PART VI
CHAPTER XXX

MEANWHILE throughout the world the British and the German Empires were coming more and more to loggerheads, snarling and growling at each other in every continent and on every sea, massing their tremendous forces against each other.

The Germans, full of young vitality, overcrowded at home, were striving with their ships and their traders and their diplomats to expand. Wherever they went they found that the English already held all that they wanted; and most of all in the Arab countries and the waterways along their coasts. These were the gates and the roads to India and the East; on the one side Egypt, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea; on the other—Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. Between them lay Arabia, a threat to both routes.

The Germans found that though their allies, the Turks, were the nominal rulers, the English were in effective control and holding all against them with dogged and resentful pertinacity; and they raged angrily against the English.

To every ruler in Arabia, to the Imam of the Yemen, to Husein the Sherif of Mecca, to the Rashids, to Ajaimi, the Sheik of the Muntafik, to Mubarak and to Ibn Saud came emissaries, both official and secret, and from both sides with promises of gold and good things in exchange for alliances.

To Ibn Saud, from Kuwait, came Shakespeare, the English consul, and from Medina and Basra, Turkish and German agents, and he listened to them all.

He had a difficult problem before him. He was convinced that a war between the English and the Germans with the Turks was at hand. With which empire should he ally? Or should he not ally with either? He was half convinced that neutrality was his best policy, yet he could not afford to remain isolated, for all round him other rulers were making alliances with one side or the other. He talked with all who came to Riad. He had the newspapers from Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus read to him, but they gave him little help.

The Turks were the power close at hand. They had behind them the Germans who were rich and strong. They were his enemies. They were allied with the Rashid. They meant to eject him and to control Nejd.

The English were his friends. They did not want Nejd. They wanted to keep open the roads to India and to protect their oil in Persia, and they were ready to recognize him as an independent ruler. They too were rich and strong. He had watched them coming up the Gulf from the East, and he knew of their rule in Egypt and India, their alliances with Muscat, Hadramaut, Oman, and Aden, their ships, their wealth, and their power. He had seen them warn back both the Turks and the Rashid from Kuwait, and how the Turks had not dared to oppose them even though they had the Germans behind them. He had met and learned to like the English representatives in the Gulf, Cox and Shakespeare. Above all, his father had a profound conviction that the English were the mastermen of the world.

But whereas the Turks and the Germans were within striking distance of him from Basra, Baghdad, and the
Red Sea Coast, the English were far away. Their nearest troops were across the sea in India.

He hesitated what to do. He would go and consult with Mubarak. They had common interests in this problem, for if the Germans prevailed and the railway came to Kuwait, it would be an end of the independence of Kuwait as well as of Nejd. He and Mubarak might have quarrelled and sparred during these last few years, but “Mubarak”, he said, “has been as a father to me. I will take my difficulties to him”.

They met in a village on the frontier between Nejd and Kuwait. Mubarak came with all his usual ceremony, riflemen riding before him, outriders on his carriage horses, and behind him his negro guards in uniforms of blue and gold. He received Ibn Saud affectionately and they sat down to discuss together. On the one side the old man, for Mubarak was old now and had hennaed his white beard and painted his eyebrows to hide his age, a wise old man and very shrewd. On the other, the young man, enormous, restless with energy, very proud, a little boastful and on his dignity, expecting the old man to patronize him.

They talked diplomatically, avoiding their personal differences, discussing only the main question. Mubarak advised avoiding all alliances. With subtle arguments he pointed out the advantages of keeping clear of both the Turks and the English.

He was at his old game. He was jealous of Ibn Saud and his success. He was determined to shut him away back into Central Arabia and to keep him from making alliances. And Ibn Saud was no fool. He realized at what Mubarak was working.

They parted as affectionately as they met, wishing each other all the blessings of God. Inwardly both were angry. Mubarak that the young man was no longer under his thumb. Ibn Saud at the old man’s patronizing air.

Ibn Saud rode out into the desert back to Riad still undecided.

He could not decide. He sat back and waited on events, meanwhile bargaining for the best terms from both sides, but he talked with the Turks, and sold them camels and horses at good prices. He talked also with Shakespeare and took the money and the arms he offered.

CHAPTER XXXI

As Ibn Saud, behind the desert, watched, waited, calculated, and parleyed, suddenly far away in Europe came the crash—the World War.

