CHAPTER I

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.

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 II

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 Kuweit, 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 Kuweit, 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 III

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 inconsistents 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 VI

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.

We were not many; and nearly all of us rallied round Clayton, the chief of Intelligence, civil and military, in Egypt. Clayton made the perfect leader for such a band of wild men as we were. He was calm, detached, clear-sighted, of unconscious courage in assuming responsibility. He gave an open run to his subordinates. His own views were general, like his knowledge; and he worked by influence rather than by loud direction. It was not easy to descry his influence. He was like water, or permeating oil, creeping silently and insistently through everything. It was not possible to say where Clayton was and was not, and how much really belonged to him. He never visibly led; but his ideas were abreast of those who did: he impressed men by his sobriety, and by a certain quiet and stately

moderation of hope. In practical matters he was loose, irregular, untidy, a man with whom independent men could bear.

The first of us was Ronald Storrs, Oriental Secretary of the Residency, the most brilliant Englishman in the Near East, and subtly efficient, despite his diversion of energy in love of music and letters, of sculpture, painting, of whatever was beautiful in the world's fruit. None the less, Storrs sowed what we reaped, and was always first, and the great man among us. His shadow would have covered our work and British policy in the East like a cloak, had he been able to deny himself the world, and to prepare his mind and body with the sternness of an athlete for a great fight.

George Lloyd entered our number. He gave us confidence, and with his knowledge of money, proved a sure guide through the subways of trade and politics, and a prophet upon the future arteries of the Middle East. We would not have done so much so soon without his partnership; but he was a restless soul, avid rather to taste than to exhaust. To him many things were needful; and so he would not stay very long with us. He did not see how much we liked him.

Then there was the imaginative advocate of unconvincing world-movements, Mark Sykes: also a bundle of prejudices, intuitions, half-sciences. His ideas were of the outside; and he lacked patience to test his materials before choosing his style of building. He would take an aspect of the truth, detach it from its circumstances, inflate it, twist and model it, until its old likeness and its new unlikeness together drew a laugh; and laughs were his triumphs. His instincts lay in parody: by choice he was A caricaturist rather than an artist, even in statesmanship. He saw the odd in everything, and missed the even. He would sketch out in a few dashes a new world, ALL out of scale, but vivid as a vision of some sides of the thing we hoped. His help did us good and harm. For this his last week in Paris tried to atone. He had returned from A period of political duty in Syria, after his awful realization of the true shape of his dreams, to say gallantly, I was wrong: here is the truth'. His former friends would not see his new earnestness, and thought him fickle and in error; and very soon he died. It was a tragedy of tragedies, for the Arab sake.

Not a wild man, but MENTOR to all of us was Hogarth, our father confessor and adviser, who brought us the parallels and lessons of history, and moderation, and courage. To the outsiders he was peacemaker (I was all claws and teeth, and had a devil), and made us favoured and listened to, for his weighty judgement. He had a delicate sense of value, and would present clearly to us the forces hidden behind the lousy rags and festering skins which we knew as Arabs. Hogarth was our referee, and our untiring historian, who gave us his great knowledge and careful wisdom even in the smallest things, because he believed in what we were making. Behind him stood Cornwallis, a man rude to look upon, but apparently forged from one of those incredible metals with a melting-point of thousands of degrees. So he could remain for months hotter than other men's white-heat, and yet look cold and hard. Behind him again were others, Newcombe, Parker, Herbert, Graves, all of the creed, and labouring stoutly after their fashion.

We called ourselves 'Intrusive' as a band; for we meant to break into the accepted halls of English foreign policy, and build a new people in the East, despite the rails laid down for us by our ancestors. Therefore from our hybrid intelligence office in Cairo (a jangling place which for its incessant bells and bustle and running to and fro, was likened by Aubrey Herbert to an oriental railway station) we began to work upon all chiefs, far and near. Sir Henry McMahon, High Commissioner in Egypt, was, of course, our first effort; and his shrewd insight and tried, experienced mind understood our design at once and judged it good. Others, like Wemyss, Neil Malcolm, Wingate, supported us in their pleasure at seeing the war turned constructive. Their advocacy confirmed in Lord Kitchener the favourable impression he had derived years before when Sherif Abdulla appealed to him in Egypt; and so McMahon at last achieved our foundation stone, the understanding with the Sherif of Mecca.

But before this we had had hopes of Mesopotamia. The beginning of the Arab Independence Movement had been there, under the vigorous but unscrupulous impulse of Seyid Taleb, and later of Yasin el Hashimi and the military league. Aziz el Masri, Enver's rival, who was living, much indebted to us, in Egypt, was an idol of the Arab officers. He was approached by Lord Kitchener in the first days of the war, with the hope of winning the Turkish Mesopotamian forces to our side. Unfortunately Britain was bursting then with confidence in an easy and early victory: the smashing of Turkey was called a promenade. So the Indian Government was adverse to any pledges to the Arab nationalists which might limit their ambitions to make the intended Mesopotamian colony play the self-sacrificing role of a Burma for the general good. It broke off negotiations, rejected Aziz, and interned Sayid Taleb, who had placed himself in our hands.

By brute force it marched then into Basra. The enemy troops in Irak were nearly all Arabs in the unenviable predicament of having to fight on behalf of their secular oppressors against a people long envisaged as liberators, but who obstinately refused to play the part. As may be imagined, they fought very badly. Our forces won battle after battle till we came to think an Indian army better than a Turkish army. There followed our rash advance to Ctesiphon, where we met native Turkish troops whose full heart was in the game, and were abruptly checked. We fell back, dazed; and the long misery of Kut began.

Meanwhile, our Government had repented, and, for reasons not unconnected with the fall of Erzerum, sent me to Mesopotamia to see what could be done by indirect means to relieve the beleaguered garrison. The local British had the strongest objection to my coming; and two Generals of them were good enough to explain to me that my mission (which they did not really know) was dishonourable to a soldier (which I was not). As a matter of fact it was too late for action, with Kut just dying; and in consequence I did nothing of what it was in my mind and power to do.

The conditions were ideal for an Arab movement. The people of Nejef and Kerbela, far in the rear of Halil Pasha's army, were in revolt against him. The surviving Arabs in Hali's army were, on his own confession, openly

disloyal to Turkey. The tribes of the Hai and Euphrates would have turned our way had they seen signs of grace in the British. Had we published the promises made to the Sherif, or even the proclamation afterwards posted in captured Bagdad, and followed it up, enough local fighting men would have joined us to harry the Turkish line of communication between Bagdad and Kut. A few weeks of that, and the enemy would either have been forced to raise the siege and retire, or have themselves suffered investment, outside Kut, nearly as stringent as the investment of Townshend within it. Time to develop such a scheme could easily have been gained. Had the British headquarters in Mesopotamia obtained from the War Office eight more aeroplanes to increase the daily carriage of food to the garrison of Kut, Townshend's resistance might have been indefinitely prolonged. His defence was Turkishly impregnable; and only blunders within and without forced surrender upon him.

