay of its building was said to have been kneaded for greater richness, not with water, but with the precious essential oils of flowers. My guides, sniffing the air like dogs, led me from crumbling room to room, saying, "This is jessamine,

this violet, this rose'.

But at last Dahoum drew me: 'Come and smell the very sweetest scent of all', and we went into the main lodging, to the gaping window sockets of its eastern face, and there drank with open mouths of the effortless, empty, eddyless wind of the desert, throbbing past. That slow breath had been born somewhere beyond the distant Euphrates and had dragged its way across many days and nights of dead grass, to its first obstacle, the man-made walls of our broken palace. About them it seemed to fret and linger, murmuring in baby-speech. 'This,' they told me, 'is the best: it has no taste.' My Arabs were turning their backs on perfumes and luxuries to choose the things in which mankind had had no share or part.

The Beduin of the desert, born and grown up in it, had embraced with all his soul this nakedness too harsh for volunteers, for the reason, felt but inarticulate, that there he found himself indubitably free. He lost material ties, comforts, all superfluities and other complications to achieve a personal liberty which haunted starvation and death. He saw no virtue in poverty herself: he enjoyed the little vices and luxuries--coffee, fresh water, women--which he could still preserve. In his life he had air and winds, sun and light, open spaces and a great emptiness. There was no human effort, no fecundity in Nature: just the heaven above and the unspotted earth beneath. There unconsciously he came near God. God was to him not anthropomorphic, not tangible, not moral nor ethical, not concerned with the world or with him, not natural: but the being [GREEK] thus qualified not by divestiture but by investiture, a comprehending Being, the egg of all activity, with nature and matter just a glass reflecting Him.

The Beduin could not look for God within him: he was too sure that he was within God. He could not conceive anything which was or was not God, Who alone was great; yet there was a homeliness, an everyday-ness of this climatic Arab God, who was their eating and their fighting and their lusting, the commonest of their thoughts, their familiar resource and companion, in a way impossible to those whose God is so wistfully veiled from them by despair of their carnal unworthiness of Him and by the decorum of formal worship. Arabs felt no incongruity in bringing God into the weaknesses and appetites of their least creditable causes. He was the most familiar of their words; and indeed we lost much

eloquence when making Him the shortest and ugliest of our monosyllables.

This creed of the desert seemed inexpressible in words, and indeed in thought. It was easily felt as an influence, and those who went into the desert long enough to forget its open spaces and its emptiness were inevitably thrust upon God as the only refuge and rhythm of being. The Bedawi might be a nominal Sunni, or a nominal Wahabi, or anything else in the Semitic compass, and he would take it very lightly, a little in the manner of the watchmen at Zion's gate who drank beer and laughed in Zion because they were Zionists. Each individual nomad had his revealed religion, not oral or traditional or expressed, but instinctive in himself; and so we got all the Semitic creeds with (in character and essence) a stress on the emptiness of the world and the fullness of God; and according to the power and opportunity of the believer was the expression of them.

The desert dweller could not take credit for his belief. He had never been either evangelist or proselyte. He arrived at this intense condensation of himself in God by shutting his eyes to the world, and to all the complex possibilities latent in him which only contact with wealth and temptations could bring forth. He attained a sure trust and a powerful trust, but of how narrow a field! His sterile experience robbed him of compassion and perverted his human kindness to the image of the waste in which he hid. Accordingly he hurt himself, not merely to be free, but to please himself. There followed a delight in pain, a cruelty which was more to him than goods. The desert Arab found no joy like the joy of voluntarily holding back. He found luxury in abnegation, renunciation, self restraint. He made nakedness of the mind as sensuous as nakedness of the body. He saved his own soul, perhaps, and without danger, but in a hard selfishness. His desert was made a spiritual ice-house, in which was preserved intact but unimproved for all ages a vision of the unity of God. To it sometimes the seekers from the outer world could escape for a season and look thence in detachment at the nature of the generation they would convert.

This faith of the desert was impossible in the towns. It was at once too strange, too simple, too impalpable for export and common use. The idea, the ground-belief of all Semitic creeds was waiting there, but it had to be diluted to be made comprehensible to us. The scream of a bat

was too shrill for many ears: the desert spirit escaped through our coarser texture. The prophets returned from the desert with their glimpse of God, and through their stained medium (as through a dark glass) showed something of the majesty and brilliance whose full vision would blind, deafen, silence us, serve us as it had served the Beduin, setting him uncouth, a man apart.

The disciples, in the endeavour to strip themselves and their neighbours of all things according to the Master's word, stumbled over human weaknesses and failed. To live, the villager or townsman must fill himself each day with the pleasures of acquisition and accumulation, and by rebound off circumstance become the grossest and most material of men. The shining contempt of life which led others into the barest asceticism drove him to despair. He squandered himself heedlessly, as a spendthrift: ran through his inheritance of flesh in hasty longing for the end. The Jew in the Metropole at Brighton, the miser, the worshipper of Adonis, the lecher in the stews of Damascus were alike signs of the Semitic capacity for enjoyment, and expressions of the same nerve which gave us at the other pole the self-denial of the Essenes, or the early Christians, or the first Khalifas, finding the way to heaven fairest for the poor in spirit. The Semite hovered between lust and self-denial.

Arabs could be swung on an idea as on a cord; for the unpledged allegiance of their minds made them obedient servants. None of them would escape the bond till success had come, and with it responsibility and duty and engagements. Then the idea was gone and the work ended--in ruins. Without a creed they could be taken to the four corners of the world (but not to heaven) by being shown the riches of earth and the pleasures of it; but if on the road, led in this fashion, they met the prophet of an idea, who had nowhere to lay his head and who depended for his food on charity or birds, then they would all leave their wealth for his inspiration. They were incorrigibly children of the idea, feckless and colour-blind, to whom body and spirit were for ever and inevitably opposed. Their mind was strange and dark, full of depressions and exaltations, lacking in rule, but with more of ardour and more fertile in belief than any other in the world. They were a people of starts, for whom the abstract was the strongest motive, the process of infinite courage and variety, and the end nothing. They were as unstable as water, and like water would perhaps finally prevail.

Since the dawn of life, in successive waves they had been dashing themselves against the coasts of flesh. Each wave was broken, but, like the sea, wore away ever so little of the granite on which it failed, and some day, ages yet, might roll unchecked over the place where the material world had been, and God would move upon the face of those waters. One such wave (and not the least) I raised and rolled before the breath of an idea, till it reached its crest, and toppled over and fell at Damascus. The wash of that wave, thrown back by the resistance of vested things, will provide the matter of the following wave, when in fullness of time the sea shall be raised once more.

Chapter 4

The first great rush round the Mediterranean had shown the world the power of an excited Arab for a short spell of intense physical activity; but when the effort burned out the lack of endurance and routine in the Semitic mind became as evident. The provinces they had overrun they neglected, out of sheer distaste of system, and had to seek the help of their conquered subjects, or of more vigorous foreigners, to administer their ill-knit and inchoate empires. So, early in the Middle Ages, the Turks found a footing in the Arab States, first as servants, then as helpers, and then as a parasite growth which choked the life out of the old body politic. The last phase was of enmity, when the Hulagus or Timurs sated their blood lust, burning and destroying everything which irked them with a pretension of superiority.

Arab civilizations had been of an abstract nature, moral and intellectual rather than applied; and their lack of public spirit made their excellent private qualities futile. They were fortunate in their epoch: Europe had fallen barbarous; and the memory of Greek and Latin learning was fading from men's minds. By contrast the imitative exercise of the Arabs seemed cultured, their mental activity progressive, their state prosperous. They had performed real service in preserving something of a classical past for a mediaeval future.

With the coming of the Turks this happiness became a dream. By stages the Semites of Asia passed under their yoke, and found it a slow death. Their goods were stripped from them; and their spirits shrivelled in

the numbing breath of a military Government. Turkish rule was gendarme rule, and Turkish political theory as crude as its practice. The Turks taught the Arabs that the interests of a sect were higher than those of patriotism: that the petty concerns of the province were more than nationality. They led them by subtle dissensions to distrust one another. Even the Arabic language was banished from courts and offices, from the Government service, and from superior schools. Arabs might only serve the State by sacrifice of their racial characteristics.