For years the rivalries for trade and power among the nations had piled up into monstrous hatreds until all could see the danger and yet the war came without warning and as a thief in the night. France and Russia came hurrying in to crush out Germany. England and a dozen countries followed. Within three months Turkey had declared for Germany and the Turks and the English were at war.

Ibn Saud was caught unprepared. All round him the other sheiks had taken sides and were calling up their men. He found himself, as he had feared, isolated. He sent out messengers suggesting a meeting of the rulers of Arabia: they had no interests in this war, he said, it would be well for them to meet and consider their own interests in common; they might profit largely if they stood together, but
he got no response. In Hail a new Rashid had defeated his rivals and was in control. Allied with Ajaimi of the Muntafik he had with his Shammar tribes joined the Turks.

Husein was working with the Turks but at the same time through his son Abdullah coming to terms with the English in Egypt. They had promised him money in sackfuls and arms, and he had proposed a scheme, suggested by the Syrian revolutionaries, of an Arab Federation, under his leadership. The English had agreed. They would do anything to get his alliance. The war must be won and at all costs. Every possible ally must be bought over.

Flattered by the English, urged on by the Syrian revolutionaries, believing that he would soon be King of Arabia and Caliph of Islam, Husein, puffed up with his big ideas, sent back Ibn Saud a discourteous message: he would have nothing to do with him until he had given up all claim to the Ataiba, and he sneered at his heretic Wahabis and his tatterdemalion Ikhwan.

Mubarak, wise, foreseeing, clearheaded, knowing his own mind and the interest of Kuwait had declared for the English, but he was in danger. The English had promised to come quickly but had not yet arrived, and the Turks from Basra might attack him at any minute. He called to Ibn Saud to stand by him. Still Ibn Saud waited. Still it seemed to him that his best policy was neutrality.

In the early winter of 1914 the English landed at Fao at the head of the Persian Gulf, drove back the Turks without difficulty, entered Basra and began to concentrate troops to advance up the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to Baghdad. They sent Shakespeare to Ibn Saud, for he had become of vital importance to them. As the central ruler in Arabia he could attack outwards either at the Hejaz and the Red Sea Coast or northwards at Syria and on to the Turkish line of advance on Egypt. The Muntafik and the Shammar tribes were threatening the English flank as they advanced on Baghdad. If Ibn Saud could be persuaded to attack the Shammar, that flank would be safe. If, however, he joined the Turks he would be dangerous. Failing active alliance Shakespeare was to try for his friendly neutrality.

Ibn Saud was quite ready for friendly neutrality, but he would not be jockeyed into a treaty. He knew what he wanted. He would take no verbal promises such as seemed to satisfy Husein. He would have a treaty properly set out in black and white or he would do nothing.

As he negotiated with Shakespeare news came in that the Rashid was advancing on Nejd. The Turks, determined to stop Ibn Saud making an alliance with the English, had given the Rashid money and arms and urged him to attack at once before it was too late.

CHAPTER XXXII

Ibn Saud ordered out his fast camel messengers with urgent summons for his fighting men. The treaty with the English must wait until he had settled this danger.

The towns and the villages of Nejd sent him footmen; among these were some companies from the new Ikhwan colonies, on their trial for the first time. The Mutair, the Ajman, and the Dawasir sent him horsemen. As soon as he had assembled three thousand he marched northwards.

He found the enemy at Jarrab which lay to the north of Artawiya and, parking his baggage and camels, he attacked without hesitation.

The battle was fought in the regular desert style. The
two sides advanced on each other in long lines, the footmen in the centre chanting their battle-cries, shouting taunts and curses “Sana-ees”, shouted the Shammar; “Ahl-al-awaja!” shouted back the Saud’s Nejdis; “We are the Knights of Unity, Brethren in obedience to God”, chanted the Ikhwan. On the flank the cavalry wheeled and galloped in great crowds of dust, looking for a chance to charge in. Ibn Saud led the Mutair cavalry himself and tore straight at the Shammar horsemen opposite, drove them back, but was unable to hold his men who went chasing the enemy wildly across the desert. The infantry, firing until they got close, drew their swords and met at the run. From midday until late afternoon they fought hand to hand, a mass of heaving men, hacking, cutting, thrusting, shouting, giving here to re-form elsewhere and crash together again. Now one side gained ground, now the other, until at last the Nejdis were pushed steadily back. The Ajman, seeing this, galloped off and looted the camp and baggage, leaving one flank exposed.