However, as this was not the way of the directing parties there, I returned at once to Egypt; and till the end of the war the British in Mesopotamia remained substantially an alien force invading enemy territory, with the local people passively neutral or sullenly against them, and in consequence had not the freedom of movement and elasticity of Allenby in Syria, who entered the country as a friend, with the local people actively on his side. The factors of numbers, climate and communications favoured us in Mesopotamia more than in Syria; and our higher command was, after the beginning, no less efficient and experienced. But their casualty lists compared with Allenby's, their wood-chopping tactics compared with his rapier-play, showed how formidably an adverse political situation was able to cramp a purely military operation.

CHAPTER XLIX

We started an hour before noon. Nasir led us, riding his Ghazala—a camel vaulted and huge-ribbed as an antique ship; towering a good foot above the next of our animals, and yet perfectly proportioned, with a stride like an ostrich's—a lyrical beast, noblest and best bred of the Howeitat camels, a female of nine remembered dams. Auda was beside him, and I skirmished about their gravities on Naama, 'the hen-ostrich', a racing camel and my last purchase. Behind me rode my Ageyl, with Mohammed, the clumsy. Mohammed was now companioned by Ahmed, another peasant, who had been for six years living among the Howeitat by force of his thews and wits—a knowing eager ruffian. Sixty feet of a rise took us out of Sirhan to the first terrace of the Ard el Suwan—a country of black flints upon marly limestone; not very solid, but hard enough in the tracks which the feet of passing centuries of camels had worn an inch or two into the surface. Our aim was Bair, a historic group of Ghassanid wells and ruins in the desert thirty or forty miles east of the Hejaz Railway. It lay some sixty miles ahead, and there we would camp a few days, while our scouts brought us flour from the hill villages above the Dead Sea. Our food from Wejh was nearly finished (except that Nasir still had some of the precious rice for great occasions), and we could not yet certainly forecast the date of our arrival in Akaba.

Our present party totalled more than five hundred strong; and the sight of this jolly mob of hardy, confident northerners chasing gazelle wildly over the face of the desert, took from us momentarily all sorry apprehension as to the issue of our enterprise. We felt it was a rice-night, and the chiefs of the Abu Tayi came to sup with us. Afterwards, with the embers of our coffee-fire pleasantly red between us against the cool of this upland north-country, we sat about on the carpets chatting discursively of this remote thing and that.

Nasir rolled over on his back, with my glasses, and began to study the stars, counting aloud first one group and then another; crying out with surprise at discovering little lights not noticed by his unaided eye. Auda set us on to talk of telescopes—of the great ones—and of how man in three hundred years had so far advanced from his first essay that now he built glasses as long as a tent, through which he counted thousands of unknown stars. 'And the stars—what are they?' We slipped into talk of suns beyond suns, sizes and distance beyond wit. 'What will now happen with this knowledge?' asked Mohammed. 'We shall set to, and many learned and some clever men together will make glasses as more powerful than ours, as ours than Galileo's; and yet more hundreds of astronomers will distinguish and reckon yet more thousands of now unseen stars, mapping them, and giving each one its name. When we see them all, there will be no night in heaven.'

Why are the Westerners always wanting all?' provokingly said Auda. 'Behind our few stars we can see God, who is not behind your millions.' We want the world's end, Auda.' 'But that is God's,' complained Zaal, half angry. Mohammed would not have his subject turned. 'Are there men on

these greater worlds?' he asked. 'God knows.' 'And has each the Prophet and heaven and hell?' Auda broke in on him. 'Lads, we know our districts, our camels, our women. The excess and the glory are to God. If the end of wisdom is to add star to star our foolishness is pleasing.' And then he spoke of money, and distracted their minds till they all buzzed at once. Afterwards he whispered to me that I must get him a worthy gift from Feisal when he won Akaba.

We marched at dawn, and in an hour topped the Wagf, the water-shed, and rode down its far side. The ridge was only a bank of chalk, flint-capped, a couple of hundred feet high. We were now in the hollow between the Snainirat on the south and, on the north, the three white heads of the Thlaithukhwat, a cluster of conical hills which shone brilliant as snow in the sunshine. Soon we entered Wadi Bair, and marched up and across it for hours. There had been a flood there in the spring, producing a rich growth of grasses between the scrubby bushes. It was green and pleasant to the eye and to our camels' hungry palates, after the long hostility of the Sirhan.

Presently Auda told me he was riding ahead to Bair, and would I come? We went fast, and in two hours came upon the place suddenly, under a knoll. Auda had hurried on to visit the tomb of his son Annad, who had been waylaid by five of his Motalga cousins in revenge for Abtan, their champion, slain by Annad in single combat. Auda told me how Annad had ridden at them, one against five, and had died as he should; but it left only little Mohammed between him and childlessness. He had brought me along to hear him greatly lament his dead.

However, as we rode down towards the graves, we were astonished to see smoke wreathing from the ground about the wells. We changed direction sharply, and warily approached the ruins. It seemed there was no one there; but the thick dung-cake round the well-brink was charred, and the well itself shattered at the top. The ground was torn and blackened as if by an explosion; and when we looked down the shaft we saw its steyning stripped and split, and many blocks thrown down the bore half choking it and the water in the bottom. I sniffed the air and thought the smell was dynamite.

Auda ran to the next well, in the bed of the valley below the graves; and that, too, was ragged about the head and choked with fallen stones. This,' said he, 'is Jazi work.' We walked across the valley to the third—the Beni Sakhr—well. It was only a crater of chalk. Zaal arrived, grave at sight of the disaster. We explored the ruined khan, in which were night-old traces of perhaps a hundred horse. There was a fourth well, north of the ruins in the open flat, and to it we went hopelessly, wondering what would become of us if Bair were all destroyed. To our joy it was uninjured.

This was a Jazi well, and its immunity gave strong colour to Auda's theory. We were disconcerted to find the Turks so ready, and began to fear that perhaps they had also raided El Jefer, east of Maan, the wells at which we planned to concentrate before we attacked. Their blocking would be a real

embarrassment. Meanwhile, thanks to the fourth well, our situation, though uncomfortable, was not dangerous. Yet its water facilities were altogether insufficient for five hundred camels; so it became imperative to open the least damaged of the other wells—that in the ruins, about whose lip the turf smouldered. Auda and I went off with Nasir to look again at it.