These measures were not accepted quietly. Semitic tenacity showed itself in the many rebellions of Syria, Mesopotamia and Arabia against the grosser forms of Turkish penetration; and resistance was also made to the more insidious attempts at absorption. The Arabs would not give up their rich and flexible tongue for crude Turkish: instead, they filled Turkish with Arabic words, and held to the treasures of their own literature.

They lost their geographical sense, and their racial and political and historical memories; but they clung the more tightly to their language, and erected it almost into a fatherland of its own. The first duty of every Moslem was to study the Koran, the sacred book of Islam, and incidentally the greatest Arab literary monument. The knowledge that this religion was his own, and that only he was perfectly qualified to understand and practise it, gave every Arab a standard by which to judge the banal achievements of the Turk.

Then came the Turkish revolution, the fall of Abdul Hamid, and the supremacy of the Young Turks. The horizon momentarily broadened for the Arabs. The Young-Turk movement was a revolt against the hierarchic conception of Islam and the pan-Islamic theories of the old Sultan, who had aspired, by making himself spiritual director of the Moslem world, to be also (beyond appeal) its director in temporal affairs. These young politicians rebelled and threw him into prison, under the impulse of constitutional theories of a sovereign state. So, at a time when Western Europe was just beginning to climb out of nationality into internationality, and to rumble with wars far removed from problems of race, Western Asia began to climb out of Catholicism into nationalist politics, and to dream of wars for self-government and self-sovereignty, instead of for faith or dogma. This tendency had broken out first and most strongly in the Near East, in the little Balkan States, and had sustained them through an almost unparalleled martyrdom

to their goal of separation from Turkey. Later there had been nationalist movements in Egypt, in India, in Persia, and finally in Constantinople, where they were fortified and made pointed by the new American ideas in education: ideas which, when released in the old high Oriental atmosphere, made an explosive mixture. The American schools, teaching by the method of inquiry, encouraged scientific detachment and free exchange of views. Quite without intention they taught revolution, since it was impossible for an individual to be modern in Turkey and at the same time loyal, if he had been born of one of the subject races--Greeks, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians or Albanians--over whom the Turks were so long helped to keep dominion.

The Young Turks, in the confidence of their first success, were carried away by the logic of their principles, and as protest against Pan-Islam preached Ottoman brotherhood. The gullible subject races--far more numerous than the Turks themselves--believed that they were called upon to co-operate in building a new East. Rushing to die task (full of Herbert Spencer and Alexander Hamilton) they laid down platforms of sweeping ideas, and hailed the Turks as partners. The Turks, terrified at the forces they had let loose, drew the fires as suddenly as they had stoked them. Turkey made Turkish for the Turks--YENI-TURAN—became the cry. Later on, this policy would turn them towards the rescue of their irredenti--the Turkish populations subject to Russia in Central Asia; but, first of all, they must purge their Empire of such irritating subject races as resisted the ruling stamp. The Arabs, the largest alien component of Turkey, must first be dealt with. Accordingly the Arab deputies were scattered, the Arab societies forbidden, the Arab notables proscribed. Arabic manifestations and the Arabic language were suppressed by Enver Pasha more sternly than by Abdul Hamid before him.

However, the Arabs had tasted freedom: they could not change their ideas as quickly as their conduct; and the staffer spirits among them were not easily to be put down. They read the Turkish papers, putting 'Arab' for Turk' in the patriotic exhortations. Suppression charged them with unhealthy violence. Deprived of constitutional outlets they became revolutionary. The Arab societies went underground, and changed from liberal clubs into conspiracies. The Akhwa, the Arab mother society, was publicly dissolved. It was replaced in Mesopotamia by the dangerous Ahad, a very secret brotherhood, limited almost entirely to

Arab officers in the Turkish Army, who swore to acquire the military knowledge of their masters, and to turn it against them, in the service of the Arab people, when the moment of rebellion came.

It was a large society, with a sure base in the wild part of Southern Irak, where Sayid Taleb, the young John Wilkes of the Arab movement, held the power in his unprincipled fingers. To it belonged seven out of every ten Mesopotamian-born officers; and their counsel was so well kept that members of it held high command in Turkey to the last. When the crash came, and Allenby rode across Armageddon and Turkey fell, one vice-president of the society was commanding the broken fragments of the Palestine armies on the retreat, and another was directing the Turkish forces across-Jordan in the Amman area. Yet later, after the armistice, great places in the Turkish service were still held by men ready to turn on their masters at a word from their Arab leaders. To most of them the word was never given; for those societies were pro-Arab only, willing to fight for nothing but Arab independence; and they could see no advantage in supporting the Allies rather than the Turks, since they did not believe our assurances that we would leave them free. Indeed, many of them preferred an Arabia united by Turkey in miserable subjection, to an Arabia divided up and slothful under the easier control of several European powers in spheres of influence.

Greater than the Ahad was the Fetah, the society of freedom in Syria. The landowners, the writers, the doctors, the great public servants linked themselves in this society with a common oath, passwords, signs, a press and a central treasury, to ruin the Turkish Empire. With the noisy facility of the Syrian--an ape-like people having much of the Japanese quickness, but shallow--they speedily built up a formidable organization. They looked outside for help, and expected freedom to come by entreaty, not by sacrifice. They corresponded with Egypt, with the Ahad (whose members, with true Mesopotamian dourness, rather despised them), with the Sherif of Mecca, and with Great Britain: everywhere seeking the ally to serve their turn. They also were deadly secret; and the Government, though it suspected their existence, could find no credible evidence of their leaders or membership. It had to hold its hand until it could strike with evidence enough to satisfy the English and French diplomats who acted as modern public opinion in Turkey. The war in 1914 withdrew these agents, and left the Turkish Government free to strike.

Mobilization put all power into the hands of those members--Enver, Talaat and Jemal--who were at once the most ruthless, the most logical, and the most ambitious of the Young Turks. They set themselves to stamp out all non-Turkish currents in the State, especially Arab and Armenian nationalism. For the first step they found a specious and convenient weapon in the secret papers of a French Consul in Syria, who left behind him in his Consulate copies of correspondence (about Arab freedom) which had passed between him and an Arab club, not connected with the Fetah but made up of the more talkative and less formidable INTELLIGENZIA of the Syrian coast. The Turks, of course, were delighted; for 'colonial' aggression in North Africa had given the French a black reputation in the Arabic-speaking Moslem world; and it served Jemal well to show his co-religionists that these Arab nationalists were infidel enough to prefer France to Turkey.

In Syria, of course, his disclosures had little novelty; but the members of the society were known and respected, if somewhat academic, persons; and their arrest and condemnation, and the crop of deportations, exiles, and executions to which their trial led, moved the country to its depths, and taught the Arabs of the Fetah that if they did not profit by their lesson, the fate of the Armenians would be upon them. The Armenians had been well armed and organized; but their leaders had failed them. They had been disarmed and destroyed piecemeal, the men by massacre, the women and children by being driven and overdriven along the wintry roads into the desert, naked and hungry, the common prey of any passer-by, until death took them. The Young Turks had killed the Armenians, not because they were Christians, but because they were Armenians; and for the same reason they herded Arab Moslems and Arab Christians into the same prison, and hanged them together on the same scaffold. Jemal Pasha united all classes, conditions and creeds in Syria, under pressure of a common misery and peril, and so made a concerted revolt possible.

The Turks suspected the Arab officers and soldiers in the Army, and hoped to use against them the scattering tactics which had served against the Armenians. At first transport difficulties stood in their way; and there came a dangerous concentration of Arab divisions (nearly one third of the original Turkish Army was Arabic speaking) in North Syria early in 1915. They broke these up when possible, marching them

off to Europe, to the Dardanelles, to the Caucasus, or the Canal--anywhere, so long as they were put quickly into the firing-line, or withdrawn far from the sight and help of their compatriots. A Holy War was proclaimed to give the 'Union and Progress' banner something of the traditional sanctity of the Caliph's battle-order in the eyes of the old clerical elements; and the Sherif of Mecca was invited--or rather ordered--to echo the cry.

[...]