The Nejdis began to give. Ibn Saud rushed in among them, laying about him, urging them on. The Ikhwan stood firm and gave no quarter, but the rest began to lose heart. Keeping them together with difficulty Ibn Saud drew off, but his force broke up, his men made home, the bedouin dispersed, and he reached Riad with only a handful left.

Shakespeare, who had insisted, against Ibn Saud’s wishes on being present, was killed. He had not understood that in desert warfare the art of running and re-forming is the most valuable. When the footmen round him had run and called to him to come he had refused and he had been cut down by the Shammar camelmen.

The Rashid could not follow up his success. He had been too badly battered. The Mutair had not only scattered his cavalry but looted his camp, so he retired to re-form. None the less Ibn Saud had been severely beaten. Once more the Ajman had betrayed him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Like the wind, the word went out across the desert that Ibn Saud was beaten; the Turks and the Rashid had beaten him. The bedouin passed the news from encampment to encampment away down to the south country. The caravans carried it to Hasa and the Hejaz and up into Baghdad and into Syria. The Ataiba and the Murra in the Great Waste rejoiced; they would soon be rid of this master; the good old raiding days would now come back, they said.

Everywhere the bedouin were on tiptoe to revolt against him. They had grown restless under his firm control, resentful of his refusal to let them raid and loot and they were suspicious of his attempts, through his preachers and the Ikhwan, to break through their tribal organizations and customs.

Ibn Saud knew his danger. He had little money and few men. He knew that if he showed one sign of weakening he was done. The tribes accepted only a strong man and a successful one. One sign of weakening and they would all rise against him, wipe him out and sweep across Nejd. On every side the world was full of war, and the war fever was in all the tribes. Turkish agents were working through them, distributing gold and urging them to attack him. The Ajman, the accursed Ajman, under their Sheik Hithlain, were already in revolt throughout the Hasa.
LORD OF ARABIA

But he showed no weakening. He put a bold face on his
difficulties. When those round him were fearful and de-
pressed he laughed at them or roared at them in anger,
whichever was his mood. He beat a man who brought him
bad news. He refused to listen to bad news. The diffi-
culties and the dangers only keyed him up to greater efforts.
He set to work at once, collected a few men from the
villages and from the Ikhwan colonies and made as if to
attack the Shammar. It was bluff, but it worked, for the
Rashid was not ready to fight and agreed to a temporary
peace.

Abdullah, the son of King Husein, was amongst the
Ataiba and moving towards Nejd. With fair words and
promises Ibn Saud bought him off. Then he looked round
for allies. The English were advancing up the Euphrates
river from success to success. They had taken the town of
Kut and chased the Turks helter-skelter in front of them,
and they were within striking distance of Baghdad itself.

Ibn Saud hesitated no longer. Clearly the English were
winning. He needed their help. He came to terms with the
English, and at the port of Ojair in the Hasa he signed a
treaty with them, by which he agreed to stand by them, not
to attack their allies or to help their enemies. In return
they acknowledged him as the ruler of Nejd, independent
of the Turks, gave him a monthly subsidy, some arms and
a decoration.

With Mubarak he came also to terms. The Ajman had
raided into Kuwait. Mubarak demanded their punishment
and that all they had looted should be returned. Ibn Saud
agreed, provided Mubarak would help him with men and
arms.

With this moral and material backing, taking his brother
Sad and Jiluw and with such men as he could collect, he
turned on the Ajman, but his difficulties were great. On
all sides his enemies were only waiting to attack him. The
Rashid and Abdullah would take the first opportunity.
The peace they had made with them were only “little
peaces”. In Mubarak’s promises he did not trust. He had
only a small force, a few villagers with some bedouin horse-
men, his bodyguard, and a handful of the Ikhwan. The
Ajman far outnumbered him. He had few camels and fewer
horses. It was already midsummer, and the violence of
the sun was great. It was not the time for marching and
fighting, but he must attack before the revolt spread.

The Ajman were brave fighters. Though treacherous to
all else they were loyal to each other and their tribe; and
they could put five thousand of the best fighters in Arabia
into the field. They hated him bitterly, and now they had
their chance of revenge.

CHAPTER XXXIV

As soon as Hithlain heard that Ibn Saud was on the
march against him he began to move southwards towards
the edge of the Great Waste, into the barren country below
Qatar, drawing him after him, so that as Ibn Saud got
farther south he found little water and less forage and he
had to leave his animals behind, and his men who now had
to travel on foot became worn out. They marched only at
night as the heat was intense. All day they lay without
tents or any protection and scorched by the sun. But he
drove them on, for to turn back at this stage would have
been as dangerous as a defeat.