An Ageyli brought us an empty case of Nobel's gelignite, evidently the explosive which the Turks had used. From scars in the ground it was clear that several charges had been fired simultaneously round the well-head, and in the shaft. Staring down it till our eyes were adjusted to its dark, we suddenly saw many niches cut in the shaft less than twenty feet below. Some were still tamped, and had wires hanging down.

Evidently there was a second series of charges, either inefficiently wired, or with a very long time-fuse. Hurriedly we unrolled our bucket-ropes, twined them together, and hung them freely down the middle of the well from a stout cross-pole, the sides being so tottery that the scrape of a rope might have dislodged their blocks. I then found that the charges were small, not above three pounds each, and had been wired in series with field telephone cable. But something had gone wrong. Either the Turks had scamped their job or their scouts had seen us coming before they had had time to re-connect.

So we soon had two fit wells, and a clear profit of thirty pounds of enemy gelignite. We determined to stay a week in this fortunate Bair. A third object—to discover the condition of the Jefer wells—was now added to our needs for food, and for news of the state of mind of the tribes between Maan and Akaba. We sent a man to Jefer. We prepared a little caravan of pack-camels with Howeitat brands and sent them across the line to Tafileh with three or four obscure clansmen-people who would never be suspected of association with us. They would buy all the flour they could and bring it back to us in five or six days' time.

As for the tribes about the Akaba road, we wanted their active help against the Turks to carry out the provisional plan we had made at Wejh. Our idea was to advance suddenly from El Jefer, to cross the railway-line and to crown the great pass—Nagb el Shtar—down which the road dipped from the Maan plateau to the red Guweira plain. To hold this pass we should have to capture Aba el Lissan, the large spring at its head, about sixteen miles from Maan; but the garrison was small, and we hoped to overrun it with a rush. We would then be astride the road, whose posts at the end of the week should fall from hunger; though probably before that the hill tribes, hearing of our successful beginning, would join us to wipe them out.

Crux of our plan was the attack on Aba el Lissan, lest the force in Maan have time to sally out, relieve it, and drive us off the head of Shtar. If, as at present, they were only a battalion, they would hardly dare move; and should they let it fall while waiting for reinforcements to arrive, Akaba would surrender to us, and we should be based on the sea and have the advantageous gorge of Itm between us and the enemy. So our insurance for success was to keep Maan careless and weak, not suspecting our

malevolent presence in the neighbourhood.

It was never easy for us to keep our movements secret, as we lived by preaching to the local people, and the unconvinced would tell the Turks. Our long march into Wadi Sirhan was known to the enemy, and the most civilian owl could not fail to see that the only fit objective was Akaba. The demolition of Bair (and Jefer, too, for we had it confirmed that the seven wells of Jefer were destroyed) showed that the Turks were to that extent on the alert.

However, there was no measuring the stupidity of the Turkish Army; a point which helped us now and again, and harmed us constantly, for we could not avoid despising them for it (Arabs being a race gifted with uncommon quickness of mind, and over-valuing it) and an army suffered when unable to yield honour to the enemy. For the moment the stupidity might be made use of; and so we had undertaken a prolonged campaign of deception, to convince them that our objective lay nearer to Damascus.

They were susceptible to pressure in that neighbourhood, for the railway from Damascus, north to Deraa and south to Amman, was the communication, not merely of Hejaz, but of Palestine; and if we attacked it we should do double damage. So, in my long trip round the north country, I had dropped hints of our near arrival in Jebel Druse; and I had been glad to let the notorious Nesib go up there, noisily, but with small resources. Nuri Shaalan had warned the Turks for us in the same sense; and Newcombe, down near Wejh, had contrived to lose official papers, including a plan (in which we were advance guard) for marching from Wejh, by Jefer and the Sirhan, to Tadmor, to attack Damascus and Aleppo. The Turks took the documents very seriously, and chained up an unfortunate garrison in Tadmor till the end of the war, much to our advantage.

CHAPTER L

It seemed wise to make some concrete effort in the same direction during the week that we must spend in Bair, and Auda decided that Zaal should ride with me in command of a party to attack the line near Deraa. Zaal chose one hundred and ten men, individually, and we rode hard, in six-hour spells with one—or two—hour intervals, day and night. For me it was an eventful trip, for those reasons which made it dull to the Arabs; namely, that we were an ordinary tribal raiding party, riding on conventional lines, in the formation and after the pattern which generations of practice had proved efficient.

In the second afternoon we reached the railway just above Zerga, the Circassian village north of Amman. The hot sun and fast riding had tried our camels, and Zaal decided to water them at a ruined Roman village, the underground cisterns of which had been filled by the late rains. It lay within a mile of the railway, and we had to be circumspect, for the Circassians hated the Arabs, and would have been hostile had they seen us. Also there was a military post of two tents on a tall bridge just down the line. The Turks seemed active. Later we heard that a general's inspection was pending.

After the watering we rode another six miles, and in the early dark turned to Dhuleil bridge, which Zaal reported as a big one, good to destroy. The men and camels stayed on the high ground east of the railway to cover our retreat if anything untoward happened, while Zaal and I went down to the bridge to look it over. There were Turks two hundred yards beyond it, with many tents and cooking fires. We were puzzled to explain their strength, until we reached the bridge and found it being rebuilt; the spring flood had washed away four of its arches, and the line was temporarily laid on a deviation. One of the new arches was finished, another had the vault just turned, and the timber centring was set ready for a third.

Useless, of course, it was, bothering to destroy a bridge in such a state; so we drew off quietly (not to alarm the workmen), walking over loose stones which turned under our bare feet in a way imposing care if we would avoid risk of sprain. Once I put my foot on something moving, soft and cold; and stepped heavily, on chance it was a snake; but no harm followed. The brilliant stars cast about us a false light, not illumination, but rather a transparency of air lengthening slightly the shadow below each stone, and making a difficult greyness of the ground.

We decided to go further north, towards Minifir, where Zaal thought the land propitious for mining a train. A train would be better than a bridge, for our need was political, to make the Turks think that our main body was at Azrak in Sirhan, fifty miles away to the east. We came out on a flat plain, crossed by a very occasional shallow bed of fine shingle. Over this we were going easily when we heard a long rumble. We pricked ears, wondering: and there came out of the north a dancing plume of flame bent low by the wind of its speed. It seemed to light us, extending its fire-tagged curtain of smoke over our heads, so near were we to the railway; and we shrank back

while the train rushed on. Two minutes' warning and I would have blown its locomotive into scrap.

Afterwards our march was quiet till the dawn, when we found ourselves riding up a narrow valley. At its head was a sharp turn to the left, into an amphitheatre of rock where the hill went up by step after step of broken cliff to a crest on which stood a massive cairn. Zaal said the railway was visible thence, and if this were true the place was an ideal ambush, for the camels could be herded without any guardians into the pit of excellent pasture.