[cut- description of the Sharifs, a clan of direct descendents from Prophet Mohammed who have considerable influence over the Arabs, and an argument by Lawrence that an earlier British offensive against the Turks in Mesopotamia (today's Iraq) failed due to lack of support from the local Arab peoples]

Chapter 6

I had been many years going up and down the Semitic East before the war, learning the manners of the villagers and tribesmen and citizens of Syria and Mesopotamia. My poverty had constrained me to mix with the humbler classes, those seldom met by European travellers, and thus my experiences gave me an unusual angle of view, which enabled me to understand and think for the ignorant many as well as for the more enlightened whose rare opinions mattered, not so much for the day, as for the morrow. In addition, I had seen something of the political forces working in the minds of the Middle East, and especially had noted everywhere sure signs of the decay of imperial Turkey.

Turkey was dying of overstrain, of the attempt, with diminished resources, to hold, on traditional terms, the whole Empire bequeathed to it. The sword had been the virtue of the children of Othman, and swords had passed out of fashion nowadays, in favour of deadlier and more scientific weapons. Life was growing too complicated for this child-like people, whose strength had lain in simplicity, and patience, and in their capacity for sacrifice. They were the slowest of the races of Western Asia, little fitted to adapt themselves to new sciences of government and life, still less to invent any new arts for themselves. Their administration had become perforce an affair of files and

telegrams, of high finance, eugenics, calculations. Inevitably the old governors, who had governed by force of hand or force of character, illiterate, direct, personal, had to pass away. The rule was transferred to new men, with agility and suppleness to stoop to machinery. The shallow and half-polished committee of the Young Turks were descendants of Greeks, Albanians, Circassians, Bulgars, Armenians, Jews--anything but Seljuks or Ottomans. The commons ceased to feel in tune with their governors, whose culture was Levantine, and whose political theory was French. Turkey was decaying; and only the knife might keep health in her.

Loving the old ways steadily, the Anatolian remained a beast of burden in his village and an uncomplaining soldier abroad, while the subject races of the Empire, who formed nearly seven-tenths of its total population, grew daily in strength and knowledge; for their lack of tradition and responsibility, as well as their lighter and quicker minds, disposed them to accept new ideas. The former natural awe and supremacy of the Turkish name began to fade in the face of wider comparison. This changing balance of Turkey and the subject provinces involved growing garrisons if the old ground was to be retained. Tripoli, Albania, Thrace, Yemen, Hejaz, Syria, Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, Armenia, were all outgoing accounts, burdens on the peasants of Anatolia, yearly devouring a larger draft. The burden fell heaviest on the poor villages, and each year made these poor villages yet more poor.

The conscripts took their fate unquestioning: resignedly, after the custom of Turkish peasantry. They were like sheep, neutrals without vice or virtue. Left alone, they did nothing, or perhaps sat dully on the ground. Ordered to be kind, and without haste they were as good friends and as generous enemies as might be found. Ordered to outrage their fathers or disembowel their mothers, they did it as calmly as they did nothing, or did well. There was about them a hopeless, fever-wasted lack of initiative, which made them the most biddable, most enduring, and least spirited soldiers in the world.

Such men were natural victims of their showy-vicious Levantine officers, to be driven to death or thrown away by neglect without reckoning. Indeed, we found them just kept chopping-blocks of their commanders' viler passions. So cheap did they rate them, that in

connection with them they used none of the ordinary precautions. Medical examination of some batches of Turkish prisoners found nearly half of them with unnaturally acquired venereal disease. Pox and its like were not understood in the country; and the infection ran from one to another through the battalion, where the conscripts served for six or seven years, till at the end of their period the survivors, if they came from decent homes, were ashamed to return, and drifted either into the gendarmerie service, or, as broken men, into casual labour about the towns; and so the birth-rate fell. The Turkish peasantry in Anatolia were dying of their military service.

We could see that a new factor was needed in the East, some power or race which would outweigh the Turks in numbers, in output, and in mental activity. No encouragement was given us by history to think that these qualities could be supplied ready-made from Europe. The efforts of European Powers to keep a footing in the Asiatic Levant had been uniformly disastrous, and we disliked no Western people enough to inveigle them into further attempts. Our successor and solution must be local; and fortunately the standard of efficiency required was local also. The competition would be with Turkey; and Turkey was rotten.

Some of us judged that there was latent power enough and to spare in the Arabic peoples (the greatest component of the old Turkish Empire), a prolific Semitic agglomeration, great in religious thought, reasonably industrious, mercantile, politic, yet solvent rather than dominant in character. They had served a term of five hundred years under the Turkish harrow, and had begun to dream of liberty; so when at last England fell out with Turkey, and war was let loose in the East and West at once, we who believed we held an indication of the future set out to bend England's efforts towards fostering the new Arabic world in hither Asia.

[...]

[The Arab revolt begins, but at first has little effect, which the British think is due to poor leadership. As a result, Lawrence and the British begin to look for a more effective Arab commander, eventually finding Faisal]

Chapter 11

While he [his guide] spoke we scoured along the dazzling plain, now nearly bare of trees, and turning slowly softer under foot. At first it had been grey shingle, packed like gravel. Then the sand increased and the stones grew rarer, till we could distinguish the colours of the separate flakes, porphyry, green schist, basalt. At last it was nearly pure white sand, under which lay a harder stratum. Such going was like a pile-carpet for our camels' running. The particles of sand were clean and polished, and caught the blaze of sun like little diamonds in a reflection so fierce, that after a while I could not endure it. I frowned hard, and pulled the head-cloth forward in a peak over my eyes, and beneath them, too, like a beaver, trying to shut out the heat which rose in glassy waves off the ground, and beat up against my face. Eighty miles in front of us, the huge peak of Rudhwa behind Yenbo was looming and fading in THE dazzle of vapour which hid its foot. Quite near in the plain rose the little shapeless hills of Hesna, which seemed to block the way. To our right was the steep ridge of Beni Ayub, toothed and narrow like a saw-blade, the first edge of the sheaf of mountains between the Tehama and the high scarp of the tableland about Medina. These Tareif Beni Ayub fell away on their north into a blue series of smaller hills, soft in character, behind which lofty range after range in a jagged stairway, red now the sun grew low, climbed up to the towering central mass of Jebel Subh with its fantastic granite spires.

A little later we turned to the right, off the pilgrim road, and took a short cut across gradually rising ground of flat basalt ridges, buried in sand till only their topmost piles showed above the surface. It held moisture enough to be well grown over with hard wiry grass and shrubs up and down the slopes, on which a few sheep and goats were pasturing. There Tafas showed me a stone, which was the limit of the district of the Masruh, and told me with grim pleasure that he was now at home, in his tribal property, and might come off his guard.

Men have looked upon the desert as barren land, the free holding of whoever chose; but in fact each hill and valley in it had a man who was its acknowledged owner and would quickly assert the right of his family or clan to it, against aggression. Even the wells and trees had their masters, who allowed men to make firewood of the one and drink of the other freely, as much as was required for their need, but who would

instantly check anyone trying to turn the property to account and to exploit it or its products among others for private benefit. The desert was held in a crazed communism by which Nature and the elements were for the free use of every known friendly person for his own purposes and no more. Logical outcomes were the reduction of this licence to privilege by the men of the desert, and their hardness to strangers unprovided with introduction or guarantee, since the common security lay in the common responsibility of kinsmen. Tafas, in his own country, could bear the burden of my safe-keeping lightly.

The valleys were becoming sharply marked, with clean beds of sand and shingle, and an occasional large boulder brought down by a flood. There were many broom bushes, restfully grey and green to the eye, and good for fuel, though useless as pasture. We ascended steadily till we rejoined the main track of the pilgrim road. Along this we held our way till sunset, when we came into sight of the hamlet of Bir el Sheikh. In the first dark as the supper fires were lighted we rode down its wide open street and halted. Tafas went into one of the twenty miserable huts, and in a few whispered words and long silences bought flour, of which with water he kneaded a dough cake two inches thick and eight inches across. This he buried in the ashes of a brushwood fire, provided for him by a Subh woman whom he seemed to know. When the cake was warmed he drew it out of the fire, and clapped it to shake off the dust; then we shared it together, while Abdulla went away to buy himself tobacco.