At last he found the Ajman in the palm-groves in front
of Kanzan and attacked them in the dark. Unknown to
Ibn Saud there were only a few of the enemy in front of him. Hithlain had cunningly laid an ambush. His main force was laying off on a flank, and as soon as Ibn Saud was in the palm-groves they swung round on to his rear.

After that there was confusion. Each man fought for himself unable to see in the pitch darkness whether his opponent was friend or enemy. Close beside Ibn Saud his brother Sad was shot dead. He himself was wounded. A bullet hit a pouch full of cartridges in his bandolier. The cartridges stopped the bullet, but he was knocked down by the blow and badly bruised about the ribs. His men, outnumbered and surprised, panicked and ran and with them went Ibn Saud.

He was in real danger. He had his back to the wall. His prestige was almost gone. In all directions the bedouin were taking heart to turn on him and were raiding. The Ikhwan and the villagers were stout-hearted but too few to hold up a general revolt. The tribes were still strong. It required only a little to break up Nejd into a hundred tribal units raiding and murdering each other as before. The Rashid had ignored his treaty and was advancing on Buraida.

With the few men left to him Ibn Saud remained in the open and kept his mobility of action, but he sent out a general and urgent call for help to his father in Riad, to Mubarak in Kuwait, and to the English. He was fighting for his life.

Fortune saved him. The people of Buraida under Fahad, the new Governor whom he had appointed after Jiluwi, a fanatical Wahabi, turned out valiantly and drove the Rashid back. Hussein of Mecca was busy preparing to revolt against the Turks and recalled Abdullah. Hithlain was a stout fighter but no more than a raiding bedouin sheik.

He did not pursue Ibn Saud, but turned to looting villages in South Hasa and then began to besiege Hofuf which was a walled town.

Abdur Rahman came out of his seclusion, collected a force from the villages round Riad, and sent them off under Ibn Saud’s younger brother Mohamed. The English despatched money and arms. Mubarak alone hesitated, and then late in the day sent a small force under his son Salim, who came reluctantly, for he was a morose, ill-natured, hard-bitten man with a general dislike of the Wahabis and a personal and bitter hatred of Ibn Saud.

As ever Ibn Saud showed himself at his best in adversity. With disaster close round him he never faltered nor lost heart. His bruised ribs—though none were broken—caused him great pain, but he told no one.

At first the death of Sad plunged him deep down in grief. Out of that grief he came raging back in terrific, blinding anger. He swore vengeance on Hithlain and the Ajman. He worked with the frenzy of hatred. He had too few men to attack the Ajman direct, but he harried them with quick fierce raids as they sat round besieging Hofuf. He killed without quarter or mercy and counted each Ajman killed as one more to settle the account for Sad. He never stopped. He was always on the move, sleeping even less than before, taking great risks, collecting men from the villages, moving with great speed.

His personality dominated. Tremendous, fearless, intense in his power to persuade and inspire. Once more too his ability to concentrate and persevere to one end and to force his men to do the same carried him through, so that by the time Mohamed and Salim had joined him he had collected a new force.
CHAPTER XXXV

THA AJMAN soon grew tired of sitting round Hofuf under the hot summer sun; they wanted loot; the drudgery of a siege wearied them into irritation. Hithlaiin could not hold them. Many of them dispersed and made for home. The rest eventually gave up the siege and went off raiding.

As soon as he was ready after them went Ibn Saud and having located them he left Mohamed and Salim with the horsemen in camp and made a forced night march on foot, caught the Ajman unawares and attacked them before dawn, himself leading the way, rifle in hand, towering above his men.

The Ajman rushed to their arms and opened fire. At close range a bullet hit Ibn Saud in one thigh and felled him. His bodyguard carried him back, streaming with blood and in much pain. His men, seeing him fall, hesitated and the Ajman taking the chance made to their horses and galloped away.

After them Ibn Saud sent Mohamed and Salim with their cavalry. They caught the Ajman still in full retreat; but suddenly and without warning Salim deserted Mohamed and joined the Ajman.

Once again Ibn Saud was in urgent danger. He lay wounded in his tent. Round him the camp was full of rumours. All his men were disheartened. Some said that the Ajman were advancing again; that more troops were coming from Kuwait to help them. Others that Ibn Saud was done; the bullet had unmanned him; he could lead them no more; he was useless for all time. Without him to cheer and lead them they were like frightened children. Even his best friends, those who had stood by him in the worst times, were wavering. They began to desert; it was best to make for home, they said, while there was still time.