I climbed at once to the cairn, the ruin of an Arab watch-tower of the Christian period, commanding a most gracious view of rich pastoral uplands beyond the line, which ran round the foot of our slope in a lazy curve, open to sight for perhaps five miles. Below on our left was the square box of the 'coffee-house', a railway halt, about which a few little soldiers were slouching peacefully. We lay alternately watching and sleeping, for many hours, during which a train ground slowly past up the stiff gradient. We made plans to descend upon the line that night, wherever seemed best for mining.

However, in mid-morning a dark mass approached from the northward. Eventually we made it out to be a force of perhaps one hundred and fifty mounted men, riding straight for our hill. It looked as though we had been reported; A quite possible thing, since all this area was grazed over by the sheep of the Belga tribes, whose shepherds, when they saw our stealthiness, would have taken us for robber-enemies and alarmed their tents.

Our position, admirable against the railway, was a death-trap in which to be caught by superior mobile forces: so we sent down the alarm, mounted and slipped across the valley of our entry, and over its eastern ridge into a small plain, where we could canter our animals. We made speed to low mounds on its further side, and got behind them before the enemy were in a position to see us.

There the terrain better suited our tactics and we waited for them; but they were at least imperfectly informed, for they rode past our old hiding-place and quickly away towards the south, leaving us puzzled. There were no Arabs among them—all were regulars—so we had not to fear being tracked, but here again it seemed as though the Turks were on the alert. This was according to my wish, and I was glad, but Zaal, on whom fell the military responsibility, was disquieted. He held a council with those others who knew the country, and eventually we remounted, and jogged off to another hill, rather north of our old one, but satisfactory enough. Particularly it happened to be free of tribal complications.

This was Minifir proper, a round-headed, grass-grown hill of two shoulders. The high neck between provided us, on its eastern face, a broad track perfectly covered from north and south and west, which afforded a safe retreat into the desert. At the top the neck was cupped, so that

collected rain had made the soil rich, and the grazing sumptuous; but loosed camels required constant care, for if they wandered two hundred paces forward they became visible from the railway, a further four hundred yards down the western face of the hill. On each side the shoulders pushed forward in spurs which the line passed in shallow cuttings. The excavated material had been thrown across the hollow in an embankment; through the centre of which a lofty culvert let the drainage of the little zigzag gully from the neck run down into a larger transverse valley bed beyond.

Northward the line curved away, hard uphill, to the wide level of the southern Hauran, spread out like a grey sky, and flecked with small dark clouds which were the dead basalt towns of Byzantine Syria. Southward was a cairn from which we could look down the railway for six miles or more.

The high land facing us to the west, the Belga, was spotted with black tent-villages of peasants in summer quarters. They could see us too, in our hill-cup, so we sent word who we were. Whereupon they kept silent till we had gone, and then were fervid and eloquent in proving that we fled eastward, to Azrak. When our messengers came back we had bread to eat—a luxury; since the dearth in Bair had reduced us to parched corn which, for lack of cooking-opportunity the men had been chewing raw. The trial was too steep for my teeth, so that I rode fasting.

Zaal and I buried that night on the culvert a great Garland mine, automatic-compound, to explode three charges in parallel by instantaneous fuse; and then lay down to sleep, sure that we would hear noises if a train came along in the dark and fired it. However, nothing happened, and at dawn I removed the detonators which (additional to the trigger action) had been laid on the metals. Afterwards we waited all day, fed and comfortable, cooled by a high wind which hissed like surf as it ruffled up the stiff-grassed hill.

For hours nothing came along: but at last there was a flutter among the Arabs, and Zaal, with the Hubsi and some of the more active men, dashed down towards the line. We heard two shots under us in the dead ground, and after half an hour the party reappeared, leading two ragged Turkish deserters from the mounted column of the day before. One had been badly wounded, while attempting to escape up the line; and in the afternoon he died, most miserable about himself and his fate. Exceptionally: for when death became certain most men felt the quietness of the grave waiting for them, and went to it not unwillingly. The other man was hurt also, a clean gunshot in the foot; but he was very feeble and collapsed when the wound grew painful with the cold. His thin body was so covered with bruises, tokens of army service and cause of his desertion, that he dared lie only on his face. We offered him the last of our bread and water and did what else we could for him: which was little.

Late in the afternoon came a thrill when the mule-mounted infantry reappeared, heading up-line towards us. They would pass below our ambush, and Zaal and the men were urgent to attack them on the sudden.

We were one hundred, they little over two hundred. We had the upper ground, could hope to empty some of their saddles by our first volley, and then would camel-charge upon them. Camels, especially down a gentle slope, would overtake mules in a few strides, and their moving bulk would send spinning the lighter animals and their riders. Zaal gave me his word that no regular cavalry, let alone mere mounted infantry, could cope with tribal camels in a running fight We should take not only the men, but their precious animals.

I asked him how many casualties we might incur. He guessed five or six, and then I decided to do nothing, to let them pass. We had one objective only, the capture of Akaba, and had come up here solely to make that easier by leading the Turks off on the false scent of thinking that we were at Azrak. To lose five or six men in such a demonstration, however profitable it proved financially, would be fatuous, or worse, because we might want our last rifle to take Akaba, the possession of which was vital to us. After Akaba had fallen we might waste men, if we felt callous; but not before.

I told Zaal, who was not content; while the furious Howeitat threatened to run off downhill at the Turks, willy-nilly. They wanted a booty of mules; and I, particularly, did not, for it would have diverted us. Commonly, tribes went to war to gain honour and wealth. The three noble spoils were arms, riding-animals, and clothes. If we took these two hundred mules, the proud men would throw up Akaba and drive them home by way of Azrak to their tents, to triumph before the women. As for prisoners, Nasir would not be grateful for two hundred useless mouths: so we should have to kill them; or let them go, revealing our numbers to the enemy.

We sat and gnashed our teeth at them and let them pass: a severe ordeal, from which we only just emerged with honour. Zaal did it. He was on his best behaviour, expecting tangible gratitude from me later; and glad, meanwhile, to show me his authority over the Beduin. They respected him as Auda's deputy, and as a famous fighter, and in one or two little mutinies he had shown a self-conscious mastery.

Now he was tested to the utmost. The Hubsi, Auda's cousin, A. spirited youth, while the Turks were defiling innocently not three hundred yards from our itching rifle-muzzles, sprang to his feet and ran forward shouting to attract them, and compel a battle; but Zaal caught him in ten strides, threw him down and bludgeoned him savagely time and again till we feared lest the lad's now very different cries fulfil his former purpose.