They told me the place had two stone-lined wells at the bottom of the southward slope, but I felt disinclined to go and look at them, for the long ride that day had tired my unaccustomed muscles, and the heat of the plain had been painful. My skin was blistered by it, and my eyes ached with the glare of light striking up at a sharp angle from the silver sand, and from the shining pebbles. The last two years I had spent in Cairo, at a desk all day or thinking hard in a little overcrowded office full of distracting noises, with a hundred rushing things to say, but no bodily need except to come and go each day between office and hotel. In consequence the novelty of this change was severe, since time had not been given me gradually to accustom myself to the pestilent beating of the Arabian sun, and the long monotony of camel pacing. There was to be another stage tonight, and a long day to-morrow before Feisal's camp would be reached.

So I was grateful for the cooking and the marketing, which spent one hour, and for the second hour of rest after it which we took by common consent; and sorry when it ended, and we re-mounted, and rode in pitch darkness up valleys and down valleys, passing in and out of bands of air, which were hot in the confined hollows, but fresh and stirring in the open places. The ground under foot must have been sandy, because the silence of our passage hurt my straining ears, and smooth, for I was always falling asleep in the saddle, to wake a few seconds later suddenly and sickeningly, as I clutched by instinct at the saddle post to recover my balance which had been thrown out by some irregular stride of the animal. It was too dark, and the forms of the country were too neutral, to hold my heavy-lashed, peering eyes. At length we stopped for good, long after midnight; and I was rolled up in my cloak and asleep in a most comfortable little sand-grave before Tafas had done knee-haltering my camel.

Three hours later we were on the move again, helped now by the last shining of the moon. We marched down Wadi Mared, the night of it dead, hot, silent, and on each side sharp-pointed hills standing up black and white in the exhausted air. There were many trees. Dawn finally came to us as we passed out of the narrows into a broad place, over whose flat floor an uneasy wind span circles, capriciously in the dust. The day strengthened always, and now showed Bir ibn Hassani just to our right. The trim settlement of absurd little houses, brown and white, holding together for security's sake, looked doll-like and more lonely than the desert, in the immense shadow of the dark precipice of Subh, behind. While we watched it, hoping to see life at its doors, the sun was rushing up, and the fretted cliffs, those thousands of feet above our heads, became outlined in hard refracted shafts of white light against a sky still sallow with the transient dawn.

We rode on across the great valley. A camel-rider, garrulous and old, came out from the houses and jogged over to join us. He named himself Khallaf, too friendly-like. His salutation came after a pause in a trite stream of chat; and when it was returned he tried to force us into conversation. However, Tafas grudged his company, and gave him short answers. Khallaf persisted, and finally, to improve his footing, bent down and burrowed in his saddle pouch till he found a small covered pot of enamelled iron, containing a liberal portion of the

staple of travel in the Hejaz. This was the unleavened dough cake of yesterday, but crumbled between the fingers while still warm, and moistened with liquid butter till its particles would fall apart only reluctantly. It was then sweetened for eating with ground sugar, and scooped up like damp sawdust in pressed pellets with the fingers.

I ate a little, on this my first attempt, while Tafas and Abdulla played at it vigorously; so for his bounty Khallaf went half-hungry: deservedly, for it was thought effeminate by the Arabs to carry a provision of food for a little journey of one hundred miles. We were now fellows, and the chat began again while Khallaf told us about the last fighting, and a reverse Feisal had had the day before. It seemed he had been beaten out of Kheif in the head of Wadi Safra, and was now at Hamra, only a little way in front of us; or at least Khallaf thought he was there: we might learn for sure in Wasta, the next village on our road. The fighting had not been severe; but the few casualties were all among the tribesmen of Tafas and Khallaf; and the names and hurts of each were told in order.

Meanwhile I looked about, interested to find myself in a new country. The sand and detritus of last night and of Bir el Sheikh had vanished. We were marching up a valley, from two hundred to five hundred yards in width, of shingle and light soil, quite firm, with occasional knolls of shattered green stone cropping out in its midst. There were many thorn trees, some of them woody acacias, thirty feet and more in height, beautifully green, with enough of tamarisk and soft scrub to give the whole a charming, well kept, park-like air, now in the long soft shadows of the early morning. The swept ground was so flat and clean, the pebbles so variegated, their colours so joyously blended that they gave a sense of design to the landscape; and this feeling was strengthened by the straight lines and sharpness of the hills. They rose on each hand regularly, precipices a thousand feet in height, of granite-brown and dark porphyry-coloured rock, with pink stains; and by a strange fortune these glowing hills rested on hundred-foot bases of the cross-grained stone, whose unusual colour suggested a thin growth of moss.

We rode along this beautiful place for about seven miles, to a low watershed, crossed by a wall of granite slivers, now little more than a shapeless heap, but once no doubt a barrier. It ran from cliff to

cliff, and even far up the hill-sides, wherever the slopes were not too steep to climb. In the centre, where the road passed, had been two small enclosures like pounds. I asked Khallaf the purpose of the wall. He replied that he had been in Damascus and Constantinople and Cairo, and had many friends among the great men of Egypt. Did I know any of the English there? Khallaf seemed curious about my intentions and my history. He tried to trip me in Egyptian phrases. When I answered in the dialect of Aleppo he spoke of prominent Syrians of his acquaintance. I knew them, too; and he switched off into local politics, asking careful questions, delicately and indirectly, about the Sherif and his sons, and what I thought Feisal was going to do. I understood less of this than he, and parried inconsequentially. Tafas came to my rescue, and changed the subject. Afterwards we knew that Khallaf was in Turkish pay, and used to send frequent reports of what came past Bir ibn Hassani for the Arab forces.

Across the wall we were in an affluent of Wadi Safra, a more wasted and stony valley among less brilliant hills. It ran into another, far down which to the west lay a cluster of dark palm-trees, which the Arabs said was Jedida, one of the slave villages in Wadi Safra. We turned to the right, across another saddle, and then downhill for a few miles to a corner of tall cliffs. We rounded this and found ourselves suddenly in Wadi Safra, the valley of our seeking, and in the midst of Wasta, its largest village. Wasta seemed to be many nests of houses, clinging to the hillsides each side the torrent-bed on banks of alluvial soil, or standing on detritus islands between the various deep-swept channels whose sum made up the parent valley.

Riding between two or three of these built-up islands, we made for the far bank of the valley. On our way was the main bed of the winter floods, a sweep of white shingle and boulders, quite flat. Down its middle, from palm-grove on the one side to palm-grove on the other, lay a reach of clear water, perhaps two hundred yards long and twelve feet wide, sand-bottomed, and bordered on each brink by a ten-foot lawn of thick grass and flowers. On it we halted a moment to let our camels put their heads down and drink their fill, and the relief of the grass to our eyes after the day-long hard glitter of the pebbles was so sudden that involuntarily I glanced up to see if a cloud had not covered the face of the sun.

We rode up the stream to the garden from which it ran sparkling in a stone-lined channel; and then we turned along the mud wall of the garden in the shadow of its palms, to another of the detached hamlets. Tafas led the way up its little street (the houses were so low that from our saddles we looked down upon their clay roofs), and near one of the larger houses stopped and beat upon the door of an uncovered court. A slave opened to us, and we dismounted in privacy. Tafas haltered the camels, loosed their girths, and strewed before them green fodder from a fragrant pile beside the gate. Then he led me into the guest-room of the house, a dark clean little mud-brick place, roofed with half palm-logs under hammered earth. We sat down on the palm-leaf mat which ran along the dais. The day in this stifling valley had grown very hot; and gradually we lay back side by side. Then the hum of the bees in the gardens without, and of the flies hovering over our veiled faces within, lulled us into sleep.

Chapter 12

Before we awoke, a meal of bread and dates had been prepared for us by the people of the house. The dates were new, meltingly sweet and good, like none I had ever tasted. The owner of the property, a Harbi, was, with his neighbours, away serving Feisal; and his women and children were tenting in the hills with the camels. At the most, the tribal Arabs of Wadi Safra lived in their villages five months a year. For the other seasons the gardens were entrusted to slaves, negroes like the grown lads who brought in the tray to us, and whose thick limbs and plump shining bodies looked curiously out of place among the birdlike Arabs. Khallaf told me these blacks were originally from Africa, brought over as children by their nominal Tadruri fathers, and sold during the pilgrimage, in Mecca. When grown strong they were worth from fifty to eighty pounds apiece, and were looked after carefully as befitted their price. Some became house or body servants with their masters; but the majority were sent out to the palm villages of these feverish valleys of running water, whose climate was too bad for Arab labour, but where they flourished and built themselves solid houses, and mated with women slaves, and did all the manual work of the holding.