Ibn Saud realized that he must act and quickly. His wound, a deep flesh wound only, was painful but not serious. He would show them that he was not unmanned. He was a man still. He called a sheik of a neighbouring village and bade him find him a girl, a girl and a virgin, fit for him to marry. That night, that very night he carried out the ceremonies and consummated the marriage in his tent in the middle of the camp and ordered all the camp to celebrate the occasion.

It was one of those dramatic gestures of which Ibn Saud was a master. His Arabs, bedouin and villagers alike, were roused from despondency to admiration, and roared their applause. This was a man indeed, a lusty giant of a man who could play lover though he was wounded. From depression they swept up into boisterous, boasting optimism. They would follow him anywhere and against anyone. The position was saved.

He would have attacked the Ajman without further delay, for Mohamed was keeping close to them with his cavalry and begging to be allowed to teach them and Salim a lesson. But Ibn Saud hesitated. Salim’s treachery justified any action, but to attack him would mean an open quarrel with Mubarak; and he wanted no more enemies at the minute. He sent, however, a note of protest to Mubarak: “Out of respect for you alone, my father”, he wrote, “I have not attacked and punished Salim”.

Mubarak’s reply was brusque. He blamed Ibn Saud. At the same time Ibn Saud intercepted a letter from Mubarak to Salim which ended: “I sent you as an observer,
my son Salim, and not as a combatant. ... If Ibn Saud defeats the Ajman we are with the Ajman, but if the Ajman defeat Ibn Saud do not repulse them, and yet do not aid them.

As soon as he read letter Ibn Saud flared up: here was the proof of treachery: too long he had borne with Mubarak, his cunning intrigues and his stabblings in the back.

Calling a council he explained the facts. One and all his advisers were for attacking even if it meant war with Kuwait.

“So be it”, said Ibn Saud and quoted from the Koran the verse with which it was his custom to declare war: “Thee only do we worship and from Thee alone seek we help”; and gave the orders to break camp and march.

As he set out news came that Salim with his men had left the Ajman and hurried back to Kuwait, for Mubarak was suddenly dead.

“From God we are. To Him we return”, said Ibn Saud and marched straight at the Ajman.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was a fight to the finish. Ibn Saud could not contain his hatred of the Ajman. He would take revenge on them for Sad. He would punish them for their many treacheries until there was not an Ajman nor a member of the family of Hithlain left. He would make such an example of them that all the tribes should see and never forget it. And the Ajman fought him back with fury.

All through 1916 they fought, now one side winning her...
his treaty and quarrel with the English—drew off swearing that when the time came he would make a final reckoning with the Ajman and with Salim.

He returned to Riad to find confusion. The minute his control over them had weakened the tribes had come out raiding and fighting among themselves and making all the countryside unsafe. But so soon as he returned victorious they crept home. They recognized him as their master and submitted, and he marched through Nejd re-establishing his authority and prestige.

But whereas with the Ajman he had shown no mercy, with all who made submission to him he was generous and conciliatory. He allowed them to appoint their own headmen and as long as they acknowledged him as ruler and sent him a contingent of fighting men when he called for them, he left them to manage their own affairs.

Once more he was supreme in Nejd.

PART VII
CHAPTER XXXVII

For two years Ibn Saud had been struggling for dear life up and down the Hasa and Nejd. He had been submerged in his own troubles, almost swept away and drowned by them and oblivious to all else. Only by immense efforts had he got back to firm ground. But by the end of 1917 he had gained his feet and re-established his position and could look round.

During these two years along the edges of Arabia there had been fierce fighting. A small English army had advanced up the Tigris pushing the Turks in front of it. Before Baghdad it had been beaten back, besieged in the village of Kut and completely captured. A second English army had come from over the seas, organized with more care, advanced and taken Baghdad and was planning a further advance on Mosul.

Out from Egypt another English army had marched northwards, driven the Turks back off the Sinai peninsula, the road into Egypt, and under General Allenby had chased them through Palestine and taken Jerusalem. Allenby was preparing a great offensive against Damascus and beyond that against Aleppo.

Husein of Mecca had declared for the English and was at war with the Turks. At the beginning the English had looked to Ibn Saud, but when he was beaten at Jarrab and all but smashed by the Ajman they realized that for the time being he was of no military value to them. Having made sure that he was ineffectual and having ensured his