It was sad to see a sound and pleasant little victory pass voluntarily out of our hands, and we were gloomy till evening came down and confirmed our sense that once more there would be no train. This was the final occasion, for thirst was hanging over us, and on the morrow the camels must be watered. So after nightfall we returned to the line, laid thirty charges of gelignite against the most-curved rails and fired them leisurely. The curved rails were chosen since the Turks would have to bring down new ones from Damascus. Actually, this took them three days; and then their construction

train stepped on our mine (which we had left as hook behind the demolition's bait) and hurt its locomotive. Traffic ceased for three other days while the line was picked over for traps.

For the moment, of course, we could anticipate none of these good things. We did the destruction, returned sorrowfully to our camels, and were off soon after midnight. The prisoner was left behind on his hill-top, for he could neither walk nor ride, and we had no carriage for him. We feared he would starve to death where he lay: and, indeed, already he was very ill: so on a telegraph pole, felled across the rails by the damaged stretch, we put a letter in French and German, to give news of where he was, and that we had captured him wounded after a hard fight.

We hoped this might save him the penalties which the Turks inflicted on red-handed deserters, or from being shot if they thought he had been in collusion with us: but when we came back to Minifir six months later the picked bones of the two bodies were lying scattered on our old camping ground. We felt sorry always for the men of the Turkish Army. The officers, volunteer and professional, had caused the war by their ambition—almost by their existence—and we wished they could receive not merely their proportionate deserts, but all that the conscripts had to suffer through their fault.

CHAPTER LI

In the night we lost our way among the stony ridges and valleys of Dhuleil, but kept moving until dawn, so that half an hour after sunrise, while the shadows were yet long across the green hollows, we had reached our former watering-place, Khau, whose ruins broke from the hill-top against Zerga like a scab. We were working hard at the two cisterns, watering our camels for the return march to Bair, when a young Circassian came in sight, driving three cows towards the rich green pasture of the ruins.

This would not do, so Zaal sent off his too-energetic offenders of the day previous to show their proper mettle by stalking him: and they brought him in, unharmed, but greatly frightened. Circassians were swaggering fellows, inordinate bullies in a clear road; but if firmly met they cracked; and so this lad was in a head-and-tail flux of terror, offending our sense of respect. We drenched him with water till he recovered, and then in disposal set him to fight at daggers with a young Sherari, caught stealing on the march; but after a scratch the prisoner threw himself down weeping.

Now he was a nuisance, for if we left him he would give the alarm, and send the horsemen of his village out against us. If we tied him up in this remote place he would die of hunger or thirst; and, besides, we had not rope to spare. To kill him seemed unimaginative: not worthy of a hundred men. At last the Sherari boy said if we gave him scope he would settle his account and leave him living.

He looped his wrist to the saddle and trotted him off with us for the first hour, till he was dragging breathlessly. We were still near the railway, but four or five miles from Zerga. There he was stripped of presentable clothes, which fell, by point of honour, to his owner. The Sherari threw him on his face, picked up his feet, drew a dagger, and chopped him with it deeply across the soles. The Circassian howled with pain and terror, as if he thought he was being killed.

Odd as was the performance, it seemed effective, and more merciful than death. The cuts would make him travel to the railway on hands and knees, a journey of an hour; and his nakedness would keep him in the shadow of the rocks, till the sun was low. His gratitude was not coherent; but we rode away, across undulations very rich in grazing. The camels, with their heads down snatching plants and grass, moved uncomfortably for us cocked over the chute of their sloped necks; yet we must let them eat, since we were marching eighty miles a day, with halts to breathe only in the brief gloamings of dawn and sunset.

Soon after daylight we turned west, and dismounted, short of the railway among broken reefs of limestone, to creep carefully forward until Atwi station lay beneath us. Its two stone houses (the first only one hundred yards away) were in line, one obscuring the other. Men were singing in them without disquietude. Their day was beginning, and from the guard-room thin blue smoke curled into the air, while a soldier drove out a

flock of young sheep to crop the rich meadow between the station and the valley.

This flock sealed the business, for after our horse-diet of dry corn we craved meat. The Arabs' teeth gritted as they counted ten, fifteen, twenty-five, twenty-seven. Zaal dropped into the valley bed where the line crossed a bridge, and, with a party in file behind him, crept along till he faced the station across the meadow.

From our ridge we covered the station yard. We saw Zaal lean his rifle on the bank, shielding his head with infinite precaution behind grasses on the brink. He took slow aim at the coffee-sipping officers and officials in shaded chairs, outside the ticket office. As he pressed the trigger, the report overtook the crash of the bullet against the stone wall, while the fattest man bowed slowly in his chair and sank to the ground under the frozen stare of his fellows.

An instant later Zaal's men poured in their volleys, broke from the valley, and rushed forward: but the door of the northern house clanged to, and rifles began to speak from behind its steel window shutters. We replied, but soon saw our impotence, and ceased fire, as did the enemy. The Sherarat drove the guilty sheep eastward into the hills, where were the camels; everyone else ran down to join Zaal, who was busy about the nearer and undefended building.

Near the height of plundering came a pause and panic. The Arabs were such accustomed scouts that almost they felt danger before it came, sense taking precautions before mind was persuaded. Swinging down the line from the south was a trolley with four men, to whose ears the grinding wheels had deadened our shots. The Rualla section crept under a culvert three hundred yards up, while the rest of us crowded silently by the bridge.

The trolley rolled unsuspectingly over the ambush, who came out to line the bank behind, while we filed solemnly across the green in front. The Turks slowed in horror, jumped off, and ran into the rough: but our rifles cracked once more and they were dead. The trolley brought to our feet its load of copper wire and telegraph tools, with which we put 'earths' in the long-distance wire. Zaal fired our half of the station, whose petrol-splashed woodwork caught freely. The planks and cloth hangings twisted and jerked convulsively as the flames licked them up. Meanwhile the Ageyl were measuring out gelatine, and soon we lit their charges and destroyed a culvert, many rails, and furlongs of telegraph. With the roar of the first explosion our hundred knee-haltered camels rose smartly to their feet, and at each following burst hopped more madly on three legs till they shook off the rope-hitch about the fourth, and drove out every way like scattered starlings into the void. Chasing them and chasing the sheep took us three hours, for which graciously the Turks gave law, or some of us would have had to walk home.

We put a few miles between us and the railway before we sat down to our feast of mutton. We were short of knives, and, after killing the sheep in

relay, had recourse to stray flints to cut them up. As men unaccustomed to such expedients, we used them in the eolithic spirit; and it came to me that if iron had been constantly rare we should have chipped our daily tools skilfully as palasoliths: whilst had we had no metal whatever, our art would have been lavished on perfect and polished stones. Our one hundred and ten men ate the best parts of twenty-four sheep at the sitting, while the camels browsed about, or ate what we left over; for the best riding-camels were taught to like cooked meat. When it was finished we mounted, and rode through the night towards Bair: which we entered without casualty, successful, well-fed, and enriched, at dawn.