They were very numerous--for instance, there were thirteen villages of

them side by side in this Wadi Safra--so they formed a society of their own, and lived much at their pleasure. Their work was hard, but the supervision loose, and escape easy. Their legal status was bad, for they had no appeal to tribal justice, or even to the Sherifs courts; but public opinion and self-interest deprecated any cruelty towards them, and the tenet of the faith that to enlarge a slave is a good deed, meant in practice that nearly all gained freedom in the end. They made pocket-money during their service, if they were ingenious. Those I saw had property, and declared themselves contented. They grew melons, marrows, cucumber, grapes and tobacco for their own account, in addition to the dates, whose surplus was sent across to the Sudan by sailing dhow, and there exchanged for corn, clothing and the luxuries of Africa or Europe.

After the midday heat was passed we mounted again, and rode up the clear, slow rivulet till it was hidden within the palm-gardens, behind their low boundary walls of sun-dried clay. In and out between the tree roots were dug little canals a foot or two deep, so contrived that the stream might be let into them from the stone channel and each tree watered in its turn. The head of water was owned by the community, and shared out among the landowners for so many minutes or hours daily or weekly according to the traditional use. The water was a little brackish, as was needful for the best palms; but it was sweet enough in the wells of private water in the groves. These wells were very frequent, and found water three or four feet below the surface.

Our way took us through the central village and its market street. There was little in the shops; and all the place felt decayed. A generation ago Wasta was populous (they said of a thousand houses); but one day there rolled a huge wall of water down Wadi Safra, the embankments of many palm-gardens were breached, and the palm trees swept away. Some of the islands on which houses had stood for centuries were submerged, and the mud houses melted back again into mud, killing or drowning the unfortunate slaves within. The men could have been replaced, and the trees, had the soil remained; but the gardens had been built up of earth carefully won from the normal freshets by years of labour, and this wave of water--eight feet deep, running in a race for three days--reduced the plots in its track to their primordial banks of stones.

A little above Wasta we came to Kharma, a tiny settlement with rich palm-groves, where a tributary ran in from the north. Beyond Kharma the valley widened somewhat, to an average of perhaps four hundred yards, with a bed of fine shingle and sand, laid very smooth by the winter rains. The walls were of bare red and black rock, whose edges and ridges were sharp as knife blades, and reflected the sun like metal. They made the freshness of the trees and grass seem luxurious. We now saw parties of Feisal's soldiers, and grazing herds of their saddle camels. Before we reached Harhra every nook in the rocks or clump of trees was a bivouac. They cried cheery greetings to Tafas, who came to Me again, waving back and calling to them, while he pressed on quickly to end his duty towards me.

Hamra opened on our left. It seemed a village of about one hundred houses, buried in gardens among mounds of earth some twenty feet in height. We forded a little stream, and went up a walled path between trees to the top of one of these mounds, where we made our camels kneel by the yard-gate of a long, low house. Tafas said something to a slave who stood there with silver-hilted sword in hand. He led me to an inner court, on whose further side, framed between the uprights of a black doorway, stood a white figure waiting tensely for me. I felt at first glance that this was the man I had come to Arabia to seek--the leader who would bring the Arab Revolt to full glory. Feisal looked very tall and pillar-like, very slender, in his long white silk robes and his brown head-cloth bound with a brilliant scarlet and gold cord. His eyelids were dropped; and his black beard and colourless face were like a mask against the strange, still watchfulness of his body. His hands were crossed in front of him on his dagger.

I greeted him. He made way for me into the room, and sat down on his carpet near the door. As my eyes grew accustomed to the shade, they saw that the little room held many silent figures, looking at me or at Feisal steadily. He remained staring down at his hands, which were twisting slowly about his dagger. At last he inquired softly how I had found the journey. I spoke of the heat, and he asked how long from Rabegh, commenting that I had ridden fast for the season.

'And do you like our place here in Wadi Safra?'

Well; but it is far from Damascus.'

The word had fallen like a sword in their midst. There was a quiver. Then everybody present stiffened where he sat, and held his breath for a silent minute. Some, perhaps, were dreaming of far off success: others may have thought it a reflection on their late defeat. Feisal at length lifted his eyes, smiling at me, and said, 'Praise be to God, there are Turks nearer us than that'. We all smiled with him; and I rose and excused myself for the moment.

Chapter 13

Under tall arcades of palms with ribbed and groined branches, in a soft meadow, I found the trim camp of Egyptian Army soldiers with Nafi Bey, their Egyptian major, sent lately from the Sudan by Sir Reginald Wingate to help the Arab rebellion. They comprised a mountain battery and some machine-guns, and looked smarter than they felt. Nafi himself was an amiable fellow, kind and hospitable to me in spite of weak health and his resentment at having been sent so far away into the desert to serve in an unnecessary and toilsome war.

Egyptians, being home-loving persons and comfortable, found strangeness always a misery. In this bad instance they suffered hardship for a philanthropic end, which made it harder. They were fighting the Turks, for whom they had a sentimental regard, on behalf of the Arabs, an alien people speaking a language kindred to their own, but appearing therefore all the more unlike in character, and crude in life. The Arabs seemed hostile to the material blessings of civilization rather than appreciative of them. They met with a ribald hoot well-meaning attempts to furnish their bareness.

Englishmen being sure of their own absolute excellence would persist in help without grumbling overmuch; but the Egyptians lost faith. They had neither that collective sense of duty towards their State, nor that feeling of individual obligation to push struggling humanity up its road. The vicarious policemenhip which was the strongest emotion of Englishmen towards another man's muddle, in their case was replaced by the instinct to pass by as discreetly far as possible on the other side. So, though all was well with these soldiers, and they had abundant rations and good health and no casualties, yet they found

fault with the handling of the universe, and hoped this unexpected Englishman had come to set it right.

Feisal was announced with Maulud el Mukhlus, the Arab zealot of Tekrit, who, for rampant nationalism had been twice degraded in the Turkish Army, and had spent an exile of two years in Nejd as a secretary with ibn Rashid. He had commanded the Turkish cavalry before Shaiba, and had been taken by us there. As soon as he heard of the rebellion of the Sherif he had volunteered for him, and had been the first regular officer to join Feisal. He was now nominally his A.D.C. [Aide-de-Camp, in other words, his closest advisor].

Bitterly he complained that they were in every way ill-equipped. This was the main cause of their present plight. They got thirty thousand pounds a month from the Sherif, but little flour and rice, little barley, few rifles, insufficient ammunition, no machine-guns, no mountain guns, no technical help, no information.

I stopped Maulud there and said that my coming was expressly to learn what they lacked and to report it, but that I could work with them only if they would explain to me their general situation. Feisal agreed, and began to sketch to me the history of their revolt from its absolute beginning.

The first rush on Medina had been a desperate business. The Arabs were ill-armed and short of ammunition, the Turks in great force, since Fakhri's detachment had just arrived and the troops to escort von Stotzingen to Yemen were still in the town. At the height of the crisis the Beni Ali broke; and the Arabs were thrust out beyond the walls. The Turks then opened fire on them with their artillery; and the Arabs, unused to this new arm, became terrified. The Ageyl and Ateiba got into safety and refused to move out again. Feisal and Ali ibn el Hussein vainly rode about in front of their men in the open, to show them that the bursting shells were not as fatal as they sounded. The demoralization deepened.

Sections of Beni Ali tribesmen approached the Turkish command with an offer to surrender, if their villages were spared. Fakhri played with them, and in the ensuing lull of hostilities surrounded the Awali suburb with his troops: then suddenly he ordered them to carry it by

assault and to massacre every living thing within its walls. Hundreds of the inhabitants were raped and butchered, the houses fired, and living and dead alike thrown back into the flames. Fakhri and his men had served together and had learned the arts of both the slow and the fast kill upon the Armenians in the North.

This bitter taste of the Turkish mode of war sent a shock across Arabia; for the first rule of Arab war was that women were inviolable: the second that the lives and honour of children too young to fight with men were to be spared: the third, that property impossible to carry off should be left undamaged. The Arabs with Feisal perceived that they were opposed to new customs, and fell back out of touch to gain time to readjust themselves. There could no longer be any question of submission: the sack of Awali had opened blood feud upon blood feud, and put on them the duty of fighting to the end of their force: but it was plain now that it would be a long affair, and that with muzzle-loading guns for sole weapons, they could hardly expect to win.