CHAPTER LII

Nasir had done great work. A week's flour for us had come from Tafileh, to restore our freedom of movement. We might well take Akaba before we starved again. He had good letters from the Dhumaniyeh, the Darausha, and the Dhiabat, three Howeitat clans on Nagb el Shtar, the first difficult pass of the Maan-Akaba road. They were willing to help us, and if they struck soon and strongly at Aba el Lissan the great factor of surprise would probably mean success to their effort.

My hopefulness misled me into another mad ride, which miscarried. Yet the Turks did not take alarm. As my party rode in there came a messenger post-haste from Nuri Shaalan. He brought greetings, and Nuri's news that the Turks had called upon his son Nawaf, as guide hostage, to take four hundred cavalry from Deraa down the Sirhan in search of us. Nuri had sent his better-spared nephew Trad, who was conducting them by devious routes in which men and horses were suffering terribly from thirst. They were near Nebk, our old camping ground. The Turkish Government would believe us still in the Wadi till their cavalry returned. For Maan especially they had no anxiety since the engineers who had blown up Bair reported every source of water utterly destroyed, while the wells of Jefer had been dealt with a few days earlier.

It might be that Jefer really was denied to us; but we were not without hope that there, too, we should find the technical work of demolition ill-done by these pitiful Turks. Dhaif-Allah, a leading man of the Jazi Howeitat, one who came down to Wejh and swore allegiance, had been present in Jefer when the King's Well was fired by dynamite placed about its lip; and sent us secret word from Maan that he had heard the upper stones clap together and key over the mouth of the well. His conviction was that the shaft was intact, and the clearing of it a few hours' work. We hoped so; and rode away from Bair all in order, on June the twenty-eighth, to find out.

Quickly we crossed the weird plain of Jefer. Next day by noon we were at the wells. They seemed most thoroughly destroyed; and the fear grew that we might find in them the first check to our scheme of operations, a scheme so much too elaborate that a check might be far reaching.

However, we went to the well—Auda's family property—of which Dhaif Allah had told us the tale, and began to sound about it. The ground rang hollow under our mallet, and we called for volunteers able to dig and build. Some of the Ageyl came forward, led by the Mirzugi, a capable camel boy of Nasir's. They started with the few tools we had. The rest of us formed a ring round the well-depression and watched them work, singing to them and promising rewards of gold when they had found the water.

It was a hot task in the full glare of the summer sun; for the Jefer plain was of hard mud, flat as the hand, blinding white with salt, and twenty miles across; but time pressed, because if we failed we might have to ride fifty miles in the night to the next well. So we pushed the work by relays at

speed through the midday heat, turning into labourers all our amenable fellows. It made easy digging, for the explosion which shifted the stones had loosened the soil.

As they dug and threw out the earth, the core of the well rose up like a tower of rough stones in the centre of the pit. Very carefully we began to take away the ruined head of the pile: difficult work, for the stones had become interlocked in their fall; but this was the better sign, and our spirits rose. Before sunset the workers shouted that there was no more packing-soil, that the interstices between the blocks were clear, and they heard the mud fragments which slipped through splashing many feet below.

Half an hour later came a rush and rumble of stones in the mouth, followed by a heavy splash and yells. We hurried down, and by the Mirzugi's torch saw the well yawning open, no longer a tube, but a deep bottle-shouldered pit, twenty feet across at the bottom, which was black with water and white in the middle with spray where the Ageyli who had been clearing when the key slipped was striking out lustily in the effort not to drown. Everybody laughed down the well at him, till at last Abdulla lowered him a noose of rope, and we drew him up, very wet and angry, but in no way damaged by his fall.

We rewarded the diggers, and feasted them on a weak camel, which had failed in the march to-day; and then all night we watered, while a squad of Ageyl, with a long chorus, steyned up to ground level an eight-foot throat of mud and stones. At dawn the earth was stamped in round this, and the well stood complete, as fit in appearance as ever. Only the water was not very much. We worked it the twenty-four hours without rest, and ran it to a cream; and still some of our camels were not satisfied.

From Jefer we took action. Riders went forward into the Dhumaniyeh tents to lead their promised attack against Fuweilah, the block-house which covered the head of the pass of Aba el Lissan. Our attack was planned for two days before the weekly caravan which, from Maan, replenished the client garrisons. Starvation would make reduction of these distant places easier, by impressing on them how hopelessly they were cut off from their friends.

We sat in Jefer meanwhile, waiting to hear the fortune of the attack. On its success or failure would depend the direction of our next march. The halt was not unpleasant, for our position had its comic side. We were within sight of Maan, during those minutes of the day in which the mirage did not make eyes and glasses useless; and yet we strolled about admiring our new well-lip in complete security, because the Turkish garrison believed water impossible here or at Bair, and were hugging the pleasant idea that we were now desperately engaged with their cavalry in Sirhan.

I hid under some bushes near the well for hours, against the heat, very lazy, pretending to be asleep, the wide silk sleeve of my pillow-arm drawn over my face as veil against the flies. Auda sat up and talked like a river,

telling his best stories in great form. At last I reproved him with a smile, for talking too much and doing too little. He sucked his lips with pleasure of the work to come.

In the following dawn a tired horseman rode into our camp with news that the Dhumaniyeh had fired on the Fuweilah post the afternoon before as soon as our men had reached them. The surprise had not been quite complete; the Turks manned their dry stone breastworks and drove them off. The crestfallen Arabs drew back into cover, and the enemy believing it only an ordinary tribal affray, had made a mounted sortie upon the nearest encampment.

One old man, six women and seven children were its only occupants. In their anger at finding nothing actively hostile or able-bodied, the troopers smashed up the camp and cut the throats of its helpless ones. The Dhumaniyeh on the hill-tops heard and saw nothing till it was too late; but then, in their fury, they dashed down across the return road of the murderers and cut them off almost to the last man. To complete their vengeance they assaulted the now weakly-garrisoned fort, carried it in the first fierceness of their rush, and took no prisoners.

We were ready saddled; and within ten minutes had loaded and marched for Ghadir el Haj, the first railway station south of Maan, on our direct road for Aba el Lissan. Simultaneously, we detached a small party to cross the railway just above Maan and create a diversion on that side. Especially they were to threaten the great herds of sick camels, casualties of the Palestine front, which the Turks pastured in the Shobek plains till once more fit for service.