So they fell back from the level plains about Medina into the hills across the Sultani-road, about Aar and Raha and Bir Abbas, where they rested a little, while Ali and Feisal sent messenger after messenger down to Rabegh, their sea-base, to learn when fresh stores and money and arms might be expected. The revolt had begun haphazard, on their father's explicit orders, and the old man, too independent to take his sons into his full confidence, had not worked out with them any arrangements for prolonging it. So the reply was only a little food. Later some Japanese rifles, most of them broken, were received. Such barrels as were still whole were so foul that the too-eager Arabs burst them on the first trial. No money was sent up at all: to take its place Feisal filled a decent chest with stones, had it locked and corded carefully, guarded on each daily march by his own slaves, and introduced meticulously into his tent each night. By such theatricals the brothers tried to hold a melting force.

At last Ali went down to Rabegh to inquire what was wrong with the organization. He found that Hussein Mabeirig, the local chief, had made up his mind that the Turks would be victorious (he had tried conclusions with them twice himself and had the worst of it), and accordingly decided theirs was the best cause to follow. As the stores for the Sherif were landed by the British he appropriated them and

stored them away secretly in his own houses. Ali made a demonstration, and sent urgent messages for his half-brother Zeid to join him from Jidda with reinforcements. Hussein, in fear, slipped off to the hills, an outlaw. The two Sherifs took possession of his villages. In them they found great stores of arms, and food enough for their armies for a month. The temptation of a spell of leisured ease was too much for them: they settled down in Rabegh.

This left Feisal alone up country, and he soon found himself isolated, in a hollow situation, driven to depend upon his native resources. He bore it for a time, but in August took advantage of the visit of Colonel Wilson to the newly-conquered Yenbo, to come down and give a full explanation of his urgent needs. Wilson was impressed with him and his story, and at once promised him a battery of mountain guns and some maxims, to be handled by men and officers of the Egyptian Army garrison in the Sudan. This explained the presence of Nafi Bey and his units.

The Arabs rejoiced when they came, and believed they were now equals of the Turk; but the four guns were twenty-year-old Krupps, with a range of only three thousand yards; and their crews were not eager enough in brain and spirit for irregular fighting. However, they went forward with the mob and drove in the Turkish outposts, and then their supports, until Fakhri becoming seriously alarmed, came down himself, inspected the front, and at once reinforced the threatened detachment at Bir Abbas to some three thousand strong. The Turks had field guns and howitzers with them, and the added advantage of high ground for observation. They began to worry the Arabs by indirect fire, and nearly dropped a shell on Feisal's tent while all the head men were conferring within. The Egyptian gunners were asked to return the fire and smother the enemy guns. They had to plead that their weapons were useless, since they could not carry the nine thousand yards. They were derided; and the Arabs ran back again into the defiles.

Feisal was deeply discouraged. His men were tired. He had lost many of them. His only effective tactics against the enemy had been to chase in suddenly upon their rear by fast mounted charges, and many camels had been killed, or wounded or worn out in these expensive measures. He demurred to carrying the whole war upon his own neck while Abdulla delayed in Mecca, and Ali and Zeid at Rabegh. Finally he withdrew the bulk of his forces, leaving the Harb sub-tribes who lived by Bir Abbas

to keep up pressure on the Turkish supply columns and communications by a repeated series of such raids as those which he himself found impossible to maintain.

Yet he had no fear that the Turks would again come forward against him suddenly. His failure to make any impression on them had not imbued him with the smallest respect for them. His late retirement to Hamra was not forced: it was a gesture of disgust because he was bored by his obvious impotence, and was determined for a little while to have the dignity of rest.

After all, the two sides were still untried. The armament of the Turks made them so superior at long range that the Arabs never got to grips. For this reason most of the hand-to-hand fighting had taken place at night, when the guns were blinded. To my ears they sounded oddly primitive battles, with torrents of words on both sides in a preliminary match of wits. After the foulest insults of the languages they knew would come the climax, when the Turks in frenzy called the Arabs 'English', and the Arabs screamed back 'German' at them. There were, of course, no Germans in the Hejaz, and I was the first Englishman; but each party loved cursing, and any epithet would sting on the tongues of such artists.

I asked Feisal what his plans were now. He said that till Medina fell they were inevitably tied down there in Hejaz dancing to Fakhri's tune. In his opinion the Turks were aiming at the recapture of Mecca. The bulk of their strength was now in a mobile column, which they could move towards Rabegh by a choice of routes which kept the Arabs in constant alarm. A passive defence of the Subh hills had shown that the Arabs did not shine as passive resisters. When the enemy moved they must be countered by an offensive.

Feisal meant to retire further yet, to the Wadi Yenbo border of the great Juheina tribe. With fresh levies from them he would march eastwards towards the Hejaz Railway behind Medina, at the moment when Abdulla was advancing by the lava-desert to attack Medina from the east. He hoped that Ah' would go up simultaneously from Rabegh, while Zeid moved into Wadi Safra to engage the big Turkish force at Bir Abbas, and keep it out of the main battle. By this plan Medina would be threatened or attacked on all sides at once. Whatever the success of

the attack, the concentration from three sides would at least break up the prepared Turkish push-outwards on the fourth, and give Rabegh and the southern Hejaz a breathing space to equip themselves for effective defence, or counter-attack.

Maulud, who had sat fidgeting through our long, slow talk, could no longer restrain himself and cried out, 'Don't write a history of us. The needful thing is to fight and fight and kill them. Give me a battery of Schneider mountain guns, and machine-guns, and I will finish this off for you. We talk and talk and do nothing.' I replied as warmly; and Maulud, a magnificent fighter, who regarded a battle won as a battle wasted if he did not show some wound to prove his part in it, took me up. We wrangled while Feisal sat by and grinned delightedly at us.

This talk had been for him a holiday. He was encouraged even by the trifle of my coming; for he was a man of moods, flickering between glory and despair, and just now dead-tired. He looked years older than thirty-one; and his dark, appealing eyes, set a little sloping in his face, were bloodshot, and his hollow cheeks deeply lined and puckered with reflection. His nature grudged thinking, for it crippled his speed in action: the labour of it shrivelled his features into swift lines of pain. In appearance he was tall, graceful and vigorous, with the most beautiful gait, and a royal dignity of head and shoulders. Of course he knew it, and a great part of his public expression was by sign and gesture.

His movements were impetuous. He showed himself hot-tempered and sensitive, even unreasonable, and he ran off soon on tangents. Appetite and physical weakness were mated in him, with the spur of courage. His personal charm, his imprudence, the pathetic hint of frailty as the sole reserve of this proud character made him the idol of his followers. One never asked if he were scrupulous; but later he showed that he could return trust for trust, suspicion for suspicion. He was fuller of wit than of humour.

His training in Abdul Hamid's entourage had made him past-master in diplomacy. His military service with the Turks had given him a working knowledge of tactics. His life in Constantinople and in the Turkish Parliament had made him familiar with European questions and manners.

He was a careful judge of men. If he had the strength to realize his dreams he would go very far, for he was wrapped up in his work and lived for nothing else; but the fear was that he would wear himself out by trying to seem to aim always a little higher than the truth, or that he would die of too much action. His men told me how, after a long spell of fighting, in which he had to guard himself, and lead the charges, and control and encourage them, he had collapsed physically and was carried away from his victory, unconscious, with the foam flecking his lips.

Meanwhile, here, as it seemed, was offered to our hand, which had only to be big enough to take it, a prophet who, if veiled, would give cogent form to the idea behind the activity of the Arab revolt. It was all and more than we had hoped for, much more than our halting course deserved. The aim of my trip was fulfilled.

My duty was now to take the shortest road to Egypt with the news: and the knowledge gained that evening in the palm wood grew and blossomed in my mind into a thousand branches, laden with fruit and shady leaves, beneath which I sat and half-listened and saw visions, while the twilight deepened, and the night; until a line of slaves with lamps came down the winding paths between the palm trunks, and with Feisal and Maulud we walked back through the gardens to the little house, with its courts still full of waiting people, and to the hot inner room in which the familiars were assembled; and there we sat down together to the smoking bowl of rice and meat set upon the food-carpet for our supper by the slaves.