We calculated that the news of their Fuweilah disaster would not have reached Maan till the morning, and that they could not drive in these camels (supposing our northern party missed them) and fit out a relief expedition, before nightfall; and if we were then attacking the line at Ghadir el Haj, they would probably divert the relief thither, and so let us move on Akaba unmolested.

With this hope we rode steadily through the flowing mirage till afternoon, when we descended on the line; and, having delivered a long stretch of it from guards and patrols, began on the many bridges of the captured section. The little garrison of Ghadir el Haj sallied out with the valour of ignorance against us, but the heat-haze blinded them, and we drove them off with loss.

They were on the telegraph, and would notify Maan, which beside, could not fail to hear the repeated thuds of our explosion. It was our aim to bring the enemy down upon us in the night; or rather down here, where they would find no people but many broken bridges, for we worked fast and did great damage. The drainage holes in the spandrils held from three to five pounds of gelatine each. We, firing our mines by short fuses, brought down the arch, shattered the pier, and stripped the side walls, in no more than six minutes' work. So we ruined ten bridges and many rails, and finished

our explosive.

After dusk, when our departure could not be seen, we rode five miles westward of the line, to cover. There we made fires and baked bread. Our meal, however, was not cooked before three horsemen cantered up to report that a long column of new troops—infantry and guns—had just appeared at Alba el Lissan from Maan. The Dhumaniyeh, disorganized with victory, had had to abandon their ground without fighting. They were at Batra waiting for us. We had lost Aba el Lissan, the blockhouse, the pass, the command of the Akaba road: without a shot being fired.

We learned afterwards that this unwelcome and unwonted vigour on the part of the Turks was accident. A relief battalion had reached Maan that very day. The news of an Arab demonstration against Fuweilah arrived simultaneously; and the battalion, which happened to be formed up ready with its transport in the station yard, to march to barracks, was hurriedly strengthened by a section of pack artillery and some mounted men, and moved straight out as a punitive column to rescue the supposedly besieged post.

They had left Maan in mid-morning and marched gently along the motor road, the men sweating in the heat of this south country after their native Caucasian snows, and drinking thirstily of every spring. From Aba el Lissan they climbed uphill towards the old blockhouse, which was deserted except for the silent vultures flying above its walls in slow uneasy rings. The battalion commander feared lest the sight be too much for his young troops, and led them back to the roadside spring of Aba el Lissan, in its serpentine narrow valley, where they camped all night in peace about the water.

CHAPTER LIII

Such news shook us into quick life. We threw our baggage across our camels on the instant and set out over the rolling downs of this end of the tableland of Syria. Our hot bread was in our hands, and, as we ate, there mingled with it the taste of the dust of our large force crossing the valley bottoms, and some taint of the strange keen smell of the wormwood which overgrew the slopes. In the breathless air of these evenings in the hills, after the long days of summer, everything struck very acutely on the senses: and when marching in a great column, as we were, the front camels kicked up the aromatic dust-laden branches of the shrubs, whose scent-particles rose into the air and hung in a long mist, making fragrant the road of those behind.

The slopes were clean with the sharpness of wormwood, and the hollows oppressive with the richness of their stronger, more luxuriant growths. Our night-passage might have been through a planted garden, and these varieties part of the unseen beauty of successive banks of flowers. The noises too were very clear. Auda broke out singing, away in front, and the men joined in from time to time, with the greatness, the catch at heart, of an army moving into battle.

We rode all night, and when dawn came were dismounting on the crest of the hills between Batra and Aba el Lissan, with a wonderful view westwards over the green and gold Guweira plain, and beyond it to the ruddy mountains hiding Akaba and the sea. Gasim abu Dumeik, head of the Dhumaniyeh, was waiting anxiously for us, surrounded by his hard-bitten tribesmen, their grey strained faces flecked with the blood of the fighting yesterday. There was a deep greeting for Auda and Nasir. We made hurried plans, and scattered to the work, knowing we could not go forward to Akaba with this battalion in possession of the pass. Unless we dislodged it, our two months' hazard and effort would fail before yielding even first-fruits.

Fortunately the poor handling of the enemy gave us an unearned advantage. They slept on, in the valley, while we crowned the hills in wide circle about them unobserved. We began to snipe them steadily in their positions under the slopes and rock-faces by the water, hoping to provoke them out and up the hill in a charge against us. Meanwhile, Zaal rode away with our horsemen and cut the Maan telegraph and telephone in the plain.

This went on all day. It was terribly hot—hotter than ever before I had felt it in Arabia—and the anxiety and constant moving made it hard for us. Some even of the tough tribesmen broke down under the cruelty of the sun, and crawled or had to be thrown under rocks to recover in their shade. We ran up and down to supply our lack of numbers by mobility, ever looking over the long ranges of hill for a new spot from which to counter this or that Turkish effort. The hill-sides were steep, and exhausted our breath, and the grasses twined like little hands about our ankles as we ran, and plucked us back. The sharp reefs of limestone which cropped out over the ridges tore our feet, and long before evening the more

energetic men were leaving a rusty print upon the ground with every stride.

Our rifles grew so hot with sun and shooting that they seared our hands; and we had to be grudging of our rounds, considering every shot and spending great pains to make it sure. The rocks on which we flung ourselves for aim were burning, so that they scorched our breasts and arms, from which later the skin drew off in ragged sheets. The present smart made us thirst. Yet even water was rare with us; we could not afford men to fetch enough from Batra, and if all could not drink, it was better that none should.

We consoled ourselves with knowledge that the enemy's enclosed valley would be hotter than our open hills: also that they were Turks, men of white meat, little apt for warm weather. So we clung to them, and did not let them move or mass or sortie out against us cheaply. They could do nothing valid in return. We were no targets for their rifles, since we moved with speed, eccentrically. Also we were able to laugh at the little mountain guns which they fired up at us. The shells passed over our heads, to burst behind us in the air; and yet, of course, for all that they could see from their hollow place, fairly amongst us above the hostile summits of the hill.

Just after noon I had a heat-stroke, or so pretended, for I was dead weary of it all, and cared no longer how it went. So I crept into a hollow where there was a trickle of thick water in a muddy cup of the hills, to suck some moisture off its dirt through the filter of my sleeve. Nasir joined me, panting like a winded animal, with his cracked and bleeding lips shrunk apart in his distress: and old Auda appeared, striding powerfully, his eyes bloodshot and staring, his knotty face working with excitement.

He grinned with malice when he saw us lying there, spread out to find coolness under the bank, and croaked at me harshly, 'Well, how is it with the Howeitat? All talk and no work?' 'By God, indeed,' spat I back again, for I was angry with everyone and with myself, 'they shoot a lot and hit a little.' Auda almost pale with rage, and trembling, tore his head-cloth off and threw it on the ground beside me. Then he ran back up the hill like a madman, shouting to the men in his dreadful strained and rustling voice.