Chapter 14

So mixed was the company, Sherifs, Meccans, sheikhs of the Juheina and Ateiba, Mesopotamians, Ageyl, that I threw apples of discord, inflammatory subjects of talk amongst them, to sound their mettle and beliefs without delay. Feisal, smoking innumerable cigarettes, kept command of the conversation even at its hottest, and it was fine to watch him do it. He showed full mastery of tact, with a real power of disposing men's feelings to his wish. Storrs was as efficient; but Storrs paraded his strength, exhibiting all the cleverness and machinery, the movements of his hands which made the creatures dance.

Feisal seemed to govern his men unconsciously: hardly to know how he stamped his mind on them, hardly to care whether they obeyed. It was as great art as Storrs'; and it concealed itself, for Feisal was born to it.

The Arabs loved him openly: indeed, these chance meetings made clear how to the tribes the Sherif and his sons were heroic. Sherif Hussein (Sayidna as they called him) was outwardly so clean and gentle-mannered as to seem weak; but this appearance hid a crafty policy, deep ambition, and an un-Arabian foresight, strength of character and obstinacy. His interest in natural history reinforced his sporting instincts, and made him (when he pleased) a fair copy of a Beduin prince, while his Circassian mother had endowed him with qualities foreign to both Turk and Arab, and he displayed considerable astuteness in turning now one, now another of his inherited assets to present advantage.

Yet the school of Turkish politics was so ignoble that not even the best could graduate from it unaffected. Hussein when young had been honest, outspoken . . . and he learned not merely to suppress his speech, but to use speech to conceal his honest purpose. The art, over-indulged, became a vice from which he could not free himself. In old age ambiguity covered his every communication. Like a cloud it hid his decision of character, his worldly wisdom, his cheerful strength. Many denied HIM such qualities: but history gave proof.

One instance of his worldly wisdom was the upbringing of his sons. The Sultan had made them live in Constantinople to receive a Turkish education. Sherif Hussein saw to it that the education was general and good. When they came back to the Hejaz as young effendis in European clothes with Turkish manners, the father ordered them into Arab dress; and, to rub up their Arabic, gave them Meccan companions and sent them out into the wilds, with the Camel Corps, to patrol the pilgrim roads.

The young men thought it might be an amusing trip, but were dashed when their father forbade them special food, bedding, or soft-padded saddles. He would not let them back to Mecca, but kept them out for months in all seasons guarding the roads by day and by night, handling every variety of man, and learning fresh methods of riding and fighting. Soon they hardened, and became self-reliant, with that blend

of native intelligence and vigour which so often comes in a crossed stock. Their formidable family group was admired and efficient, but curiously isolated in their world. They were natives of no country, lovers of no private plot of ground. They had no real confidants or ministers; and no one of them seemed open to another, or to the father, of whom they stood in awe.

The debate after supper was an animated one. In my character as a Syrian I made sympathetic reference to the Arab leaders who had been executed in Damascus by Jemal Pasha. They took me up sharply: the published papers had disclosed that these men were in touch with foreign Governments, and ready to accept French or British suzerainty as the price of help. This was a crime against Arab nationality, and Jemal had only executed the implied sentence. Feisal smiled, almost winked, at me. 'You see,' he explained, 'we are now of necessity tied to the British. We are delighted to be their friends, grateful for their help, expectant of our future profit. But we are not British subjects. We would be more at ease if they were not such disproportionate allies.'

I told a story of Abdulla el Raashid, on the way up to Hamra. He had groaned to me of the British sailors coming ashore each day at Rabegh. 'Soon they will stay nights, and then they will live here always, and take the country.' To cheer him I had spoken of millions of Englishmen now ashore in France, and of the French not afraid.

Whereat he had turned on me scornfully, asking if I meant to compare France with the land of Hejazi?

Feisal mused a little and said, I am not a Hejazi by upbringing; and yet, by God, I am jealous for it. And though I know the British do not want it, yet what can I say, when they took the Sudan, also not wanting it? They hunger for desolate lands, to build them up; and so, perhaps, one day Arabia will seem to them precious. Your good and my good, perhaps they are different, and either forced good or forced evil will make a people cry with pain. Does the ore admire the flame which transforms it? There is no reason for offence, but a people too weak are clamant over their little own. Our race will have a cripple's temper till it has found its feet.'

The ragged, lousy tribesmen who had eaten with us astonished me by their familiar understanding of intense political nationality, an abstract idea they could hardly have caught from the educated classes of the Hejaz towns, from those Hindus, Javanese, Bokhariots, Sudanese, Turks, out of sympathy with Arab ideals, and indeed just then suffering a little from the force of local sentiment, springing too high after its sudden escape from Turkish control. Sherif Hussein had had the worldly wisdom to base his precepts on the instinctive belief of the Arabs that they were of the salt of the earth and self-sufficient. Then, enabled by his alliance with us to back his doctrine by arms and money, he was assured of success.

Of course, this success was not level throughout. The great body of Sherifs, eight hundred or nine hundred of them, understood his nationalist doctrine and were his missionaries, successful missionaries thanks to the revered descent from the Prophet, which gave them the power to hold men's minds, and to direct their courses into the willing quietness of eventual obedience.

The tribes had followed the smoke of their racial fanaticism. The towns might sigh for the cloying inactivity of Ottoman rule: the tribes were convinced that they had made a free and Arab Government, and that each of them was It. They were independent and would enjoy themselves--a conviction and resolution which might have led to anarchy, if they had not made more stringent the family tie, and the bonds of kin-responsibility. But this entailed a negation of central power. The Sherif might have legal sovereignty abroad, if he hiked the high-sounding toy; but home affairs were to be customary. The problem of the foreign theorists--'Is Damascus to rule the Hejaz, or can Hejaz rule Damascus?' did not trouble them at all, for they would not have it set. The Semites' idea of nationality was the independence of clans and villages, and their ideal of national union was episodic combined resistance to an intruder. Constructive policies, an organized state, an extended empire, were not so much beyond their sight as hateful in it. They were fighting to get rid of Empire, not to win it.

The feeling of the Syrians and Mesopotamians in these Arab armies was indirect. They believed that by fighting in the local ranks, even here in Hejaz, they were vindicating the general rights of all Arabs to national existence; and without envisaging one State, or even a

confederation of States, they were definitely looking northward, wishing to add an autonomous Damascus and Bagdad to the Arab family. They were weak in material resources, and even after success would be, since their world was agricultural and pastoral, without minerals, and could never be strong in modern armaments. Were it otherwise, we should have had to pause before evoking in the strategic centre of the Middle East new national movements of such abounding vigour.

Of religious fanaticism there was little trace. The Sherif refused in round terms to give a religious twist to his rebellion. His fighting creed was nationality. The tribes knew that the Turks were Moslems, and thought that the Germans were probably true friends of Islam. They knew that the British were Christians, and that the British were their allies. In the circumstances, their religion would not have been of much help to them, and they had put it aside. 'Christian fights Christian, so why should not Mohammedans do the same? What we want is a Government which speaks our own language of Arabic and will let us live in peace. Also we hate those Turks.'

Chapter 15

Next morning I was up early and out among Feisal's troops towards the side of Kheif, by myself, trying to feel the pulse of their opinions in a moment, by such tricks as those played upon their chiefs the night before. Time was of the essence of my effort, for it was necessary to gain in ten days the impressions which would ordinarily have been the fruit of weeks of observing in my crab-fashion, that sideways-slipping affair of the senses. Normally I would go along all day, with the sounds immediate, but blind to every detail, only generally aware that there were things red, or things grey, or clear things about me. To-day my eyes had to be switched straight to my brain, that I might note a thing or two the more clearly by contrast with the former mistiness. Such things were nearly always shapes: rocks and trees, or men's bodies in repose or movement: not small things like flowers, nor qualities like colour.

Yet here was strong need of a lively reporter. In this drab war the least irregularity was a joy to all, and McMahan's strongest course was to exploit the latent imagination of the General Staff. I believed in

the Arab movement, and was confident, before ever I came, that in it was the idea to tear Turkey into pieces; but others in Egypt lacked faith, and had been taught nothing intelligent of the Arabs in the field. By noting down something of the spirit of these romantics in the hills about the Holy Cities I might gain the sympathy of Cairo for the further measures necessary to help them.