They came together to him, and after a moment scattered away downhill. I feared things were going wrong, and struggled to where he stood alone on the hill-top, glaring at the enemy: but all he would say to me was, 'Get your camel if you want to see the old man's work'. Nasir called for his camel and we mounted.

The Arabs passed before us into a little sunken place, which rose to a low crest; and we knew that the hill beyond went down in a facile slope to the main valley of Aba el Lissan, somewhat below the spring. All our four hundred camel men were here tightly collected, just out of sight of the enemy. We rode to their head, and asked the Shimt what it was and where the horsemen had gone.

He pointed over the ridge to the next valley above us, and said, 'With Auda

there': and as he spoke yells and shots poured up in a sudden torrent from beyond the crest. We kicked our camels furiously to the edge, to see our fifty horsemen coming down the last slope into the main valley like a run-away, at full gallop, shooting from the saddle. As we watched, two or three went down, but the rest thundered forward at marvellous speed, and the Turkish infantry, huddled together under the cliff ready to cut their desperate way out towards Maan, in the first dusk began to sway in and out, and finally broke before the rush, adding their flight to Auda's charge.

Nasir screamed at me, 'Come on', with his bloody mouth; and we plunged our camels madly over the hill, and down towards the head of the fleeing enemy. The slope was not too steep for a camel-gallop, but steep enough to make their pace terrific, and their course uncontrollable: yet the Arabs were able to extend to right and left and to shoot into the Turkish brown. The Turks had been too bound up in the terror of Auda's furious charge against their rear to notice us as we came over the eastward slope: so we also took them by surprise and in the flank; and a charge of ridden camels going nearly thirty miles an hour was irresistible.

My camel, the Sherari racer, Naama, stretched herself out, and hurled downhill with such might that we soon out-distanced the others. The Turks fired a few shots, but mostly only shrieked and turned to run: the bullets they did send at us were not very harmful, for it took much to bring a charging camel down in a dead heap.

I had got among the first of them, and was shooting, with a pistol of course, for only an expert could use a rifle from such plunging beasts; when suddenly my camel tripped and went down emptily upon her face, as though pole-axed. I was torn completely from the saddle, sailed grandly through the air for a great distance, and landed with a crash which seemed to drive all the power and feeling out of me. I lay there, passively waiting for the Turks to kill me, continuing to hum over the verses of a half-forgotten poem, whose rhythm something, perhaps the prolonged stride of the camel, had brought back to my memory as we leaped down the hill-side:

For Lord I was free of all Thy flowers, but I chose the world's sad

roses, And that is why my feet are torn and mine eyes are blind with

sweat.

While another part of my mind thought what a squashed thing I should look when all that cataract of men and camels had poured over.

After a long time I finished my poem, and no Turks came, and no camel trod on me: a curtain seemed taken from my ears: there was a great noise in front. I sat up and saw the battle over, and our men driving together and cutting down the last remnants of the enemy. My camel's body had lain behind me like a rock and divided the charge into two streams: and in the back of its skull was the heavy bullet of the fifth shot I fired.

Mohammed brought Obeyd, my spare camel, and Nasir came back leading the Turkish commander, whom he had rescued, wounded, from Mohammed el Dheilan's wrath. The silly man had refused to surrender, and was trying to restore the day for his side with a pocket pistol. The Howeitat were very fierce, for the slaughter of their women on the day before had been a new and horrible side of warfare suddenly revealed to them. So there were only a hundred and sixty prisoners, many of them wounded; and three hundred dead and dying were scattered over the open valleys.

A few of the enemy got away, the gunners on their teams, and some mounted men and officers with their Jazi guides. Mohammed el Dheilan chased them for three miles into Mreigha, hurling insults as he rode, that they might know him and keep out of his way. The feud of Auda and his cousins had never applied to Mohammed, the political-minded, who showed friendship to all men of his tribe when he was alone to do so. Among the fugitives was Dhaif-Allah, who had done us the good turn about the King's Well at Jefer.

Auda came swinging up on foot, his eyes glazed over with the rapture of battle, and the words bubbling with incoherent speed from his mouth. 'Work, work, where are words, work, bullets, Abu Tayi' . . . and he held up his shattered field-glasses, his pierced pistol-holster, and his leather sword-scabbard cut to ribbons. He had been the target of a volley which had killed his mare under him, but the six bullets through his clothes had left him scathless.

He told me later, in strict confidence, that thirteen years before he had bought an amulet Koran for one hundred and twenty pounds and had not since been wounded. Indeed, Death had avoided his face, and gone scurvily about killing brothers, sons and followers. The book was a Glasgow reproduction, costing eighteen pence; but Auda's deadliness did not let people laugh at his superstition.

He was wildly pleased with the fight, most of all because he had confounded me and shown what his tribe could do. Mohammed was wroth with us for a pair of fools, calling me worse than Auda, since I had insulted him by words like flung stones to provoke the folly which had nearly killed us all: though it had killed only two of us, one Rueili and one Sherari.

It was, of course, a pity to lose any one of our men, but time was of importance to us, and so imperative was the need of dominating Maan, to shock the little Turkish garrisons between us and the sea into surrender, that I would have willingly lost much more than two. On occasions like this Death justified himself and was cheap.

I questioned the prisoners about themselves, and the troops in Maan; but the nerve crisis had been too severe for them. Some gaped at me and some gabbled, while others, with helpless weepings, embraced my knees, protesting at every word from us that they were fellow Moslems and my brothers in the faith.

Finally I got angry and took one of them aside and was rough to him, shocking him by new pain into a half-understanding, when he answered well enough, and reassuringly, that their battalion was the only reinforcement, and it merely a reserve battalion; the two companies in Maan would not suffice to defend its perimeter.

This meant we could take it easily, and the Howeitat clamoured to be led there, lured by the dream of unmeasured loot, though what we had taken here was a rich prize. However, Nasir, and afterwards Auda, helped me stay them. We had no supports, no regulars, no guns, no base nearer than Wejh, no communications, no money even, for our gold was exhausted, and we were issuing our own notes, promises to pay 'when Akaba is taken', for daily expenses. Besides, a strategic scheme was not changed to follow up a tactical success. We must push to the coast, and re-open sea-contact with Suez.

Yet it would be good to alarm Maan further: so we sent mounted men to Mriegha and took it; and to Waheida and took it. News of this advance, of the loss of the camels on the Shobek road, of the demolition of El Haj, and of the massacre of their relieving battalion all came to Maan together, and caused a very proper panic. The military headquarters wired for help, the civil authorities loaded their official archive into trucks, and left, hot-speed, for Damascus.