The men received me cheerfully. Beneath every great rock or hush they sprawled like lazy scorpions, resting from the heat, and refreshing their brown limbs with the early coolness of the shaded stone. Because of my khaki they took me for a Turk-trained officer who had deserted to them, and were profuse in good-humoured but ghastly suggestions of how they should treat me. Most of them were young, though the term 'fighting man' in the Hejaz meant anyone between twelve and sixty sane enough to shoot. They were a tough-looking crowd, dark-coloured, some negroid. They were physically thin, but exquisitely made, moving with an oiled activity altogether delightful to watch. It did not seem possible that men could be hardier or harder. They would ride immense distances day after day, run through sand and over rocks bare-foot in the heat for hours without pain, and climb their hills like goats. Their clothing was mainly a loose shirt, with sometimes short cotton drawers, and a head-shawl usually of red cloth, which acted towel or handkerchief or sack as required. They were corrugated with bandoliers, and fired joy-shots when they could.

They were in wild spirits, shouting that the war might last ten years. It was the fattest time the hills had ever known. The Sherif was feeding not only the fighting men, but their families, and paying two pounds a month for a man, four for a camel. Nothing else would have performed the miracle of keeping a tribal army in the field for five months on end. It was our habit to sneer at Oriental soldiers' love of pay; but the Hejaz campaign was a good example of the limitations of that argument. The Turks were offering great bribes, and obtaining little service--no active service. The Arabs took their money, and gave gratifying assurances in exchange; yet these very tribes would be meanwhile in touch with Feisal, who obtained service for his payment. The Turks cut the throats of their prisoners with knives, as though they were butchering sheep. Feisal offered a reward of a pound a head for prisoners, and had many carried in to him unhurt. He also paid for captured mules or rifles.

The actual contingents were continually shifting, in obedience to the rule of flesh. A family would own a rifle, and the sons serve in turn for a few days each. Married men alternated between camp and wife, and sometimes a whole clan would become bored and take a rest. Consequently the paid men were more than those mobilized; and policy often gave to great sheikhs, as wages, money that was a polite bribe for friendly countenance. Feisal's eight thousand men were one in ten camel-corps and the rest hill-men. They served only under their tribal sheikhs, and near home, arranging their own food and transport. Nominally each sheikh had a hundred followers. Sherifs acted as group leaders, in virtue of their privileged position, which raised them above the jealousies which shackled the tribesmen.

Blood feuds were nominally healed, and really suspended in the Sherifian area: Billi and Juheina, Ateiba and Ageyl living and fighting side by side in Feisal's army. All the same, the members of one tribe were shy of those of another, and within the tribe no man would quite trust his neighbour. Each might be, usually was, wholehearted against the Turk, but perhaps not quite to the point of failing to work off a family grudge upon a family enemy in the field. Consequently they could not attack. One company of Turks firmly entrenched in open country could have defied the entire army of them; and a pitched defeat, with its casualties, would have ended the war by sheer horror.

I concluded that the tribesmen were good for defence only. Their acquisitive recklessness made them keen on booty, and whetted them to tear up railways, plunder caravans, and steal camels; but they were too free-minded to endure command, or to fight in team. A man who could fight well by himself made generally a bad soldier, and these champions seemed to me no material for our drilling; but if we strengthened them by light automatic guns of the Lewis type, to be handled by themselves, they might be capable of holding their hills and serving as an efficient screen behind which we could build up, perhaps at Rabegh, an Arab regular mobile column, capable of meeting a Turkish force (distracted by guerilla warfare) on terms, and of defeating it piecemeal. For such a body of real soldiers no recruits would be forthcoming from Hejaz. It would have to be formed of the heavy unwarlike Syrian and Mesopotamian towns-folk already in our hands, and officered by Arabic-speaking officers trained in the Turkish army, men

of the type and history of Aziz el Masri or Maulud. They would eventually finish the war by striking, while the tribesmen skirmished about, and hindered and distracted the Turks by their pin-prick raids.

The Hejaz war, meanwhile, would be one of dervishes against regular troops. It was the fight of a rocky, mountainous, barren country (reinforced by a wild horde of mountaineers) against an enemy so enriched in equipment by the Germans as almost to have lost virtue for rough-and-tumble war. The hill-belt was a paradise for snipers; and Arabs were artists in sniping. Two or three hundred determined men knowing the ranges should hold any section of them; because the slopes were too steep for escalade. The valleys, which were the only practicable roads, for miles and miles were not so much valleys as chasms or gorges, sometimes two hundred yards across, but sometimes only twenty, full of twists and turns, one thousand or four thousand feet deep, barren of cover, and flanked each side by pitiless granite, basalt and porphyry, not in polished slopes, but serrated and split and piled up in thousands of jagged heaps of fragments as hard as metal and nearly as sharp.

It seemed to my unaccustomed eyes impossible that, without treachery on the part of the mountain tribes, the Turks could dare to break their way through. Even with treachery as an ally, to pass the hills would be dangerous. The enemy would never be sure that the fickle population might not turn again; and to have such a labyrinth of defiles in the rear, across the communications, would be worse than having it in front. Without the friendship of the tribes, the Turks would own only the ground on which their soldiers stood; and lines so long and complex would soak up thousands of men in a fortnight, and leave none in the battle-front.

The sole disquieting feature was the very real success of the Turks in frightening the Arabs by artillery. Aziz el Masri in the Turk-Italian war in Tripoli had found the same terror, but had found also that it wore off. We might hope that the same would happen here; but for the moment the sound of a fired cannon sent every man within earshot behind cover. They thought weapons destructive in proportion to their noise. They were not afraid of bullets, not indeed overmuch of dying: just the manner of death by shell-fire was unendurable. It seemed to me that their moral confidence was to be restored only by having guns, useful

or useless, but noisy, on their side. From the magnificent Feisal down to the most naked stripling in the army the theme was artillery, artillery, artillery.

When I told them of the landing of the five-inch howitzers at Rabegh they rejoiced. Such news nearly balanced in their minds the check of their last retreat down Wadi Safra. The guns would be of no real use to them: indeed, it seemed to me that they would do the Arabs positive harm; for their virtues lay in mobility and intelligence, and by giving them guns we hampered their movements and efficiency. Only if we did not give them guns they would quit.

At these close quarters the bigness of the revolt impressed me. This well-peopled province, from Una Lejj to Kunfida, more than a fortnight's camel march, had suddenly changed its character from a rout of casual nomad pilferers to an eruption against Turkey, fighting her, not certainly in our manner, but fiercely enough, in spite of the religion which was to raise the East against us in a holy war. Beyond anything calculable in figures, we had let loose a passion of anti-Turkish feeling which, embittered as it had been by generations of subjection, might die very hard. There was among the tribes in the fighting zone a nervous enthusiasm common, I suppose, to all national risings, but strangely disquieting to one from a land so long delivered that national freedom had become like the water in our mouths, tasteless.

Later I saw Feisal again, and promised to do my best for him. My chiefs would arrange a base at Yenbo, where the stores and supplies he needed would be put ashore for his exclusive use. We would try to get him officer-volunteers from among the prisoners of war captured in Mesopotamia or on the Canal. We would form gun crews and machine-gun crews from the rank and file in the internment camps, and provide them with such mountain guns and light machine-guns as were obtainable in Egypt. Lastly, I would advise that British Army officers, professionals, be sent down to act as advisers and liaison officers with him in the field.

This time our talk was of the pleasantest, and ended in warm thanks from him, and an invitation to return as soon as might be. I explained that my duties in Cairo excluded field work, but perhaps my chiefs

would let me pay a second visit later on, when his present wants were filled and his movement was going forward prosperously. Meanwhile I would ask for facilities to go down to Yenbo, for Egypt, that I might get things on foot promptly. He at once appointed me an escort of fourteen Juheina Sherifs, all kinsmen of Mohamed Ali ibn Beidawi, the Emir of the Juheina. They were to deliver me intact in Yenbo to Sheikh Abd el Kadir el Abdo, its Governor.

[...]

[Lawrence serves for many months as a liaison between the Arab tribesmen and the British, and succeeds (with Faisal's help) in leading a number of successful raiding expeditions that weaken the Turkish forces and play a role in British victory against the Ottoman Empire]

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